

FANSiA

성황의 아이들

카페인나무s
판타지 장편소설

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English Title: Children Of The Holy Emperor

Author(s):

카페인나무s

Artist(s):

Bebseo

뱍세오

Year:

2022

Status in COO:

474 Chapters (ongoing)

Description:

Lee Seongjin, the strongest hunter who defeated the demon king.

He possessed the body of the pig tr*sh Third Prince, the Holy Imperial Family's shame.

But the members of this family... there's something strange about them?

'Overpowered' Holy Emperor.

'Regressor' First Princess.

'Player' First Prince.

Lots of trouble and lots of words

The story of the Holy Emperor and his children.

Associated Names:

성황의 아이들

[Chapter 169 until 199 are machine translates and unedited.]

1

The 17th Holy Emperor of Delcross, Nathaniel Klein, Nate.

Apart from the founding Holy Emperor, he was a ruler with an unprecedented level of power.

With a tremendous divine power befitting of a representative of the gods, he was the unofficial youngest Sword Master and the strongest swordsman on the continent.

Under his rule, Delcross was enjoying the pinnacle of stability and prosperity, and the relationship with the neighboring vassal states had never been more friendly. He was fit to be evaluated as a once-in-a-century emperor.

However, he was more famous by another epithet: the [Unprecedented Playboy Holy Emperor].

At the young age of 21 when he ascended the throne, he already had three wives, one lover, and five children.

Now, after ruling for over 12 years, he has over seven children that are officially known. The number of his hidden illegitimate children is unknown to all.

For generations, the Holy Emperors of Delcross, thanks to their image as [God's Representative], they did not have many children.

The only exception was the founding Holy Emperor, who was known to have over 15 children, but considering that he, referred to as the demigod, ruled for over 300 years, the number is not unbelievable.

Such were the circumstances, and thus this young and competent emperor couldn't stop the playboy image from sticking to him.

All of this was the result of the immaturity of his younger days. Humbly accepting this responsibility, Holy Emperor Nate decided to properly take care of his children as far as his power reached.

Therefore, he ordered his chief chamberlain to keep a close eye on the children's conditions, and he worked hard to spend one-on-one time with his children, putting off his busy office hours.

However, despite his efforts, parenting was never an easy task, as growing children rarely obey their parents' wishes.

Children occasionally engaged in behaviors that their parents simply couldn't understand.

Let's take his eldest child, the 1st Prince Owen, as an example.

He was a boy who was discovered when he was already grown, and initially, he seemed very pleased to meet his father after so much hardship.

However, one day he suddenly started speaking nonsense, claiming that he could see some strange documents in thin air.

"Father, I aim to become stronger with the power of this status window."

Then he set off for the southern front line.

He was a son who was brought into the fold late, and there were many things he wanted to do for him, but alas, he was an unfathomable son who did not care for his father's feelings at all.

The second, 1st Princess Amelia, was not much different.

She was a pitiful daughter who lost her birth mother, who was an illegitimate child of a commoner, and later discovered that she was a princess and sought her father.

Despite hiding her sorrow beneath a bright smile, she was a lovable girl who rattled on about her interests to her still awkward father.

This daughter of his, who was once like a rosebud, also started

behaving oddly at some point.

One day, she woke up crying as if she had a nightmare, her appetite decreased, and she became noticeably depressed.

When he asked the reason for her sudden change during a snack time, she suddenly burst into tears and blurted out something shocking.

"Your Majesty, Father, I... have returned from death to the past!"

Nate was taken aback by her sudden story.

Her subsequent outpouring of grievances, when summarized, went like this:

Leonard, the rosy-cheeked second prince of Rohan, had lured her into a marriage. However, this was not out of love, but a plot to solidify his own kingship by borrowing the power of the Holy Emperor. After forcibly proceeding with the marriage, he openly took many concubines and habitually abused Amelia, the queen. And not much later, he ultimately abandoned her alone in a tower.

"He wished to see me die in front of you, Father, after cruelly killing me..."

"..."

"Oh! Despite your initial opposition, Father, your foolish daughter ruined everything!"

As she broke down into tears, he simply stared blankly at her.

He married you, abandoned you, and killed you?

But, my daughter, aren't you alive and well right in front of me?

"So, I will have my revenge. I will pursue him to the end of hell. I will shatter all of his hopes and completely ruin him. I won't forgive anything that stands in my way!"

"..."

Sensing the hint of madness flickering in his daughter's tear-filled eyes, Nate involuntarily drew a breath.

His beloved daughter, who he had always cherished and believed to be a delicate bud, had suddenly turned into a rose bristling with thorns.

At this point, Nate had no choice but to admit that he had been underestimating the task of parenting.

Do all parents on the continent raise their children amidst such torment, or is it only his own children who are peculiarly strange? The young Holy Emperor held his throbbing head in his hands.

'Is every parent on this continent raising their child in such agony, or are his own children exceptionally strange?' The young emperor clutched his throbbing head.

But this was just the tip of the iceberg.

Among Nate's odd children, the one who ate away at his heart the most was his fourth child and third prince, Morres.

Prince Morres, the offspring of the extremely hysterical Queen Elizabeth, was an ordinary child apart from his uncontrollable mischievousness in his younger days.

Regrettably, he had no standout traits compared to his siblings, and he was a child who could not meet his mother's expectations.

As a result, Morres had to suffer a rather harsh early education under the Queen who was struggling to make her son the Crown Prince.

In his childhood, he seemed to be following his mother's wishes decently enough.

But at some point, he began to commit mischief on the palace servants, and when he reached puberty, he turned into an uncontrollable hooligan.

Neither the Queen's hysterical scoldings nor tearful pleas had any effect.

Nate, too, had no solution, and he could only quietly wait for his son to come to his senses, but disregarding his parents' worries, the prince's hooliganism only intensified with each passing day.

Thus, it seemed that the child would forever remain an unprecedented disgrace to the imperial family.

The change came unexpectedly. He suddenly caught a high fever, almost died, and then woke up as a completely different person.

He stopped his mischief and focused solely on basic training in the training ground every day, losing weight to the point of being unrecognizable and his swordsmanship, which had always been stagnant, began to improve rapidly.

His formerly ordinary disposition had now become fairly sharp.

While his son's changes were undoubtedly desirable, Nate felt an eerie sensation in his heart.

Perhaps it would have been better to have an honest conversation with Morres long ago. However, since the child seemed a little unstable, Nate could only continue to tread lightly as he always had.

And the result of his hesitant approach was an irretrievable storm.

Boom!

Suddenly, with a sound like a mountain collapsing from outside, the palace shook as if an earthquake had occurred.

The cardinals and ministers who had just finished their morning meeting and were moving about were in a state of chaos and rushed out into the imperial palace courtyard.

What they saw was a huge black lump carelessly thrown on one side of the courtyard.

A large wing with hardly any skin left, a majestic body with rotting flesh hanging off, and the black magic energy emanating from the entire body.

"A real dragon....."

"What... what in the world....."

Why would the demon race, known to be wreaking havoc in the eastern region, suddenly fall into the middle of the imperial palace?

While the stunned cardinals were stammering at the unexpected event, the imperial guards and the order of Knights rushed in and surrounded the dragon.

The beast, was still twitching intermittently as if it had not completely expired due to the shock of the crash.

However, they couldn't approach carelessly because of the fierce magical energy emanating from it. Just then,

"Ah, I didn't mean to cause a commotion... please, carry on with your tasks."

A boy dressed in light armor appeared next to the dragon's head, speaking these absurd words. Light golden hair with a gray tint, ferocious eyes, and a cheeky expression.

"Prince Morres?"

"Your Highness, what exactly has happened here?"

Despite Knight Commander Baltazar's trembling question, the voice of the boy known as Mores was absolutely cheerful.

"The exorcists from the punitive force said that, unlike other demon species, this one doesn't get fully resummoned even if it's slain. Its body is left behind. So to purify it, it apparently needs to be transported to the imperial road where Father is, right?"

"....."

"But if we were to capture it all the way in the east and transport it, it seemed like our soldiers and the villages would get contaminated with magical energy all along the way, so..."

In short, he was saying that to minimize the secondary damage that could occur while moving the demon species' corpse, he drove the demon here and dropped it right in the imperial palace, where the emperor resides.

"What an insane...."

A high priest unwittingly blurted out a blasphemous phrase, but no one objected to it.

Everyone had the same thought running through their heads at that moment.

That worthless, pig-like prince had evolved into an unpredictable lunatic!

—Kieeeeeek!

The dragon, using its last bit of strength, roared in an attempt to shake off the prince.

As a response, dark magical energy surged stronger and spread out, making the knights who had surrounded the demon flinch and step back.

However, Morres, who was right in the middle of that dreadful magical energy, drew the sword from his waist with a nonchalant expression.

Soon, a dark aura began to emanate thickly from his sword, Nutcracker.

A noticeable energy was accumulating on the sword blade.

Considering the young age of the prince, it was an impressive level, but the nature of that blood-red aura was overwhelmingly ominous.

Definitely not the aura a prince of the Holy Empire should have.

"I'm going to take down this creature now. Be careful of the magic."

With his calm voice,

Pshhh.

The prince's sword pierced the dragon's heart, which had turned black with magic.

Soon, cracks formed in the dragon's heart along with a cracking noise, and from there, dark magic began to explode and pour out.

Hwaaak!

In an instant, both the dragon and the prince disappeared, wrapped in a cloud of black smoke.

"Ahhaaak!"

"Your Highness Morres!"

"Your Highness!"

The magic, seemingly about to cover the entire palace courtyard, was blocked by a transparent, silver barrier before reaching the knights who were surrounding it.

The Holy Emperor had set up a massive holy barrier around the dragon in that short period of time.

Sshhh.

The barrier, filled with magic, looked like a black dome. But the magic was purified where it met the emperor's holy barrier and began to blur, and over time, it started to become transparent.

Soon, only clear air and a whitened skeletal frame of a giant creature were left inside the barrier.

"Wha- where's the prince?"

Ordinary people would rot away from just touching the magic of the undead demon species.

A young prince without a hint of holy power should not have been able to withstand it, especially being at the epicenter of a magical

explosion.

Despite everyone's concerns, fortunately, Prince Morres was safe. After the barrier disappeared, the boy, who had been cloaked in his own aura, slowly walked toward the emperor.

His nonchalant demeanor made it seem like the magic wasn't a threat at all. The twisted and blood-red aura was emanating from the prince.

If a stranger saw this, they might have been confused as to who between the prince and the dragon was the spawn of the demon.

"...Your Majesty, I might be out of place, but are you saying that that power of the prince is truly not from a demon?"

Archbishop Benitus, who was standing next to the emperor, asked in a trembling voice.

How dare he suggest that the prince of the Holy Empire was a demon? Normally, he could be charged with blasphemy or treason. The frail old man must have been half shocked, unable to comprehend this.

Nate, who had been quietly watching this incredible series of events, eventually raised a hand to cover his face and let out a soft sigh.

Yes, Morres.

The child who was merely a reckless fool had now become the eye of a new storm, bringing a massive wind of karma to Delcross.

2

Morres Klein, the third prince of the Holy Empire Delcross.

The laughingstock under the heavens.

The unparalleled disgrace of the Imperial Family.

This idiotic prince, in stark contrast to his father, who was recognized as the most powerful emperor in history, was a worthless son who inherited neither his sword skills nor a speck of his holy power.

Most of all, his fiery temperament and vulgar speech, which were nothing like the calm demeanor of the emperor, were too excessive to simply be dismissed as youthful impetuosity.

It wasn't unreasonable for some bishops and high priests to whisper that perhaps Prince Morres might not be the Holy Emperor's biological son.

However, an opportunity for change came to Prince Morres, who seemed forever doomed to idiocy.

One day, he suddenly fell ill with a severe fever. He suffered through three days and nights of near-death experiences, but when he regained consciousness, he had become an entirely different person.

"People really can change after a near-death experience," everyone thought, dismissing it lightly. But the truth was, the prince had a deep secret he couldn't easily reveal to others about his sudden transformation.

That's because the one who opened his eyes in the dying body of Morres was a man named Lee Seongjin, a human from Earth.

* * *

From an early age, Lee Seongjin was a boy with a peculiar persistence.

From infancy, he was stubborn about seeing things through to the end, causing his parents, despite him being their only child, to experience an exceptionally challenging upbringing.

"Who on earth did he inherit that stubbornness from?"

His mother would tear up looking at her son who was still stubbornly suckling on his pacifier past the age of four, worried about potential dental issues.

Fortunately, his baby teeth grew out evenly and nicely.

Just when they thought his interest in pacifiers had decreased now that he was in kindergarten, he started insisting on not going home after school.

No amount of persuasion, whether it was promising snacks at home or watching Pororo¹, worked.

The kindergarten teachers, suspecting child abuse at home due to his refusal to return, could only return the mother's awkward smile.

In the end, the routine continued with either the mom or dad carrying the child, touring the playground until he fell asleep, and then returning home late at night.

With Seongjin entering elementary school and maturing a bit, his parents were finally able to breathe a sigh of relief. They thought that at least now he was at an age where he could communicate.

That was until one day he returned home with a classmate's crayons, resulting in a call from his homeroom teacher the next day.

It was a brief period of peace.

"He broke my crayons. So, I took his instead."

"Seongjin-ah². Hyung-cheol already apologized. It's wrong to forcibly take your friend's things."

The child's eyes sharpened.

"So, you're saying if I say sorry, that's it? What about my crayons?"

"We can buy more crayons."

"Why should you buy me crayons when it was Hyung-cheol's fault? The person who caused the accident should take responsibility."

Stunned by her son's retort, the mother lost her words. From the child's perspective, he wasn't wrong.

After some hesitation, the mother finally said, "Seongjin-ah, friendship with friends is priceless compared to the cost of crayons. When a friend apologizes, accept it first. If you still feel wronged, let's discuss what to do next, okay?"

The child seemed dissatisfied but reluctantly nodded.

"But, the broken crayons were a 24-pack. Why did you take Hyung-cheol's 56-pack crayons?"

"That's for my mental distress. Of course, I should get something better, right?"

She couldn't tell if her son was shrewd or just intelligent.

After a unique childhood, Seongjin became quiet as a middle schooler, as if he was a different person.

His parents were cautiously watching to see if their somewhat different son was adjusting to school life.

But his uniform and textbooks were always neat, and there was no sign of bullying.

He's finally grown up.

Seongjin's parents were overjoyed.

In reality, while it seemed peaceful on the surface, Seongjin's school life was a mess, but his parents were none the wiser.

While the son failed to acquire the easygoing sociability his parents wished for, he did gain the cunning to conceal incidents and accidents from his homeroom teacher and parents.

For instance, he was unlucky enough to be targeted by a school bully, but after persistently attacking one of them for three months, the bullies ended up trembling and declared a truce.

Or, he stalked a student council member who picked a fight with him for a week, causing the member to develop social anxiety and paranoid delusions, leading to long-term absence from school.

His school life was a colorful journey that straddled somewhere between justice and crime.

Although not an outstanding student, he was somewhat diligent and, at the end of his school life, Seongjin entered a reasonable four-year university in Seoul.

He dated moderately, served in the military after becoming a sophomore, and found employment at a decent small-to-medium-sized business after graduation.

– That Mr. Lee, there's something cheap about him.

– Really? Isn't he diligent and good at his work?

He did receive suspicious glances from some older superiors, but externally, Seongjin performed the role of a diligent company worker flawlessly.

Job proposals started trickling in, and he began flirting with a female coworker.

If nothing unusual had happened, he probably would have led a normal life, getting married and living uneventfully.

August 2035.

The Gehenna Gate Incident.

As the Stargates, which connected to the demon world of Gehenna, suddenly appeared all over the world without warning, armies of thousands, tens of thousands of monsters began to rush out.

Cities and facilities were destroyed in the blink of an eye, and the world fell into a temporary state of anarchy in just a few days.

After a hard struggle, humanity, focusing on a few militaries that managed to establish defensive lines, began to counterattack, but the scale of human casualties in just a few days reached astronomical numbers.

With most of its major cities destroyed, human civilization greatly regressed as well.

Seongjin, who was on a business trip and was lucky enough to take refuge in a bomb shelter within the defensive line, survived. However, he lost everything, including his family and his life's base.

In front of this massive tragedy of humanity, Seongjin did not cry. He just calmly contemplated who he should repay this debt to, while watching the endless stream of monsters pouring out of the gates.

Monsters kept coming no matter how many were killed, but this stubborn man never gave up once he targeted something.

Seongjin became a Hunter. He became a professional monster hunter.

After killing a monster, if one touched its corpse, a strange energy-like thing was sucked into one's body, which the hunters called the monster's aura.

People who absorbed this became capable of exhibiting abilities beyond human limits. As if absorbing part of the monster's power.

Sometimes it was simple physical strength, sometimes it was a reinforcement-type ability to create a tough outer skin, and sometimes it manifested as superpowers like telekinesis.

The more monster aura the hunters absorbed, the stronger they became, and soon, superhumans began to emerge who could single-handedly kill thousands of monsters.

Humanity, which had been pushed to the brink, began to slowly push back the front line, and a lengthy war of attrition continued for decades.

The demon world, which ambitiously invaded Earth, ironically faced destruction along with Earth several decades later.

As hunters became stronger, the monsters killing humans also became stronger. The front line, maintaining a steady balance of power, forced both sides to exhaust an unbearable amount of life force.

When the final superhuman squad of humanity stood before the Demon King, who had been hiding deep within the heart of the demon world, the Demon King greeted them with a grim face and sighed.

"So it has come to this. What have we been doing for decades? I feel ashamed."

Of course, they didn't care about the Demon King's disappointment. There was virtually nothing left on both sides to catch their breath and stop this war of attrition.

Total annihilation of one side.

That was the only thing left between the demon world and humanity.

Regardless of his resigned attitude, the Demon King's resistance was tenacious to the end.

The superhuman squad and the Demon King fought tirelessly for three days and nights, and by the time the third night fell, only the upper part of the Demon King's head was barely intact, and there was only one human being left alive among the superhuman squad members.

That was the unyielding man, Seongjin, who never gives up until the end.

He strained to lift his now barely moving fist towards the demon king's head. The demon king, with only his head remaining, spoke in

a bored tone.

"This stubborn one. I thought you were the least interesting of all, but I never thought I would die at your hands."

So, what's your point?

Seongjin sneered as he threw a punch.

Crash!

A crack appeared on the only remaining horn of the demon king, which was dark as obsidian.

"...Huh?"

Crash!

The next punch sent the demon king's nose crashing down, but it still lacked the strength to crush his head in a single blow.

Seongjin caught his breath and clenched his trembling fist again.

"Hey! Wait! Just a moment!"

The demon king, whose double nose was bleeding, was startled, but Seongjin just clenched his mouth shut and threw another punch.

Crash!

"Argh! Hey, this is a bit....."

Crash!

"...Wait a moment, you brat!"

No more fists were thrown.

Of course, it wasn't because he heeded the Demon King's words, but rather he took a moment to recover his strength, which was no longer being exerted in his fists.

Surprisingly, in the meantime, the flattened nose of the demon king

began to gradually rise again. Although the speed was significantly slower than before, a demon king of this otherworld has the ability to regenerate his body, even with only a head left.

An ominous feeling swept over both the demon king and Seongjin that the final blow was going to take longer than they thought.

"Stop with your pitiful punching. You're not putting any strength into it! Look, human, you can't kill me like this. How about we have a temporary truce, get ourselves together, and fight again?"

That was nonsense.

If two fully recovered opponents fight, it's blatantly clear who will be at a disadvantage.

As Seongjin tremblingly lifted his arm again, the demon king spoke in a desperate voice.

"No, let's just stop fighting altogether! I'll leave Earth and Gehenna forever. I won't show up again, okay?"

"....."

"I get to save my life, and you get to keep both Earth and the demon world. Think about the potential of the two merged worlds! You might be able to match the power of a demon king!"

"....."

"If you kill me as I am, the masterless Gehenna will perish, and Earth, having lost its pillar, will gradually be sucked into the gate. Both worlds will end! What does that mean to you?"

Seongjin finally responded to the demon king.

"What's important to me isn't this world. Whether you're done for or not, that's all that matters."

Since the result will not change anyway, he didn't need any silly persuasion.

The demon king watched with a pale face as Seongjin slowly clenched his fist.

Just how many more punches will it take to be done with him?

"Hey, hey! Can't you at least let me die by myself? I'm losing strength because of the auto-regeneration. Just give me a moment, and I can burn my soul with Gehenna's flame. I'll disappear all by myself so you won't have to bother!"

"....."

"And... I'll also close the gate. Even if the demon world vanishes, Earth won't be affected!"

That proposal seemed rather attractive. Lee Seongjin nodded.

"Alright. I'll think about it after killing you first."

"How can we converse if I'm dead... More than that, you won't be able to kill me like that! No, why am I even trying to reason with someone like you!"

The Demon King screamed.

How long had the neverending punches gone on for? As Seongjin was taking a breather, he started to hear sobbing sounds.

"This... This damn brat... I truly didn't want to resort to this....."

Suddenly, a crimson flame ignited from thin air, engulfing the Demon King's head. Even amid the persistent regeneration, the Demon King's skin started to warp in the burning red flames.

"This is....."

Gehenna's flame.

The deep corrosion of the demon world that obliterates the very existence of objects.

The constant regeneration of the Demon King's flesh and even his

soul could indeed be extinguished. It appeared the rumors were true.

And that means...

"So you couldn't kill yourself because you lacked power, all of it was your trickery."

As Lee Seongjin smirked and lifted his fist again, the Demon King flinched and shouted out loud, "...What! Why! What! What's the difference! I was trying to disappear into another dimension as if I were dead, so what!"

Despite his teary eyes, there was a strange pride in his demeanor. Even Lee Seongjin was momentarily lost for words at this attitude.

"But now everything is wrong. Sob! Yes. I'm dying as you wish. But I won't go alone."

The flame that was burning the Demon King slowly grew and transferred to Seongjin's body. With a surge of intense heat, his body was also swallowed by the crimson flames in an instant.

"Burn along with the noble soul of this Demon King as fuel! I will definitely annihilate you! I'll burn your soul to ashes!"

In the flames, his flesh warped and his bones were exposed, yet the Demon King smiled, seemingly delighted. It appeared he was deeply resentful for being hit for so long.

"What, this....."

"Hahahaha! How does it feel! The pain of your soul burning! Uhuhahahahaha!"

Even as his own soul was burning.

Listening to the Demon King's laughter, which sounded more like sobbing, Lee Seongjin examined his burning body.

Indeed, his body, which had become strong by absorbing demonic energy for decades and was not harmed by ordinary physical forces, was now melting away futilely.

Despite the body becoming insensitive to pain due to multiple enhancements, the process of dermis burning and muscle fibers getting exposed was extremely painful.

He had fought countless battles on the brink of death, but this time, Lee Seongjin could feel that he was surely dying.

However, one way or another.

The instigator of the demon world invasion, the target of his lifelong enmity, was finally defeated.

"Uhahaha! Hahahaha....."

The Demon King, who was laughing insanely, abruptly closed his mouth as he saw Lee Seongjin, covered in flames, die. An involuntary chill ran down his spine.

"So, I guess this is the end for me too."

With his muscles, now nothing more than skeletal remnants, slowly moving, he lifts his fist engulfed in flames.

"So let's take one last hit."

"What!? You bastard... even at this point....."

"Consider it compensation for psychological damage."

Kwaaaang!

"Aaaaaaargh!"

The piercing scream soon faded.

After confirming that the Demon King's face had crumbled and turned to ash, Seongjin closed his eyes.

In the darkening consciousness, it seemed like he heard a sound of something shattering in his mind.

That was the last memory of Hunter Lee Seongjin.

3

It was supposed to be the end.

* * *

'What the hell is happening...'

Why would I, who was certain I had burnt even my soul, be lying on a bed, chewing on porridge someone else is feeding me?

[Ha ha ha! This is hilarious! Are you a baby? What are you going to do with this bib?]

'...It's a napkin, you idiot.'

Why is this damn demon king, who had solemnly sworn to burn his own soul, making a racket in my head?

The clock winded back a day. As a wet towel caressed his forehead, he opened his eyes to see a mature woman in extravagant clothes, tears welling up as she looked at him.

"Morres! My baby! Can you recognize your mother?"

"Oh, Prince! You have finally regained consciousness!"

Caught amidst the commotion, Seongjin blinked in confusion.

A grand, ornate room. The attentive care of people who seemed to be servants.

At first, he thought he might be in the afterlife. Realizing that the situation was abnormal happened when a familiar voice echoed in his mind.

[Hey, quit standing around dumbfounded and wake up! Are you still

half asleep?]

This absurd voice, could it be?

'...The demon king?'

[Ah, you recognize me! You weren't opening your eyes so I thought your soul was completely damaged. You know how intense Gehenna's flames are, right?]

Why is this bastard?

Are you telling me we didn't finish it all off?

[Woah, woah. Calm down, get your bearings. Your soul is still settling in, you know. This body you just got into, if you mess up, you could get bounced right back out, got it?]

What the hell is he babbling about? If Gehenna's flames weren't enough, if my punch wasn't enough, I'm more than ready to finish him off for good.

Seongjin, gritting his teeth as he tried to get up, found his body surprisingly sluggish and heavy. He collapsed back down. Not only because people around him were holding him back in surprise, but his body was also oddly languid and heavy.

It's hard to breathe. My arms and legs are too heavy.

"Morres! What's wrong? My child, are you in pain?"

"Prince! Please calm down..."

Let go! The Demon King is still alive! We need to kill that bastard...

[Hey, your blood pressure is skyrocketing, you know? If you keep this up, you'll die just as soon as you've been revived. Now, take some deep breaths, okay? Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale.]

What the hell is this demon king talking about! And what are these people doing, holding me down!

Let me go! Let go!

"Cough!"

Suddenly, a sharp pain pierced his back, and his vision started to spin.

"Morres!"

"Your Highness!"

As the desperate cries of the people faded away, darkness claimed his sight. When Seongjin came to, he was still in the same place, surrounded by the same people. And the goddamn voice of the demon king was still echoing from somewhere.

[Wow, I thought you were just prone to bad tempers, but it seems your anger really is out of control.]

'You, bastard...'

Grinding his teeth furiously, Seongjin heard the demon king quickly backtrack.

[Ah, sorry, sorry. I won't make any more annoying comments, okay? Let's just talk, let's talk. That's good, right?]

'What? This bastard?'

Their conversation was still somewhat tentative. But surprisingly, Seongjin, who had been raging so furiously he seemed likely to die from anger, quickly calmed down within half a day.

Because he found out that the demon king's physical body had been completely destroyed, and only a fragment of his soul remained like a leftover.

He was at a loss as to how to deal with a guy who was nothing but a voice, and getting angry seemed to be a waste of effort.

So he quenched his rage and listened quietly to the demon king's explanation.

The final battle had completely incinerated not only the demon king but also Seongjin's own body in the flames of Gehenna. For some reason, however, Seongjin's soul remained largely unscathed, and the fire had quietly died down.

Perhaps, the demon king suggested in his neutral tone, his soul survived due to the unexpectedly rapid evolution of the flames.

[While my noble soul was mostly burnt away, I have no idea why you remained unscathed.]

"....."

[Anyway, that's how I ended up losing nearly all of my power and vigor. All that's left now is perhaps a vestige of my original personality.]

The point is, he could never return to the mighty demon king he once was.

"Then you should have just disappeared somewhere long ago, why bother talking and rambling inside another's head?"

At Seongjin's dismissive response, the demon king sighed.

[That's not such a simple matter. Do you think I haven't tried? But I can't escape. Every time I try to distance myself from you even a little bit, I suffer unbearable pain, thanks to the holy energy around me. It's a terrifying pain that crushes the core itself. If time continues to pass, won't even the remaining fragments of my soul disappear completely?]

"Looks like we have a conclusion. Just vanish cleanly. It's simple."

[You brat! Would you do the same if you were in my shoes, huh?]

Of course, Seongjin wanted to eradicate even the smallest trace of that remaining soul.

But how could he kill something that doesn't have a physical form in the first place? There was no way he could summon Gehenna's flames right now.

Seongjin had a tendency to charge without looking around when he had a goal, but he was not a man to stubbornly stick to the impossible.

Once he accepted the situation, he found the annoying entity surprisingly useful. After all, the former demon king did know a lot.

The demon king, who had regained consciousness a day earlier than Seongjin, had already collected a fair amount of information about this new world and Seongjin's situation.

Using an efficient method of directly touching other people's souls and glimpsing their memories, or so he claimed.

Thanks to this, while Seongjin was lying in bed receiving the devoted care of the people, he began to quickly grasp his current situation based on the babbling of the demon king.

According to the demon king, this place was a completely different dimensional world, far removed from Earth or the demon world.

[We're extremely lucky. We had a high chance of being scattered beyond the void, but strangely enough, we've ended up in a main world]

Main world?

[It's a higher dimension. It's at least a couple of levels above the imaginary worlds¹, like Sigurd-34 Earth or Gehenna.]

'Imaginary worlds? What is Sigurd-34 Earth?'

The demon king clicked his tongue.

[Wah, such a primitive Earthling class. You don't even know the name of your own dimension. You don't even have a concept of dimensions, do you? You should have figured this out before rushing in to die. Oh...these ignorant fools.]

He regretted not wiping out the demon king's head completely. At least he would've been able to slap him around before the demon king could annoy him.

Feeling some eerie energy, the soul of the demon king began to shudder.

But to sense his spirit so directly, it's a little disgusting.

[You're harsh. You're a really ruthless guy. Even though we've become soul companions now.....]

'...Shut up!'

Anyway, this place belonging to a higher dimension is the Holy Empire of Delcross.

A powerful empire with many kingdoms and grand duchies under the rule of the Holy Emperor, who receives the protection of the gods from generation to generation.

The current Holy Emperor is the 17th, and the man would be this body's biological father.

In other words, he Lee Seongjin was now a prince. No wonder people were extraordinarily polite.

[Your name now is Morres Klein. The third prince and the fourth child of the Holy Emperor, who turns 15 this year.....]

'A child?'

[He's a very famous troublemaker.]

His mother, the first queen, Elizabeth Asein, is the daughter of the highly respected Archduke Asein, and among the women of the palace, she is the queen with the most distinguished lineage.

She had an unbeatable confidence even in front of the Holy Emperor and Empress, believing without a doubt that her son, who had inherited the noblest blood among the royal children, would be the crown prince to succeed the Holy Emperor.

And that expectation soon morphed into an excessive educational fervor and emotional attachment.

Fortunately, Prince Morres tried to live up to his mother's expectations when he was young.

He may not have been exceptionally gifted compared to his other brothers, but he at least diligently learned the demeanor of a prince.

However, from around the age of seven, he began to frequently lose his temper for no reason and gradually became lawless.

He ranted and raved at the maids and servants, often resorting to unprovoked violence. When he was bored, he would break things by throwing dishes and items around, and he continually tortured and stressed his escort knights.

During lessons, he would insult and mock his teachers, and after being scolded by the queen a few times, he stopped attending lessons altogether.

The demon king recounted the scandalous history of the troublesome prince as if he was looking at Seongjin's own shame.

'But how can you have such detailed information in just one day? Can I trust this?'

[Oh! These are the pieces of information I've obtained by directly contacting the souls of the people around us. They are high-quality information that you alone couldn't gather even if you were reborn. Be grateful.]

'.....'

After that, the prince's daily life plummeted downhill.

His once impeccable manners disappeared, and he began to find even the slightest physical activity bothersome.

Eventually, he gave up even his swordsmanship classes which he had somewhat enjoyed, lying in bed all day loafing around and incessantly snacking.

People couldn't understand why he had suddenly changed. They could only speculate that the young prince, who had so far

obediently followed his ambitious queen mother, might have been unknowingly suffering from severe stress.

Over the years, the once noble prince became an ignorant, ill-tempered swine, rolling around due to his severe obesity.

[Then, he suddenly collapsed.]

The incident happened three days ago.

Morres, who had eaten well and gone to bed the night before, suddenly suffered from a mysterious high fever from dawn, and by the afternoon, he had completely lost consciousness. There were no signs of poisoning, and the symptoms were unfamiliar for any disease.

The skilled royal physicians rushed to help the prince, but he remained unconscious.

The emperor postponed national affairs and visited the sickroom, while the queen mother kept vigil over the sickbed in tears all night.

And four days after the fever began, not Morres, but Seongjin, woke up in this body.

'So where did the real soul of Morres go?'

That was what Seongjin was most curious about. Unintentionally, he had become a spirit possessing someone else's body, and even for him, who had no spiritual knowledge, this was not normal.

If they unlawfully possessed a healthy person's body, it would be a big problem if the original owner were harmed.

However, the reaction of the demon king was not so enlightened.

[Hmm? When I woke up, there were no other souls in this body besides us. Maybe he died from the fever?]

So he's saying they conveniently entered the body of someone who had just died from illness.

'So what happens if we leave here?'

[Why? Leave? Since it's a soulless body, there's a high chance it will just die, right?]

'...Is there a way to get out?'

The demon king's response was ruthless.

[Why not? Just die, that's it.]

'.....'

Seongjin looked terrified.

Certainly, being unexpectedly resurrected wasn't a bad feeling.

Even when he was about to face death with the demon king, he knew he couldn't escape annihilation, and he was intoxicated with the sense of achievement of having destroyed the demon world—even though there were some residual garbage that hadn't completely burnt—it felt enough.

But when he actually woke up, the past life filled with patience, suffering, and deprivation came to him in a different way.

The life of constantly wearing himself down in order to fight, to eliminate the underworld.

Seongjin's past life was far from what one could call happy.

What about now? Could he really live a new life in another's body?

Is it okay to consider this miraculous coincidence a compensation for his past unhappy life?

As Seongjin was lost in thought, the demon, who had no way of understanding his complex feelings, was teasing him from the side.

["Anyway, what if you're a pig? You've become the son of the highest person in the country? Wow, congratulations. You've hit the jackpot in life, you."]

Yeah, this was also a problem too.

Seongjin swallowed his saliva, looking at his massive body sprawled on the bed.

The bulging belly that blocked his view despite being in a lying position, and the thick arms and legs bloated with fat that couldn't even fully fold at the joints.

He was short of breath and felt tired just from squirming for a moment; this wasn't just the aftereffect of a simple fever.

To think he had to occupy such a worthless body. Seongjin sighed, recalling his previous body covered with powerful muscles.

'Is this really a good thing...'

This is what had happened in the past day.

And now, Seongjin, lying on a luxurious bed, reluctantly eats the porridge fed by Queen Elizabeth, as if he were a baby bird, with a napkin neatly placed on his neck.

"Now, Morres, say ah- one more time."

He was embarrassingly close to death, but at the sight of the affectionate queen, Seongjin reluctantly opened his mouth again.

The demon's almost breathless laughter echoed in his head.

["Hahahaha! I'm going crazy! I'm going to die! Are you trying to make me die laughing! Hahahaha!"]

That son of a gun, I will definitely get rid of him someday.

Seongjin swallowed the porridge roughly and then stopped the queen who was about to scoop the next bite.

"Um... Mother (eomoni)? My stomach is full now. You must be tired, I think you can stop feeding me."

"Morres....."

The queen gazed at her son with a sorrowful expression for a moment, then lowered her head and wiped her tears with the end of her extravagant lace sleeve.

"That's right, I suddenly realize that your memory is not intact. You've never called me mother (eomoni) before."

"Uh, um....."

Awkward as hell!

He had vaguely brushed it off, saying that his memory before the illness was hazy, to avoid any unwarranted suspicions. But every time he talked to the queen, Seongjin was nervous that he might be discovered as not being Morres.

Even now, Seongjin didn't know how to respond and was hesitating, but the demon who had glimpsed memories from the queen's soul gave him a hint.

[It seems like you usually called her 'Royal Mother'?]

I know, but so what.

Since he couldn't say 'Royal Mother', Seongjin ended up having no choice but to respond like this.

"...I'm sorry."

"What do you have to be sorry about? Your fever was so terrible. Even with the emperor himself administering treatment, the fever did not subside, so as a mother, I was worried that something terrible had happened."

The queen delicately adjusted her sleeve and carefully held Morres' hand.

"Just you waking up healthy is more than enough to make me happy."

When her gentle, warm hand touched him, Seongjin had to work hard not to harden his expression. He felt horribly guilty for having

to pretend to be her son, when he was not.

Her real son was already dead, his soul gone, and she couldn't even mourn him because she didn't know the truth.

But then again, he couldn't tell her that he was another soul inhabiting Morres' body.

There was no chance she'd believe him, and even if she did, it would be problematic.

What if she immediately exorcises him? And if his soul really gets chased out of the body?

He didn't particularly regret his spare life, but he also didn't want to commit suicide in such a grand manner.

"But it seems there's a silver lining to you being sick. My child is sitting quietly with me like this, when was the last time?"

"Hahaha...."

This crazy Morres. How did you live that your mother could be happy about such trivial things?

Seongjin could only awkwardly smile.

4

The body, which began to show signs of recovery once, quickly improved. The food was also changed from porridge to regular food, and the range of behavior began to increase.

In the meantime, Seongjin spent time doing various exercises in his room in his spare time.

He wanted to run outside right away and do high-intensity aerobic exercise, but he decided that it was impossible with his physical strength, which fell to the floor while lying down due to illness.

'In addition, if I move too hard right now, it seems like my joints will fly.....'

Look at the trembling knees just by doing national gymnastics once.

Standing exercise is also burdensome, but if he run with this heavy weight, the cartilage won't just wear out.

Is there no swimming pool anywhere? He wanted to train with the feeling of rehab.

As he was clumsily struggling with his arms and legs, leaning part of his weight on the bed so as not to strain his body as much as possible, the demon king comforted him and spoke nonsense.

[Well, it's better than the first time though, right? It seems that the outline of the face is revealed a little.]

When he looked in the mirror, a huge blond boy approaches him with a sullen expression.

He had grayish blonde hair, and his slightly fierce eyes reminded him very much of Queen Elizabeth.

Although he is overweight, he seems to have grown quite well for a 15-year-old, but since he is not familiar with the average height of the people here, it is only a guess.

'I don't know of any change. Isn't it just a little swelling?'

[Shouldn't we inspire motivation with a positive mind first? Maybe not? If you keep working hard, will you become a handsome man from a pig? Now, fighting!]

I want to just destroy him. Seongjin shook his head and started his bare-handed exercises again.

* * *

The detached palace where Seongjin is currently staying is a pretty ivory building called 'Pearl Palace'.

From the outside, it was just a subtle and neat shape, but if you look around, it was a beautiful villa filled with luxurious and colorful decorations.

It is said that the First Queen built it specially for Morres, so it probably wasn't a normal effort.

It is equipped with all facilities for the prince's education and social activities, including small but luxurious bedrooms, a private study, a private gymnasium, a private greenhouse, and a private banquet hall. The gymnasium and the library were planned to be visited by Seongjin sooner or later.

However, as a result of observing for several days while building basic physical strength, Sungjin found out that this Pearl Palace is a place where things go a little strangely.

First, none of the humans who reside or visit the Pearl Palace have divine power.

It was a really strange thing. The entire imperial palace is filled with divine energy, but the source of that energy is not visible.

'I'm sure the area is overflowing with divine power to the point that

the Demon King can't get out of this body without permission.....'

However, in reality, Seongjin had never met anyone with divine power after entering this body.

Morres' body is no exception. The current Holy King, Nathaniel himself, was an unprecedented holder of enormous divine power, but unfortunately, Morres, the son of the most ambitious First Queen, was not born with even a handful of divine power.

Well, it was a very fortunate thing for Seongjin and the Demon King. If Morres' body had held even a little divine power, the Demon King would have disappeared as soon as he entered this body.

'... What a waste. I could have sent it completely.'

[This bastard! Do you think you bastard will be fine alone? You are the evil spirit that entered the prince's body at will! If you were to be discovered by the priest, wouldn't you be exorcised right away?]

That might be a bit difficult.

Anyway, the Holy Empire Delcross has a strong theocratic system, and its influence extends to the entire continent. In other words, it means that it is a place where people with divine power gather from all over the continent.

However, there are only ordinary people without divine power in the Pearl Palace. Could this be a coincidence?

Not seeing that common healer, it was really strange considering that the precious prince had been brought back to life.

The demon king carefully guessed the reason.

[Maybe it's because the original Mores doesn't have divine power?]

'What does that matter?'

[Think about his reputation. Even though he's the son of the Holy Emperor, it is said that he has zero divine power. With that personality, he would have overlooked other people using divine

power. I think he just went out of his way because of his inferiority complex?]

It's plausible, but is that all?

[Hey, that's why, let's go here. Isn't it good for us? Those with divine power are particularly sensitive to magic and evil spirits. How good is it without worrying about getting caught?]

Uh, wait a minute.

'But isn't Morres's father doing well? How can the priests avoid their father if they are stuck in a separate palace? In the same palace?'

[... Is the final boss your father?]

Seongjin sighed as he felt the demon king tremble.

I don't know either. Be it what it is.

Second, the servants of the Pearl Palace were somehow strange.

Pearl Palace is managed by a small number of servants. Excluding the minimum number of guards, the number of people residing in the palace compared to the size of the palace was few and far between.

One dedicated lady-in-waiting, two maids, a resident housekeeper, a chef, and a low-level administrative official.

Even Queen Lizabeth, who occasionally visits Seongjin, is accompanied by attendants, escort knights, and nearly 20 people.

Moreover, even these very few servants were unusual.

First of all, as an example, there would be Edith, the one and only lady-in-waiting.

She was a young lady with short bobbed hair and a graceful face, and she walked around the palace with a blunt expression unsuitable for an imperial court lady.

Every time she go to Seongjin's room alone, he thought at first that

she had a lot of trouble at a young age in a poor working environment.

Even though it is a town without labor laws, shouldn't there be a minimum number of shift workers?

But this woman was no ordinary person.

Even if Seongjin makes a small gesture, she flies into the room, or she picks up and carries an enormous amount of food by herself.

What a surprise she was when she lifted Mores' huge body with her slender arms, saying that she would change the sweaty sheets while he was lying down. She initially suspected it was an assassin posing as her handmaid.

Hunter's intuition, forged by decades of battles with demons, said:

Maybe this woman is on par with quite a few knights.

He thought people here were just like that, but that wasn't the case. Even just looking at the First Queen, she is just a weak lady who grew up finely, and the same goes for her ladies-in-waiting who follow her when she goes on a journey. Although they were skilled housekeepers, they were all just women with extremely normal bodies.

Why is it that only Morres' dedicated handmaid is so special?

"Edith, how is Edith so strong?"

Well, if you're curious, you can ask yourself.

Edith, who opened the curtains to ventilate the room, quickly bowed her head and answered Seongjin's question.

"Yes, Your Highness. That's because I'm an Aura user."

Perhaps because the queen had such a strong influence, she maintained a relatively polite attitude even in front of the prince, who had a dirty reputation.

It can be said that it is a professional attitude that knows how to exclude emotions when working.

[She just said, 'What is this Pig Prince doing to annoy people in the morning?' in her thoughts.]

Of course, it was meaningless to the person next to the demon king who was talkative and liked to tell stories.

Seongjin, embarrassed for nothing, cleared his throat.

"Hmm, Aura user?"

"Yes, Your Highness. 'Aura' is said to be the power that is the basis of life that spreads evenly throughout the world. Those who consciously collect and use them on their bodies are called 'Auro users'."

In response to Seongjin's basic question, perhaps thanks to the excuse that her memory was not perfect, Edith gave an explanation without any doubt.

"As long as you enter Aura Initiation and be recognized as a proper Aura user, you will be eligible to take the Imperial Palace Knights entrance exam."

"Uh, you mean that, Edith too?"

"Yes, I also entered the imperial palace at first as a squire aspiring to join the Royal Guard."

"Squire? So, an apprentice knight?"

Seongjin's doubt deepened.

Why is a sane aspiring knight doing this in the Pearl Palace?

"That is....."

Edith glanced at Seongjin and cautiously continued.

"That... Your Highness, in the past, treated servants a little harshly....."

In short, as Morres' depravity escalated, injuries and complaints from employees continued.

The First Queen tried hard to crack down on the mouth, but it was impossible to cover it up quietly as people were getting hurt every day.

And the news reached the Holy Emperor's ears.

– Can't control it? Then the prince should hire someone he can't carelessly hurt.

On the way, the Holy Emperor arranged many servants of the Pearl Palace to other palaces, and recruited a few high-wage servants.

A high salary was offered to those who are relatively skilled in handling the internal auras, and those with skills higher than squire.

At first, people thought there would be no applicants. No matter how high the salary is, it is difficult to be a maid or servant to the innocent aspirants who have come to the capital with a swollen dream of becoming a decent imperial knight.

However, the Holy Emperor said without a sign of great concern.

– There must be at least one.

As expected, there were exceptions everywhere.

Edith, who decided to come without any connection at just the right time and stick around anywhere with just one skill as a user, entered the Royal Capital around that time.

"I took the entrance exam, but it's a little difficult to roll from the ground in the Knights."

"....."

Thus, the strongest handmaiden was born, who could catch a dish thrown with quick wits, fly away easily when a weapon was wielded, and smear fish bones with a knife containing Aura.

The more he listened to her explanation, the more Seongjin became confused.

'Where did this go wrong?'

[Well.....]

It was expected of Morres, who was corrupt enough to the extent that a servant could only survive if they can master Aura, but he also thought that the Holy Emperor who came up with the idea of replacing everyone and hiring Aura users was not a sane person either.

Of course, the strangest person seems to be Edith, who was caught up in it and is acting as an exclusive maid.

"... But Your Highness."

Suddenly, Edith looked up at Seongjin and tilted her head.

"Are you all right now?"

"What?"

"Before, if you heard even the slightest talk about the Aura, you would get very angry....."

"Angry?"

"You used to throw things all over the place."

"....."

The more I got to know Morres, the more he was an asshole. Why throw things over nothing? Are you a kid?

Seongjin opened his mouth, but he had nothing else to say.

"... Sorry."

Edith's eyes widened at his answer. She looked a little surprised, probably not expecting to hear an apology.

Soon she smiled and shook her head.

"It's okay, Your Highness. It was also quite fun to catch the flying dishes."

"....."

Seongjin looked at Edith, who was quietly lowering her head, with a pitiful eye and said to the demon king.

'She must be a little strange too.'

[I know.]

By the way, it means to come.

Sungjin thought deeply.

Seeing that Aura, Divine Power, and concepts that appear only in fantasy novels actually exist, Lee Seongjin realized once again that this is a different world.

Of course, Seongjin's world where the demonic gate was open and the war with monsters was also fantasy-like, but at least at that time it was a clear and tangible battle of power.

At that time, hunters became physically stronger even by absorbing the spirit of monsters, and the occasionally born supernatural powers only exercised physical power through psychokinesis.

The same goes for demons. Occasionally, there were those who generated high heat with incendiary materials or those with corrosive poison, but it was only a small fraction, and most of them were just ignorantly smashing them with force.

So, until the demon king tried to burn the soul with 'the Flames of Gehenna', Seongjin could not even imagine that such invisible forces could exist.

[That's because Sigurd District 34 was that much of a lower dimension. The fact that you are unfamiliar with such powers is proof that it was a low-level world where magic and divine power were not

allowed.]

'It's kind of bad to say it's low-level. Why are you skipping Gehenna? You said it's the same sub-dimension.'

[Do you think that all flames are the same? Gehenna is a little different! At the critical moment when we are about to take a big leap, you guys get in the way.....]

'What?'

When Seongjin's eyes became fierce, the demon king quickly turned around.

[Ahem. In any case, such low-level flame worlds usually have limited spiritual abilities or powers related to the mind. It seems that the concept itself is connected from the Main World, but there is no way to actually demonstrate its power.]

'.....'

[So please don't treat Pandemonium Gehena as the same level as a lesser dimension like Sigurd District 34. Because that place was on the verge of transforming into a Regular World.]

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

What is a Regular World?

[This bastard makes a blank face again. Wow, you ignorant Earthling. Dimension, huh? Big, huh? It is classified into the Main Phase, the Regular Phase, and the Flame Phase, huh? Don't you know that?]

'Why is this bastard fighting again? Whether you classify the dimension into three or four, is that an important issue in the current situation?'

When Seongjin gets angry, the demon king's voice creeps in.

[It doesn't matter... It may not seem like.....]

'Let's get back to the point. So, how can I use Aura?'

If he didn't know, Seong-jin felt a strong interest when he learned about the possibility of a new power.

Originally a successful hunter who used to fly around, he was about to die of frustration to be confined to such a dull body.

It seems that there are no monsters in this world, so if he can't regain the power of a hunter, how about becoming an Aura user as the next best thing?

[I don't know that either. Because our world is different from here. To explain it with your perception of the earth, there is a difference between hydroelectric power generation and thermal power generation, no, nuclear power generation. That the way the world works is completely different.]

There are things that even the Demon King, who pretended to be proud as if he didn't know anything in this world, doesn't know.

At his words, the demon king snorted.

[Hmph! What do you know about that? This body is the demon king and the ruler of one dimension. It's strong enough even without that!]

The guy who got beaten up by Seongjin was the strongest.

'Then, what about Morres in the past? Was he a user?'

He thinks it's already wrong to say that divine power has to be innate, but if it's Aura, maybe it can be acquired through learning?

He didn't feel any special feeling that is presumed to be an Aura on this body, but it's not a very rare ability because it's a power that can handle not only escort knights but also even a handmaid skillfully.

However, Morres' garbage power far exceeded Seongjin's expectations. The demon king seemed to contact Edith's soul for a moment and find out about this and that, and then he sighed.

[Hmm, it seems that the difference in achievement is extreme depending on talent. There are people who can't even feel the Aura properly no matter how much they train, and there are talented

people who use Aura as if they were breathing since they were young. It's a pity, but Morres seems to have been the former.]

What did the First Queen believe in and think of making this guy the crown prince?

Seongjin sighed.

'... Should I do some physical training for now?'

[Cheer up. Life is inherently unfair. For our existence, fighting!]

'Shut up!'

5

Around the time Seongjin was getting used to the new life little by little while doing physical training in the corner of the room, rumors began to circulate in the imperial palace that the prince had become a little strange.

It was because in the past, Pearl Palace, which had never been quiet due to the sound of swearing in a loud voice and the sound of breaking objects, was as calm as a windless water surface for several days.

At first, even those who thought that he had no energy to act evil after he was ill, gradually began to notice the change in the prince.

"I heard he doesn't complain about the food at all? In the past, it was rather rare that the table was not spilled."

"In the past, he made a fuss from time to time asking for snacks, but these days he doesn't even look for snacks at all. The amount of food was also greatly reduced."

The commotion happened gradually.

Until now, the servants, who had been careful with their mouths as much as possible because of the Queen, who opened her eyes and kept their mouths shut, started pounding cubes here and there to avoid being watched as their peaceful daily life continued.

"Why is he so meek? I'm rather anxious that something might explode."

"They said his memories isn't complete yet? People don't change easily. When he recovers, he will soon act like he used to."

"well. They say that people themselves have changed. He had such a

high fever, so maybe his head got a little weird after all?"

"Shh! You're out of your mind, what if someone hears it....."

And all such rumors were being reported to the chief chamberlain through the eyes and ears densely spread within the imperial palace.

"... What a strange thing."

After hearing the reports from the attendants, Chief Chamberlain Louis rested his chin on his head and thought.

"It is said that it is not uncommon for a person to have such a complete personality change after suffering from a high fever or trauma."

Even as the attendant added, Louis shook his head in silence.

Prince Morres' change was certainly surprising and welcome.

However, the chief chamberlain was rather concerned about the Holy Emperor's attitude towards him rather than the prince's change.

He has been by his side every single day since the young Holy Emperor ascended the throne. So, he was well aware of how diligently the Holy Emperor put his heart and soul into managing the Pearl Palace without any variable.

Employees were directly nominated, and visitors were strictly limited. The resident driver who manages the accounting books separately and is in charge of security was also selected by directly reviewing the application documents.

That's why, in spite of Prince Morres' sudden change, it was rather strange that he had been quietly watching without any comment until now.

The reason for the change must have been due to the unexpected fever, but would it be too much of a doubt if he considered that this was also under the control of his master?

"It's time for Prince Morres's audience."

He guessed he should visit the prince in person before that and take a closer look.

Touching his smooth-shaven chin, the chief chamberlain made that decision.

* * *

"Did you have a good night?"

"Yeah, roughly."

If there is a person Seongjin sees most often after Edith, it would be the resident doctor at Pearl Palace.

This elderly councilor by the name of Ninnias was too sloppy to be seen as a member of the imperial palace.

Every time he opens his mouth, the smell of alcohol vibrates, and his nose is red, which makes him feel like an alcoholic.

Such shabby inspiration was a regular checkup, and he examined the Seongjin twice a day, morning and evening, but he couldn't trust anything he did.

Presbyopia or less sobering, he looked at Seongjin's complexion with dim eyes and nodded, but it is doubtful that he was seeing something properly.

He felt his pulse with his hand, which also had severe tremor, but his trembling fingers couldn't even properly touch it.

"Great. That's good."

What's good? Is this person a trustworthy doctor?

When Seongjin, taken aback, looked back at Edith, who was standing next to her, she sighed and replied.

"Ninnias is actually the one who mainly looks after the permanent knights of the Pearl Palace. There was originally a separate doctor for Your Highness, but....."

According to Edith, until recently, several well-to-do members of the Imperial Palace were on duty as Morres' personal physician.

They were said to be fairly well-known members of the 'Lyora School', which is the most recognized in the imperial capital.

However, when the prince collapsed from a fever and was unable to receive proper treatment, all of them fell out of favor with the Holy Emperor and were demoted to lower positions.

He must be touring the slums and seeing plague patients now.

What, then shouldn't we send a new primary care physician soon? Why are you treating the prince who came back to life like this?

"Kukukuku."

Doctor Ninnias, who had been quietly listening to Edith's story, suddenly let out a low laugh.

"Isn't that what really suits them? Because the Lyora Order always bullshit about them fighting the plague on the front lines."

At the sudden cynical words of the doctor, Sungjin and Edith eyes widened and they looked at him.

As if he had accidentally said something, the doctor was more startled than they were, and quickly tried to fix it.

"Oh, of course I respect the teachings of the Lyora School, the only tradition recognized by the Crusade of Delcross! How are I!"

[He speaks well of things he doesn't like.]

The demon king quickly added in Seongjin's head.

[The old man is now thinking 'It's been bad, you Lyora quacks...'.]

Well, even if he didn't tell me, he couldn't help but notice that talking about respect was bullshit when he saw the expression on the doctor's shit-eating face.

It seems to be antipathy towards the school itself rather than something personal.

Naturally, Seongjin had no choice but to ask the following question.

"Well then, Doctor Ninnias. Where is your school?"

The doctor stared at Seongjin for a moment with blank eyes.

It seemed out of focus like never before, but Seongjin got the feeling that the old man was seeing him properly for the first time.

After a moment of silence, Doctor Ninnias shook his head slowly.

"I'm sorry to inform you, my lord. I am a foolish pharmacist who learned by picking things up here and there."

"....."

"I was lucky enough to catch His Majesty's eyes and get a solid job in my old age, but I never really belonged to a school."

[It is a lie.]

This time, too, Seongjin was able to grasp the true intention of the doctor before the demon king tipped him off. He was an old man with an honest expression.

"Anyway, I don't think you need to do regular check-ups every day from now on, Your Highness. You have fully recovered from your fever."

The doctor hurriedly collected the examination tools and stood up from his seat.

"From now on, focus only on recovering your physical strength by eating a lot and exercising freely. And....."

"And?"

"Compared to normal people, it seems that the activation of the Aura in the body is a little weak, so I think that recovery will be faster if

you put in effort at least in practicing Aura."

He had only recently started examining Morres, and it was clear that the old man did not know much about the idiot Third Prince.

If it had been Morres's original doctors, they would never have said the last word.

As soon as the words to come came out of the old man's mouth, Edith looked back at Seongjin with twinkling eyes.

".....?"

Girl, were you expecting me to throw something?

Seongjin looked at her blindly, and she immediately grumbled with a sullen face.

"My only pleasure....."

Edith, you're not a disk-chasing dog, so why are you looking for the pleasure of life in such a place?

Anyway, even if it wasn't recommended by the doctor, Seongjin was also thinking about starting outdoor exercise in earnest while managing his diet.

"Edith. Could you tell the kitchen to ask for less spice on the food from now on? Ask for plenty of salad without sauce. I don't mind eating food I don't touch."

I'm not in the mood to give you a low-salt, low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet, so I thought I'd have to pick and eat.

How much knowledge do people here have about nutritional components? As far as I can see, it seems to be somewhere between the Middle Ages and modern times.

Edith was unable to hide her puzzled expression at the unexpectedly unfamiliar order, but Seongjin slowly turned her shoulders and added a comment.

"Oh, and I want to go to the gymnasium, can you guide me?"

* * *

The gymnasium in the Pearl Palace was originally a place made for Morres' private swordsmanship lessons.

Of course, it wasn't used for a while after he struck his swordsmanship early, but it was kept clean even after that by the administrative officials who kept an eye on the queen.

As a result, at some point, the escort knights residing in the Pearl Palace had been transformed into a comfortable place for individual training instead of a distant Knights training ground.

But now all the knights stopped training and gathered in the corner of the gymnasium and stood with their eyes open. It was because the Pig Third Prince, who suddenly appeared, was taking over the not-so-wide gymnasium.

The prince was neither walking nor running, but circling the entire gymnasium at a moderate speed.

'What the fuck is that crazy guy suddenly getting wind of?'

The eyes of the knights who were watching the prince who was leading the gigantic body were not very kind.

Unlike the ladies-in-waiting, who had a strong military discipline, they were knights with relatively weak influence from the queen.

It's not uncommon for them to treat the prince rudely. Even now, some knights openly cast contempt.

However, to Seongjin, who had already set the goal of training his stamina and acquiring Aura, and started rushing forward, the unpleasant reactions of the knights were not a consideration at all. He whimpered and turned around a few times, and without even looking at the knights, he entered the Pearl Palace empty-handed, wiping his sweat with his sleeve.

What the hell just happened? The knights belatedly looked at each

other bewildered.

It was a situation where he would have gone crazy at them for not bowing properly, but that fool just quietly exercised and disappeared completely?

The knights blinked their eyes for a moment, but soon resumed their personal training and thought.

'There are all sorts of strange things in life.....'

Everyone thought it was just a whim.

But the next day, and the day after that. The knights appeared at the same time and saw Morres walking around the gymnasium.

"Ugh! Heuk! Keugh! Huh!"

[Hey hey, you're out of breath. How many laps has it been that you're already dying?]

'Wow, such poor stamina.....'

Seongjin frowned while panting unsightly.

Originally, he planned to lightly train for a few days to build enough muscle to support his skeleton, and then start aerobic exercise in earnest when he lost some weight.....

'No, I'm already doing aerobic exercise with all my might?'

He'd only walked a few laps around the gym, but his lungs felt like they were about to explode and his heart was beating like crazy. His whole body was drenched in sweat as if it had been rained on.

At this rate, when do you build stamina and when do you learn aura? Slowly, annoyance rose.

The knights whispering in the corner with a disapproving expression were annoying for nothing, and the sweat dripping down his hair wet his eyes and stung them.

He was rubbing his eyes nervously when a dry towel suddenly appeared in front of his eyes.

He accepted it without hesitation and looked up to see an old gentleman looking at Seongjin with a smile on his face.

'Who.....?'

The old man was standing with several attendants. Looking at his white hair, he doesn't seem to be young, but his waist is straight and he's wearing a neat outfit with not a single button disturbed.

When Seongjin's eyes met, the old man took a step back, raised his right hand to his chest, and bowed his head respectfully.

"I greet the prince."

It is an old-fashioned gesture as if it were painted. The attendants following him also bowed their backs.

Seongjin didn't know how to react and was staring blankly at him, but the old man put on a slightly puzzled expression.

"This... I heard that your memories went missing after the fever, but I didn't pay a visit. I apologize. Your Highness."

He never loses his extremely polite attitude toward the young prince. He was a person with a respectful attitude.

Seongjin admired inwardly and picked up a towel to wipe away the sweat.

Seeing that, the old man smiled again, then lightly lowered his head and said,

"My name is Louis Feltre, Chief Chamberlain of the Imperial Palace. I am assisting His Majesty's side."

".....!"

Suddenly, someone like the right hand of the final boss appeared.

Seongjin's mouth hardened for an instant, but the old man, unaware of it, continued with a bright voice as he handed over a sweaty towel.

"It's been a while since you woke up from the hospital, and you're already doing this intense physical training."

"Well, just for exercise....."

"Since the young prince is so valiant, wouldn't the knights of the Pearl Palace follow suit and become more diligent? Indeed, it is the joy of the Holy Imperial Family, and it cannot be anything but the blessing of Delcross."

Seongjin looked around with an absurd face.

No, old man. Look at the atmosphere when giving flattery. Look at those knights over there. Don't you think they're going to fire lasers right now?

The Demon King clicked his tongue.

[Wow, this guy, is he serious? Is this a bean pod from the other world?]

It's not like it's not true, but the chief chamberlain has a happy face as if he were looking at his wonderful grandson.

Seongjin averted his gaze and cleared his throat.

"... uh, hm. Louis. So what's going on here.....?"

Seongjin, who was not used to treating an elderly man as a servant, blurted out his words clumsily, but the chief chamberlain didn't seem to care.

"After the prince passed out from the fever, His Majesty the Holy Emperor was greatly worried. Didn't he put off state affairs and inspected the Pearl Palace himself, and afterwards, refusing the healing priests and displaying his enormous holy power, he finally cured the terrible fever?"

"That... I heard of it."

He didn't know, but let's say that for now.

"Fortunately, the prince got out of bed in good health, but His Majesty was not easily relieved and ordered to take a closer look at your condition before the audience."

"Uh... That's really something to be thankful for."

"The prince is still recovering his health, so if you wish, He will personally go to the Pearl Palace during this refreshment time."

Huh? Yes? Are you going?

Recognizing Seongjin's bewildered expression, Louis quickly added an explanation.

"Oh, you seem to have forgotten about the regular audience. Since ancient times, His Majesty the Holy Emperor has had a regular refreshment time with the princes and princesses at least once a week."

".....!"

Does the king of a country have all the time for that?

This is unpleasant news for Seongjin, who wants to avoid encountering the Holy Emperor as much as possible.

"As you know, His Majesty's attention to his children is very special, and the audience has not been delayed until now unless there is a major event in the empire or an unavoidable schedule change. In the case of Prince Morres, however....."

However?

"There were many cases where appointments were canceled on the day of the audience. For some reason, it was not uncommon for you to send a message saying that you suddenly felt unwell right before the audience....."

"....."

"As a result, recently, it has often been the case that His Majesty the Holy Emperor asked the prince's intention in advance and personally delivered him to the Pearl Palace. He told me to ask the child if he would do the same this time."

Morres you crazy bastard! You say you broke your appointment with the Holy Emperor frequently? Is this bastard insane?

Seongjin felt a cold sweat flow.

6

Suddenly, a person called the Chief Chamberlain came and said that sooner or later, a meeting with the final boss awaits.

Not only that, it turns out that this world's asshole used to habitually beat the final boss fearlessly.

Seongjin was stunned for a moment.

"... Your Highness?"

"Uh... Um, yes. No! I....."

He was so flustered that my pupils trembled violently and his words kept twisting.

The desperation that he should not lose more points from the human who might be the final boss made Seongjin spit out a plausible sentence.

"This time, I will visit in person... Thank you for your consideration... That's my reply, so please pass it on."

You can't tell someone like the Holy Emperor to come and go.

He wished he could know a bit more about how Morres originally spoke and whether this was appropriate for etiquette. Strangely, the Demon King, who was usually busy chattering in his head without rest, is now still silent.

Fortunately, Seongjin's answer seemed to please the chamberlain.

"Since the prince is so dignified, how satisfied must His Majesty be? I will do my best so that God1 will not neglect the audience! Then, I will soon send someone to the Pearl Palace to give you a message, so please take care."

Louis showed his courtesy again with a dignified gesture and left the gymnasium with a calm face.

However, Seongjin's keen eye, trained in a long battle, did not miss the cheekbones of the head chamberlain flinching and trying to rise.

'What the hell did I do that he liked so much.....'

The more he thought it through, the more he realized how stupid Morres was before.

Seongjin, who briefly caught sight of the chief chamberlain's party walking away with light steps, sighed lightly and turned around.

Because of the unexpected meeting, the break was longer than expected.

Seongjin made up his mind and started walking around the gymnasium again. He had to at least go around a few more laps than yesterday before he could be confident that he was making progress.

Of course, he was out of breath before he had even walked half a lap, putting his firm resolve to shame.

The knights, who had gathered in groups of twos and threes in the corner of the gymnasium, watching the chief chamberlain, did not hide their uncomfortable expression when the prince, who they had expected to return soon, started his run again.

Some showed their annoyance and went out of the gymnasium, while others sat down and pretended to mend their equipment, occasionally sending disrespectful glances at Seongjin.

Up until now, Seongjin hadn't cared a bit about being cocky or not, but he was starting to get annoyed with the constant hostility.

Even if it's annoying, I think it's necessary to take care of the knights once in a while.

"Huk, huk."

How long did he go around the gymnasium like that?

Seongjin, who had been gasping out of breath and staggering, took a few more steps staggeringly before collapsing on the floor.

"Cough! Cough! Keuk, heuk, heuk! Heuk!"

His vision went yellow.

Wow, he felt like dying.

He didn't think it was this hard when he fought monsters while sleeping on the front line in Paju for a week.

As he was gasping for breath, a small voice quietly spoke to him as if it was crawling in.

[... Hey. So, are you meeting in the end? the Holy Emperor.]

'... Huh?'

At first, he couldn't understand it well because his head was in a daze due to lack of oxygen. Come to think of it, wasn't this guy strangely quiet from before?

'I think I'll have to? What were you doing anyway? Did you get some information from the chamberlain? It was so quiet that I thought you had finally disappeared.'

It was definitely the timing to get angry, but the demon king strangely didn't react.

[I did find out. I did.....]

The demon king replied with a strangely downcast voice.

[The chief chamberlain was a guy with resistance to detecting souls. It's not easy, so I had to focus.]

Sungjin tilted his head.

'Detection resistance? You never said anything like that until now. Could the chief chamberlain be a priest?'

[Are you crazy? Making contact with a divine spirit? I'd rather try

suicide again.]

According to the demon king's explanation, detecting a soul is similar to talking to a sleeping person.

When not in a crisis or stressful situation, the soul is usually defenseless, as if it were half asleep.

If you send out what you want to ask there in the form of a thought wave, related memories sporadically emerge from the unconscious.

There was a limit to this seemingly convenient ability, but the demon king could not read the memories directly from Seongjin's soul. He didn't even know the exact reason.

[Such a lax and simple guy is secretly difficult.]

'What, punk?'

So, souls with strong mental power or divine power could not be touched.

In the case of a human with strong mental power, similar to a soul in a state of extreme tension, resistance to thought waves is high.

And souls with divine power will completely disappear the demon king's soul the moment he tried to contact it.

[In that sense, the chief chamberlain has a very strong ego defense. A person who is strict and has strong self-control. Such a person does not easily recall the memories he wants, and his mental barrier is so hard that it is not easy to break through it without damaging his soul.]

Even so, the demon king tried to get as much information as possible. Sooner or later, he would have to be dragged in front of the most powerful priest on the continent and wait for his disposition.

Will the Holy Emperor be able to recognize the remnants of another world and the demon world possessing his son's body?

'So, did you find out anything?'

[Unfortunately, there was no information that would be helpful right away. That old man is, first of all, a very fine-grained person in the imperial palace. He was bigger than I thought. The information he had was so vast that I couldn't focus on what I wanted to find out.]

Well, at first glance, it seemed to be relevant.

[So, I tried to get a rough idea of the Holy Emperor, right? But, how should I say this, his perception is very biased... That's why I don't trust it very much.]

'Can't trust it? The information of the chief chamberlain who serves the Holy Emperor right by his side?'

At Seongjin's question, the demon king's soul is slightly agitated. Perhaps, if there is a substance, it will feel like sighing.

[First of all, the loyalty the chief chamberlain has to the imperial family is real. To put it bluntly, he's so friendly even to Morres, who is being criticized for being a scumbag. On top of that, his faith in the Holy Emperor is so firm, well... To put it nicely, it's loyalty, but in a bad way it could be called fanaticism.]

'Is it enough to be called fanaticism?'

[Yes, he thinks the Holy Emperor is almost omnipotent, okay? Is this reliable information?]

Sungjin blinked his eyes.

Omnipotent?

[I don't think he's clearly aware of it either. He's just content with himself that he's giving his loyalty to such a good holy emperor. But at least in his subconscious mind, the Holy Emperor is by no means a mere human being. He firmly believes that he is the greatest successor of all times and the undoubted representative of the Main God.]

'.....'

[But you know what's really funny? He really doesn't have much faith

in God. He's not very interested in religion itself.]

What's with that. He doesn't believe in God, but believes in God's representative?

[That's why it's funny. Isn't that a complete contradiction? But that picky guy doesn't know that! How far can the respect, admiration, and trust in a human go to the extreme?]

Sungjin stood up without a word. Suddenly, his breathing calmly subsides.

In the gentle breeze that blows, his heated body quickly cooled, and goosebumps appeared.

'... I don't think this is simply a matter of strong or weak divine power.'

God's representative.

Since Seongjin was close to an atheist in the first place, he didn't think that there would be an omnipotent person who actually represented God.

Just that the chief chamberlain subconsciously believed that the Holy Emperor might have something special.

For example, what if the Holy Emperor had the same ability as the demon king's 'soul detection'? Wouldn't the people around him think of him as omnipotent?

Whatever it is, one thing is certain.

'We, it seems likely that we will be caught. Is there any solution?'

[Maybe? Can't we just break the promise like Morres did?]

'That's a stopgap. Previously, Morres didn't even show his face, so he went all the way to the Pearl Palace himself. What will you do if they come here again?'

[What if we escape the imperial palace?]

'I don't know if I have time to prepare, how can I do that with this low-quality stamina? Besides, with this body, I'd be noticed wherever I go.'

[... We're doomed.]

Is that all you have to say?

Sensing the demon king's soul trembling in his head, Seongjin struggled to suppress the rising anxiety.

* * *

The main palace sent an attendant to announce the time for refreshments even before evening. Needless to say, the Pearl Palace turned upside down.

How long has it been since that fat prince went on an official outing!

Upon hearing this news, Queen Elizabeth led a large number of ladies-in-waiting from the Ruby Palace and attacked from the early morning of the day. Soon, the entire Pearl Palace went bustling under the direction of the queen.

Seongjin, who had planned to spend the entire morning at the gymnasium because it was an afternoon appointment, was caught by the ladies-in-waiting with solemn expressions before he even left the room.

"... Huh?"

With a bewildered face, he was taken to the bathhouse and was purified. That too, embarrassingly, in front of the lady-in-waiting!

As he struggled and protested, Edith poured perfume on his head with a determined face.

"Calm down, Your Highness. Shall we finish quickly and have a snack?"

Are you bathing a cat right now?

He stared at her in disbelief, and she tilted her head.

"Hmm, it worked fine before."

"....."

Previously, he was wondering how she dealt with the temper of Morres, who is was a scumbag, by herself, but turns out he was treated like an animal that couldn't communicate at all.

"Get out. I can take a bath myself!"

"While you were sick, I always took care of this and that, so why are you ashamed?"

This woman said it now.

As Seongjin showed no sign of backing down, Edith's expression suddenly darkened.

"Come on, Your Highness. Please kindly cooperate. Do you know how much the Queen will pester me if there is even the slightest setback in preparation?"

As the queen's visits increased recently, it seemed that this steel-mental maid was under stress without realizing it.

"Why do the maids of Ruby Palace bother to come to Pearl Palace? It's not even the their's palace."

Like saying 'Things that's less than a handfull. Fufu,' Edith laughs with an eerie expression. It was twice as scary because the user was doing that.

He quickly took a bath and came out, pressed by her sultry spirit, and this time, the queen's ladies-in-waiting were lined up in a row, holding very professional-looking beauty tools.

Soon he got his hair trimmed, his nails trimmed, his eyebrows trimmed, and a fuss breaks out.

"Ah, look at this beautiful hair that looks just like the queen!"

"Oh, you have lost a lot of weight. The contours of his face have become so defined!"

Don't lie, these guys.

'It's just a simple audience? What is this all about!'

Pulled this way and pinched that way, there is no mess like this.

Seongjin, tattered as if he had come through a storm, managed to breathe a sigh, but that was not the end.

A procession of maids with both hands full of clothes and accessories stretched from the end of the room to the outside of the hallway.

Seongjin's face went pale.

'Hey, how can I do this? How long do I have to do this!'

However, the demon king, who would normally have laughed at Sungjin like crazy, was in a strange state.

[Fufu. That one near the end, the color should be fine. Of course. Fufufufu.]

'.....'

Fortunately, Queen Elizabeth's taste was quite noble.

For a while, he was worried about the clothes with lots of frills coming and going, but the finally finished look was quite good from the perspective of a modern person, Seongjin.

The dark blue uniform embroidered with silver thread was neat at first glance, but if you look closely, you can see how much money, craftsmanship, and time have been spent on it.

As if it were not completely empty words to say that he had lost weight or something, the clothes were still quite plentiful, and the ladies-in-waiting were busy mending them for a while.

Of course, no matter how dressed up, it was a beautifully packaged

pig.

Seongjin secretly sighed, but even so, his appearance was not so satisfactory in the eyes of the queen.

"Oh, Morres. How can you look so great!"

Not to be outdone by this, the soulless praises of the ladies-in-waiting continued.

"You are extremely devoted!"

"Isn't it because of the dark clothes that the prince's gorgeous hair stands out even more?"

"How about cuffs and brooches? How could it match the prince's jewel-like gray eyes!"

"Ah, it's a beauty that makes you fall in love at first sight!"

Hey, you've gone too far.

* * *

The main palace sent a carriage on time. He said he would prepare without a hitch, but the chief chamberlain was more meticulous than he thought.

As he climbed into the carriage, attended by Edith, two escort knights rode behind them.

'The imperial carriage is so splendid. It's definitely a different ride than a car, isn't it?'

[Oh, goodness. Are you a child? Aren't you a guy old enough to know that this is a carriage to the nether world?]²

'Shut up.'

However, shortly after leaving the Pearl Palace, the demon king trembled and called Seongjin.

[Hey, I don't have a good feeling.]

Seongjin, who had been spread out comfortably, straightened his posture with tight tension.

'What? Why?'

[Look outside, fool.]

'.....?'

[Isn't the main palace still far away? But the surroundings are already full of ominous light.]

When I lifted the curtains and looked out the window, I saw a vast panoramic view of the imperial garden.

On the vast green lawn, where the boundaries are not even visible, the imperial palace road stretches wide enough for three wagons to run side by side. At the end of the road, you can see the magnificent and beautiful main palace shining white.

And countless people were filling the large garden in front of the main palace.

Knights wary of their surroundings, aristocrats in groups of twos or threes, clerks hurriedly walking back and forth carrying piles of papers.

And a huge number of priests dressed in shining white uniforms.

'Wow, this is a little.....'

People in white clothes were visible beyond half of the crowd.

From plain robes to extremely splendid robes embroidered with gold thread, the crests of the main gods in the form of the sun and sword are always engraved on the white clothes.

It dawned on me that this place was the den of priests.

[Ah, I misunderstood! I thought it would be okay if I hid well in my body, but I was wrong. It stings my soul like being pricked with a needle just by being close to those with divine power!]

'.....'

Seongjin, who was nervous about the demon king's fuss, swallowed without even realizing it.

It seemed that many clergymen would recognize Seongjin any moment and rush at them, shouting that it was an evil spirit that had taken over the prince's body.

[We should have just run away when we had the chance.....]

At the same time as the wretched Demon King lamented, the carriage stopped.

He arrived at the main palace entrance, the residence of the Holy Emperor.

T/N:

1. The word here is 신 and it means god, but given the context I suspect that it's also a way for a person of his status to refer to himself? Not that he thinks himself as god, no, but more like something along the lines of 'this servant'. So the sentence might go something like "This servant will do his best to make sure the audience is not neglected". But hey I'm not the expert in the Korean language so I might be wrong.

2. Meaning they're convinced they're gonna die as soon as the Holy Emperor sees them and find that they've replaced his son's soul lol.

7

Stepping carefully on the rocking steps and getting off the carriage, a group of knights dressed in fancy uniforms greeted Seongjin.

"We greet Prince Morres!"

"We greet the Third Prince!"

The knights raised their swords in unison and thumped them on the ground with their sheaths, then lowered their heads in a moderate motion. It was a well-rounded courtesy that could not be compared to the resident knights of the Pearl Palace.

Seongjin's mouth opened involuntarily.

Oh, that was kinda cool.

Looking at the knights with their heads down blankly, one of them, who appeared to be the leader, approached Seongjin and smiled softly.

"I congratulate you on your belated recovery. Your Highness the Prince! From here on, our imperial guards will serve you."

He was handsome man with his dark blonde hair.

His well-trained, sturdy body was quite intimidating, but the small, round eyes made his overall impression strangely mild.

"....."

Not knowing how to react, Seongjin stared blankly at him, and the man's smile faded.

However, as if he had been warned beforehand, he immediately calmed down his expression, put his right arm on his chest, and

bowed his head politely.

"My name is Marthain Klanos, a member of the Imperial Guard, and the leader of the 2nd Knights, my lord. It's really nice to see you back in good health."

Ah, it seems that this person was originally familiar with Morres.

Well, what can he do? Seongjin smiled shyly, and Marthain smiled softly at him again, and then he turned around and started walking in the lead.

He seems to have guessed that he might not know the geography of the main palace at all. Thinking that it was fortunate that there was a person with quick judgment, Seongjin followed him.

However, as soon as he stepped into the high arched entrance, the Demon King made a sound of pain.

[Ew... Stuffy. It feels like my soul is being crushed flat!]

'Why? Could those people be paladins too?'

[No. They seem to be regular knights... It's not that, it just feels like this area is exceptionally full of holy power. The moment I leave this body, I feel like I'm going to be crushed to death... ugh.....]

After that, the demon king completely shut his mouth. He called out several times, but the presence of the soul itself was extremely faint, and now it was difficult to even feel its presence.

He made up his mind to pretend he entered the boss dungeon, but he never thought that the demon king would be knocked out so quickly.

Concealing his anxiety, Seongjin slowly walked into the lobby of the main palace following the guides of the knights.

The office of the Holy Emperor was located at the end of the second floor of the main palace.

The wide hallway was relatively quiet, but occasionally people dressed in fancy clothes, who seemed to be high priests, would pass

by the party.

Each time, Seongjin was nervous inside, but fortunately, they just stepped aside and greeted politely without any reaction.

'It seems that priests don't recognize that the soul has changed? Could it be that we were worried for nothing?'

Seongjin, a little relieved, called out, but there was still no answer from the demon king.

Couldn't withstand the energy of the priests and perished?

The complete annihilation of the demon king was originally what he longed for. He is the main culprit who led Sungjin's world to destruction, and the enemy who drove him to death by the Flames of Gehenna.

It's just that until now, there's no other way to use your hands, and the existence itself is so insignificant that he just left it alone.....

However, when he thought that the demon king had really disappeared, Seongjin felt a strange sense of emptiness.

"Your Excellency Cardinal Benitus!"

The thoughts didn't last long. It was because Marthain, who was walking ahead of him, suddenly stopped and lowered his head.

A thin old man stood in front of the party, poking his head over the shoulder of the lowered knight commander.

He was an eccentric old man with a long hooked nose and a drooping mouth.

Despite his small and diminutive body, the high priestly hat and the splendid robe embroidered with gold and silver made him look quite dignified compared to his size.

It's a cardinal..... He must be a high-ranking nobleman, right?

The old man stood upright and looked at Morres' party for a while,

then slightly bowed his head toward the knight commander.

"You don't have to be so polite to me. Sir Marthain."

Contrary to his strict first impression, his tone was quite polite. Then, he nods his head towards Seongjin.

"Your Highness the Prince."

".....?"

What? Something feels terribly wrong?

Saying hello to the escort knight first and later pretend to notice the prince? And with just a nod?

The old man's attitude was strange even for him, who had no knowledge of Delcross' culture.

Seongjin's eyes narrowed. As if Marthain also noticed this, he restlessly looked at Seongjin.

"So, what's going on in the main palace?"

It is not a question directed at the knight commander who always stands guard at the main palace, but the cardinal does not pay attention to Seongjin and asks Marthain.

Truly, the courtesy was an old man who ate cheap wraps. As he was trying to see how far it was going, Marthain, impatient, took a step forward and warned the cardinal in a low voice.

"Your Excellency Cardinal. You are in front of the His Highness the Prince. Please set an example."

"Ahem!"

Cardinal Benitus, who made a sound that he couldn't tell whether it was a cough or a snort, only then turned to Seongjin and met his eyes. It was an arrogant posture with hands behind the back and belly sticking out.

"Yes, I heard that you have been through quite a bit of trouble lately, but it is fortunate that you are still in good shape... Huh?"

Except for the old man talking, he narrows his eyes and looks Seongjin up and down.

Marthain's face hardened at that clearly rude attitude, but the cardinal's eyes suddenly widened.

"Huh? By the way, wait... No, prince?"

Then, all of a sudden, he started approaching me with a straight face.

Seongjin realized something was going wrong.

"How... What is this....."

With a slightly bewildered face as if he had discovered something strange, the old man suddenly stretched out his arm toward Seongjin.

Soon, a hand surrounded by strong white light approached my eyes like a rake. It was not an auspicious light even to Seongjin, who was unfamiliar with it.

'Perhaps, this is the divine power.....'

It's the first time he's seeing divine power after coming to this world. His heart was beating fast, and all sorts of thoughts ran through his head in that brief moment.

Did he recognize Seongjin's soul? Or did he notice the Demon King who was with him? What will happen if he touched that divine power like this? Will he be expelled from the body?

If he wanted to live as the prince of the Holy Empire, this kind of thing will happen all the time in the future. At this point, it wouldn't be bad to try the divine power as a test.

That's right.

'Let's see, so you're just putting your hand in to get it?'

Seongjin's eyebrows crumpled involuntarily. He had no intention of arguing with the elderly in every detail, but still, isn't it a little too much to try to touch the prince as he pleases?

Seongjin, who almost threw his hands away reflexively, tried to brace himself. Those bony fingers of the cardinal looked straight and brittle at the slightest mishandling, so fortunately, before he could commit elderly abuse, Marthain quickly blocked Seongjin's way.

"Stop it, Sir Benitus!"

Stop. The old man, who stopped moving for a moment, looked at the knight commander with a puzzled expression.

"Do you know what Sir Marthain is doing now?"

It was clearly an attitude of blaming him, but the knight commander was adamant.

"No high-ranking clergy can approach the prince. The Cardinal is no exception to that."

"Don't you think that is strange at all?"

"This is His Majesty's command. It is to protect the prince."

For a moment, a cool air flowed between the two. The cardinal, who had glared at Marthain for a while with sad eyes, opened his mouth as if lamenting as soon as the knight commander showed no sign of backing down.

"Who the hell are you protecting from a priest who serves a god... ...
."

The cardinal shook his head and took a step back.

"Sir Marthain has always been like that. Why are you so blind to his words?"

"....."

"Then see you again. Sir Marthain."

Then he glared at Seongjin and shook his head sideways. It was more like a snort than a greeting.

"... Your Highness the Prince."

Then, without seeing Seongjin's reaction, he hurriedly passed the party.

Marthain was just staring at the back of the cardinal without saying anything, but the corners of his mouth twisted strangely, making an expression that he couldn't tell if he was laughing or crying.

But only for a while. The Knight Commander, who immediately regained his polite smile, bowed his head toward Seongjin.

"We're a bit delayed, Prince. Let's hurry."

The behavior of the two felt a little strange, but Seongjin soon turned off his nerves and followed Marthain obediently.

All right. He had a big job right in front of him, meeting with the Holy Emperor, so what does that have to do with it?

* * *

"Oh, Your Highness Morres! What a splendid figure you are! His Majesty the Holy Emperor will be greatly pleased!"

Upon arriving at the front of the office, Chief Chamberlain Louis, who has been waiting outside the door, approaches with open arms.

I was hesitant about the over-reaction, but Louis immediately flinched and quickly responded.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Your Highness. You are so compliant and dedicated that this servant forgot his manners for a moment."

There was a corner where the gentle-looking nobleman was secretly out of his arms. Seongjin smiled bitterly and asked.

"Um... Louis? As you know, I can't remember... isn't it? Is there anything I should be careful about when I meet my father? I'm sorry

for bothering you more."

Louis's face lit up. If the Demon King had read his thoughts, he would have said this.

'You asked such a thoughtful question. That Sir Morres has become so dignified!'

Thanks to Morres, who faithfully laid his personality to the bottom, Seongjin can do whatever he want in moderation.

"I assumed that the prince would be confused about manners. Thankfully, His Majesty the Holy Emperor doesn't care much about outward etiquette. All you have to do is call him 'Your Majesty the Holy Emperor', and it's enough if you just show respect."

the Holy Emperor doesn't seem to have a very strict personality.

As he was feeling relieved inside, the chief chamberlain turned around and spoke to the door in a loud voice.

"Your Majesty, it is Prince Morres."

Now, in the boss room position.

Creak.

As the door to the office slowly opened, Seongjin walked into the room, trying to calm his pounding heart.

'In the worst case, I'll just be kicked out of this body.'

After engraving that fact in his heart once again through his encounter with Cardinal Benitus, his initial anxiety was greatly diluted.

Then, the vacancy is filled with curiosity, and soon thoughts start popping up here and there.

What kind of existence is the Holy Emperor, who is called the God's representative? When he tried to imagine it, he thought of the pope in the bread hat he saw on TV before Seongjin's world was destroyed.

That person was a grandfather, but since the Holy Emperor has a son in his puberty, he must be younger than that, right? Could he be a lot like Morres?

Was he a strong person? Or is it the image of a typically weak priest?

At least it didn't seem like he would be pushed back in terms of age. Now, he and the demon king are fighting and becoming childish together, but even so, Seongjin was over sixty when he died on Earth.

As he entered the room, half nervous and half excited, swallowing saliva, the first thing he noticed was the gorgeous refreshment set in the middle of the room.

he thought maybe it was considering Morres' taste. This is because he had seen similar desserts often served in the Pearl Palace.

Beyond that, he could see a large desk with splendid reliefs.

Looking at the documents stacked high and the books scattered here and there, he feel that this is a space for official affairs.

And.

the Holy Emperor stood in front of a large window that opened toward the terrace.

".....!"

Seongjin opened his eyes wide involuntarily.

'The Holy Emperor? Is that person?'

He was a well-groomed young man.

No matter how you look at his soft features and youthful face, he doesn't look like a father to an adolescent son.

Short trimmed black hair, simple-looking everyday clothes, and a sleek-looking body made him look more like a well-trained swordsman than a priest.

A man called a priest even wears a long sword on his waist!

There is no tall hat of a cardinal, nor a bread hat like the one worn by the pope. Only the white and splendid robe draped over his shoulders like a cloak made it possible to guess that he was not an ordinary high priest.

If I had to look for a similarity with Morres, would it be the gray eyes that catch the light and shine with a mysterious silver light?

Those warm eyes were still staring at Seongjin.

Is that the father of this fat man?

"Ah... Father?"

Oops! He was told to call him His Majesty the Holy Emperor!

He was so flustered that he had spit out the name that was in his head.

The Holy Emperor tilted his head to the side. He might be puzzled, but there was no expression on his cold face, so he couldn't guess what he was thinking.

"... Your Majesty the Holy Emperor."

As he quickly corrected himself and lowered his head, the Holy Emperor opened his mouth. It's a clean low pitched voice.

"Father is fine too, you certainly don't have any memories of the past."

"Yes. That is... It happened."

Seongjin blurted out his words. Actually, the soul has changed, but since he's in front of the Holy Emperor, it is strangely awkward to lie.

Fortunately, the Holy Emperor responded briefly as if he did not feel anything wrong with him.

"Okay."

Then, with strides, he approaches Seongjin. The elongated robe swayed accordingly, emitting a soft light depending on the angle.

He was watching the movement inadvertently, and before he knew it, the Holy Emperor, who had come one step closer, stopped walking.

Up close, he was taller than I thought.

Blink. He didn't know how to react, so he was looking up at him with his eyes wide open, but the Holy Emperor, who was looking down at Seongjin with an unknown expression, suddenly lifted his arm and stretched it toward his head.

It happened so fast, he couldn't react.

Clench. His fists, which were spontaneously clenched, are damp with cold sweat.

Did he hear it too? Was he going to die like this? Seongjin closed his eyes, anticipating the end. He did.

Thump. The hand came up to the top of his head.

'... What?'

Nothing happened.

[Hng?]

No, rather than nothing happened.....

[Hnggg?]

That familiar, low-key voice echoed in my head.

'... Demon King?'

The demon king's presence, which was so faint that it was impossible to detect, suddenly grew rapidly, and at the moment, a sharp vibration was transmitted. It felt as if my soul was stretching.

[What? Wait a minute, huuuh?]

'Are you alive? What happened?'

The demon king did not respond to Seongjin's words. Perhaps he himself did not know. Because the surprise and confusion he felt came through unfiltered.

[Huh? What is this... Oh? Hiiiiieek!]

The demon king's soul suddenly made a strange sound as if it was startled by something, then fell back into silence.

But this time, Seongjin let out a sigh of relief because he could clearly feel his presence.

At the same time, one side of the head cools down.

'What did the Holy Emperor do? Did he notice the existence of the Demon King?'

If he noticed, why didn't he get rid of him? Rather.....

But he couldn't afford to think any longer. It was because the Holy Emperor, who lowered his hand from the top of his head before he knew it, commanded in a calm tone.

"Sit down."

And the two dissimilar father and son sat face to face with the refreshment table in front of them.

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Seongjin sat down and stared at the Holy Emperor in silence for a while. It was an expression of his will to gauge his intentions as much as possible.

It was the most disrespectful look on his son's face, but the Holy Emperor didn't seem to care as he lifted the teacup in front of him.

His face as he looked into the tea without drinking was so indifferent that Seongjin immediately doubted whether the person in front of him had emotions.

The silence between the two was broken when the Holy Emperor set the teacup down on the table.

"Don't like it? Didn't you usually enjoy eating?"

"....."

What? Were you suspicious of this?

Seongjin thought about it and called him cautiously.

"... That, father?"

"Yes, Morres."

In an instant, his pulse went blank. He was nervous about something, but the other person really seemed to have no idea.

'Well, it's a bit questionable, but you're going to treat me like a son, right?'

For some reason, Seongjin felt like he was going to be what he was, so he picked up a cookie in front of him.

If he didn't eat it, he thought he'd keep noticing, and it's a pity since it's already prepared.

Munch munch.

".....!"

It's more delicious than he thought?

Does the body that lost fat after a few days of dieting want sugar, or is it similar to Morres' original taste that Sungjin didn't even know about.

Decades of living mainly on preserved food on a planet that was devastated by the invasion of monsters. The desserts that the royal chef put the soul into were enough to satisfy his desolate taste buds.

Seongjin admired and tasted various kinds of desserts. In the meantime, the Holy Emperor would look at Seongjin without saying anything and would sip tea from time to time.

Only then could Seongjin take some time to observe the Holy Emperor.

'At first glance, he looks young and docile.'

Perhaps because of his strangely cool eyes, he doesn't look young at all. In reality, he may not be that young. Edith once told him that aging slows down when an Aura user reaches a certain state.

If so, how strong is he? Even for Seongjin, who had a history of fighting for decades, the decision was not easy.

In the case of Edith and the resident knights of the Pearl Palace, if they could regain some of their physical strength, they were confident enough to try rubbing it without an aura. Needless to say, it is possible to crush if it is in the state of absorbing the magic beast's spirit.

However, in the case of the Holy Emperor, it was ambiguous. He didn't feel any strong momentum, but when he tried to find a gap, it was strangely awkward.

Above all, Seongjin's intuition, forged in a long battle, continues to sound an alarm toward the Holy Emperor.

"This must mean that he's strong enough to be hard to measure, right?"

If possible, let's not stretch out on this guy¹. Seongjin made that decision.

After that, an awkward father-son conversation ensued.

"That's right, how have you been?"

"What... I have been doing physical training, and I am thinking of losing some weight."

"Good idea. I hear you are going to the gymnasium these days?"

"Yes. First of all, I try to start with light exercise and gradually increase the training time."

"Exercising too much can actually be harmful."

"I know. Once I get used to it, I can reduce the time instead of increasing the intensity. Then, wouldn't it be possible to read some books in my spare time?"

"Books?"

The Holy Emperor's eyes widened.

It was a meaningful change in expression that Seongjin, who doubted whether he was human because he had no expression, can read it for the first time.

Oho. This topic works. After all, there are no parents who would hate their children studying anywhere.

Seongjin felt a little more at ease and started chattering incoherently.

"Um... That's why I've been so ignorant until now... No, haven't I lived away from books?"

It's true that the demon king said so, right? Fortunately, the Holy Emperor did not show any reaction.

"....."

"Then, when I came back to life, I think it made me think about life again. A philosophical topic pops into my head. Why do you live your life. What do you do with life. Things like that."

"Philosophy."

"Yes. And I'm also curious about religion. Death and the afterlife, God and the soul, I want to know some of these things."

The Holy Emperor tilted his head.

"Are you interested in that? I think the first person who got kicked out was the theology teacher."

No, didn't Morres just skip all classes, regardless of subject?

"That's why, Your Majesty the Holy Emperor, no, Father. I have a real question."

"What are you curious about?"

"Yes. Do you believe your father has a soul? No, since you are the Holy Emperor, of course you'll believe it..... It's not like that, in my father's eyes... Can you see the human soul?"

"....."

It was an impulsive question. It was because of his personality that he couldn't hold back his curiosity at the moment when he was strangely convinced that the Holy Emperor would not harm him right away.

At the same time, it also penetrated the most fundamental suspicion.

What Seongjin had been worried about from the beginning, and what he still doubts about the Holy Emperor.

The Holy Emperor answered mildly.

"I can clearly see the soul in my eyes. Even if it is not, the priest who believes in the Lord naturally does not doubt the existence of the soul. As the prince of the Holy Empire, you shouldn't have such doubts."

"Then what does the soul look like?"

"It is the same as the person he was before he was born. Because the soul is affected by the body until the moment it dies."

Seongjin swallowed his saliva. Then.

"Then, maybe... What does my soul look like?"

The Holy Emperor did not answer right away this time.

"... Why is that all of a sudden?"

"No, what. I have lived a dissolute life so far, I wonder if my soul has gained this much weight too....."

It was bullshit even thinking about it, but Seongjin decided to be confident.

The Holy Emperor looked at him blankly for a moment with unknown eyes, then said.

"To confirm that, you will have to see your soul come out of your body first. Did you want to die?"

"....."

No, this guy strikes people when they're caught off guard.

He was wrong.....

The audience time passed faster than expected.

Seongjin was never a good social person even in his previous life, but strangely, in front of the Holy Emperor, words leaked out as if his tongue was greased.

Maybe he was such a talkative person, he was surprised at himself

even during the conversation.

It's a quick adaptation compared to what he was nervous about considering the Holy Emperor as the final boss. Perhaps it was because of the relief that came from the disappearance of the threat to life he had been feeling all along.

"... So, while I was doing gymnastics on the floor, Edith suddenly came running in fright. She thought I flipped over and couldn't get up."

"Is that so?"

"I think I'll throw everything I have in my hand, how do I know how to run if I'm holding on something while working out my arms?"

"That's right."

"By the way, the tea is really good. I've never drank it much, but it smells really good compared to the tea called Melbourne that Edith brew the other day. It really tasted like bile."

"This tea is also Melbourne... .."

"... Yes?"

The Holy Emperor was a better person to talk to than he thought, because he silently listened to Seongjin even when he talked about nonsensical things. Of course, he wasn't a guy with a very good reaction.

Maybe that's why, even though he was actually almost the age of Seongjin's son, his father's voice came out well and smoothly.

"So I want to learn Aura. But I'm not sure how to start."

At the end, he also asked for this.

He seems to be the most powerful person in the country and a fairly strong Aura user, so if he can't take advantage of this opportunity, he's an idiot.

"That's right, Aura....."

The Holy Emperor rested his chin on his head and was lost in thought.

"They said that training in swordsmanship or spearmanship should precede it. I heard that there are unique Aura practice methods tailored to that skill, and the more you master them, the more you can handle Auras freely."

"Ah, there's a separate method of seniority!"

"okay. The basics of learning Aura are seniority. Of course, it is said that the classification of seniority becomes meaningless after reaching a certain level. Because where the heart goes, the Aura naturally flows."

"Then, first of all, while learning swordsmanship....."

What?

Seongjin nodded and suddenly became puzzled.

Isn't this man an Aura user? Why are you talking so bluntly as if you heard it from someone else?

"I heard that Father is also a user. How did you learn it in the first place?"

At Seongjin's question, the Holy Emperor rubbed the tip of his chin with his hand.

Um? Why do you look a bit embarrassed right now?

I keep watching, so I think I know a little bit about this expressionless man.

"That's it, I don't really remember how I got it. I moved habitually when using the sword, and later heard from my master that it was an Aura."

"... Yes?"

Seongjin's mouth fell open.

Wow, he heard that he had a talent for using Aura as if he was breathing since he was young, was basically what this person was saying.

"Come to think of it, even though you didn't know how to study when you were young, it seemed like you enjoyed swordsmanship lessons quite a bit. But no matter how much you practiced, you couldn't get a feel for the aura at all."

"Oh, um....."

"Even when you try, there was no result, so in the end you have lost interest in swordsmanship."

"I see....."

Suddenly, a flood of sympathy for that Morres floods in.

There was at least one thing he did with his heart, but he didn't even have the talent for that, poor bastard.

Seongjin's thoughts became complicated. It was because it was Morres' body, so he thought that the way to go would be difficult if he was naturally insensitive to aura.

"Will it be too hard? I thought that if it was something I could learn through training, I could somehow learn it....."

Seonghwang shook his head.

"In the end, it is a matter of time and effort. Even those who take time to feel the aura at first, I have seen cases where the speed at which they are mastered it is extraordinary. Furthermore....."

He stopped talking, stared at Seongjin's face for a moment, and then spat out unexpected words.

"... I don't think it would be that difficult for you now."

* * *

In the carriage returning to the Pearl Palace, Seongjin was spread out, leaning against a cushion in a proud mood.

Although he was a little tired, today's audience was quite a success.

Chief Chamberlain Louis was in tears.

"It's been several years since the two of you spent such a happy time....."

To make a decent grandfather so happy, this is a true example of respect for the elderly.

In addition, to Seongjin's request to resume the swordsmanship class, the Holy Emperor replied as follows.

"Sooner or later, I will send a suitable person to the Pearl Palace."

And one of the biggest achievements of all, is that he didn't have to worry about being exorcised in the future! Hurray!

The carriage writhing violently as the body of a large body writhed here and there in joy.

"Prince! What's going on! Are you okay?"

Hearing the coachman's shout outside, Seongjin quickly straightened up and cleared his throat.

"Ahem, no problem! I slipped off the seat for a moment. Don't mind it!"

[Good job. Are you a kid? I'm really ashamed to see others.]

And the demon king, who had been silent until now, finally opened his mouth. Seongjin responded happily.

"That's what I do when I'm alone. anyway are you okay? Why are you so quiet?"

[The impact on the soul is too great. I also needed time to recover.]

The feeling of trembling is vividly conveyed. It seemed like a really

big deal.

[The main palace, it was truly a terrifying place filled with divine power. I thought I would die from being completely crushed. If the divine power hadn't been cut off at that time, if it had been a little late, I would.....]

Divine power blocked?

Seongjin also had some guesses. Just when the Holy Emperor put his hand on his head, he did something then.

[I don't know what kind of trick he did, but now there's a barrier around our souls.]

'... Barrier?'

[It seems to have a property that completely blocks spiritual energy as well as divine power. Now, even if someone with divine power is nearby, it doesn't sting like before. Only.....]

The demon king hesitated a little, then continued with a downcast voice.

[It's just that it's impossible for my soul to interfere with other souls.]

Wait, that means.....

[Yes, that's right.]

A trembling wave like a sigh is transmitted.

[Soul detection is no longer possible. I just tried it against the coachman and escort knight, but it didn't work at all.]

Does this guy's only usefulness disappear like this? Now, he really has become the embers of the Demon Realm.

The demon king exclaimed in a fit of anger.

[But now it is possible to move away from this body to some extent? Can you stop treating me like trash?]

So you've gone from lie detector to short-range navigation?

'Too bad.....'

Seongjin corrected his posture and sat down, looking out the window. As the twilight slowly sets, the ivory walls of the Pearl Palace begin to appear in the distance.

It had only been a few days, but it was strange that the Pearl Palace felt as cozy as home.

'For now, let's take comfort in surviving. He was a better person than I thought, and both of us are safe.'

However, the Demon King thought differently.

[What? Good guy? You're safe? Wow, you naive human being. If people are ignorant, their hair can become a field of flowers like this.....]

Seongjin was at a loss for words as a black and thick feeling of fear suddenly surged from his trembling soul.

[Maybe you don't know. You won't know unless you touch it soul-to-soul.]

'.....?'

[That... That's a monster. How could such a thing exist in this world?]

'Hey, monster is a bit.....'

[If not a monster? Do you really think someone that I, the great Demon King of Gehenna, cannot measure the limits of, is an ordinary human?]

To that extent?

Still, wasn't that person relatively kind to them? He gives good advice and saves the demon king.....

The demon king snorted.

[Hmph! Do you really think that monster doesn't know who you are? But why would he let you live? What about the evil spirit that stole his son's body?]

'It's a bit harsh to say it's an evil spirit. Cursing others, huh? Just doing harassment, or just do whatever you want! Isn't that enough.....?'

Huh? I'm an evil spirit.

Ignoring Seongjin, who suddenly gained enlightenment, the demon king began pouring out all the words he wanted to say.

[Let's see if we're gone. Isn't Morres's body going to die? So even if it annoys him, he'll leave us alone for now! And hey, how would his find his real son's soul? Perhaps the evil spirit that stole the body knows best? Because the clues are none other than us! Doesn't that mean he's going to stay by our side and keep an eye on us? Huh? Don't you know that?]

'Hey, calm down.....'

Seongjin was not as comfortable with the Holy Emperor's favor. But he thought, for a moment, that there was a real father-son bond.

Of course, he didn't convey that thought to the demon king. He was in a rage, and now he's crying.

[Scary. That guy, he's so scary.....]

While soothing the sobbing Demon King, Seongjin's carriage entered the Pearl Palace.

Before he knew it, a twilight was settling around him.

And that evening, an administrative official who visited Seongjin with Edith announced that the visitor restrictions placed on the Pearl Palace had been partially lifted as of today.

T/N:

1. 양반 literally means nobleman, but with the way Seongjin talks (and how later someone scolded him for referring to the emperor like that) I think he meant it more as the slang for that guy/that man. So I'll stick to that moving forward.

9

"So, you mean there was a visitor limit until now?"

Seongjin asked Edith while eating the lightly baked pre-dinner bread.

"Since when?"

"I don't know the exact period. It's been two years since I've been on the job, so it's clear that there were restrictions at least before then."

Edith answered as she poured water into his cup.

According to her explanation, except for a few servants and resident knights, all visitors were initially restricted from entering the Pearl Palace. Those who inevitably wanted to visit had to submit an application to the main palace. Even if it was a member of the imperial family, there was no exception.

And most of the applications were rejected. It's practically a no-entry ban.

"I can't believe it, am I not allowed to go out?"

Edith shrugged.

"As far as I know there was no such thing. It's just that Your Highness hates going out of the Pearl Palace, so you rarely go out."

Fortunately, it seems that Morres was not confined to the detached palace.

Indeed, he was even too lazy to go to the main palace once a week, so he skipped regular visits.

The human relationship of the prince of the Holy Empire, can it be like this?

"Still, you used to go to the town house to see a friend once every two months."

"Friend?"

"Yes, I think most of it was an appointment with the young duke¹ of Scarchapino."

It wasn't that he didn't have friends at all.

"Hmm....."

Seongjin chewed on his salad and was lost in thought.

It is said that there are no special restrictions on the Blue Rose Labyrinth or the Silver Rose Labyrinth, the palaces of the princes and princesses, so such measures were aimed only at Morres. It may have something to do with the reason why only the Pearl Palace had so few servants.

However, no matter how famous he was, is it really the right thing to do to isolate him in a separate palace while blocking visits from his family and friends?

Although Morres had a dirty personality, he wasn't particularly a heinous criminal, so wouldn't being locked up like this have a more adverse effect on his character and position?

"By the way, if it is released, what is partial release?"

"They said that high-ranking priests and paladins are still prohibited from entering."

"That....."

So, people with strong divine power should not enter the Pearl Palace at all?

The demon king whispered.

[Suspicious.]

'Oh, yes. It's very suspicious.'

What the hell is that Holy Emperor guy up to?

If he had known it would be like this, he would have been a little more active in researching this and that while the demon king was able to detect the soul. After finishing the meal feeling uncomfortable, Seongjin sighed.

Well, now he had to think about it alone, so there's no way to know what's going on. Whatever the reason, the fact that the restrictions were lifted immediately after meeting him must mean that Seongjin's impression in the audience yesterday was not too bad. He guessed he thought it would be less rotten if he's let loose.

Let's do what they can do now.

Soon, he erased all trivial thoughts and ran straight to the gymnasium.

"One two! One two!"

As usual, Seongjin started training by running round the gymnasium. Now, keeping the run at a fairly steady pace didn't put too much strain on my body. It's an encouraging development considering he almost crawled when he first came out on the field.

Intermittently, he started doing strength training as well. It was because he was losing weight rapidly unexpectedly and was concerned about muscle loss.

The knights of the Pearl Palace were training on their own, avoiding his range of motion, as if they were now relatively accustomed to Seongjin's appearances. The not-so-kind gaze was still the same, but they weren't openly hostile like before.

'Well, this is someone's gymnasium, but who can say it's safe?'

He snorted inwardly and took a moment to catch my breath when a stranger appeared at the entrance of the gymnasium. He was a man of considerable stature and well-formed.

He stood at the entrance for a while, looked around, found Seongjin, and approached with a bright smile.

Hm? That gentle, large-sized retriever-like face, where had he seen that face?

"Your Highness!"

He strode forward with his blond hair fluttering brightly, and as he put his right hand on his chest, he greeted him with a sharp smile.

"I greet Prince Morres."

"....."

So, where did they meet?

The man's eyebrows droop.

"... I am Marthain Klanos, the leader of the Imperial Guard and the 2nd Knights. Your Highness."

Ah, the kind knight commander who escorted him from the main palace yesterday.

Seongjin smiled a little too much in an apologetic heart and welcomed him.

"Sir Marthain! I never expected to see you at the Pearl Palace. What are you doing here? Are you off duty today?"

It's not wrong, but now he was wearing simple casual clothes, not a knight's uniform, and he was wearing only a sword. At Seongjin's question, Marthain smiled lightly and scratched his head.

"I came because I heard that the visitor limit has been lifted as of today. So far, I haven't been given permission to enter. You were sick, but I apologize for not being able to visit you once."

Seongjin blinked at the unexpected answer.

Does that mean you often applied for visits before? As soon as the

restrictions were lifted, were you the first to run?

Uh, maybe this knight commander was closer to Morres than he thought.....

The demon king bluntly criticizes.

[You are bad! Wrong! Have you forgotten the guy you saw yesterday? How many people are good to this idiot?]

Ehem. He's really sorry for not recognizing. Sir Marthain.

Seongjin swallowed tears in his stomach, feeling guilty, but the knight commander didn't notice at all and asked in a bright voice.

"I heard you've been working hard on your physical fitness lately. Do you always come to the gym at this time?"

"Yeah, I spend most of my day at the gymnasium, unless it's a big deal."

"Excellent!"

In response to Seongjin's answer, Sir Marthain nodded with a warm eye smile.

"Then, if there is nothing special, from now on I can come to the gym together at this time."

"Sir Marthain? Why?"

"This is His Majesty's command. From now on, he asked me to watch the prince's swordsmanship."

They said they would send the right person, so maybe a knight commander?

It was a request yesterday, and the work was done faster than expected.

"I don't have a lot of skills, but I have a good understanding of basic Aura training classes. It will definitely help."

"Ohhh, is that so?"

"Yes, I mainly recruit and teach new squires."

He looks young, but he is the leader of the knights. I'm sure his skills are good, but for his humble personality, he's so confident that he seems to be really good at basic classes.

Marthain, recognizing the expectation and admiration in Seongjin's eyes, smiled shyly and scratched his head.

"It's embarrassing, but I was very late in my initiation because I came here myself. Since the period of digging the foundation was much longer than others, the process had to be hardened....."

It is said that there are people who master it quickly even if they are late in initiation, so this person seems to be that type. It is a solid foundation for guaranteed skills. Isn't that the perfect line?

Seongjin smiled.

"I'm still inexperienced. Please take good care of me, Sir Marthain."

"Yes, Your Highness!"

Marthain was embarrassed and lowered his head.

"Um, but....."

Unlike usual, Seongjin felt empty and glanced around the gymnasium.

Sure enough, all the resident knights of the Pearl Palace, who had been training here and there until just now, had disappeared.

Why? Certainly, even before Lord Marthain appeared.....

I was looking at the empty gymnasium, and Marthain asked.

"Sir, I mainly teach swords, but do you have any other weapons you particularly prefer?"

"Weapon?"

Seongjin was deep in thought.

When he was fighting monsters in the past, most of the world's infrastructure collapsed and supply was not smooth.

Not to mention weapons. Even the heat weapons were not eaten by the thick skin of the monsters, and the few cold weapons were also prone to chipping or breaking after a couple of knife cuts.

As a result, the hunters had no choice but to head to the bare ground with one strengthened bare body. Occasionally, the claws, pincers, and teeth of monsters were roughly trimmed and wielded, but should we really see them as weapons?

"... I don't think there is anything."

"If so, what are your memories of the swordsmanship you learned as a child....."

"doesn't exist. It flew clean."

When Seongjin answered with a refreshing face, Marthain sighed.

"Yes. Then, I think it would be a good idea to start with the standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights and the Banahas seniority method."

"Are there other options?"

"Imperial Knights basically learn both sword and spear skills, but in the case of Aura techniques, it is a rule not to start practicing other techniques until one has been mastered. They usually start with Banahas, which is intuitive compared to Wirose, which is designed for spearmanship."

Well, it still doesn't change that you have to learn both in the end, he added.

Seongjin tilted his head and asked.

"Isn't it better in terms of time to pay attention to only one? When you reach a certain level, the distinction of seniority becomes

meaningless....."

"Eh?"

Marthain made a grotesque expression.

"Who did you hear that from?"

"Father said that it is a way to go to the place where the heart goes....."

Tuck!

Seongjin was momentarily frightened as Marthain suddenly hardened his face and yelled at him.

Well, it's a little scary because normally a mild-mannered person has a straight face.

"A certain level? What level do you think that level is? Even if you devote your life to it, how many people will reach even the tip of it!"

"Uh....."

"Where the heart goes... I beg your pardon? Is that something to say to a beginner? Yes?"

No, why are you angry at me.....

While Seongjin was sweating, Marthain suddenly stuck his face out in front of Seongjin's nose and emphasized it again in a strong tone.

"Forget about learning anything from him! If you've heard anything, forget it all here! You absolutely must!"

"....."

"Understand?"

The Demon King spoke quietly.

[Hey, doesn't it look like he's hung up on something?]

'... I know.'

For some reason, he had a hunch that the class with Marthain would not be smooth.

It was a memorable first lesson, but he didn't learn how to wield a sword right away. Marthain went around the gymnasium with Seongjin and did light exercises, first thoroughly checking his overall physical strength.

In the meantime, he heard a rough explanation of the origin of the Imperial Knights' standard swordsmanship and the characteristics of the Aura practice method, which I had to learn in the future, but with that alone, the morning passed quickly.

Finally, Marthain finished the class after explaining a simple meditation method.

"If we adjust the office hours of the main palace until late, we will probably be able to take more classes in the afternoon in the future."

Seongjin waved his hand in fright at the knight commander, who said that if it didn't work out, he would take a vacation and come to class.

Are you voluntarily returning your main job, overtime, and even vacation?

Compared to his fairly reliable first impression, the more he looked at Sir Marthain, the more he became a clumsy person.

* * *

Sir Marthain wasn't the only unexpected visitor that day. He eats lunch and is doing gymnastics in his room for a while, when Edith knocks on his door with a slightly embarrassed face.

"Your Highness. Lady Amelia came and is in the drawing room."

Who's Amelia?

Fortunately, the demon king, who was nerfed to be a navigator, had the information accumulated in advance.

[That's your older sister. The First Princess.]

First Princess?

"She didn't say she was visiting, did she? But did you just let her in?"

No matter how much of a brat Morres was, the palace of the prince is not be a place one could visit at will. Didn't Queen Lizabeth also send a message before coming?

"That is... Because she recklessly came in saying that she had to meet Your Highness..."

Ahh. Since she was a princess, it must have been embarrassing for Edith to bring her in or send her back.

Anyway, this was an unexpected situation. Didn't that guy Morres not get along very well with the other princes and princesses? Let alone paying a visit.

[Especially, they say that your relationship with Amelia has already broken down.]

'Whose fault was it?'

[Isn't that obvious? They said that Morres was very harsh when he told her that she was a lowly princess.]

'.....'

The purpose of this visit would never be a good thing. Seongjin sighed.

"Guide me."

Walking with a heavy heart, they arrived at the front of the drawing room, and before Edith could even open the door, they heard the sound of a chair being pushed as if someone was suddenly getting up from inside.

Then there was the sound of light heels hitting each other.

"Eh?"

Jump!

Suddenly the door was pushed back violently, and at that moment, Seongjin almost collapsed backwards in front of the door.

Confused, he looked ahead and saw a tall girl staring at Seongjin's face while holding the doorknob.

[Wow.....]

'Wow.....'

The Demon King and Seongjin exclaimed in bewilderment, but the girl in front of him looked like an angel who just came out of a fire.

A neat white dress with wavy, rosy hair. The shade of long eyelashes trembled over her delicate cheeks like a porcelain doll.

A pretty girl, like a single rose, was looking at Seongjin with wide eyes.

"... Morres."

"Yeah....."

So, is this the Amelia? But why is she looking at Morres with such an affectionate gaze? It seems a bit different from what he thought.

The demon king memorized trivial information from the side.

[He usually called her a lowly girl. Of course, you don't need to refer to that.]

'Shut up!'

Seongjin broke into a cold sweat and opened his mouth to the girl.

"Uh... That... Sister? What's going on here....."

However, Seongjin could not finish his words. As if a dam burst at the sound of his voice, the girl started to shed tears.

Then.

"Morres!"

Wham! The sudden weight of her arms made Seongjin fall on his butt.

"Huh? Huh?"

"Morres! Morres! Morres!"

The girl didn't care about the fallen Seongjin and just called his name and dug into his arms. It was a desperate gesture, as if it were a baby burrowing into its mother's arms. His chest was wet with tears in an instant.

No, what the hell is this?

Seongjin tried to say something with an absurd face, but soon shut his mouth and started patting her back with both hands. It was because her little girl's shoulders were trembling pitifully.

As she sobbed sadly, she began to repeat incomprehensible sounds as if she were talking to herself.

"Ah, you are alive! I'm back! I'm back... Really, really fortunate!"

... Yes?

T/N:

1. Young duke is what they call the heir of the duke.

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-Please be my precious family, the one and only family I will love with all my soul.

When the foreign prince finally held her hand and whispered to her, the girl just nodded silently, unable to contain her throbbing heart.

This is the story of a girl who wanted to be part of someone's family one day.

* * *

She was suddenly dragged out of the tower, tied up, and walked for a long time wearing an blindfold. Her thin shoes touches the cold, hard stone floor.

Amelia shivered lightly as she smelled the strange smell of metal through the cool morning air.

The voice of the people, no, the voice of the soldiers. Weapons that sometimes cause friction and the strange heat condensed like a dam before bursting.

Eventually, the black cloth covering her eyes came undone, and she found herself standing in the middle of the wall.

"Look, Amelia."

She blinked.

As soon as her eyes, which had been covered for a long time, got used to the light, she saw longbowmen and foot soldiers tightly packed on the walls.

Inside the gates, Rohan's lancers were ready to rush out at any moment, and on both sides of the castle, thousands of infantry units

lined up in long lines, waiting for the battle to begin, soaked in quiet excitement.

And the allied army camped like a swarm of ants on the plain beyond the wall. Even the flag of the Holy Empire, Delcross, that shines the brightest among the allied flags.

After taking in all the sights, Amelia turned her head to the side and met the man holding her blindfold.

King Leonard of Rohan.

At one time, she had no doubt that he would become the most loving family in the world, but in the end, he deceived and betrayed her and pushed her life into a pit. He was the culprit who framed her for her guilt and imprisoned her in a cold tower for years.

Leonard looked into Amelia's terribly dry eyes and raised one corner of his mouth.

"That's right, is it unfair? do you resent me? But all this is the retribution that a sinful daughter of the empire deserves. Aren't you the main culprit of this Holy War?"

Amelia showed no reaction. It was because she knew that everything he said was actually a lie, just because he knew it was a good fit.

Who was the real culprit of this war, neither the speaker nor the listener knew who it was.

A strong wind blew over the castle walls, blowing her rosy hair, which had been cut short.

Leonard gazed at the scene for a moment, as if bewitched, then raised his hand and gently touched its end.

"Romaine's plan was not even half successful. Your goddamn father did a good job capturing the raccoons in that kingdom."

He tousled her hair, brushed her rough cheeks, and finally grabbed her slender neck.

"So you have to pay the price instead. Now I will cut your throat and make it the beginning of this war."

Amelia closed her eyes as she felt the strength in the hand gripping her neck. She had no more regrets in her life, which was full of pain.

She just hoped that at least the allied forces will thwart this cruel man's ambitions, and that they will completely crush what he desires so that he cannot get his hands on anything. At that moment, that was all she wanted.

It was then that disturbances broke out on the front.

The allied camp, far away, began to stir, and soon after, a black shadow jumped out of the camp like an arrow.

Only one cavalry. It was a sudden rush made without any sign of openness.

Leonard hesitantly grabbed her by the neck and narrowed his eyes as he surveyed the allied camp. As the uproar grew, it seemed to be an accidental action that was not planned even on the enemy side.

After a while, a group of cavalry corps rushed out from the allied camp. It seemed that they were hurriedly chasing after the knight in the lead.

"That person....."

As the figure of the knight in the lead got closer and closer, the rumblings intensified even in Rohan's camp.

The knight's black armor and main huge stance on the back. And even the several spears worn on the sides.

A famous man who until recently had notoriety on the frontlines is charging towards the walls single-handedly!

"... The Black Demon!"

"It's The Black Demon of Delcross!"

"It's the Crown Prince! The Crown Prince of Delcross!"

Woosh-

The knight in black armor pulled out a single spear. As the spear was enveloped in an ominous dark red aura, the entire castle wall began to shake.

Was he crazy? He hasn't even come within range of the arrows yet, and he's going to throw a spear there?

"Shoot, shoot! What are the archers doing! Go ahead and shoot him!"

Bewildered, Leonard's order fell.

Swish-

The arrows soared into the air, covering the sky black, and after a while, they slammed to the ground with terrifying acceleration.

Kwa-kwa-kwa-kwa. However, the range was also a bit short. The knight ran past the field of arrows with the same posture as aiming the spear.

"Damn it.....!"

While the archers quickly reloaded their arrows, the prince narrowed the distance by another 50 meters and finally threw the spear he was aiming.

Crash!

Scattering auras, the spear flew with terrifying momentum and pierced the ground right in front of the castle gate. It couldn't reach the wall by a hair's breadth, but the faces of the soldiers who looked at the deeply dented ground became pale.

"Is, is he even human?"

"Ready to launch! Ready to launch!"

Hundreds of arrows soared into the air all at once again. The prince

pulled out the sword from his back, created a wide sword shield with his aura, and deflected most of the arrows. However, it was not enough to block all the massive amount of arrows that were intensively sprayed.

Neigh! With the sound of a horse screaming, he fell off his horse and rolled across the floor. They wondered if he would roll around and get up like that.

Crash!

The spear that flew in again landed firmly in the center of the wall this time.

"This crazy.....!"

With a couple of arrows stuck in his armor, the black knight started running toward the wall again.

The horse's speed was incomparable, but the relentless appearance of running towards the castle wall with dark red aura burning all over the body was terrifying. Waiting for the reload, the knight commander's neck was shaking with tension.

Amelia watched the whole scene, standing on the castle wall, held in Leonard's grip. Her eyes, which had become numb to the point of insensitivity, trembled slightly as they showed emotional agitation for the first time.

She gave up her own life, but someone else has yet to give up. And he is running without hesitation to the place where he is sure to become a limb.

Swish-

The rain of arrows poured down mercilessly toward the prince once again. But this time, he wasn't the only one to face it. It was because the group of knights who ran after the prince who had left the camp without permission caught up with him and raised their shields all at once while the attack was concentrated on the prince.

Thwack thwack thwack. The shield made by intertwining shields

quickly became a honeycomb.

"Hey! You crazy bastard!"

It was the sound of an unknown knight who had thrown a ruined shield and screamed at His Highness the Crown Prince.

Leonard bit his lip nervously.

"... Can he reach here? Can he really reach here?"

The knights formed a formation in a circle with the prince in the middle, and began to advance little by little in that state.

Arrows began to rain indiscriminately after entering the direct range, but the party managed to narrow the distance from the wall by alternately opening sword screens, probably all of them were considerable Aura users.

The crown prince was deflecting arrows with his bare face exposed, having lost his helmet while rolling on the floor.

Fierce looking eyes and a slightly sharper jawline with age. It was a familiar yet unfamiliar face to Amelia. In the meantime, he was grazed by an arrow, and half of his pale blonde hair is soaked in his blood.

"... Morres."

She thought they weren't close to each other since they were young. But why is that child trying so desperately to reach her like that right now, was what she was thinking.

At the same time, the gray eyes of the two people who resemble each other meet.

A moment. Morres' eyes widened.

Thump-

A sharp pain radiated to the right chest.

".....!"

Amelia looked down at the dagger lodged in her chest. The bloodstains spreading red on the shabby dress are unrealistic like blooming flower petals.

Following the hand holding the dagger, she slowly turned her head and looked at Leonard's face. He had the most desperate look in his eyes, but at the same time, his mouth was leaking a fishy smile.

"If you are so precious to them, what can I do? I have no choice but to return you. Only....."

"....."

"... I will never hand you over unharmed."

Thud.

Relying on Leonard's grip, she was barely standing at the end of the wall, and was easily pushed out of the wall with just a slight push.

"Amelia!"

She fell helplessly to the ground as she heard Morres screaming her name in the distance.

What she saw beyond the overturned vision is a calm blue sky like a lie. She thought she could see a bird disappearing through the clouds, but then she lost consciousness.

The sound of someone shouting, screaming, and clashing weapons. The sound of flesh being split.

"... Amelia, Amelia! Sister! Wake up!"

And Amelia's eyes opened as he continued to call her.

Cough! At the same time as she let out a cough, her chest hurts like it's burning. She rolled her eyes and looked around.

In the middle of a battlefield where forces from both sides collide.

Morres sat down next to the lying Amelia, his gauntlet removed and his hand pressed against her chest where the dagger was stuck.

"Mo.....!"

I wanted to call his name, but no sound came out. The dagger hurt her lungs, and every time she tried to breathe, she heard a whistling sound, and blood leaked out of her mouth.

"Shh... Don't talk, stay still, sister. The wound is open. I think I caught you well when you fell, but the place you were stabbed wasn't so good....."

Morres said as if to soothe Amelia, who kept struggling.

"Still, Father will come in a little while. These wounds are nothing to that man, so don't worry. Sister knows that, don't you?"

The younger brother's face also turned pale with tension. He continued to talk to her as if he wanted to reassure Amelia as well as reassure himself.

"Hold on for a moment. Amelia. If you endure a little longer, everything will be fine when Father arrives....."

Aah, His Majesty the Holy Emperor. Father.

Thinking of him, Amelia's dry eyes began to shed tears for the first time in years.

After objecting to marriage with Leonard until the end, and eventually disowning and leaving the house, she never sent a message to her father. Even if he comes now and sees her again, what will he say to Amelia.

Morres, who had managed to sense her guilt, spoke in a low voice.

"Amelia. That guy always thinks of and worries about sister. He wasn't mad at sister in the least, so when you see his face later, just pretend not to know and smile. Understand?"

"....."

"He was so disheartened with the loss of Logan not too long ago, it was kind of scary. I don't know what that guy will do if something even goes wrong with sister. That guy needs sister.

Amelia's eyes widened and she looked up at his face. He hadn't laid his eyes on Amelia the moment before. Unfocused gray eyes stare blankly into space.

Come to think of it, she thought it was because of nervousness, but why is his face so pale?

"... And at this point, I'd like to apologize a bit. I'm sorry that I recklessly talked to you and bullied you when we were young. I was all wrong....."

Amelia, who was examining Morres closely, was startled. She didn't notice because they were facing each other, but it was because his armor behind him was already filled with dozens of arrows.

Most of what wet his hand, which was pressing Amelia's chest, was his own blood.

Amelia realized he must have rushed into the rain of arrows to catch her as she fell off the castle wall. Even though she fell from such a high place, why did she not have any other wounds, and why did not even one of the arrows grazed her?

In that fleeting moment, Morres poured out all his strength for Amelia.

And only then, she could hear the shouts of the knights surrounding them.

"Hold on a little longer, Your Highness!"

"Anyway, they pop out all the time, don't they? Huh? Crown Prince, see you when you get out of here!"

"His Majesty is coming soon! Your Highness! Don't let your mind wander!"

Amelia sobbed helplessly, feeling Morres's breathing slowly fading

away.

Aah. It's because of me.

Since I came to Rohan on my own, Father had to carry out unfavorable diplomacy continuously, and my younger brother, the Crown Prince, had to run into an unpredictable death.

And despite all their sacrifices, she eventually dies as their burden to the end.

It was then that the sky suddenly began to turn red.

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The change on the battlefield happened suddenly. It was not yet noon, so it was a clear day without a single cloud.

The sun disappeared from the sky before they knew it, and a red light began to spread from over the horizon. It was a strange sight, as if blood was seeping into the air.

In the sky that suddenly became unrealistically dark, the spirit of the clashing soldiers gradually faded. In the air that seemed to be weighing down heavily, strength was gradually drained from the weapons facing each other. The agitation that started like that quickly spread throughout the plains, and the battle was greeted with a lull like a lie.

Under the red sky, the Holy Emperor was standing.

He appeared in the middle of the battlefield before anyone knew it and was walking slowly. Wearing short silver armor and a long robe like a mantle, he held his favorite sword, the Nutcracker, in his right hand, and a severed human head in his left.

The bloodstains splattered here and there on the shimmering white robe were particularly frightening.

The knights, who were engaged in a defensive battle surrounding Amelia and Morres, hesitated and retreated as the Holy Emperor approached. At the same time, Morres' body collapsed to the side with a thud. He has already lost his breath.

".....!"

Morres. Morres. Morres!

Amelia barely rolled her eyes, staring intently at the face of her little

brother lying on her side. Instead of his name, she vomited up bloody water.

The Holy Emperor approached them and slowly bent his knees.

Thud. The head was thrown carelessly to the side, the long silver hair coiled around it as it rolled around.

He stretched out his hand and slowly stroked her blood-soaked head.

Father, Father. Morres.....!

Seeing the desperate appeal in Amelia's eyes, the Holy Emperor shook his head.

"I am a little late."

Until then, the knights who had been guarding the side with nervous faces fell to their knees.

"This can't be.....!"

Those who simply shed tears in dismay, those who wept on the floor, and those who stared into the sky in a daze. It was a sight that clearly showed how much they cared for the crown prince.

The Holy Emperor looked at them for a moment, then put his hand on the handle of the dagger stuck in Amelia's chest. For treatment, the blade had to be pulled out first.

Then Amelia gritted her teeth and shook her head from side to side.

She can never live like this. Sacrificing her brother, living a life alone. She was in pain until now, but she had no confidence to endure such a life that would have left only the pain she had to endure in the future.

Even if it is the worst sin of turning away from a father who has to remain alone.

It was then. A small pendant hanging from her neck protruded from the side.

It was a necklace with a drop-shaped jewel that Amelia never took off from her body as a keepsake from her mother.

The white and clean jewel rolls over the blood-soaked dress and emits a brilliant light.

The Holy Emperor was startled and picked up the jewel. For an instant, a colorful light passed from his eyes, whose expression did not change at all. Questioning and understanding. Then, relief and sadness.

He looked back and forth between the small pendant and Amelia's earnest eyes, then closed his eyes.

"Your Majesty, the princess' condition....."

An inferior knight urged him, but the Holy Emperor, leaving the dagger stuck in her chest, held Amelia's hand with one hand and began gently stroking her forehead with the other.

Amelia closed her eyes when the Holy Emperor's hand touched her, but when she realized that there was no light on her hand, she was relieved and surrendered herself.

His father's hand, which she held for the first time in a long time, felt very warm even without divine power.

Father, I'm sorry.

"You have suffered a lot so far. Amelia."

Father, thank you.

"Rest in peace now. Daughter."

Slowly, her vision began to blur.

The sky gradually sinks into a heavy red light. As if blood would drip at any moment. No it's already falling. Her vision soon becomes dark.

The muffled noise around her is getting farther and farther away.

What is this? What's in the sky? What the hell is going on? Agh!
Aaaaaaagh!

And her father's last voice.

"Don't worry, Amelia. This is something you don't have to go through."

Amelia, the First Princess of Delcross, met her death like that.

* * *

Amelia, who carelessly rubbed her eyes in the beating morning sun, blinked blankly for a moment as she lay down.

'What? Morning? Didn't I just die? Why am I still lying in bed.....'

Her face turned blue with the sudden fear.

I'm still alive!

"Ah... No! I don't want to live like this again! I am! I am!"

"Princess? Why are you like that?"

"Aah! Morres... Morres! Father! Father! Father!"

"Miss Amelia!"

Since morning, there has been a great uproar in the Silver Rose Labyrinth. It was because the First Princess, Amelia, suddenly burst into tears and had a seizure.

The princess cried and screamed, exhausted herself, got up and cried for a long time, and after a few hours she lost her energy and lay quietly on the bed.

The servants were taken aback by the normally calm princess' eccentricity and hurriedly called the imperial palace councilor.

"Whew. Your beautiful eyes are so swollen. Did you have a nightmare?"

Mirabelle, the exclusive lady-in-waiting, asked kindly, wiping the lukewarm wet towel from Amelia's forehead.

"Mirabelle....."

Amelia repeated her name weakly, and Mirabelle smiled and brushed back her hair that was disheveled on her forehead.

"Yes. Our pretty princess. Why do you keep calling my name today?"

"That's because you already died by Leonard's hand before I was imprisoned in the tower.'

Mirabelle was a handmaid with a warm impression who had taken care of Amelia ever since she entered the imperial palace. The princess, who was shy and pretty like a doll, was cherished and loved with all her heart from the beginning.

In the end, she followed Amelia to Rohan, where she met a gruesome death in the dungeon due to Leonard's severe torture. She remembers that there was no particular reason. Leonard did it purely to annoy Amelia.

Years had already passed in Amelia's mind. Now, when I think about it, grains of sand will flow instead of tears.

She closed her eyes, feeling Mirabel's touch as if it were a dream.

It was a bit late, but Amelia was gradually realizing her current condition.

It wasn't the hair that had been cut messily, but the glossy, rosy hair that wavy to the waist. Not rough and skinny hands, but healthy white and soft hands.

And Mirabelle, smiling kindly with a younger face than before.

She was clearly back in the past.

"Lie down for a bit. Miss Amelia. An imperial councilor will arrive soon. I don't know where it hurts, but you'll get better soon."

– Father will come. Hold on for a moment, Amelia. If you endure a little longer.....

On top of Mirabelle's voice, the voice of her younger brother, who couldn't be heard, overlapped.

Tears began to flow from Amelia's eyes again. Mirabelle clicked her tongue and wiped her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Oops. What's going on here? Not too long ago, the Third Prince collapsed, and the whole palace was in an uproar. Now, it's scary to imagine what a commotion would happen if even the princess said she was sick."

Amelia murmured in surprise.

"The Third Prince?"

"Yes. Prince Morres."

"Not... the Crown Prince?"

"Yes? What do you mean? Sir Morres? The Crown Prince?"

Mirabelle's face softened as if she had heard the most absurd thing in the world, but it didn't matter too much to Amelia. She jumped up from her bed.

Morres.

"... Morres is alive!"

Yes, then did you wish he would die while sick?

That pig trash harassed the princess quite severely, but that's probably not the case, is it? My kind-hearted princess?

Irrespective of Mirabel's confused face, Amelia was already putting the towel aside and getting out of bed.

"I'm going to the Pearl Palace. Get ready, Mirabelle. I need to meet him."

"Yes? However, the imperial palace....."

Mirabelle, who hurriedly followed the princess as she walked into the dressing room and tried to dissuade her, hesitated momentarily and took a step back.

He felt a strange sense of intimidation from the princess, who spoke clearly with a determined gaze like never before.

"I need to meet Morres right now!"

That's why we've come to this situation.

The two of them, who were normally incompatible, sat face-to-face on the sofa in the living room and kept an awkward silence.

Amelia, who had burst into tears as she hugged Morres in a fit of emotion the moment she saw Morres' face, was now blushing and sipping bitter tea.

Seongjin, who has an unexpected refreshment time, doesn't know what to say, so he just rolls his eyes.

"I... So, you had a nightmare about me dying....."

"Ye... Yeah. That's right. So I don't know."

Amelia bowed her head in embarrassment.

She returned to the past from death, but that didn't mean she could tell the truth outright. That she, well, she had nightmares wasn't a very convincing explanation.

Look. Isn't Morres also tilting his head, perhaps a little puzzled?

However, Seongjin's situation was a little different from Amelia's. He was working hard on the demon king in his head.

'Hey, how did this happen? Are the two of them really bad? Why does she look like an ordinary older sister who is worried about her sick younger brother? Huh?'

[This is what people, no, demon lords are! You met her in the garden the day before you collapsed and cursed at her? A lowly woman, a disgrace to the Holy Imperial Family, a lowly bitch, and... Should I do more?]

'.....'

Wow, Mores you son of a bitch.

The idiot who gets the most swearing in the imperial palace, but who are you calling the shame of the Holy Imperial Family?

Seongjin cleared his throat and scratched his head.

"Ahem! Uh, thanks anyway, sister. Um... So, you were worried about the fever?"

First of all, let's say thank you for worrying. Seongjin's thoughts were simple.

But what Amelia paid attention to was something else.

"You're calling me sister now."

Seongjin averted his gaze in surprise, but Amelia touched the teacup for a moment and smiled gently. She smiled vaguely, as if reminiscing about the distant past.

"That's right. Come to think of it, I think it was around this time."

The trash, who was a disgrace to the Holy Imperial Family, seemed to come to his senses at some point, lose weight and learn swordsmanship.....

And at the same time, his attitude toward Amelia also became very docile, but she hadn't readily accepted this change in her previous life.

It was because the face of Morres, who had been hostile to her with a ferocious face since childhood, was embedded in her mind.

If Morres was sometimes spoken to first, he would turn his head away

or walk away. In the end, the two never had a chance to reconcile properly, and soon after, she fell in love with Leonard and left for Rohan.

Amelia smiled bitterly.

"If I had been a little more open-minded and approached at that time, our relationship would have made a huge difference."

The family I longed for was not far away.

And only then did she meet Morres and say what she really wanted to say.

"I'm sorry for neglecting you until now, Morres. I wanted to say that."

"Uh....."

Seongjin was very embarrassed.

What? Is this person an angel?

Morres did the bad thing, so why is she apologizing?

The demon king whispered.

[Hey, is the atmosphere okay right now? Now that this has happened, how about trying to improve the relationship?]

'How?'

[You apologize too! You've been wrong so far. When will you have an opportunity like this again?]

'That's right.'

It was the perfect timing even for Seongjin. Not seeing his chance to pass up, he bowed her head to Amelia and quickly issued her apologetic words.

"No, rather, I'm sorry, sister! I don't know if you've heard, but I can't remember well after I was sick. However, I know that I gave you a hard time while being immature. I really want to apologize!"

Amelia stared blankly at Morres. She looked at her little brother's round crown as he bowed his head, a little embarrassed.

She could still see the bloody sight of that soft pale blonde hair.

The still plump body and round, dry face overlapped with the young man's face, which had cooled down while being an arrow holder.

– I'd like to apologize a bit. I'm sorry that I recklessly talked to you and bullied you when we were young.

'Ah.....'

She cried so much that she felt like all the water in my body was drained today, and even then, there were still tears left to shed. Amelia's eyes widened, and she started to shed tears again.

As if the demon king was dumbfounded, he reprimanded Seongjin.

[Hey, you said you apologized. Why are you making the child cry again?]

'No, what did I do!'

Seongjin didn't know what to do, so he stood up awkwardly and apologized again.

"I am really, really sorry. Sister."

"It's okay, Morres."

Her tear-soaked cheeks glowed white.

"You already apologized to me."

She was laughing through tears.

It was a smile brighter than anything else in the world.

12

A stormy day passed and the next morning came.

The servants of the Silver Rose Labyrinth had to pay attention to the princess in a different way than yesterday. Because the princess, who surprised them by pouring out her emotions to the extreme, became excessively lethargic this time.

The intense memory of the death awakened her emotions, albeit temporarily, but as a little time passed, the intense agitation at that time gradually subsided inside.

Her body was a 16-year-old girl, but her mind was that of a queen confined to a tower alone for a long time.

Leonard's mental and physical abuse over the years. Those painful memories continued to eat away at her mind even now, back in the past. She had returned to the Amelia of that time, completely exhausted and as dry as the desert.

"Miss Amelia....."

Mirabelle looked at the princess with pitiful eyes as she lay down on the bed, weak and slumped.

"Don't be too heartbroken. There must be a way to fix it."

"Huh?"

Amelia questioned incredulously, then realized that Mirabelle was looking for the cause of this melancholy in the wrong place.

"It was your mother's precious keepsake, but how did they manage it... I'll give the lady-in-waiting a good scolding!"

Necklace. It was the story of a necklace found broken in the morning.

A small white necklace that was carefully kept in a jewelry box as a keepsake from her mother when she was young. When she was in the tower, she hadn't taken it off her body for even a moment.

"Mirabelle. Could you bring it to me?"

"Yes? But if you see it, it'll hurt more....."

"I'm okay. Please."

Mirabelle obediently obeyed her orders. Soon the broken necklace was wrapped in a clean handkerchief and passed into Amelia's hands.

She unfolded the handkerchief and rolled the fragmented pendant.

It's strange that this is broken.

The white jewel in the pendant was an unnamed miscellaneous jewel, and the ladies in charge of precious metals always admired it, saying that it was somehow harder than diamond.

As proof of that, wasn't it still hanging around her neck until the end when she went through that hardship in Rohan?

But to hear it suddenly split in two in the jewelry box.

'However, this is proof that I have returned to the past.'

Amelia's eyes narrowed coldly.

'Now I won't make the same mistake again.'

She rolled up the pendant wrapped in a handkerchief and swore again and again.

'Never again, Leonard, don't be fooled by that motherfucker. Never!'

But what next?

If she doesn't get involved with Leonard and doesn't go to Rohan, then what?

Is it enough to not be taken advantage of by him?

If so, can she just hide in the Silver Rose Labyrinth and live quietly so as not to become a burden to Morres and Father?

'I don't know.....'

Amelia clutched the handkerchief to her chest and burrowed into the bed.

Her mind was already too tired to think about life and its direction.

The next morning was bright. Mirabelle was on the verge of exploding.

"Princess, please eat something today. Alright? The imperial physician says there is no serious pain, but how long are you going to skip meals?"

Amelia sat up from her seat with a smile on her face.

"Sorry, okay. Could you bring me some simple soup?"

"Ah! You have to wake up and wash your face! Now, let me brush you. Why is our lady, the princess, acting like this these days!"

Amelia thought blankly, her hair bobbing back and forth from the emotional brushing.

Aah, Mirabelle. Because now all problems are solved.

Morres is still alive, and His Majesty Father is still alive and well. I will no longer be their burden. Are there any problems?

Mirabelle's sighs could be heard overhead.

"Really, what is this? They said that as soon as he got up from the hospital bed, the foolish prince had gone to exercise in order to recover his stamina, but now our pretty princess wants to be lazy after that?

There was a momentary twinkle in Amelia's eyes, and the light returned.

"Morres....."

The princess muttered blankly.

"Shall we go to the Pearl Palace....."

Mirabelle, who would normally have hated hearing the name of Morres, strangely, today, her whole face turned bright and she shook the bell with a jingle.

"Good idea! Now, after a simple meal, shall we dress up beautifully?"

Soon the maids gathered, carrying scented oil, bath products, and all kinds of dresses and accessories.

* * *

An unexpected spring breeze blew in the Pearl Palace gymnasium.

The goddess of spring, wearing a pale yellow dress and her hair decorated with small white flower decorations, has descended.

Seongjin, who had been taking a breather for a while after completing the two sets of runs at the gymnasium, widened his eyes.

"Whoa... Sister. What happened?"

The female knight who accompanied her as an escort was also quite beautiful, but Princess Amelia was a girl who truly boasted unrivaled beauty. She has an atmosphere that combines extreme brightness and neatness at the same time.

"Yeah, I stopped by after thinking about it on the way. I heard you live at the gymnasium these days?"

Amelia smiled shyly and continued as if a little apologetic.

"I don't know if I'm interfering or not. Everyone is training so hard....."

He followed her gaze. The resident knights of the Pearl Palace are training hard in the corner of the gymnasium with their tops open.

These bastards?

"Well, it was break time anyway. You don't have to worry about it, as it's well taken care of."

Seongjin waved his hand.

Amelia looked at Seongjin with a bit of admiration as he stretched back and forth even while taking a breather. They said it had been a few days since he appeared at the gymnasium, and he looked like he had lost a lot of weight.

His stomach still jiggles whenever he moves, but it's a huge improvement compared to the past when he was waddling and rolling.

"You really have changed. You have lost a lot of weight."

Seongjin smiled bitterly.

"Fufufu. There is no diet as sure as marching with military gear on."

The weight this body has to lose easily exceeds the weight of the full outfit, Sister.

Of course, Amelia, not understanding what he was saying, tilted her head.

Sir Marthain, who seemed to give up his duties immediately and come running, was unexpectedly taking time to hand over his duties. It seems that from now on, he will put off all work to his lieutenant and focus only on Seongjin's lessons in earnest.

Thanks to that, Seongjin was still training alone at the training ground. Well, that is until today.

In order to leave a little bit of energy for class, the scene unfolding right in front of him is not very good for mental health, so let's do some training in the morning.

"I'm going to have lunch now, would you like to have it before dinner?"

It is unimaginable between the two before. The escort knight winced and looked at Amelia, but she smiled happily and nodded her head.

"Yes, let's do that. Morres."

And the brother and sister left the gymnasium, ignoring the earnest eyes of the resident knights.

* * *

"Hmm... You say this is the purpose of life?"

Seongjin had just finished taking a shower and was sitting face to face with Amelia at a modestly set table.

Unexpectedly, the two talked well, but Amelia, who was normally shy, was surprised inside. She said it was because her meal time with him was more enjoyable than she thought.

Even until morning, she had no appetite at all, but before she knew it, she was emptying the food and making a lot of noise. Perhaps the unprecedentedly intense greeting two days ago played a role in breaking down the wall between each other.

"So you're saying you don't know what the purpose of living in vain is after you've gotten away from the guy who bothers you?"

"To sum it up, that's it."

Somehow, Amelia was consulting with him about her recent worries. Of course, she couldn't tell him that she had regressed, so it was a vague story somewhere.

Seongjin tilted his head.

I felt that this kind of conversation was not very unfamiliar. Oh, didn't he tell the Holy Emperor that he wanted to know why a person lives?

But could there be someone who could make the life of someone such as the princess so painful? Enough to lose the purpose of life? Who is that?

The demon king nodded in a calm tone.

[Yours. It's your story.]

'No way... Right?'

Seongjin frowned and pondered for a moment before opening his mouth.

"Hmm, sister. This is purely my opinion, just take note."

Amelia nodded eagerly.

"Okay."

"So you're saying it's all thanks to someone else that you got away from him? It means that you didn't even have a chance to do anything yourself."

"Yeah."

"And he's still living a fine life?"

"Yeah."

"So, is there anything to worry about? Until you have another purpose in life, focus on tormenting him. You have to pay back the damage with interest, and get compensation for the psychological damage as a bonus."

"Hmm....."

Amelia's face darkened.

"I think I should too. At one time, my resentment was so great that I only thought of revenge."

In the first few years after learning Leonard's true feelings, Amelia also gnashed her teeth and vowed revenge on him. She would risk everything and pay back with all her might.

However, while she was confined for a long time and spent a painful time, her vengeance gradually wore off without doing anything.

Leonard.

He was the king with all the power of Rohan.

Amelia, on the other hand, was just a powerless prisoner.

Besides, can it be said that he alone is solely responsible for Amelia's downfall and death?

Many people's ambitions, struggles for interests, and conspiracies. She was just helplessly tossed and trampled in it.

The foolish queen, who had only been imprisoned for so many years, did not even know who she had to avenge.

It was so sad, and in the end it made her shrink herself.

However, Seongjin clicked his tongue and shook his head.

"Wow, this sister is so naive again. What do you think is so complicated? Sister. Revenge, first of all, starts with taking only one guy and beating him up."

".....?"

"Listen, sister. First of all, take a picture of the one that bothers you the most! And only care about how to temper that bastard. You don't need anything else. You're going to follow that one bastard to the end of the world."

For a moment, he felt a piece of garbage tremble in Seongjin's head. Why is he shaking again?

Seongjin wasn't a delicate person enough to realize that it wasn't like someone else's story.

"Then, the officials will come out one after another, right? Then lose again. What if that bastard is the most powerful? By the time you kill that bastard, everyone else must be dead, right? What? Is your revenge over?"

Huh? That's true, but.....

Somehow it sounds like a very simple thing.

Amelia tilted her head.

"Imagine him begging to sister with a double nosebleed. I assure you, there is absolutely no time to be depressed. Purpose of life? Sister, is there anything in this world that fills the heart as much as the pleasure of revenge?"

"....."

The demon king sighed.

[No, you demon!]

"True revenge, sister. It's not just a process you have to persevere to see results. Think of the perfect trap you design to taffy your opponents. How beautiful is it? How precious and rewarding must each of the steps taken to execute this be?"

"....."

"Then what if there is something you want to do? then you can do something else. Retaliation from the other side? What are you worried about? The strongest backing in the country is our father."

"Yeah, that's right."

Amelia felt that her mind, which had been complicated until now, became much clearer.

"Yes, you are right. I definitely want revenge."

Could she ever be satisfied with just avoiding getting involved with him? Why did she try to ignore that fact until now?

It was because she thought it would be beyond her power. Because she felt that if a goal was unattainable, she would have to give up. She tried to console herself that it was not right to waste her life on such things.

So she became helpless. Only her empty shell remained.

"I thought revenge that didn't reach the end was just futile. But true revenge is something that enriches life not only in the result but also in the process itself."

A bright smile bloomed on Amelia's face.

Let's not turn away from her true desires anymore.

That's right. I want to see the ruin of Leonard.

There was nothing left but that longing. Maybe she went back to the past for that.

If you fear not succeeding, you will love even the process of failure.

If the already exhausted mind says that no life can sing, from now on revenge will ignite her desire, give her joy, and make her life shine.

Little by little, the light returned to Amelia's eyes. It was a blue light that had never been seen before.

Seongjin was startled for a moment and avoided her gaze.

That, excuse me sister.

I'm not the target... Am I?

13

Chief Chamberlain Louis entered the office and was startled. It was because the Holy Emperor was lying on the sofa in his office with his hand on his forehead.

It was a rare look from the young holy emperor.

When he saw the chessboard lying on one side of the table, he smiled knowingly.

"Come to think of it, today was the day the twin princess and prince had an audience. Did you play chess again?"

Nate let out a murmur.

"It's getting more and more difficult to deal with those two. Can't they simply play like children?"

"Isn't it something you can just lose?"

"If I don't do my best, it's a problem because they'll notice it like a ghost."

Well, they were very intelligent twins. The chamberlain nodded his head.

"By the way, what about Amelia?"

Louis knew that the Holy Emperor had been keenly aware of the situation at the Silver Rose Labyrinth recently.

Two mornings ago, the First Princess had a sudden seizure and called the imperial doctor. Although he had heard reports of no particular abnormalities in her health.

"They says she eats less and is a little depressed."

"Okay."

"And I heard that she visited the Pearl Palace twice."

"... That is surprising."

Two children who never seemed to get close started coming and going. It's certainly a welcome thing, but it would rather prove that what happened to Amelia wasn't just a change of heart.

Nate sighed as he got up from the couch.

"It would be nice if she could tell me what the hell is going on at the audience tomorrow."

At that time, the Holy Emperor could not even imagine what kind of trouble his lovely daughter would bring him.

* * *

Unwillingly, the direction of a naive girl's life changes completely, and thanks to this, her father is going to grab the back of his neck¹.

However, Seongjin, the culprit behind all of this, was heading to the gymnasium with a throbbing heart, unaware of anything. This is because the swordsmanship class with Marthain, who has finally finished taking over, has begun.

He's was a little sorry for the adjutant who took on the duties of the knight commander. However, being able to have one-on-one lessons with a motivated swordsmanship teacher all day long was an opportunity that would not have been easily obtained if it were not for the prince.

Seongjin was a little impatient because he wanted to come in contact with the unknown power to come quickly.

After a couple of laps around the empty gymnasium without a resident engineer training somehow, Seongjin finished his warm-up with his usual national gymnastics. However, Marthain, who was watching him closely, wrinkled his forehead.

"Your Highness, is it okay if we continue the class as it is? Aren't you feeling uncomfortable somewhere?"

"Huh? I'm fine though? Why?"

Now he's got some strength and he can move.

Seongjin was puzzled and asked, and Marthain asked again.

"Are you sure you have fully recovered from the fever?"

"The doctor said it was okay to exercise. Why, is something wrong?"

"But why is the Aura....."

Marthain looked carefully at Seongjin's complexion and then continued with a rather serious face.

"A while ago, I thought it was because you just woke up from the sickbed. I don't know why Your Highness' Aura activity is still so weak like a sick person even though you've recovered."

Aura is the power that is the basis of life that spreads evenly throughout the world. It is said that even if you are not an aura user who performs contraction from the outside, a certain amount of aura activity will basically occur if you have a normal body.

Occasionally, in the case of a weak person or a person with a disease, this aura activity is weakened. However, Morres' body is said to be extremely inactive, like a person with a serious illness.

"Can you see it? I can't even see Aura."

"Of course it is not visible. However, if you become accustomed to feeling the flow of the Aura, it is possible to guess the degree of activity within the body by detecting the movement of the Aura around you."

It is said that Aura originally has the property to distribute evenly like air or water. If you try to collect the Aura that has flowed into your body without sending it out, the Aura will move faster and faster to fill the gap.

So, the more Aura is used, the more energy is used, the more naturally Aura moves around that person.

It is also a way to indirectly guess the state of others, Marthain added.

"... Oh, come to think of it!"

There was something that suddenly came to Seongjin's mind. These were the words Doctor Ninnias had said in passing during his last regular check-up.

-Compared to normal people, it seems that the activation of the Aura in the body is a little weak, so I think that recovery will be faster if you put in effort at least in Aura practice.

When he told that to Marthain, he tilted his head.

"Did the doctor say that? There aren't many members of the clinic who really feel the activation of Aura, but he seems to be quite experienced."

"Yes, Doctor Ninnias didn't seem to take it too seriously. I heard that I was inherently insensitive to Aura, isn't that why?"

However, Marthain seemed very surprised by Seongjin's words. He breathed in vain and immediately stared at Seongjin's face with round eyes.

What? Is it strange that I say that his Aura is dull?

As expected, he was seriously contemplating whether he should break the plate at least once, but Marthain opened his mouth with a slightly pale face.

"Your Highness previously....."

He licked his lips for a while, as if his mouth still didn't come off, then swallowed dryly and cleared his throat.

"As far as I know, before you got sick, your Aura activity wasn't much different from that of normal people."

"Really?"

"Yes, Your Highness. So, if it's not the aftereffects of a fever, what could be the cause?"

Somehow, when he first opened his eyes in Morres' body, he thought it was exceptionally heavy. Maybe it wasn't just because of being overweight.

Anyway, it was fine now. It's not too hard to move.

Seongjin swung his arms around to loosen his shoulders and spoke indifferently.

"I must have lost a lot of weight and my body was a bit weak. I'll be fine soon."

Marthain had a slightly confused expression, but soon nodded.

"Yes, the doctor has some truth. It's true that once you start contracting your Aura, your Aura activity will increase, so even if you have the aftereffects of your illness, your recovery will be quicker."

Then he began to elaborate on how to meditate. It was the first step towards full-fledged Aura training.

* * *

At that time, in the Holy Emperor's office, the countdown started with a large bomb manufactured by Seongjin the day before in Amelia's hand.

"Hmm....."

Amidst the heavy silence, Holy Emperor Nate let out a short sigh.

Audience time with his daughter alone. This is because his daughter, who would normally talk for hours about the flowers and accessories she received as a gift and the prince she admired, kept her mouth shut.

He looked down at Amelia's rosy hair, her head bowed down, and his

eyebrows furrowed slightly. Because that little head is full of worries.

Nate decided to untie the knots one by one. First of all, he tried to change her mood by conveying news that her daughter would like.

"Amelia. About the Second Prince of Rohan you always talk about."

Confirming Amelia's flinching reaction, he continued.

"He sent me a letter saying he would visit here soon. As if he's going to eventually become the crown prince instead of his sickly older brother. It looks like he's trying to solidify his position as the crown prince by receiving official teachings."

Leonard of Rohan.

A sleazy bastard who sings that his daughter has longed for him since last year.

Although it was distasteful to directly deliver the news of the scandalous bastard, it is said that parents cannot beat their children. His daughter said that she likes him, so what more can he say?

However, his daughter's reaction, which he thought would be delighted, was completely unexpected. Amelia lifted her head in a flash, and soon he noticed that jewel-like tears began to drip from her large gray eyes.

"Father, Your Majesty, this girl does not want to meet Leonard! That cruel man will eventually become the source of evil that will harm me, Morres, and Delcross!"

Nate was instantly taken aback by his daughter's sudden violent reaction.

And bombs were dropped on him.

"Your Majesty, I... returned from death to the past!"

It was a sudden bolt from out of the blue.

Afterwards, Amelia's complaints poured out as if a blocked dam had

burst, shaking the office like a storm.

To sum it up roughly, Leonard, that damn bastard, seduced his beloved daughter, openly spied on her, deceived and mistreated her, and soon began to physically and mentally abuse her. Even that was not enough, she was confined in a cold tower for years, and finally killed in front of his eyes.

And his daughter returned to the past from that gruesome death?

These were stories that were not easily believable.

"Aah! Your Majesty was so against it from the beginning, but this foolish daughter of yours ruined everything!"

"....."

Nate just stared blankly at his daughter, who was now starting to sob.

There was a lot to say, but he couldn't easily ask any of them. It was because Amelia's voice pouring out like she was vomiting was so desperate.

"Last night, this girl had a lot of troubles too. Will I embrace this secret alone? If so, how far can a girl's power change the future? Even coming here, I was constantly conflicted. However!"

"....."

"It is a conspiracy that begins within the royal family of a neighboring country. These are events that will bring about a great war on the continent. If I don't discuss all of this with Father, the greatest monarch of the continent, who can I ask for help?"

At least, as if it were true that she had been thinking all night, thick dark circles were sitting on Amelia's always neat face.

"... I am well aware that all of this is nonsense for Your Majesty to hear. But for me, every day was like hell. Those vivid memories cannot be dismissed as a midday nightmare."

"Is... that so?"

"Yes. Your Majesty the Holy Emperor, Father. It has been a long time since I came back."

She swallowed sadly for a moment, then raised her head.

"So this girl will take revenge. I will pursue him to the ends of hell. I will crush all his hopes and utterly ruin them. I won't forgive anything that gets in my way!"

"....."

"Only his body will appease this girl's hunger, and his blood will satisfy my thirst."

Fufufufufu.

His daughter, who was like a single rose, laughs gloomily while making a scary sound.

Nate blinked in bewilderment. Had he been misinformed about this child all this time?

Okay, let's just say everything Amelia said is true. Even so, is this tender child calmly harboring a sword of malice towards others?

She is the daughter who did not hold a single grudge against the Marquis² who neglected her as a child. How can a person's personality itself change like this in one day?

As he stared at his daughter's venomous eyes, which were only unfamiliar to him, Louis, the chief chamberlain, who was watching from the side, tipped off to him.

"Apparently she has been hanging out with Prince Morres recently....."

"....."

That's right, Mores.

Nate let out a small sigh.

From some time ago, there was always that child in every causal distortion.

"... Amelia."

The Holy Emperor did not hastily say that he believed in her.

Nor did he console her that it was simply her nightmare and that it would not be true.

He just asked this.

"It must have been a very long and painful time for you. Shouldn't you be compensated for this now?"

"....."

"If I use my hand, Leonard, he won't be king. You will not go to Rohan, you will find other happiness in Delcross. Why do you want to throw away the time you regained for revenge?"

But Amelia firmly shook her head.

"I came to realize that a girl's happiness could never be separated from her revenge. Your Majesty."

A blue light is burning in the eyes of the daughter who was just beautiful and neat.

The Holy Emperor realized. She can't be stopped.

In the end, he had no choice but to ask in a low voice.

"Do you have... a specific plan?"

If it is unavoidable, as a father, he has no choice but to generously pour in advice.

"After he took the throne, didn't he go through a complicated process to find a reason to confine me? In order to guess the power structure at the time, it is necessary to find out the current situation of Rohan....."

"I don't know how it was possible for you to be so completely cut off from Delcross. Even in Rohan, there are many talented subjects of Delcross. What I remember about that place....."

"Isn't it strange why it should have been a Holy War? Instead of a war, it's possible Rohan was trying to draw in allies under the guise of a Holy War....."

"Daughter, that Leonard is not a person with exceptional strength. Aren't you out of shape when you're so easily hit by a dagger? Swordsmanship class starting tomorrow....."

The tea time with his daughter turned into an insidious time plotting the destruction of the royal family of a neighboring country.

After seeing off Princess Amelia safely, Louis entered the office and stopped in shock. It was because the Holy Emperor was lying face down on his refreshment table with his hand covering the back of his neck.

Arguably, it was the first time the chief chamberlain had seen this in his many years as an assistant.

The Holy Emperor groaned a little.

"I'd rather just play chess for a week and a half....."

T/N:

1. When people grab their neck in stress. Nate will be doing this a lot when dealing with children, ESPECIALLY Morris.
2. Just a reminder, Amelia's mom was an illegitimate daughter to a marquis and Amelia's life was pretty miserable before Nate found her and brought her to the imperial palace.

14

The Holy Emperor Nate is not a deeply religious person by nature.

However, what he dare to say without shame is that he did not particularly seek carnal pleasure or senseless romance.

That is to say, he didn't lead his life recklessly enough to be called [The Unprecedented Playboy Holy Emperor].

But why did he already officially have five children when he ascended to the throne at the young age of 21? Here, too, there were some circumstances which deserved sympathy.

Born as the son of the hated Second Queen, the Third Prince of the former Holy Emperor, he was unfortunately the most talented human being among his half-brothers.

A prince with innate elegance, a brilliant brain, and even a talent for swordsmanship. He was naturally a top priority for other members of the imperial family.

In addition, the son of the powerless Second Queen who was shunned by the Holy Emperor and kicked out by her family. He had to be eliminated first, and even if things went wrong, he was bound to be the most uncompromising target.

Because of this, he suffered numerous assassination attempts from a young age.

Several raids, as well as various attempts to poison in particular, continued to happen. Not to mention three meals a day and food and beverages, it was not uncommon for the entire villa to be engulfed in poisonous smoke.

No matter how quick-witted Nate was and possessed extraordinary

divine power, he could not avoid the crisis of crossing life and death several times.

Before he was 10 years old, the Second Queen, who suffered from poison for several years, eventually died.

It's been a long time since the people of the castle or family stopped visiting altogether. His one and only son was also poisoned, and it was a lonely death in a bone marrow.

By then, Nate's health was also in critical condition. The oracle of Kornsheim left behind a curse-like prophecy saying that he would never see an heir from now on, and that he would die a miserable death at a young age.

The members of the imperial palace also unanimously declared that the poisoned young prince had already become infertile. In addition to this, even if you take good care of your health from now on, it is accompanied by a gloomy prospect that it will be difficult to exceed the terms and conditions.

A prince who has no rear ship and cannot see his heirs.

Everyone was unaware that Nate had been unofficially removed from the throne entirely.

For more than two years after that, the prince steadfastly survived by himself. Even after reaching this point, poisoning attempts continued, so it was a tearful struggle for survival.

However, after going through an event where he vomited blood again at the imperial palace banquet celebrating the birthday of the holy emperor. Little Nate, his patience finally exhausted, thought with a carefree smile as he lay in his bed.

Fuck, life.

After that day, the poor third prince disappeared completely from the imperial palace.

After leaving the capital, the young prince wandered the country alone for years.

At first, he reluctantly ran away to live, but as soon as he escaped the small fence of the imperial palace, many of his natural talents began to bloom brilliantly.

His uncharacteristic cleverness allowed him to evade the pursuers in the imperial palace, and the miscellaneous skills he picked up here and there allowed him to quickly rise to the level of excellent swordsmanship. The suppressed divine power was also completely released, allowing it to exert miraculous healing power.

Is that all? Everyone who met him treated him kindly.

An experienced hunter, a talented treasure hunter, an independent hidden pharmacist, and a wandering sword master.

It was a passing relationship for a while, but they all saved the talent of the prince and tried to help.

It didn't take long for the prince to transform into a fairly competent adventurer. The desperate nomadic life is now becoming a pleasant foodie trip to enjoy the life that is not long left to the fullest.

Many years after running away from the imperial palace. Although he was a bit infrequent, the assassins continued to pursue him, and Nate periodically moved from city to city and wandered around the country. As his hair grew thicker to a certain extent, he naturally began to have meetings with women.

Nate must have been quite a style to be eaten by women. Even though he revealed that he couldn't settle down in one place, there were many women who wanted a cool swordsman and a fleeting flame of romance.

At that time, Nate was someone who enjoyed wandering around, but on the other hand, always had a fear of a terminally ill life, not knowing when he would die.

So, if he can remain as a momentary good memory for them, then his life would be worth a little bit. Thinking about it now, he met women with his own desperate reasons.

He was always faithful to love, feeling that it might always be the

end of his life.

It may sound like an excuse, but the women who met him were very happy, and parting was always heartbreaking and beautiful.

The only thing Nate overlooked was that his health quickly improved as he got rid of his periodic poisoning and started to deal with his Aura properly.

And since his innate divine power greatly exceeded previous popes, the healing power of his body was also beyond imagination.

That is to say, he was not sterile.

He found out about it when he was almost 20 years old. In the city where he stayed for quite a long time as the frequency of his pursuers decreased, from the day his lover Melody vomited.

The doctor's diagnosis was pregnancy.

There was no doubt about the lover. Because he knew better how innocent and noble she was.

'No way.....'

An eerie assumption passed through his mind.

From then on, Nate hired the Information Guild and went on to inquire about the women he had dated before.

Since when did he become normal?

What was the oracle's prophecy about having no heirs and short-lived?

If, by any chance, other women had children, how are those fatherless children doing now?

While anxiously waiting day by day, Melody's stomach began to grow, and by the time winter came around, he was able to receive an answer from the Information Guild.

– Judging from the women's future actions and the baby's appearance, there are currently three children suspected of having the client as the parent. Further reports will be made as the investigation progresses.

That means there may be more if you look for them.

Cold sweat flowed like rain.

'What should I do? Let's find them all and take responsibility... No, then what about the Melody? First of all, I'm going to have to marry Melody, how heartbroken will she be when she finds out?'

He had that thought.

'Oh, what if those women are already in a family with someone else? Then, wouldn't it be true love to just pretend not to know and wish for happiness? No, no. That's irresponsible.....'

Nate grabbed his head. Because even he thought he was too trashy himself.

But the water has already been spilled, and the flesh has been shot.

While struggling with pain, he decided to focus on taking care of his lover, whose birth date was approaching. And in order to ascertain whether it was a situation where he had to intervene, he additionally commissioned a detailed investigation into the current situation of the other women and children to the guild.

However, aside from his complicated personal circumstances, the situation in the Holy Empire began to flow strangely.

It seemed that the battle between the First Prince and the First Princess for the succession was in full swing, but the Second Prince suddenly seized the market and knocked out the Princess.

Shortly thereafter, the Holy Emperor suddenly passed away, and a civil war between the First and Second Prince factions broke out, but surprisingly, the two princes died at the same time due to a small friction between the troops in the capital.

Nathaniel Klein, 21 years old.

The auspicious day when Melody finally held her beautiful daughter in her arms.

And the day when the three Holy Knights and five cardinals came to the village in groups and knelt at once in celebration of the birth of a new Holy Emperor.

The information guild announced that they had found another child, and he inherited the throne and officially became the father of five children.

* * *

"Are you still paying attention to what the princess said?"

Click. Nate raised his head at the sound of tea cups clinking. It was Louis, the chamberlain, who had been assisting him for the past several years.

He is a competent fellow who takes care of the tea that the Holy Emperor enjoys in the evening without even ordering it separately.

"Hmm....."

Nate moved his chin to the other hand and asked a question in passing.

"What do you think? How much can be believed from what Amelia said?"

Louis smiled softly.

The young Holy Emperor he served had occasions like this. It was only after he had finished his thoughts and reached a complete conclusion, that he asked for the opinion of the chief chamberlain, who would not even refer to it.

So the seasoned chief chamberlain gave a moderately common sense opinion.

"Wasn't she originally a kind and imaginative person? She must have had a frightening dream."

"That's right."

Nate nodded.

"How about the Pearl Palace?"

"I've been told that Prince Morres and Sir Marthain devoted themselves to swordsmanship lessons all day long. Both of them are more motivated than ever before, and I heard that he seems to be doing well."

"Right."

Nate gave a short answer and raised a cup of tea.

The chamberlain silently stayed by his side. It was because he knew empirically that the Holy Emperor would command him to do something soon.

After a while, Nate opened his mouth.

"... Louis."

"Yes, by your command."

"Get the necklace from Amelia's room."

Louise's eyebrows rose slightly.

Among the many accessories possessed by the princess, there must be only one that the Holy Emperor specifically refers to.

As the chamberlain, who knew even a little about the jewel, it was impossible not to know that the Holy Emperor was taking this incident more seriously than he thought.

"Your Majesty, that necklace....."

As the chief chamberlain opened his mouth in confusion, the Holy Emperor suddenly raised his hand.

He was stunned speechless, but immediately shut his mouth when he realized that Nate was staring at the ceiling.

"....."

Soon, a dark figure falls from above. He was a man in a black outfit.

He was an agent of the Information Guild, who Louis was familiar with, but his skills were truly ghostly. Even when he appeared, he didn't seem to be there, but he didn't even hear the sound of him sitting on the floor.

How the hell does the Holy Emperor know in advance that this man is coming every time?

"Your Majesty the Holy Emperor."

The man, who got down on one knee and bowed respectfully towards Nate, continued to report with a low voice as he kept his head bowed.

"There is a new progress in the long investigation, so I visited late."

"....."

Louis was startled and looked at the Holy Emperor. It was because there was only one issue that this information guild had been hanging on to for a long time.

As expected, Nate's face, which maintains a poker face for a while, is slightly wrinkled.

"... Say it."

"Yes, we tracked down the woman Your Majesty met in the Eusenian Hot Spring Village. After she left the village, her activities were completely cut off and we have been walking in place until now, but while searching for her, there was someone who vaguely remembered that she was the daughter of a male writer in Rohan."

It's Eusenian. Perhaps it was in the middle of his wandering period.

Strangely, it turned out that she was a person of Rohan.

"It is said that she even gave birth in the hot spring village and was on her way home. However, there was no record of entering Rohan, so the investigation was disrupted. It turns out that before entering Rohan, they were attacked by bandits....."

Clack.

Hearing the sound of the teacup being set down on the table a little harshly, the informant glanced up at the Holy Emperor's face and continued.

"Everyone in the party, including the woman, died, but after that, there were eyewitnesses who said they saw a boy from the bandits. The baby was probably raised by thieves, and was captured after the situation....."

Louis, the chief chamberlain, stared at the Holy Emperor's clenched fist as if the blood would disappear, and then quietly closed his eyes.

It was the moment when the Holy Emperor's eighth child was confirmed.

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Several days passed.

In the meantime, Sungjin spent a fruitful time going back and forth between the library and the gymnasium. It was a faithful time he had only experienced decades ago in his school days, devoting all his energy to self-development without any worries.

There was Morres' personal library in the Pearl Palace, which was very large compared to the size of the palace and had many collections.

Just when he thought he'd take the time to look into it, Amelia cautiously asked him to use the library. He said that he was interested in the international situation and the situation of neighboring countries, and she wanted to study specialized books.

There were only small libraries in the Blue Rose Labyrinth, the palace of the princes, and the Silver Rose Labyrinth, the palace of the princesses. However, going to the Imperial Library or the library of the main palace was too far away.

On the other hand, the Pearl Palace library has the advantage of having a large collection of books and not far from the Silver Rose Labyrinth.

– There are not many libraries that have this many specialized books. It was because it was prepared by referring to the theological academy.

This is what the librarian and administrator said with great delight when a person came to the library, which had been flying only flies, for the first time in a while.

Indeed, it was said that the queen had built it with all her heart and

soul for the education of the third prince, but it seemed that the level was comparable to that of a specialized educational institution.

And Seongjin, who visited the library for the first time with Amelia, learned a shocking fact.

It's true that the language he used so far was not actually Korean!

[Wow, I thought it was lacking somewhere before, but did you only know that now? I'm more curious that you didn't know that until now.]

The demon king sneered. Seongjin made a fussed face as he flipped through the books written in an unfamiliar language.

'Can it be that I have to study the spelling again?'

After recognizing that fact, Amelia's chatter next to me came to me with a very strange feeling. Why didn't he know until now? Sentence structure and pronunciation is a foreign language completely new to him?

What was even more surprising was that despite this, Seongjin had no major problems understanding her words.

Seongjin asked the demon king with a sudden thought.

'Just in case, aren't you speaking Korean right now.....'

[What? Punk?]

The answer that came back was absurd.

[Why would I, the Demon King of Gehena, speak the language of a low-level world like Sigurd District 34, and not even an official language at that, but a corner country? I don't even know what it means.]

'Then how are we still talking?'

[That's because this body is in the middle of a direct dialogue with the soul through thought waves. Ignorant Earthling.]

The demon king, who seized the opportunity to pretend to be proud after a long time, was arrogant.

[If you're like me, it's not even a task to read thoughts before words. There is no language that this body cannot understand.]

ah. Is that so.

Then, is Seongjin's understanding of words related to the fact that the demon king reads his thoughts first?

The Demon King answered his question coolly.

[Shall we try it?]

Then, in an instant, his presence disappeared from my mind.

'.....!'

They said I could get away from this body a little bit, so it was like this.

While he was thinking blankly, Amelia, who was wandering around, approached him with an excited face and spoke to him.

"There are so many books here, Morres. It doesn't seem to fall short even compared to the main palace library! Can I use it more often in the future?"

"Yes, of course, Big Sister Amelia. Feel free to use it anytime."

Unfamiliar language still flowing softly from his own mouth. It seems to have nothing to do with the existence of the Demon King.....

'Could it be that I was a language genius?'

However, the demon king, who returned after a while, dismissed his opinion at once.

[The language center is in the brain, right? The soul is Lee Seongjin, but this body belongs to Morres. Shouldn't this be seen as what Morres' body remembers?]

It was a very plausible statement. If so, maybe.....?

With a glimmer of hope, Seongjin pulled out a book and began to look closely at it. After looking at it for a while, sure enough, there were a few letters that were recognizable.

That is, onomatopoeia, and very simple words.

[It is at the level of a child who is just learning letters.]

The demon king summarized it in one sentence.

Wow, Morres you fucking son of a bitch.

How is it that a prince can't even read properly even when he's reached puberty?

Seongjin, who had suddenly started to study a foreign language unexpectedly, looked at the sky with a bewildered face, and the demon king comforted him and chuckled.

[Consider it luck that Delcross adopted the phonetic alphabet. Won't you learn quickly because you know the language? Go for it!]

On the other hand, life at the gymnasium has undergone many changes.

First of all, it is because Seongjin, who has lost quite a bit of weight, cuts down on physical training and aerobic exercise, and starts learning swordsmanship from Sir Marthain in earnest.

The standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights he was learning was a very simple and effective swordsmanship that a genius knight named Banahas refined based on the swordsmanship of the Delcross Empire about 100 years ago.

It is a practical swordsmanship that organizes old swordsmanship, originally passed down in 15 types and 9 types, into 8 types and 10 types.

It was a great swordsmanship that was established as the basic swordsmanship of the knights along with the Banahas technique he

devised.

Among them, Marthain focused on Seongjin for the most basic movement 1 and movement 2. It was the basis of all the movements, but it was a process that had to be mastered first in order to learn the Banahas practice method.

"Well, that's strange."

Marthain said curiously to Seongjin, who wielded a wooden sword while sweating.

"Certainly, the prince does not have the basics of swordsmanship or attitude at all. Even so, you seem familiar with handling weapons."

That's right.

After wielding the claw of a monster for decades, it's easy to come up with a cool form of your own.

"And I can already see a lot of bad habits. The arm holding the sword must be stopped with full force. But you have a habit of swinging it with all your might and subtly relaxing it before stopping it. The same goes for a frontal stab. Why do you keep rotating it counterclockwise?"

Holy shit. What he wielded at will for decades returned as poison.

Seongjin gritted his teeth and tried to make his sword as plain as possible.

Fortunately, his tenacity to hold on to one thing shined through, and soon after, he was able to correct most of the pointed out habits. Of course, if he lost his guard even for a moment, his right arm would rotate without realizing it.

Marthain was satisfied.

"Originally, I was going to repeat movement 1 and movement 2 until we entered the Aura practice, but the prince is progressing faster than I thought. I don't think it would be too much trouble to go through a little bit of swordsmanship training."

And while learning the 3rd and 4th movements, Seongjin's bad habit was discovered again.

"Why do you pull the sword down toward your waist while performing a simple slanting up slash? Isn't this just too twisted with a sword to be a simple habit!"

Seongjin swallowed the tears inwardly.

All of these were things that came from beating the hard outer skin of monsters, but there was no way that Marthain would know his circumstances. In the end, he swung his wooden sword until his palm was grazed all over and corrected all of the pointed out habits.

Needless to say, Marthain was amazed.

"You seem to be a really gifted swordsman! It's not just a matter of sword talent. It's not easy to correct a habit even for knights who have risen to the heights, but Your Highness is tenaciously digging into it and eventually fixing it! Being devoted to one thing is one of the most important virtues for a prosecutor."

However, contrary to the comparatively rapid progress of swordsmanship, Aura practice training was strangely ineffective.

The Aura practice method begins by carefully refining the sense of Aura through meditation and then gradually applying its operation to the basic formula that is the basis.

It is said that there is a time gap of several days to several years depending on the talent in putting the operation into motion. If you succeed in weaving an Aura into one movement according to your will, then you can say that you have entered the practice.

However, it is said that in most cases, it does not take a few days to feel the Aura and begin to accumulate energy in the body in small amounts.

However, Seongjin hadn't felt any energy for almost a week.

After much thought, they tried doubling the meditation time.

"The Aura melts into every movement in the body. Now, let's start with breathing in and breathing out. The refreshing air when inhaling and the fine energy spreading in it spreads to the chest with a slight tickling feeling."

"....."

"Calm the mind and contemplate the inner self. Now, feel the Aura flow through your veins and into every nook and cranny of your body. It puts your mind at ease....."

Even Sir Marthain, who couldn't wait, tried something hypnotic!

"Hypnosis! I explained the process of absorbing the Aura in detail!"

He was very distressed.

"The prince tends to adapt to swordsmanship training fairly quickly, so maybe it would be a good idea to feel the flow while performing basic movements."

So they did.

"Now, that's just the motion. Can you feel a slight tickling sensation running down your arm at the end of that cut? The Aura rotates from the elbow to the wrist and from the inside to the outside."

"Yes, here you should have the feeling of hitting down from the knee and pushing up from the foot. Tap tap! Like that. Yes, tap tap! It feels like that. It is to make the lower body firmly fixed as the Aura flows in the opposite direction in succession."

To Seongjin, it sounded like bullshit.

Finally, the exhausted teacher and student collapsed onto the floor of the gymnasium helplessly.

Hey, Sir Marthain. Didn't you say you're really confident in one basic class?

"Well, it's a bit harsh for me to say this, but it seems to me that your sense of Aura is a bit dull."

Such an assessment finally came from the mouth of the amiable knight commander, who was trying to avoid pointing out Morres' lack of talent as much as possible.

"It took me twice as long as everyone else to get into the practice, but it took less than two days for me to feel Aura and start practicing."

Wow, Morres really was an Aura beyond imagination.

While Seongjin wrapped his head in frustration, Marthain looked up at the sky at the gymnasium with a little vague eyes.

"Thinking about it, it's understandable that you gave up swordsmanship when you were young. Lord Logan, who started the class together with you, succeeded in initiation in just one day, but Your Highness have not made any progress even after a year. It makes sense to get discouraged."

Sir Marthain. Can you stop beating people up for not being talented just because it's someone else's business?

Who is Logan by the way?

[That's your big brother. You rascal.]

The demon king, who was bored with nothing to do during training, said it was this time and gave the information he knew.

It turned out that the Holy Emperor had quite a lot of sons and daughters, as many as seven.

Logan, the third child and second prince among them, is the son of the empress, and he is the same age as Morres, a few months older than him.

However, this son seemed to be a great talent. He is said to have been gifted with powerful divine power as well as a genius who entered the practice in just one day.

It is said that his appearance resembles the Holy Emperor the most, so there are already many people in the public eyeing the second prince as the next prince and trying to line up.

Even his personality is in great shape. It is said that he is taking the initiative to lead the young paladins for the seawater subjugation.

'It's completely different from Morres.'

A fool who only eat and rolls around in a separate palace, having close to zero divine power.

A talented and good-natured young paladin who kills seawater¹ for the sake of his people.

It was a good target for comparison.

'If you think about it, Morres is quite pitiful.....'

As Seongjin was thinking while looking at the passing clouds, Marthain, who had been sitting down with his head down, suddenly stood up with his fists clenched.

"It can't go on like this. Your Highness! I think we need to take some special measures!"

".....?"

Seongjin looked up in puzzlement, and Marthain's eyes were burning as if he was prepared for something great.

"It is too early to give up. Here's something you haven't tried yet!"

Why not try sooner? Is it dangerous?

"It's okay. It was a method that helped me a lot when I was young and hit the wall of initiation."

"Well, if that's the case....."

"Then, could you give me your hand for a moment?"

Seongjin got up from his seat with a doubtful face and held out his hand.

"Believe me! I will definitely help you feel the sense of Aura!"

The face of Marthain, who emphasized his faith again while holding Seongjin's hand, was quite grim.

This is really unsettling.

T/N:

1. I'm guessing this is referring to some type of demon kind or just hostile enemies? I'll keep it as seawater until given more context.

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"It is a completely different matter to adjust the Aura that naturally flows through the body as desired, and to let it flow out of the body."

Marthaine began to explain.

The two stood facing each other in the middle of the gymnasium. Seongjin's outstretched hand was supported by him with his left hand, and the middle and index fingers of his right hand were raised and placed on his wrist as if touching his pulse.

He calmly continued his explanation.

"Even if it's a small amount, expressing the outside air means putting that much strong will into the Aura. In other words, the Aura emitted to the outside cannot be mild at all, and inevitably exerts strong destructive power and influence on the outside."

"....."

"Especially, pouring outside air into another person's body is, in other words, no different from stabbing a sharpened blade into that body."

The longer his explanation goes on, the more Seongjin's anxiety grows.

Sir Marthain. Why are you explaining this in a way that makes it feel like you're about to spill an aura into someone else's hands?

"Of course, it is not impossible for those who are very skilled in the use of Aura to pass them on to others without any harm. Since the intention loaded into the Aura is free, the effect is also natural, and if you use it extremely delicately, it is possible to make others feel like your own Aura."

According to Lord Marthain, his uncle was at such a level.

He said that for his dull nephew, who could hardly get a feel for the operation of the Aura, he handed out the Aura from the outside and learned the changes one by one.

Of course, the young Marthain at the time didn't recognize at all that the process was so dangerous, he was just happy to make progress during training.

"I have a long way to go to reach my uncle's level, but I am also a high-ranking knight who's about to reach the level of Dekaron Knight. When it comes to the delicacy of Aura management, this body is one of the top spots among the knights. It will be absolutely safe, so don't worry too much, Your Highness."

No, wait a minute, then why is your expression so hardened?

Aren't you nervous, Sir Marthain? Right?

Seongjin asked in a cold sweat.

"That... So, if there are any mistakes along the way....."

"The body will be torn apart by the Aura."

Aaaaaagh! What are you trying to do to me? You're a grown man!

Fortunately, Seongjin's hands were not torn apart and covered in blood. As Sir Marthain had assured, he was a fairly advanced Aura user.

Through Marthain's fingers touching his wrist, he felt things like fine grains of sand tingling and running down his arms. It's a small amount, but it's a distinctly different energy.

After some time passed, Marthain stopped dripping his aura and wiped the sweat from his forehead. A look of exhaustion was evident on his face, as if he had consumed more mental energy than he thought.

"My level is low, so this is the limit. How did you feel?"

"It felt like sand was flowing in."

"Did you feel a different energy than usual?"

Seongjin nodded.

"Why can't I feel this certain energy at all by myself?"

Sir Marthain's face brightened. It was a minor achievement that was finally seen after several days of shoveling.

"Seeing that you even grasped the texture of the Aura I used, perhaps Your Highness' initiation is not too far away."

"Does it feel like this even if I use Aura in my own body?"

"When your aura actually flows, the feeling will be a little different. weaker and softer... So, is it like the feeling of flowing water? Some people say that it is tingling like a weak cramp."

"Hmm....."

I started to guess what the feeling of the Aura that seemed to catch something floating was like.

So it's like that.

'It feels similar to strengthening the body by absorbing the spirit of a monster, doesn't it?'

Using the absorbed power to match muscle movements, block external impact, and weave it into a weapon to make it sharper.

These are the things Seongjin did in the past as naturally as breathing.

When he thought about it carefully, there were many similarities between the Aura operation of movement 1, which Marthain explained in detail, and the way Seongjin applied the monster's spirit to his muscles when he performed similar movements.

Contrary to Marthain's brightening, Seongjin's face darkened.

At first, he thought that Aura was a completely new quality of power, so its aspect would be completely different. So even if he didn't feel anything in his body, he just thought it was because he was dull.

However, if you think about it, it was Seongjin who had been fighting while assimilating foreign energy throughout his body for the past few decades. There was no way he would not notice the movement of such a distinctly different force.

Seongjin contemplates his body condition again, but he still doesn't feel any foreign energy.

This means one thing.

It was that there was a more fundamental problem with Morres' inability to use Aura.

* * *

Can there be a person without a single Aura in his body?

Anyone who has learned even a little bit of Aura practice will categorically say that this cannot be the case.

This world was very rich in the flow of energy, which is the basis of Aura.

Ordinary people could also faintly feel the flow of energy flowing from the air to and from the body if they put in a little effort. It was a different matter to store or operate this energy as an Aura inside the body.

Auras occur naturally in the human body, albeit in extremely small amounts. Although it is a small amount, it is continuously produced in the body in an amount that can be noticed by those who are sensitive.

In other words, fundamentally, there can never be a person whose Aura concentration is close to zero.

[Could it be an illusion? Wasn't it really just a fleeting moment when you felt that power?]

The demon king murmured.

[Aura is a power that is unfamiliar to me. No matter how low I am, there is no way that I, the king of demons, cannot distinguish between demonic spirit and aura.]

'Hmm.....'

[Occasionally, when I saw your dedicated lady-in-waiting, it just felt like she was wielding a little stronger vitality. Okay? Demonic energy and Aura are fundamentally different powers.]

Seongjin came out of the training ground after the morning training and was walking in the garden of the Pearl Palace.

Originally, it was time to take a shower and go to the palace to have lunch, but now he didn't feel like it. He didn't consume much physical strength because he had to come to most of the morning training and skip the exercises, and he didn't sweat much either.

Above all, today is the first time in a week that he has an audience with the Holy Emperor.

He had pushed away Queen Elizabeth and her ladies-in-waiting, who had been in a frenzy since morning, under the pretext of not being able to miss training with a teacher sent by His Majesty himself.

If you go in now, it's obvious that there will be a fuss because they don't have time to eat anyway, and you're caught by them and grooming yourself.

Let's run away.

Seongjin, who made that decision, came out of the Pearl Palace and started to walk aimlessly along the long tree-lined road outside the palace.

[That's why even if you're used to feeling the monster's spirit, it might not help you feel the Aura.]

'Why is that? Is it the same as absorbing energy from the outside and building and managing it?'

[Are the alien Aura of creatures from other worlds the same as the original Aura of creatures in this world? Did you say Aura is a force close to the source of life force.]

'Then let me ask you one thing. Does Morres' body have that life force you felt?'

[That.....]

The Demon King hesitated for a moment.

[Very... It's rare, but isn't that because it hasn't been long since he woke up from a hospital bed?]

'... As expected.'

Seongjin's suspicion gradually grew closer to certainty.

It wasn't that Morres was insensitive to Aura, but that in fact, he might not even have the slightest perceptible aura on his body.

He stopped walking and was lost in thought.

'Then what should I do now?'

After all, Seongjin didn't have to risk his life for Aura. He started exercising because of his health. The world isn't in danger like before.

In addition, he became the noble status of a prince. Even if he doesn't become an Aura user, he can spend the rest of his life comfortably.

But.

For some reason, he really wanted to learn.

It looks fun.

Once he started, he wants to see it to the end anyway.

In Seongjin's eyes, the spark of courtesy that used to appear every time he was stabbed was quietly burning.

He organized his thoughts.

The first thing that comes to mind is to find someone who has mastered the Aura and have his current status confirmed. Knowing the cause will help him find a solution.

However, since even a person as strong as Sir Marthain was not aware of Morres' condition, at least someone stronger than him was needed. Yes, a person Marthain said was about the level of his uncle.

A person who is proficient in using Aura and knows other people's bodies well enough to freely spill their Aura on other people's bodies.

But where can you find such a person.....

"Ah.....!"

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

There was someone.

A person with a very high level of Aura, who seems to be able to answer well when SeongJin asks.

Someone who seems to somehow solve it if you ask for help.

When he looks up, he sees the familiar Imperial Palace Road at the end of the tree-lined road. Probably, if you follow that road in a straight line, you will pass the wide imperial garden and come to the main palace.

I have an appointment today anyway, and it's a little early.

'... Shall we go?'

[Hey, hey..... Why are you going in this direction? Hey, where are you going?]

Ignoring the demon king's uneasy trembling, Seongjin started to walk toward the main street with strides, following his memory.

Fortunately, he didn't get lost. Was it just that it was farther than expected?

When Morres appeared at the entrance of the main palace in informal casual clothes and with a wooden sword at his waist, the knights of the imperial guard who stood guard were very bewildered. However, they quickly correct their expressions and slam their swords on the floor, lowering their heads.

"We greet the Third Prince!"

As expected, the knights of the Royal Guard are different. Seongjin smiled happily and asked a knight for guidance.

Even the demon lord didn't complain that his soul is dying under the pressure of divine energy like before. Although he was just crouching down with his mouth shut because he was just tight.

Occasionally high-ranking priests in fancy robes and tall hats passed by the Seongjin, but they, too, took no notice and stepped aside to give a short bow. Seongjin, who confirmed that the barrier made by the Holy Emperor was working properly, walked inside the main palace without hesitation.

At the end of the hallway on the second floor, several administrators and priests were speeding back and forth carrying bundles of papers.

'Is it a busy time?'

The door to the office was wide open for people to come and go.

I sneaked a peek inside and saw several priests arranging papers stacked on the table with quick fingers. Chief Chamberlain Louis and three young administrative officers lined up on either side of the Holy Emperor's desk.

The Holy Emperor was sitting at his desk in a comfortable outfit, scribbling something on a document, but soon noticed Seongjin's gaze and raised his head. He still had a cold face, not knowing what he was thinking.

"Your Highness Morres!"

Following the Holy Emperor's eyesight, the chief chamberlain looked back at Morres and was delighted. In an instant, everyone in the

office stopped working and bowed in unison.

"We greet the Third Prince!"

Seongjin smiled at them.

"Um, did I come a little early? Uh... If you're busy, please continue your work."

The Holy Emperor stared blankly at Seongjin for a moment, then, without looking back, waved his left hand and gestured.

"Dorian."

A fragile-looking young man standing near the desk holding a pile of papers approaches him with a bewildered expression.

The Holy Emperor put down his pen and stood up, throwing something that looked like a large stamp into his bosom.

"This is a jade chain. Leave the papers on the left aside for now, and take care of everything else."

"Ye... Yes?"

"Turn it all over to the executive secretary in the morning."

The face of the official called Dorian turned pale.

Before he knew it, the chief chamberlain was approaching the Holy Emperor, holding a white robe. The Holy Emperor asked in a nonchalant tone while accepting his attendant and slipping the sleeve of his robe roughly on his arm.

"What about lunch?"

"... I came straight from the gymnasium, so I haven't....."

Seongjin, realizing a moment late that this was a question he was asking himself, answered, and the Holy Emperor turned to Louis and gave instructions.

"I'll be in the backyard with Morris."

"Yes, I will prepare as you said. Your Majesty."

The chief chamberlain bowed his head politely.

The Holy Emperor, who strode out to the entrance without even adjusting his collar, passed Seongjin and gave a small glance.

"Let's go."

Hey, Your Majesty? Father?

It must be a mistake that you seem like you're running away, right?

Ignoring the young administrative officer's earnest gaze, Seongjin turned and followed him. They continued walking down the hallway on the second floor at high speed.

"Can you leave what you're doing? You seemed to be very busy."

Seongjin asked, but the Holy Emperor did not answer right away. Behind him as he steps forward without hesitation, the hem of the white robe flutters and casts soft light.

"... Keep in mind, son."

He was trying to keep up with the stride and follow him, but when he reached the other end of the hallway, the Holy Emperor suddenly opened his mouth.

"National affairs is like a gigantic clockwork that goes back and forth without any deviation."

"Clockwork?"¹

What is this man talking about all of a sudden?

Seongjin was dumbfounded and looked up at the back of his head.

"Yes. What would happen if you tampered with the elaborate clock mechanism?"

"Uh... Will it break?"

"Exactly so."

Seongjin tilted his head and asked.

"That means....."

"This is how to govern a country."

"A country."1

"That's right. It will suffice for you to put competent subjects in their places, and simply let them function properly."

"....."

He was a guy who spoke very grandiosely about skipping.

b

1. In both these sentences Seongjin was so taken aback he forgot to speak in formal speech so he stuttered and added a '-요' to fix his mistakes lol.

17

The place where they arrived to after following the Holy Emperor was a one where the word backyard was put to shame.

No, can he even dare call this place a garden?

Just in the middle of a wide open green lawn, sparse garden trees stand as if they sprouted in a drought. Even that is a meager number that can be counted on one hand.

What is this desolate backyard? Is it a soccer field?

The Holy Emperor, who managed to notice Seongjin's bewildered gaze, said.

"Sometimes this place is used instead of a gymnasium."

Indeed. Next time, he'll ask him to look at his swordsmanship here.

In the middle of the lawn, there was a small table that was too small to be called a dining table.

As the two settle down, the servants of the main palace come out belatedly and prepare a simple meal on the table. Seongjin had planned to skip lunch, but when he saw the neatly prepared food, he felt hungry for no reason.

The two started eating without saying anything.

"Hasn't there been much progress in training?"

Seongjin, who was eagerly chewing and swallowing a piece of meat, looked at the Holy Emperor in surprise.

This guy was like a ghost.¹

He went on nonchalantly, putting the knife down on an untouched plate.

"Several days have passed since the skilled knight commander was sent, but you haven't even formed an Aura core, let alone pile up layers."

Seongjin blinked his eyes. It was because he thought that the Holy Emperor's words were strangely specific.

Sir Marthain and Doctor Ninnias simply said that his aura activity was weak, but why does this guy seem to have a fairly detailed grasp of the level of energy in his body?

Maybe this is it.

"Apart from indirectly guessing through Aura initiation, is there a way to know exactly what level of Aura someone else has accumulated?"

"It's usually hard to tell unless you deliberately show it outside, but....."

"....."

"It is not that there is no way at all."

Seongjin grinned and showed his teeth.

He was certain that he had come to the right person.

"Yes, Marthain did such a trick."

When he talked about the recent training situation, the Holy Emperor slightly raised the corner of his mouth. Whether it's a smile or a sneer, it's an ambiguous response.

"The approach was not bad. And then?"

"Yes, rather than progress, I think I got a clue."

"A clue."

"That's right."

Seongjin wiped his mouth with a napkin and looked at the Holy Emperor for a while, then tilted his head slightly toward him and said quietly.

"That... Father. People say that my Aura is bizarrely thin. So, for some reason, I suspect that the Aura inside my body has already been depleted."

"....."

"Of course, just in case. Are there any constitutions in the world that do not accumulate Aura?"

He thought it would be a relief if he didn't get scolded for saying things that weren't trivial in his heart. However, the Holy Emperor's reaction upon hearing that was surprising.

His eyes widen a little, then narrow slightly. Soon after, his eyebrows frowned a little, then he put his hands on his chin. Then he lowered his eyes and began to ponder something.

Wow, this is the first time he's seen such a big change in expression.

This man is on to something!

Seongjin unknowingly swallowed his saliva and watched his actions.

"Hmm....."

The Holy Emperor was immersed in thought for a while, and then gestured toward the chief chamberlain.

"Louis."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Clear the place for a while."

Louis bowed his head politely, and the table was cleared in an instant. Surprisingly, in less than 5 minutes, the nearby workers had

completely disappeared.

The Holy Emperor was silent for a while as he gazed at the whole view of the back garden. Seongjin couldn't stand it and was about to open his mouth, but the Holy Emperor turned his head and met his gaze.

"The person who looked like he was going to be able to use his aura right now is making no progress, so I just wondered if his laziness disease had flared up again."

Yes? Is that what you're thinking about?

"But after hearing what you said, it dawned on me that there were other possibilities. I'll have to check that out."

"Eh?"

Another possibility?

"Hand."

The Holy Emperor said, as he put his hand on the table. Seongjin momentarily realized that he was going to use a method similar to what Marthain did.

When he put his hand on the table, the Holy Emperor lightly wrapped his hand around Seongjin's wrist.

"This is not a simple awakening of the senses, but a test to know for sure the whereabouts of the Aura. Unlike what Marthain did, don't be too surprised because you might suddenly get a lot of Aura."

Seongjin swallowed and nodded.

At the same time, a cool sensation began to run down his arm from the wrists that were touching.

'... Oh?'

It was literally like flowing water. A far more powerful sensation than Marthain's Aura spreads through the entire arm in a refreshing way

without any tingling stimulation.

Is this the feeling of flowing his own Aura that Masain explained and Seongjin imagined? It's comfortable, so somehow it feels like even the arm muscles that were knotted up in the recent swordsmanship class are completely relaxed.

Seongjin opened his mouth in a strange feeling and admired it, but soon the sense of Aura from his wrist was cut off.

"I stopped just now. Examine the flow of the remaining Aura."

At those words, he woke up and tried to observe the flow of the Aura. However, the effort was not rewarded, and the sense of Aura gradually faded and disappeared completely after passing the shoulder.

"Uh, I don't feel it now."

Seongjin tilted her head and said. He thought it was a fairly large amount of Aura, but it disappeared without a trace like this?

However, the Holy Emperor's expression became quite serious.

"Your guess is correct. The Aura has completely disappeared. It's leaking somewhere."

"It's leaking?"

The Holy Emperor was looking at Seongjin's chest. As if Aura was leaking from there.

Just in case, he wonders if this man can see Aura?

While looking at him with suspicious eyes, the Holy Emperor started pouring Aura again.

The flow of water, more intense than before, climbed up his arm. It was a very large amount, but strangely, there was no strain on the body at all. The cool stream of water passes through the elbow, passes through the shoulder, fades, and flows through the chest... What?

The Holy Emperor tried to push more and more Aura, but it couldn't get past the chest and disappeared.

This time, Seongjin could definitely feel it. So, closer to the back, rather than the chest.....

"It's a scar."

A scar?

After saying something incomprehensible, the Holy Emperor let go of Seongjin's arm and rubbed his chin, thinking again.

Even though he operated his aura like that, he didn't look tired in the slightest. He felt sorry for comparing him to Marthain all the time, but it was definitely on a different level from him.

After much time has passed the Holy Emperor began to explain as if he had completely organized his thoughts.

"There is definitely something like a passageway in your body, and I went there and confirmed that everything went out. So, no matter how hard I tried, the Aura wouldn't gather in your body. It is unknown when the passage started and where it leads."

"Uh....."

Suddenly it became a fantasy. Although this is a different world.

Passage? Passage in the body?

The Holy Emperor continued talking to Seongjin, who was taken aback.

This is not a physical passage, but a spiritual passage through which Aura-like energy or soul flows.

The passage must be open in both directions, but it is a little strange that the energy escapes only from Morres' body.

Since this does not normally happen in the body of an ordinary person, he speculates that it may have something to do with Morres'

resurrection from the dead.

It was a very absurd thing, but Seongjin was not without a guess.

'Could it be that my soul came here because Morres had that passage?'

If so, he can naturally guess where the passage is connected.

Sigurd District 34 or Gehena, where the demon king said was a lower dimension.

This is Seongjin's original world.

"You have two options."

As Seongjin's mind became complicated, the Holy Emperor continued his explanation.

First, to wait for the passage in the body to close.

Since this phenomenon is not normal, there is also a possibility that it will close naturally as the body recovers. Of course, the odds were slim.

Moreover, even if it is closed, it is unknown how long it will last, and you may have to live without Aura for the rest of your life.

Second, fill the passage with water to keep it from leaking further.

If the passage is empty and the Aura is leaking out, then fill it completely with Aura. Even if there is a hole in the dock, if it is full of water, the water will no longer leak because of the water pressure.

"Something like that... Is it possible?"

To Seongjin, it sounded like he was about to pour water into the open sea.

"Fortunately, the passage isn't that big, so I guess I can try it on the edge. I have done something similar before."

"Are there other cases like this?"

"There are. Of course it's not that common. I have seen two so far."

Two people? It's not common, but I wouldn't say it's very rare, right?

As Seongjin opened his mouth wide, the Holy Emperor continued.

"The reason I explain these options to you is that any choice carries some risk."

First, if the aisle is left as it is, there's a possibility that the aisle will widen rather than close.

It is said that when a person with a passage is under extreme stress or under spiritual pressure, the passage may suddenly run out of control. One of the two people the Holy Emperor saw was such a case.

It is said that the runaway passage is no longer limited to spiritual things, but becomes an ant hell that affects even the physical reality. There was a time when an entire nearby village was sucked into that wide passage.

What is it, it's not even a wind hole in the palm of your hand, is that a black hole?

"Isn't it a big deal then? If that happens, what should I do?"

"We need to get rid of the entrance to the aisle. At that time, I closed it myself."

The Holy Emperor's eyes are cold as he answers.

Seongjin felt chills run down his spine as he seemed to know how he closed it without asking.

"Then isn't there no other choice? Rather than risk becoming a walking disaster, I should take the second option!"

As long as I can block it by filling the passage, I don't think there's a better way than that.

However, the Holy Emperor paused for a moment while looking at

the panoramic view, and then suddenly asked Seongjin a strange question.

"Do you know what priming water is?"

"Yes?"

When he asked back with a bewildered face at the unexpected question, he kindly continued his explanation.

"It is a method used by people in the mountainous regions of the west to water for farming. When there is a drought, the people there install something like a small waterwheel with a thin water canal connected from the bottom to the top. You put it on a pulley and turn it quickly to pump the water up."

Suddenly, the topic of farming came up. However, Seongjin listened in silence.

Because he thought that the Holy Emperor wouldn't say something like this for no reason.

"Sometimes, however, if the slope is too high, no matter how fast the pulley rotates, the water will not flow back. Do you know what they do at such times? Pour water into the aqueduct beforehand."

"....."

"In order to draw water, it is to first fill the empty canal with water. That is the priming water."

It seemed that he gradually knew what the Holy Emperor wanted to say.

In other words, the priming water is not that different from filling the passage with Aura.

"Then, the danger you mentioned is....."

"It's good that you understand quickly."

The Holy Emperor's eyes widen as he gazes at Seongjin. The strangely

cold gray eyes looked like the blade of a sharpened sword.

"Until the pulley turns, there will be no problems. But, if you try to pull the water in the canal."

"....."

"Whatever is on the other side of the passage, it will easily be pulled this way too."

The demon king's soul, which had been silent and crouched until now, suddenly trembled.

Seongjin's world perished with Gehenna.

Maybe there are a few survivors. However, he doesn't think it's a number that's enough to continue the species.

There was nothing left of the infrastructure that could serve as a foundation for mankind. Nothing would grow on the land polluted by the corpses of monsters.

Moreover, even if mankind luckily avoids destruction, after the death of the demon king, the Earth will be swept away by the collapsing Gehenna and one day completely disappear.

What on earth remains there, and can it come over to this world?

After organizing his thoughts for a while, Seongjin soon made up his mind.

T/N:

1. A saying that basically means someone somehow knows what the other person is thinking or have supernatural powers that only ghosts have.

18

Seongjin stood in the center of the back garden with the Holy Emperor.

Either way, there is only one choice. Blocking the passage even temporarily to block the possibility of congestion. As long as he doesn't deliberately touch the blocked aura, he'll be safe forever. There was no room for worry.

The Holy Emperor gently pressed the lower part of Seongjin's right collarbone with the palm of his hand. Probably the closest location to the open passage.

"If the flowing flow of Aura is strong, breathing may be a little difficult. However, keep in mind that it is only an illusion caused by the flow of aura, not bodily sensations."

Seongjin nodded, trying to hide his tension.

"Let's begin."

Suddenly, a large stream of water poured into his chest. It was a surprisingly large amount, but it was still a refreshing flow that did not burden the body.

The stream of water hovers near the chest and then hisses under the right shoulder blade before disappearing.

That's the passage. For Seongjin, the position that had been ambiguous until now was now clearly felt.

The amount of Aura starts to increase little by little. As soon as it disappears into the passage, it fills the chest again.

However, it was still lacking. All the Aura that was still pouring in

was clearly sucked through the passage.

"Hup."

Seongjin controlled his breathing, trying hard not to breathe as much as possible.

Even though there is actually no restriction on breathing, the feeling of water filling his lungs somehow made his chest feel stuffy.

Whoosh. His breathing is getting heavier, but his hair sways lightly as wind swirls around the back garden.

'How long will this go on?'

Suddenly, Seongjin became curious. No matter how successful an Aura user is, as long as he is a human, there must be a limit to the Aura stored in his body.

However, the volume of input shows no sign of ending at all. The passage was still sucking in every sip of Aura, and the amount of Aura flowing in was still increasing.

A little worried that he might be overdoing it, he glanced at the Holy Emperor, but he still looked down at his hand with a normal face.

Or, perhaps, he is staring somewhere beyond Seongjin's chest, somewhere in the invisible passage.

Splash.

There was an illusion that he could hear the sound of the waterfall pouring in his ears. The amount of influx of Aura is so large that confusion arises in the senses.

Now, rather than water pouring into his body, it felt like his body was crawling into the river.

'I'm out of breath.....'

He was constantly holding my breath so that he wouldn't hyperventilate just in case, but he heard the demon lord muttering in

his head.

[This, this is crazy. There's no way this is possible for humans.....]

'I also think it's insane.'

Trying to forget his increasingly painful breathing, Seongjin looked away. But a strange sight came into his eyes.

He heard that the wind around them was getting stronger little by little from earlier, but when he looked closely, the wind was swirling around them in a circle. The grass on the floor lay on its right side and rose above the ground.

The long robe worn by the Holy Emperor also floated in the air on the wind. It was as if the whole air around them was rising.

The flying hair mercilessly hit his face, and the grass stalks that flew here and there whirled around, and then soared into the air in a counterclockwise direction.

For a moment, a possibility popped into Seongjin's mind.

How can the Holy Emperor continuously pour out Aura that far exceeds the amount that one human being can accumulate.

'No way, this guy. Is he pulling the Aura around us now?'

They were literally the eye of a typhoon.

The garden trees that were a little further away swayed as if they would soon break in the strong wind. Even so, the grass of the support that was empty is starting to be pulled out. The small table where they had eaten until earlier was blown away weakly by the wind and tossed into the corner of the back garden.

'Anyway, I think this is a bit dangerous.....'

Seongjin, who was breaking into a cold sweat at the chaos around him, rolled his eyes and looked back at the Holy Emperor.

This guy, too, closed his eyes and furrowed his brow, as if he was

feeling a little tired now. He feels a slight trembling in the hand touching his chest.

And yet, the rushing torrent is still getting stronger!

The demon king screamed in his head.

[Oh crazy! He's thinking of pouring more here!]

Rumble rumble!

A handful of garden trees were broken and thrown to the ground, and the small table that had been bent on one side bounced around and soared into the air.

They were now in the stormy sea. He felt his body being pushed backwards by the strong waves, and his breath caught in his throat.

He can't keep to his senses. In an instant, Seongjin's spirit was being swept away by a fierce current.

[Kuaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!]

When he heard the screams of the demon king, it went away in an instant.

And it went dark before my eyes.

* * *

"... Huh?"

Marthain, who was beating the resident knights of the Pearl Palace in the middle of the drill hall, quickly raised his head and frowned.

Suddenly, the wind was blowing strong, but the Aura in the air was shaking like crazy.

"Is it the main palace? no way....."

He glanced at the resident knights, who were exhausted with spirit, and then turned around and started running toward the main palace.

* * *

Crash!

Suddenly, the prayer room door was opened violently, and the paladins who were standing on the alert were startled and corrected their posture.

Katrina, the leader of the Knights of Saint Aurelion, who had just been in private prayer, strode out with a stiff face and began putting on the short armor.

"What about the lieutenant?"

The knight, flustered by her behavior, who seldom violated the prayer time, replied a beat late.

"Sir Francis is now at the academy. Regarding the relic....."

"Well, okay. If he feels something, he'll catch up."

She kicked the sword belt with one last click and pointed at the door with the tip of her chin.

"I'm going to the main palace right now. You guys follow me."

* * *

"What the hell is this, chamberlain!"

Balthazar, the commander of the 1st Knight of the Imperial Guards, rushed to the support with fearsome momentum, howled.

Suddenly, all the Aura in the air seemed to be swept away somewhere, and then a storm came down on the back garden of the main palace. It was a whirlpool of Aura that was colossal to look at.

In the fierce momentum of trees being pulled and blown away, the servants are gathered at the edge of the storm, unable to do this or that, and are only stomping their feet.

What kind of lightning strike is this all of a sudden in the peaceful

imperial palace!

In Balthazar's opinion, only the Holy Emperor himself could perform such feats on all continents.

So, he grabbed the person who was most likely to know the whole story and started to shake him.

"What the hell is he doing again? Come on, answer me!"

But Louis, who was caught by the collar, was muttering while looking at the storm with a dazed face.

"Over, over there..... Over there His Majesty the Holy Emperor, His Majesty and Prince Morres....."

"Even Prince Morres?"

The strength in the grip of the old knight, who was strong, was drained. In a situation where even the young prince was involved, he thought that this would never be what the Holy Emperor intended.

Balthazar looked back at the storm, and for the first time there was a light of nervousness in Balthazar's eyes.

* * *

Crackle crackle.

With the sound of burning flames in the background, he slowly moved.

A mess of broken wooden fences, torn down barracks, and overturned military trucks.

And all around are covered with corpses.

The corpses of comrades strewn with monsters here and there.

This place is definitely a place in Seongjin's memory.

The place where the superhuman unit, who decided to fight for the last time, left with tears behind. The last outpost that was completely

in ruins.

There was only one thing that was different from that time.

All of this was engulfed in a red fire that was not there at the time.

Crackle. The tree of the slanted wooden fence split open and fell to the floor scattering sparks.

Seongjin stopped walking and looked down at his hands and body.

Battle clothes and combat boots stained with blood and bodily fluids of monsters.

A scarred hand with a tattered bandage wrapped around it.

This is Lee Seongjin's usual appearance. But why does it feel so strange?

When he raised his head again and looked at the dark red flames covering the tent, the flames that danced here and there as if they were alive came slowly towards Seongjin.

As he put his hand to greet it, the flames were sucked in and stuck to his hand.

This heat. It's a familiar heat that he's experienced before. As he stared blankly at the burning hand, the flames crawled up his arm and began to spread.

The sleeves of the combat uniform are on fire, and the skin on the forearm is distorted.

And a calm voice was heard.

"It is indeed a flame that burns up even the soul."

Fwoosh.

Suddenly, a rush of cool air came from behind, and the flames were pushed out in an instant.

"No matter how much I pushed it, the heat hardly went away, so it

was no wonder that the inside of the passage was completely burned and empty."

The dark red flames burned more and more fiercely and struggled, but they could not invade the border drawn round around Seongjin. All of a sudden, the flames that had spread to his body completely disappeared.

Surprised, Seongjin looked back and saw a man who should never be here standing with his arms crossed and looking this way.

An involuntary voice came out of his mouth.

"... Father?"

No, why is this man here?

"This is the story of when you had a fever. I wondered where this kind of fire came from, but it really is a flame from hell."

The Holy Emperor looked around for a while, then slowly approached Seongjin. As he gets closer, the flames are pushed a little further outward.

The light of the fire was reflected on the long white robe, giving off an unrealistic red sheen.

Coming closer, he was almost at eye level with Seongjin.

Like pouring cold water on the head, it gradually clears his head.

The Holy Emperor is in this world.

He sees the true nature of Seongjin.

He.....

"... Your Majesty... The Holy Emperor."

A suppressed sound escaped Seongjin's mouth. His own voice was full of fear that was difficult to explain.

At Seongjin's call, the Holy Emperor stared blankly at him for a

moment, then tilted his head slightly to the side and answered. As if a little puzzled.

"Yes, Morres."

What?

"No, this... But....."

"You seem to need a bit more training, son, to be pushed all the way here without being able to withstand that level of Aura."

"Son... Um, Father?"

While he was stuttering in embarrassment, the Holy Emperor turned away from him and waved his hand.

"Open your eyes now, I'm a little tired too."

"Yes?"

That was the end.

Swoosh.

A strong stream of water rushed in from somewhere. In an instant, the scenery in front of his eyes disappears.

The ruined outpost.

Bodies filling the base.

The Flames of Gehenna struggling in red darkness.

Seongjin's spirit began to drift helplessly again.

[Morres.]

Like a dream, the voice of the Holy Emperor resonated in my brain.

[Keep in mind that when you pull water in a canal, things on the opposite side are drawn together.]

* * *

"...nce!"

"Lord Morres!"

He woke up to the sound of someone calling loudly.

As he blinked and focused for a moment, he saw a familiar gentle-faced knight smiling brightly.

"You're awake, Your Highness!"

"... Sir Marthain?"

For some reason, Seongjin was lying leaning on Marthain's arm.

He tried to get up, but he just gave up because of the spinning feeling. His whole body is languid, he has no energy.

"Ohh, Your Highness the Prince!"

"How fortunate!"

Looking around, he was surrounded by old knights and servants of the main palace, who had never seen him before. Only then did he slowly begin to remember the circumstances behind it.

Ah, we... completely blew away the main palace's back garden. There must have been an uproar.

"... How's Father?"

Yes, where is the person responsible for this accident?

At his question, Marthain and the old knight met eyes for a moment and then spoke to Seongjin.

"Relax, Your Highness. His Majesty will be safe."

"....."

Seongjin, who followed Marthain's gaze as he moved around

unsteadily, found the Holy Emperor surrounded by another group of people from a little distance away.

He, too, was being supported by the knights of the Imperial Guards, but somehow his eyes were closed and his head hanging down as if he was completely unconscious.

A middle-aged woman in silver short armor is holding his hand and pouring divine power that shines white, while the chief chamberlain next to him hovers around restlessly.

The old knight, noticing Seongjin's gaze, spoke in a soft voice that did not suit him.

"Don't worry. He's just a little exhausted."

"... Okay."

Seongjin nodded.

It will be fine. He's a guy who pretended to be proud until the end.

Unknowingly, he put his hand on his chest where the passageway was.

It was as if he could hear the sound of water droplets splashing somewhere inside his body.

19

Night at the main palace came a little earlier than usual.

After the aura storm riot in which all of the back garden was destroyed, the people of the main palace were distracted by the aftermath for a while.

Above all, the Holy Emperor that was at the center of the storm has not yet awakened. The chief chamberlain busy calling for a priest and the imperial palace doctor, and dismissed most of the servants who are bustling at the palace to ensure sufficient rest for the Holy Emperor.

The main palace, with only a minimum of attendants and escort personnel, greeted an exceptionally quiet night that day.

A man in a black coverall penetrated the darkness.

The man who walked quietly through the hallway of the main palace, who was sleeping deeply, and avoided the guards who were on guard everywhere, and with familiar movements landed in the hall of the palace without a sound.

In the middle of the bed, where the moonlight streamed in through the window, drawing a long plaid pattern, the young Holy Emperor lay quietly with his eyes closed.

Considering that he usually noticed his approach like a ghost, it was very unusual. Maybe it won't happen again.

The man's footsteps headed towards the bed without a sound.

But he couldn't get any closer and had to stop. It was because a blue blade had touched his neck.

"Who do you dare to look at with such disloyal eyes?"

Francis Argen, lieutenant of the Knights of Saint Aurelion.

A paladin who was one head taller than an average person and had a sharp look was glaring fiercely at the intruder.

"....."

For a moment there was a chilling silence in the room.

"Francis."

Their confrontation was soon over.

The Holy Emperor sat up from his bed and was looking at them. It is a very normal face for the one that had been lying unconscious until now.

"Withdraw your sword. He is from the guild."

The young paladin stared at the man for a moment after hearing the order, but then sighed and drew back his sword. Freed from the threat, the guild's informant immediately knelt down and bowed his head toward the bed.

"Your Majesty."

"Report."

"I have identified their whereabouts. They are currently in a slash-and-burn village located at the end of the western mountain range, near the border of the Kingdom of Flandor. The guild identifies this village as bandits disguised as slash-and-burn villagers. It is said that after a subjugation order was issued in Rohan, a large number of bandits settled here along the western mountains."

The Holy Emperor slightly frowned.

"... Is it the border area with Asein?"

"That's right."

"What a coincidence."

The Kingdom of Flandor had been in minor local friction with the neighboring Dukedom of Carthage for as long as forty years. The fight that started over dowry has turned into a dispute over the rock salt mine near the border, and now only the insidious Archduke Asein has been reaping tangible benefits between them for decades.

Of course, even if they settle down, is it between Asein and Flandor? The anticipation was not very good.

The Holy Emperor was silent in thought. The guild's informant raised his head and stared at him for a moment, but then he lowered his head again at the command of the Holy Emperor.

"Further investigate the movements of the upper ranks between Flandor and Asein. Regarding the slashed-and-burn village, don't neglect monitoring for now and report any unusual issues immediately."

The informant bowed his head in the utmost respect, then disappeared as silently as when he appeared.

Francis, who briefly glared in the direction the man had disappeared, turned his head toward the Holy Emperor. A look of displeasure is evident on his face.

"That stealth isn't normal. Since when did assassins come and go in and out of the imperial palace like this?"

The Holy Emperor sat comfortably on the bed and waved his hands.

"He is a guild informant with whom I have known for quite some time. You don't have to be so nervous."

"You mean the one who sheds such a disrespectful look?"

"At least he's not an idiot who throws himself at the impossible."

The young paladin twisted one corner of his mouth.

"How can you be sure that is impossible? Is Your Majesty confident

that you will not be hit by a knife under any circumstances, or that you will not die with a knife stabbing into your heart?"

It was both. However, the Holy Emperor also had a sense of limit that prevented him from uttering those words. Instead, he asked another question.

"What about Katrina?"

The leader of the Knights of Saint Aurelion was famous for going out of her way in whatever business regarding the Holy Emperor. If it were her, she would most likely have insisted on not leaving the side of the unconscious Holy Emperor.

As expected, Francis replied in a slightly annoyed tone.

"Then why did you do something that makes people worry? It hasn't been long since the captain changed shift with me. Stop making older people suffer."

Then he sat down on the sofa on the far side of the room and leaned his sword against the armrest. He opens the book he had closed in succession and raises his glasses.

It was a bizarre sight in the dark of the night, reading with an Aura.

After spending the night in this place, the uncomfortable Holy Emperor rubbed his chin and ordered.

"It's been hard you. Now go back and rest."

However, the arrogant lieutenant, who had gone against him to his face for nearly 10 years since his days as a squire, was too well aware of the timing when he could chew on the order of the Holy Emperor.¹

He turned over the page of the book and snorted.

"Am I doing this because I like to work all night? I'm tired of arguing with the academy president all day."

"That's right, it's okay now so....."

"It is the order of the captain. I have to switch with the captain tomorrow morning."

Through the glasses, Francis' sharp eyes emit a cool light.

"Instead, if I don't get a day off tomorrow, I swear to God I will resign."

* * *

Seongjin woke up to the sound of birds chirping in the garden of the Pearl Palace at the same time.

It was early in the morning, before the workers started working in earnest.

Usually, he jumped up as soon as he opened his eyes and started the day with stretching. Today, he just lay there looking at the sunlight coming in through the curtains with a blank face. Something felt strange.

It was an exhilaration that was difficult to describe.

The texture of the soft bedding that hugs the body feels coarse. Even the movement of each small piece of dust floating under the sunlight came with a strange sense of reality. Every time he inhale and exhale, the change in concentration of gases that permeate and exit each alveolus is vividly conveyed.

There's no way.

'Is this... Aura? Am I feeling Aura?'

Seongjin jumped up with excitement.

Finally!

He almost jumped off the bed and walked around the room barefoot, feeling strangely lighter than usual.

Seongjin, who was pulling up his pajama pants that were about to slip down at his movements, realized that his stomach circumference

had suddenly shrunk noticeably.

'... Huh?'

He casually turned his head to look in the mirror.

There stood a rather well-groomed boy.

The contours of the face, which had been deeply buried in the flesh, are revealed, and the volume of the body is noticeably reduced. Although he was still chubby, he could be praised for looking healthy and not bloated like before.

He lost a little more weight, but most of all, he felt that his body was compressed and hardened. The skin, which showed signs of sagging due to rapid weight loss, was firmly attached.

His eye level also rose a bit, but rather than growing taller, it seemed as if his skeleton, which had been bent and twisted in a bad posture, had returned to normal. His shoulders were straight and his spine was upright even without straining to stand.

It is an overly dramatic change for something that happened in one day.

Seongjin, who possesses the knowledge of modern civilization, felt as if his knowledge of physics and physiology was denied at once.

All of this is just a change caused by the return of a depleted Aura? It was the moment when the theory of omnipotence was clearly embedded in his mind.

'Looking at it like this, there are parts that resemble the Holy Emperor.....'

Although his impression was a little fierce, resembling the beauty of Queen Elizabeth with her sharp eyes, his lower lip revealed as he lost weight and his mouth with delicate lines definitely resembled the Holy Emperor's.

He turned around and looked in the mirror in a strange mood when he heard a polite knock on the door.

"Did you cough, Your Highness?"

He saw Edith, bringing a new water bottle and a clean cloth as usual, enter the room with an unexpected person behind her.

"Sir Marthain?"

"How are you feeling, Your Highness? Do you feel uncomfortable anywhere?"

No, why are you here since morning when you are not a resident knight of the Pearl Palace?

The knight commander approached Seongjin with a polite smile.

"Well, yesterday was a mess, wasn't it? Inevitably, it seems necessary to reinforce the boundaries of the Pearl Palace for a day or so."

So, he said that he volunteered to stay overnight at the Pearl Palace, which was not his place of work.

"But wasn't Sir a knight of the Imperial Guard? Why didn't you stay by Father's side....."

"Is there even a place for me? Sir Katrina personally rolled up her sleeves. The main palace is probably guarded by the Holy Knights of Saint Aurelion."

Marthain also told me about the situation at the main palace.

The Holy Emperor, who woke up safely last night, is said to be completely back to normal this morning. Of course, he said he skipped the morning assembly on the pretext of poor physical condition.

Even this is nothing different from the usual, so there is nothing to worry about in the main palace.

"Don't worry, the guards aren't neglecting their duty. According to the manual in case of emergency, the alert is working without omission."

Are you really okay with that?

Well, in an emergency, shouldn't the head of the knights still show his face in the main palace? There are other people too.

"What is the problem? I am the leader."

Even the well-rounded knight commander, who held the discipline of the guards like a knife, had a looser corner than expected.

"Besides, there's no way something could happen to His Majesty the Holy Emperor."

"....."

Ah, that must have been why he stopped being a stickler for rules.²

Seongjin, who was about to head straight to the gymnasium after seeing Sir Marthain's face in the morning, ran into an unexpected difficulty.

Suddenly, the volume of the body was excessively reduced, and none of the clothes fit. No matter how tight the waist strap was, the moment he swung his wooden sword once, his pants almost slide down.

In an instant, all the servants of the Pearl Palace were mobilized for sewing.

Seongjin, who expected that this time he would come and learn the practice properly, was greatly disappointed. He was eating breakfast in a baggy nightgown, and Marthain said in a bright voice as if comforting him.

"But from now on, classes will be accelerated. You, too, have certainly felt Aura."

It seemed that he had some idea of what had changed in Seongjin's body.

"Does Sir Marthain sense the change too?"

"Of course. The flow of Aura around the prince has become quite active compared to yesterday. There must be something similar going

on inside the body."

Ugh, I want to run to the gymnasium right now.

"Anyway, it's hard to understand from common sense."

Seongjin said with a sullen face as he rolled up his sleeves that kept slipping down the back of his hand.

"How can a person's body shrink like this in one day? Can this really be explained by Aura alone? Are all Aura users going through this?"

Among the resident knights of the Pearl Palace he encountered on his way back and forth, there were some quite fleshy ones. Of course, they must also be proficient Aura users.

Marthain smiled.

"Because Aura is effective in making the body healthy and restoring the damaged body. Aura users usually experience physical changes in a positive way."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. An Aura user who has attained this level does not get a cold, and does not even get cavities."

Wow. As expected, Auror is omnipotent.

"Of course, changes usually take place over a long period of time, and it is the first time I have seen a noticeable change in one day like the prince, but... .."

After saying that, Marthain smiled shyly and scratched his head.

"Well, wouldn't His Majesty the Holy Emperor know something and act well?"

"....."

It must have been that way that was out of common sense.

His Majesty the Holy Emperor taught Prince Morres something by

using an aura.

It is said that His Majesty the Holy Emperor did something with aura, so that the prince lost weight and became healthy.

Rumors seemed to have spread in the imperial palace that way.

The servants who had gathered to mend the clothes were also startled when they saw Seongjin for the first time. In Seongjin's opinion, it was a strange thing, but everyone seemed to think that he had done something else, and it was a natural atmosphere.

Amelia, who had visited the Pearl Palace since morning, was surprised for a while, but then she just made a vague expression as if she was seeing something missing.

Even Queen Lizabeth was like that. Her son is completely different.

-Ah, how long has it been since you woke up from the sick bed... Such drastic teaching to such a weak child, I must say something to him today!

She just trembled with the corners of her eyes pointed upwards.

'His Majesty the Holy Emperor is a cheat key.....'

You guys, no matter how different the world is, don't you accepting it too hastily?

It was such a crazy morning.

It was when Seongjin received a set of clothes that had been hurriedly mended that he noticed the change.

While changing his clothes, he casually spoke to the demon lord.

'It's a job to live wearing only tailored clothes. If I lose more weight, I'll have to mend it again. right?'

But there was no answer coming back.

'... Hey? Demon King?'

Only then did Seongjin realize that he didn't feel the slightest sign of the demon king around him.

T/N:

1. Basically Francis here likes to talk back to Nate but he's still a loyal subordinate so he knows where the line is between what's okay and not. This time Nate told him to leave but he refused knowing Nate won't forcefully kick him out anyway.

2. 아, FM을 벗어난 건 그쪽이었구나. I'm not too sure what it means, just that FM seems to be someone who follows rules well (but not particularly in a good way). I tried to reword it to my understanding but as usual I could be wrong.

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The demon king has disappeared. Since when?

It was too late to notice because he was intoxicated with the feeling that his whole body filled of Aura. Come to think of it, it seems that there has been no sign of him since morning.

There are often times when he was crouching down without saying anything, so even if it was quiet, he didn't think it was a big deal.

'Is it true that he hasn't been there since morning?'

How was last night. After being caught in a storm, he was brought back to the Pearl Palace while he was dreaming and fell asleep until morning.

Was the demon king there back then?

'Oh, wait a minute. When was the last time he spoke to me?'

Seongjin recalled the voice of the demon king who had been caught in the storm and screamed.

– Oh crazy! He's thinking of pouring more here!

– Kuaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

Could it be that that was the last time?

Seongjin broke out in a cold sweat.

As expected, just as Seongjin's consciousness flew to Earth at that time, the demon king also flew to another world somewhere.

Or, although it's a hypothetical assumption, wouldn't it be possible that the soul of the insignificant demon king perished in that

powerful storm?

If he's drifted away somewhere, where should he find him?

'But do I really need to find him?'

Since only the two of them flew to this world, they have their own sense of comradery, so they keep watching, but the two are originally implacable enemies. Wouldn't it be good for both of them if he disappear like this?

Seongjin, who thought for a moment with a hard face, stirred his hair wildly.

Oh, whatever. He said he couldn't leave this body, but if he survived, he'd be back soon.

* * *

Seongjin, who arrived at the gymnasium later than usual, was taken aback by the unexpected situation. It was because as soon as he entered the entrance, five or six of his knights rushed over and all at once put their hands on his chest and bowed his head.

"Greetings to the Third Prince!"

One voice booms. What's this? For a moment, he thought he was watching the main palace guards.

Seongjin rubbed his eyes and looked at them again, but there was no doubt that they were the resident knights of the Pearl Palace.

What did they eat wrong? Why are they suddenly like this?

"Your Highness! You've arrived!"

From the other side, Sir Marthain walks with a fresh face.

Seongjin, who instinctively realized that this change had something to do with that person, asked.

"Sir Marthain? What's with them?"

"Yes, Your Highness. Discipline is slack, so I did some mental training yesterday and today."

From now on, he'll take good care of them so that they can become someone who can help him by his side. Marthain added with a bright face, and the faces of the resident knights who were supporting each one turned dark.

Come to think of it, Seongjin also had something on his mind. When Sir Marthain appeared at the gymnasium, all the knights ran away with their backs.

He passed it on without much thought at the time, but it seems that Sir Marthain is more notorious among knights than he looks.

Seongjin looked at the resident knights with a little pity.

They were shameful people who dared to show only disrespect towards the prince, but their face is already turning black, no matter how much they have rolled over the past two days. Seeing that pitiful figure, I didn't even feel hatred.

"Hmm, Sir Marthain. You work for the main palace guards and even takes care of my swordsmanship, but isn't it too much to manage even the resident knight?"

However, Lord Marthain was adamant.

"Residents is recruited here and there, but belongs to the Imperial Guard. I have no tolerance for the discipline of those under my responsibility."

"Uh, yes....."

Seongjin shook his head excitedly at the resident knights whose eyes were slowly fading.

Wasn't that what you usually do well?

Once he started to feel the Aura, the class was a breeze.

Seongjin, who was meditating after listening to Marthain's detailed

explanation on how to save energy, was able to create an Aura core the size of a millet near the lower abdomen.

The auras, which did not listen and escaped here and there even after trying to fix them, suddenly came together in a circle the moment they filled up a certain amount and found stability. It was still a small amount, but he could feel the Aura spinning a little more actively around the core.

'It's definitely a different quality from the spirit of a monster that spreads evenly throughout the body and is absorbed.....'

And before long, he was able to build up even the first layer of Aura around the core. It was more difficult to stabilize than the core, but eventually the Aura began to spin smoothly in the lower abdomen, creating a ball the size of a grape.

"It's really amazing that you can make all the layers in one go! It's hard to believe that you were lost before."

Most of all, it was Marthain who was delighted with his achievements.

"Now all that remains is to constantly build layers! Of course, the Aura is also stored in the muscles and skeleton, but this is a gradual change that occurs as a result of using the Aura for a long time. There's nothing more explosive than layering an Aura core."

You'll need at least three layers to properly weave into a swordsmanship movement, he added.

Seongjin, who was excited about the achievement he had made, was about to try to go up to the second layer, but Marthain shook his head.

"It will take a little longer to build the second layer. If the power required to make a core is one, and the power required to make the first layer is roughly three, then when building the next layer, at least close to 10 Auras must be gathered at once."

According to his explanation, much more Aura is required to offset the force of repulsion between layers than to form layers. As the

layers pile up, this repulsive force increases exponentially.

Culmination of the body. When it comes to the level of the 10th layer knight, Dekaron Knight, the repulsive force alone reaches hundreds of times compared to the first layer.

"Therefore, it is necessary to meditate for a long time and practice using a much larger amount of Aura than now. It's fast enough even now, so take your time and proceed slowly."

So, Marthain added cautiously.

"I apologize for seeming to disturb you while you are engrossed in your practice, but if you have time, could you please visit the main palace for a while?"

According to him, all of the Holy Emperor's official schedules today have been canceled.

Of course, everyone knows that he is fine now, but it was still an incident in which the surroundings was destroyed and the Holy Emperor collapsed from exhaustion. It seems that it is good for others to see that the prince visits the hospital before it is too late.

Even so, the last thing he saw yesterday was him lying down unconscious, so he was a little worried. It's a bit of a burden to just visit without an appointment to see His Majesty the Holy Emperor.

When he said that, Marthain smiled.

"Perhaps important people have already visited the hospital. He got to skip his schedules with great energy, but he must have been unable to take a break because he was greeted by people he was not happy with. He'd be very happy if he could see the prince's face even for a moment."

Seongjin nodded obediently and held out a wooden sword to Marthain.

There would be plenty of time to practice in the future. At least, isn't it all thanks to the Holy Emperor that came to be possible?

When he was still concentrating his mind on his chest, I still felt like something was shaking.

However, Marthain's face as he accepted the wooden sword was a little strange.

The eyes that were round from laughing are gradually distorted, and the corners of the mouth that used to draw a smile tremble.

What, why are you like that all of a sudden?

"I don't think the day will come when the two of us can live like this again....."

".....?"

Marthain, who had swallowed his words as if he was laughing or distorted, turned around before Seongjin could ask. Then he pointed out two of the resident knights waiting by his side.

"You and you! Escort His Highness to the main palace. The rest will go round the gymnasium from now on!"

Yeesss?

As the knights' faces turned pale, Marthain yelled.

"You sent the prince to the main palace alone yesterday without an escort? Can you guys still be called the proud Guards of Delcross! From now on, I'll rip off that poor mental head and fix it!"

Uaaaaaahhh.

Hearing the desperate screams of the knights, Seongjin quietly conveyed his condolences.

* * *

The Holy Emperor was receiving all the visitors in the drawing room attached to the bedroom.

By the time Seongjin arrived, there were already visitors in the

parlor.

"Oh, Prince Morres! How can you be so devoted! The future of the Holy Empire seems to be in blissful brilliance!"

Chief Chamberlain Louis gave a grandiose compliment and then gave a sneaky hint.

"... Her Majesty the Empress is currently inside."

When the Holy Emperor was absent from his duties, Louis explained, Empress Tatiana would usually fill in for him on official occasions.

As he approached the open drawing room entrance, he heard the sound of quiet conversation.

"... how about... Rohan's... protest....."

"... informal... one by one... required....."

"... possess a problem... until the birthday... careful....."

Louis politely knocked on the open parlor door.

"Your Majesty the Holy Emperor, Your Majesty the Empress. Prince Morres ate it."

The two of them, sitting on the sofa and drinking tea, looked back at Seongjin at the same time.

"Oh my!"

The first to respond was the Empress.

She opened her eyes wide, then covered her mouth with her hand and smiled softly. Even if it wasn't, her slightly drooping eyes gently curved.

"Prince! In the time I haven't seen you for a while, you've become very wonderful. How happy Elizabeth will be!"

Clatter. Afterwards, the Holy Emperor puts down the teacup with a slightly harsh sound.

There didn't seem to be any major changes in his expression other than his slightly widened eyes, but Seongjin's sharp eyes noticed the slightly trembling pupils.

Hold on a second?

What are you so surprised about?

As he looked at him with a puzzled look on his face, feeling betrayed for some reason, the Empress stood up with a smile on her face.

"This... I guess I was holding on to the sick person too carelessly with business as an excuse. I will get going, so you two have a good time."

"Then take care on the way back, Tatiana."

"Yes, Your Majesty. Please do not forget that the birthday is near."

Then, with graceful movements like flowing water, she gently approaches Seongjin.

She was a tall, crane-like beauty. With an inertial eye smile on the corners of her waterdrop-like eyes, the Empress lowered her head toward Seongjin and whispered.

"It makes me very happy to see the prince in such good health again. How great was His Majesty's concern so far. That's right, I hear you've got a little trouble with your memory, right?"

"Yes, what....."

He didn't know the proper response, so he just answered with a sullen face, and the Empress gently raised the corner of her mouth.

"Prince, don't dwell on it and be respectful. Everyone will be happy just letting go of the past."

".....?"

He doesn't know what she wants to say, but why does it feel like he's being turned around?

As Seongjin frowned involuntarily at the unknown displeasure, the Empress took a step back from him and smiled harmlessly.

"Then, I will leave."

She caught a glimpse of the Holy Emperor's eyes, which somehow became cold, bowed gracefully, and left the drawing room.

"....."

"Sit down."

The Holy Emperor pointed at the sofa across him with the tip of his chin. Seongjin slumped back in his seat, leaving behind his slightly uneasy feelings toward the Empress.

"You're busy, but didn't I interrupt you for nothing?"

"No, it was just fine. There will be no audience or official schedule for the time being from tomorrow, so it will be hard to see your face for a while."

"Yes? Could it be that you need long-term care?"

He looks fine to him.

While Seongjin was puzzled, the Holy Emperor shook his head.

"I plan to enter the prayer room soon. I just handed over the work a little earlier."

"The prayer room?"

"... That's something you don't remember."

According to the Holy Emperor, he sometimes had to leave for days to pray.

In the meantime, the official schedule was given to the Empress, and the cardinals who were in charge of the council's chairman and the executive department were delegated their respective powers before closing.

In the depths of the main palace, there is a huge prayer room that only the Holy Emperor can enter, and it is said that the door is sealed by the Order of the Holy Knights so that no one can enter or leave while he is inside.

They did say that this is a theocratic country, and the head of the country even does closed prayers.

Seongjin, who was close to an atheist even in the previous world, had no choice but to ask this without realizing it.

"Pray for what? For the Empire? Does that even work?"

He wondered if it was a bit of a celibate question to ask the Holy Emperor, who is said to be the representative of the Main God, but his answer was unexpectedly cool.

"At least people won't believe that."

So it's an official excuse to loaf around.

No wonder the Holy Emperor, dressed comfortably and holding a teacup, looked somewhat relaxed. There is no court uniform, which was always worn in an assortment of colors, so it feels like he was on vacation.

"By the way, it seems that you have finally made progress in your practice. Is it still on the first layer?"

Seongjin, realizing that the Holy Emperor's eyes were on his lower abdomen, was certain.

This human, it seems that he really comes and sees something.

"Yes, thanks to Father, I finally made my Aura layer. So, I have a question for you."

"What are you curious about."

"Yes, what the hell happened to my body?"

A change close to metamorphosis that cannot be explained simply by

forming Aura. At least, Seongjin had no doubt that the incident yesterday had had a profound impact.

"Hmm....."

The Holy Emperor slightly averted his gaze.

"It's not that I don't have any guesses....."

A slurred expression is a rare expression of lack of confidence.

"As you know, Aura has the property of restoring the human body and transforming the body into an ideal form."

Seongjin had also heard sufficient explanations from Marthain. When Aura flows through the body, the body changes in a positive direction.

Didn't he just say that it was a gradual change over the course of a lifetime?

"It's more likely a matter of total amount of Aura than a matter of time."

According to his explanation, it was. Even if you use your Aura every day, there will always be a limit to the amount that your body can absorb and use throughout your life. This means that if a sufficient amount of Aura is supplied, the change in the body can also be rapid.

That's what it means.

"Are you saying that the amount of Aura that passed through my body yesterday exceeds the amount of Aura that humans roll in a lifetime?"

Seongjin opened his mouth wide. Is that possible?

T/N:

Also some extra information, Holy Emperor Nate has three wives.

Tatiana, the Empress, is Second Prince Logan's mother. Lizabeth is the First Queen and as we know is Third Prince Morres' mother. Then there's Melody, the Second Queen and the mother of the Third Princess, and also the woman Nate was with when he found out he was, in fact, not impotent lmao. He also has a lover who lives in the Imperial Capital but outside of the palace, probably because she refused the position of queen, who is the mother of the twins Fourth Prince and Second Princess. First Princess Amelia's mother already passed away, and I don't know about the First Prince Owen's mother but I'm assuming the same.

21

The Holy Emperor said it wasn't actually the of time he used Aura that affected that affected the change, but an enormous amount that a person could not reach even if they worked hard for a lifetime.

-What level do you think that level is? Even if you devote your life to it, how many people will reach even the tip of it!

Suddenly, he remembered that Marthain had burst into anger at Seongjin. Did he say to abandon the idea of learning anything from this guy?

When Seongjin's expression became subtle, the Holy Emperor took that as a sign of understanding and continued talking.

"Hmm, that's because the passage eats up more than expected, so it's just that the amount of Aura dragged in inevitably increased. It didn't go to such a dangerous situation."

It seems that yesterday's Aura storm was an accident that was not expected by the Holy Emperor. Falling down from exhaustion was probably not in his plan.

"As expected, you used the Aura directly from the outside, didn't you? How is that possible?"

"Didn't I tell you before? When you reach a certain level, go where you want to go....."

"Ah, yes."

Sir Marthain was right.

He doesn't think this will be of much help.

After that, time passed quickly as they talked about swordsmanship

training and Aura training.

"Can you watch my swordsmanship next time?"

After this guy took care of him for a while, his Aura performance increased dramatically. Could swordsmanship be possible in that way?

Seongjin expected that, but the Holy Emperor's reaction was sluggish.

"That might be difficult. I've never formally learned swordsmanship from the basics, so I don't know what to teach."

Yes? You self-study swordsmanship?

"By the time I met someone who could be called my teacher, my sword was already strayed. A sword he can neither sharpen nor teach anyone, so he said."

Wow, you really are a guy with no common sense.

Some people wield weapons at random for decades and develop a bad habit, while others wield them at will and invent their own style of swordsmanship?

The Holy Emperor glanced at Seongjin's bewildered face before adding.

"Still, it seems possible to clash swords for fun. After praying, let's have a sparring session."

So while I'm gone, practice quietly. Don't make trouble.

That's what the Holy Emperor was saying.

That evening, news of His Majesty's closed prayer spread throughout the imperial palace.

And even after that night passed, the demon king's soul did not return.

* * *

[Sniffle.]

Ah, what is it?

[Huuhuuu.]

Don't cry. You're not a kid, what are you doing grossly?

[Huwaaahhh.]

Please don't cry. It's noisy, so don't cry but talk.

[... call... sniffle.]

What, punk?

[Call me.]

Oh, alright.

"... Ah, so noisy. Calling. I'm calling....."

Seongjin opened his eyes in surprise at his own voice.

Chirp chirp. As always, birds chirping in the garden.

After blinking a few times, Seongjin's spirit completely returned. Faint sunlight streamed in through the curtains covering the large windows, illuminating the entire room in a dim light.

He rubbed his eyes and rose from his bed.

Did he have a dream?

He thinks he heard that stupid guy keep whining?

'... Demon King?'

Still no answer.

Seongjin sighed and scratched his head. Now, he feels like he has to admit that the Demon King has completely disappeared.

But what was his name?

* * *

"Okay. Did you go and speak directly to His Majesty yesterday? Did you hear anything else about the closed prayer?"

Marthain, who approached with a wooden sword, asked with a slightly strange expression.

"There was nothing special about it. Why?"

"It's because the timing is a little off."

"Is that so?"

After morning meditation, Seongjin was doing some light stretching.

Behind them, several resident knights are circling the gymnasium in an undisturbed posture. Ever since Sir Marthain began appearing in the Pearl Palace, the resident knights were literally changing day by day.

Well, they are going to die.

"Father said it happens sometimes?"

When Seongjin turned around and said something insignificant, Marthain slightly furrowed her eyebrows.

"It's the same as the supreme ruler of the empire is leaving the capital. Could it be that simple?"

It is said that person usually go into prayer to ask for help from the Main God when the imperial family is in trouble or the empire is facing a national crisis. The last time he went to the closed prayer two years ago, the southern front was actually at a very precarious time.

"But isn't there no clear cause now?"

In addition, the birthday banquet of the Holy Emperor was

approaching in two months.

A sensitive time when royal families, high-ranking nobles, and envoys from each kingdom and grand duchy gradually adjust their visit schedules.

Then Marthain added half-heartedly.

"Of course, since His Majesty is doing it, I guess there must have been an important reason."

Marthain evades with a confused face.

Soon, the two were absorbed in class.

The standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights entered the movement 5.

It was definitely fun to learn a new movement, but he also wondered if it was a bit rushed. When he questioned Marthain, he looked at Seongjin with a very proud face and smiled.

"You already know how important it is to lay a solid foundation. That's wonderful. However, once you make it to the third layer of the Aura, you can only practice movement 1 and 2 for a while after initiation. You'll get bored enough, so let's slow down for now."

Is that so.

Seongjin moved the wooden sword countless times following the newly learned movement and fell into a trance.

There is a definite difference between wielding a weapon against monsters at random and sophisticated swordsmanship with human combat in mind. It was fun.

The resident knights who were training at the gymnasium were watching his movements one by one, but Seongjin didn't notice it.

The morning training time passed in the blink of an eye.

"By the way, Your Highness. The Aura around your body has become

really active. That's just how fast the stamina increases. At this rate, I think you will be able to come and build the second layer sooner or later."

"Huh?"

Seongjin blinked at Marthain's words.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? Sorry. Actually, I made the second layer last night."

"... Yes?"

It was a pity that the afternoon training was cut short because he went on a visit yesterday. So, he meditated a little longer than usual before going to bed at night, and the second layer was created.

As he explained that, Marthain's expression changed to something worth seeing.

"Feeling an Aura, the second layer in one day....."

"Yeah, now if I build one more layer, I can come and start the exercises in earnest, right?"

The minimum standard for draining a sufficient amount of aura from the short circuit to both limbs is the third layer of Aura. When you build those three layers, you can start practicing weaving Aura in swordsmanship movements.

If you start initiation like that, then you can officially call yourself an Aura user.

Unlike Seongjin, who was very excited, Marthain seemed a little shocked.

"No, why did someone who can do this well, up until now....."

Seongjin shrugged at Marthain, who was muttering blankly.

He made up his mind to pull it, and the Aura in the air came into his body more easily than he thought. It's a huge improvement compared

to the previous times when he couldn't even detect Aura.

Perhaps being caught up in an Aura storm has made him a little more Aura-friendly. Or, because he had a habit of using monster energy, it was relatively easy to use Aura.

Anyway, at this speed, it seemed like he could become stronger than he thought.

Seongjin, who happily wrapped up his wooden sword and turned to the Pearl Palace for lunch, paused for a moment and looked at the fence of the gymnasium.

"... Huh?"

Is it because of the mood? Something feels wrong?

It was a strange feeling that he had never felt before.

"Why are you doing that, Your Highness?"

Marthain approached, puzzled, but Seongjin calmed down a little more without answering.

Even when he was originally a hunter, he was praised for having a different sense than other colleagues.

Even now, it's nothing compared to when he was in his prime. However, some of the senses that had been sharpened to the limit were still intact, and somehow, in a hurry, they caught the eyes looking toward the gymnasium.

"Sir Marthain. Who is over there?"

"Yes?"

Marthain blinked his eyes for a moment, not knowing why. However, his complexion soon changed and he shouted in a low voice to one of the resident knights standing nearest to him.

"Sir Kurt! There is someone spying on the Pearl Palace!"

"Yes? Spying?"

A mature knight called Kurt asked with a dumbfounded face.

"Can you feel anything?"

"It's faint, but it's definitely nearby. They're a person who controls their aura quite skillfully. It just seems like they're not used to completely erasing their presence."

"... Are you saying they're not an assassin?"

"I think it's close to a knight, but I'm not sure yet."

Sir Marthain instructed him with a determined face.

"Right now, search the area around the gymnasium. Divide into two groups and create an encirclement from the entrance of the gymnasium to the back gate of the Pearl Palace without any gaps."

Sir Kurt was still dubious, but he didn't particularly dispute the words of the knight commander, who was known for his skill.

As if he was accustomed to leading the resident knights, he quickly divided the number of people and led one of them and ran out. Soon all the knights, except for the minimum number of escorts, left and the gymnasium was empty.

"I think they already noticed....."

Seongjin looked towards the back gate of the Pearl Palace in the distance, estimating the presence quickly moving away.

Was it necessary to start the search so conspicuously? Look. That hurriedly running away figure.

"It seems like a formidable opponent, wouldn't it have been better if the Sir, the strongest knight, had hit the back alone?"

"Because it's formidable, I can't leave the side of Your Highness."

Marthain put his hand on the sword at his waist and answered with a

grim face. Judging by the twitching of the muscles in his forearms, he is probably holding back from wanting to jump out.

Well, even if you usually look docile, he's still the captain of the knights. When he's so serious, Marthain has a slightly intimidating face.

'Swinging a wooden sword in this atmosphere is a bit much, let's just sit and meditate.'

He was thinking such a carefree thought while everyone was rigidly stiff, but after a while, the resident knights trudged back to the gymnasium.

As expected, they were empty-handed, but the face of Sir Kurt, who had led them out, had turned serious.

"A paladin was wandering around the Pearl Palace. He noticed and ran away before we could even create a siege."

"Did you check who it was?"

"Unfortunately, the distance is far, so to the identity... But I definitely saw the pattern of the black sword engraved on the knightly uniform."

A black sword wrapped in a golden chain.

"Holy Knights of Marcias!"¹

"Perhaps so."

Seongjin silently listened to the conversation between the two.

'The Holy Knights?'

Come to think of it, he remembered that the Demon King had grumbled the other day. There are five useless Holy Knights in the imperial palace.

They declare that they will inherit the names of the five great saints, and depending on their purposes, they are said to carry out their own

duties in different departments.

Among them, the demon king emphasized to Seongjin that he had to be extra careful with the Holy Knights of Marcias. Probably because the department they are based in.

"... The Heresy Court."

Sir Marthain's face contorted.

"As if those ungodly men had been waiting for you as soon as His Majesty was gone....."

Sir Kurt spoke to Marthain in a low voice.

"With the exception of some paladins, access to the Pearl Palace is strictly restricted. If they ignored it, could it be that His Excellency Cardinal Benitus himself gave the order?"

"Looking at how quickly he ran away, it shouldn't be like that. There is a high possibility that it's the work of an individual, below the commander of the knights."

"Shall we ask the Heresy Court?"

"It will be useless. Even so, it is a department with a strong closed atmosphere, and there is no way they'll give an answer easily with that dishonest stance."

Marthain thought for a while with a hard face, then smacked his lips with a slightly uneasy expression.

"There is no other option for now. First of all, we have no choice but to further strengthen the security of the Pearl Palace until His Majesty returns."

And the two knights looked at Seongjin's face at the same time as if they had planned it.

Marthain had an expression of concern, and Sir Kurt had an expression of admiration.

"Anyway, you're really great, Your Highness."

Sir Kurt stuck out his tongue.

"How did you know the spy was hiding? I didn't even notice it at all."

"Huh? well, I just felt a little strange, so I checked."

In the past, even among hunters, he had a high reputation for searching for monsters, but he can't say that.

Seongjin scratched his cheek while receiving the gaze of the resident knights who were a little amazed.

In fact, it's best not to say that there was one more spy a little further away. Run far away anyway, since it seems wrong to catch it already.

* * *

A secluded garden quite far from the Pearl Palace. A man staggered down the small side road to the administration building and sat down on the ground gasping for breath.

"... Huff, huff, huff!"

The skinny middle-aged man, breathing heavily, was wearing a white priestly uniform with the Main God's pattern engraved on it.

Originally tidy clothes are now crumpled, stained with sweat and dirt. It was because as soon as he saw the movement of the resident knights, he turned around and ran like crazy, and then even rolled a couple of times on the street.

"Cough! Cough!"

The man trembled, breathing heavily as if he were about to die.

But the expression on his face was more of joy than pain. His slender cheeks were wet with tears and sweat.

"... At last!"

After taking a deep breath, a sobbing voice escaped from the man's

mouth.

"Here at last! He is here!"

As the long years passed, his strong faith also gradually faded. Even so, when he heard rumors that the trash had turned into a completely different person, how anxious he was at the thought of just in case.

He was able to see it with his own eyes, taking advantage of the moment when the monitoring of the castle was neglected.

And he realized. His long hours of endurance were never in vain.

"To this place... He said he would come!"

The wait was long, but in the end it happened as He said.

Then.

"... In the future, everything will be done as you wish!"

After that, the man did not know how to move with his head bowed on the dirt floor in a reverent posture for a long time.

T/N:

1. Previously I wrote these as [Knights of Saint X], but I decided to change it into [Holy Knights of X].

22

It's only been a day since the Holy Emperor entered the closed prayer. The atmosphere in the Pearl Palace was changing rapidly.

Little by little people began to come and go to the Pearl Palace, which was like a small isolated island within the imperial palace.

Attendants carrying letters came in and out, and small gift boxes and bouquets of flowers began to be delivered.

It's been quite some time since the access restrictions were lifted, but the reason for this belated change was obvious. Until now, it means that people were nervous about the Holy Emperor.

Requests for visits began to come in from here and there, and the one and only lady-in-waiting became very busy as well.

"Oh, this is a big deal. Your Highness!"

He was just leaving the gymnasium from morning training when Edith called to Seongjin with a very nervous face.

"What is it?"

"I just got a message from the Ruby Palace. The Queen told me to prepare refreshments without a hitch because she is coming with a special guest!"

Isn't that just a usual guest reception?

"What's the problem?"

Seongjin stared blankly at Edith, who had a teary face.

"But I don't know how to brew tea properly?"

"... What?"

You punk. Then, while you are fully aware of your poor skills, you brought me such tasteless tea all this time?

Seongjin felt his blood pressure rise.

"Why did you get a job as a lady-in-waiting if you don't even know how to make tea?"

"I didn't know. In the first place, the recruiting condition was [Aura users] only."

Oh, that's right. She did say she originally wanted to be a knight.

Still, isn't it already her second year as a maid? It's time to learn how to make tea.

However, Edith also had her own excuses.

"Because Your Highness originally didn't enjoy tea, and there weren't any particular guests visiting."

"I heard that Father sometimes come?"

"His Majesty the Holy Emperor was always accompanied by the chief chamberlain, so I had nothing to do. Lord Louis has prepared the perfect refreshments from the main palace."

Come to think of it, it seems that Louis himself served tea during the last audience.

"What should I do? I just did some practice, and it just tastes like rotten grass. How do I serve this to the guests?"

So you know well what the tea you brew tastes like.

"Well, tea is originally grass and water. Won't it be okay?"

After replying indifferently, Edith stomped her feet.

"But Your Highness! It is said that the Queen has made a new request. She said that since it is the first time your fiancée is visiting the Pearl

Palace, there should be no shortage of hospitality to her!"

Seongjin heard something he couldn't let go of there, and asked Edith back.

"Wait, Edith. But am I engaged?"

"That's right. When did you get engaged without me knowing, Your Highness?"

"... Huh?"

"... Yes?"

* * *

"I Invited Lady Valois to the imperial palace on my own account. But suddenly, I realized that the two of you were still meeting for the first time? Even though marriage talks have been going on for such a long time."

When Queen Lizabeth arrived at the Pearl Palace, Seongjin managed to sit down at the well-appointed refreshment table.

The Queen did not look for any flaws when she saw the assortment of refreshments. She didn't even bother to sit back and taste it.

Edith couldn't help but feel glad. Seongjin inadvertently took a sip of the tea in front of him, and a deep bitter taste like bile rose up.

'I wonder about it every time, but how can grass and water taste like this?'

Trying to control his expression, Seongjin faced the new visitor the Queen had brought.

Lady Valois, Chloe Mia de Valois.

The fluttering light curly hair and the water-colored dress harmonize, making her look like a small girl who might float into the sky with a simple tap.

According to the Queen, the Valois family is a great aristocracy with roots in Brittany, and is a prestigious family that has produced outstanding scholars for generations. The dean of Delcross Theological Academy is also from the Valois family.

That's why even before Chloe was born, there was occasional talk of marriage with Morres on the Queen's line. Fortunately, it's still a story that only comes out privately, and it doesn't seem like an official engagement relationship.

Right. Considering the times, an engagement started from the womb is not incomprehensible. The problem was the opponent's age.

'... 12 years old?'

Since Morres is 15 years old, it must be a calculation that there will be a fairly decent age difference when he becomes an adult. Of course, if it's a real Morres.

Seongjin's age before his death was estimatedly 64, and at the age of 12, she could almost be his granddaughter.

No matter how much he decided to pretend to be Morres and live on a steel plate, this is far beyond what he can afford.

The girl sitting across from him was quietly chewing on dessert and bobbing her legs. Cold sweat broke out on Seongjin's back as she watched him.

"Seeing the two of you together makes me even more confident in this marriage talk. Aren't you a really beautiful pair to look at?"

"....."

Seongjin made an impression without even realizing it, and had to drink poisonous tea once more to hide it.

His tongue goes numb beyond the bitter taste.

Edith, are you sure the tea wasn't poisoned?

In any case, it was an awkward refreshment time, with the Queen

talking alone and the two parties to the engagement keeping silent.

"How long has it been since we had such a friendly refreshment? Seeing that the Prince was so calm, you must also like Lady Valois. I am satisfied that the two of you seem to fit better than I thought."

Oh, it's fine if he just didn't make a fuss.

Queen Lizabeth continued to talk for a long time after that, from trivial topics such as the weather to the latest status of a famous salon in the social world, and the newly launched 7th Knights as the Imperial Guard.

Chloe calmly chewed on a snack and chimed in, while Seongjin blankly nodded and sipped bitter tea.

"I didn't even notice. The conversation was fun, so I didn't realize how fast the time goes."

How much time had passed, Queen Lizabeth rose from her seat, leaving Chloe behind.

"I will get up first, so the two of you should chat a little longer. Opportunities for the two of you to face each other are rare, so I shouldn't waste that precious time like this."

As if it were not empty words to say that the conversation was enjoyable, the Queen's eyes, which were usually sensitive, relaxed quite gently.

Following her, the ladies-in-waiting and all the escort knights left, and finally, Edith and the engagement party were left alone in the spacious drawing room.

'This has become difficult.'

Seongjin clicked his tongue as he watched the little girl pick up the snack.

He's not used to dealing with children.....

After thinking for a while, Seongjin cautiously opened his mouth.

"Um. So, Lady Chloe....."

"Call me Chloe, Your Highness."

Said the girl as swallowed the piece of macaron she was chewing on.

He wondered if she had a timid personality because she had kept quiet until now, but her sharp tone was unexpectedly bold.

"While marriage talks come and go, being too distant can also be a story for others."

"....."

The girl slightly folded her eyes and made something similar to an eye smile. Of course, those eyes weren't smiling at all.

"I don't know why you are looking at me with such an apologetic face. Sir, are you thinking of embarrassing me by refusing to talk to me?"

Astutely, the little girl seemed to be aware of some of Seongjin's reluctance.

Just like that. Seongjin, who wanted to make his wishes clear for her sake, realized that the matter was not so simple.

"If this engagement is broken, Chloe... will you get in trouble?"

"Well, there is nothing to worry about. It's just that I'll be shamed by the adults in my family, shamed by the young girls I interact with, and shamed by the social world where I'm about to debut, and I'd rather just die."

... It's getting very difficult.

"Isn't it burdensome to decide to get married already at such a young age?"

"It is a burden. The wedding ceremony with the Holy Imperial Family is a great honor for the family just by coming and going. Whoever the opponent is."

Even if it's a rumored trash.

The girl's raised mouth seemed to have somehow swallowed these words. However, Seongjin had no intention of responding to the little provocations of a child, whose judgment was twisted.

"That's why it won't be easy to get rid of later. The glory of the family doesn't guarantee Chloe's happiness, so wouldn't it be better to be a little more cautious about the wedding? Is it okay to make such a thorough selection only for the family?"

"... Yes?"

"You may suddenly have other hopes for the future or want to live abroad. Or maybe in the future you will find someone you really want to marry."

"....."

"In any case, it will not be possible after the marriage has progressed to some extent."

"Hmm....."

Chloe removed the sneer from her lips and put on a serious expression. After observing Seongjin's face for a long time, she carefully opened her mouth.

"... Your Highness?"

"Yea?"

"Do you think I was forced to come here because I couldn't overcome the pressure from my family?"

It was a straight line.

Why, aren't there such stereotypes? A 12-year-old young aristocratic girl might somehow think, 'I'm going to marry a prince on a white horse! I don't like opponents decided by my family!'

Ah. Of course, Morres himself is something like a prince.

"Like preparing to sacrifice my life for the family?"

"Isn't it like that?"

"No."

Chloe answered firmly and ran her finger over the corner of her mouth smeared with cookie crumbs.

"Hmm, this is a bit unexpected."

The girl looked at Seongjin with slightly deepened eyes, as if she had a lot of thoughts.

"You seem to be genuinely concerned about me, so I will be honest with you. With just the fact that I had already had marriage talks with the Holy Imperial Family before my debutante, I can attract a lot of attention once I debut in the social world."

"... Is that important?"

"That's right. After that, the influence I will have on the social world will soon become my strength and lifelong asset. It is by no means a choice only for my family."

Chloe seemed to have a fairly firm opinion about this marriage talk. They say that the family has a lot of scholars for generations, so even a child like this has a different idea.

As she was agreeing with a somewhat uneasy feeling, she glanced at Seongjin's eyes and cautiously continued.

"In addition, you don't have to attach much importance to this wedding talk."

"... Why?"

"It is not a relationship in which each other feels heavy responsibility. I'm sure I'm not the only partner in marriage talks that 'only talks come and go'."

So there's other fiancée candidates?

When Seongjin looked at Chloe in amazement, she asked with a slightly mischievous smile.

"Isabella, the daughter of the wealthy Scarchapino, and Julia Meyer, the granddaughter of Cardinal Meyer and knight of the Imperial Guard. Both of them are from prominent families, and they are now in full bloom and are proud of their mature beauty."

Isabella Scarchapino, who is called the flower of society, and Julia Meyer, who was assigned an unconventional assignment as the lieutenant of the 7th Knights at a young age in recognition of her talent as an outstanding knight.

While listening to Chloe's explanation, Seongjin suddenly had a thought.

Queen Lizabeth left after talking for a while about major social news and the newly launched 7th Knights. Although he assumed that the occasional squint at Seongjin's face was simply because she was concerned about Morres' health.

The Queen conveyed the current situation of the other marriage partners and looked at Seongjin's reaction.

"It seems you don't have any memories of them either, Your Highness."

And the Queen got her answer, and somehow left with a satisfied face.

Seongjin's lips hardened. It was a new alarm about Queen Lizabeth.

He thought she was just a pitiful mother with a spoiled son, but why is she circling around people instead of asking openly? Could she have some kind of scheme to hide from Morres?

Above all, the fact that she created this kind of opportunity as if she had been waiting as soon as the Holy Emperor was away was proof that she, too, had been paying attention to the Holy Emperor.

"No marriage talks have been confirmed yet. Marriage talks that are only mentioned in private for a long time, in the end, the longer they

drag on, the more they gain from each other. So Your Highness....."

Chloe's smile faded a bit, as if she had accepted Seongjin's hard expression.

"If the reason you disapprove of this marriage talk is purely out of concern for my position, then please do not refuse the marriage talk first."

"... I understand. I'll wait patiently for Chloe to throw me away."

Since Morres already had a bad reputation, it would be a big deal if he become broken hearted once or twice. It's not that difficult.

Seongjin nodded his head obediently, and Chloe blushed a little and then raised her teacup with a relieved expression. She always had a relaxed attitude, but deep down, it seemed that she was anxious about breaking up the marriage talks on her own.

"Hold on.....!"

Perhaps she was quite thirsty, she gulped down the tea without giving Seongjin a break.

"... Cough! Oh my!"

Chloe's eyes widened as she managed to swallow the tea without spitting it out.

The trembling eyes lingered for a while on Seongjin, who stood up from his seat and stopped. Soon after, her eyes alternately examine Seongjin's half-empty teacup and Edith's face.

There was a new realization in Chloe's eyes, which turned to Seongjin's face again.

"Your Majesty, you are a more generous person than I thought."

That you're still keeping it alive.

She didn't say it with her mouth, but her cold gaze toward Edith made it clear what she wanted to say.

Gulp. He heard Edith swallowing dry saliva from behind him.

* * *

"How was the imperial palace, my lady?"

In the carriage on the way back to the mansion, the maid cautiously asked Chloe, who was exceptionally quiet.

The little girl, who had been on high alert in the morning and sharpened her blades like a hedgehog, now sat quietly, as if deep in thought.

"Well, it wasn't as bad as I thought."

No one knew how annoyed she was when she suddenly received an invitation from Queen Lizabeth last night.

She thought it was a good talk, but not a story that would go deep in the first place. Prince Morres didn't have a very good reputation, and there were already plenty of other great candidates for the Queen.

Perhaps that is why the Queen picked Chloe and invited her. Because she was the most easy opponent to come and go at will.

'Even so.....'

Contrary to rumors, Prince Morres, whom she met in person, was a very handsome boy. She heard that he also has a dog-like personality, but looking at it today, he seems quite thoughtful and serious.

He didn't ignore her like a child like everyone else did, but treated her as a proper lady. He was even subtly cool when he confirmed that she would throw him away.

Chloe rubbed her slightly heated cheeks and muttered.

"From now on, I think I will send a bouquet of flowers to the Pearl Palace regularly."

"... Yes?"

The lady-in-waiting asked back in bewilderment, but Chloe's little head was already spinning quickly.

Isabella Scarchapino, who believes in her innate beauty and is arrogant.

Julia Meyer is dedicated to training as a knight and is famous for hitting the iron wall with people courting her.

'Good. If we move one step faster, this side is not without odds.'

Fufufu.

In front of the lady-in-waiting, who was confused and didn't know why, Chloe smiled softly and clenched her fists.

T/N:

1. She didn't think Queen Elizabeth would take the marriage talk this seriously to the point that she made the two of them meet face to face.

23

Seongjin, who lost most of the day's training time because of an unexpected visit from his fiancée, tried to run to the training ground as soon as Chloe left. For him, who was gaining momentum from his recent training, every minute and every second was a waste.

But this time, too, there was an unexpected hindrance.

"Hi, Morres."

"Hi, Morres."

As he was running out of the lobby of the Pearl Palace, a small carriage stood blocking the entrance.

Children poking their heads out of the window are waving at him. They were pretty children like porcelain dolls that looked the same as if they were cut out of a mold.

Who are they?

He looked at Edith who was beside him with eyes asking for an explanation, but she just hung her head indifferently.

"I did not receive a separate message that they would visit. Your Highness."

If the demon king was there, he would have proudly and released the information. Suddenly, his absence is felt in a big way.

Fortunately, Marthain, who followed behind him, solved Seongjin's curiosity. He placed his hand on his chest and made an angled bow toward the children.

"Greetings to the princess and the prince."

"Hi, Older Brother Marthain."

"Hi, Older Brother Marthain."

So, they were Morres' younger siblings.

Herna and Gades.

The two were twin princess and prince who had just turned 13 years old.

The two, who are said to be living with their mother in a mansion in the capital, visit the imperial palace by carriage once a week when it is time for an audience.

The two grumbled that today's appointment had been canceled thanks to the Holy Emperor's closing prayer, and although they were only two years younger than Morres, they had a strangely childlike side to them.

"Of course, it's not that Father Holy Emperor deliberately avoided us. But it's still regretful."

Herna grumbled and crossed her arms around Seongjin's right arm.

"I've been waiting for a week to meet His Majesty Father. So we came to the imperial palace to play."

Gades pouted and grabbed Seongjin's left arm.

"Well, Father Holy Emperor doesn't like playing chess that much, though."

"Well, I'm suggesting that we play chess because it's fun to see His Majesty Father look troubled."

Then, the two began to stare at Seongjin's bewildered face.

"So will you play with us, Morres?"

"You're not going to kick us out, are you, Morres?"

Two pairs of identical purple eyes twinkle mischievously.

Wow, what is this?

Seongjin broke out in a cold sweat, not knowing what to do.

In the previous world, Seongjin was hit by Gehenna Gate before he even got married. He never dreamed of having a normal family or having children.

Besides, the world was too harsh for children. As the superhuman unit was formed and the battle with the monsters continued, even the few children died one by one.

So he couldn't figure out how to deal with innocent children who were just clinging to him. He looked at Marthain with his little brother and sister in his arms, but the man was feeling moved on his own without knowing Seongjin's thoughts.

"To see Prince Morres getting along with his younger siblings like this....."

Guess they weren't very friendly in the first place.

Why are you guys doing this to me all of a sudden?

"Because Morres is Morres?"

"Because Morres is none other than Morres."

A sullen smile appeared on the faces looking at Sungjin.

It's strange to appear out of nowhere and pretend to be close, but the twins didn't seem to care about Seongjin's sudden change in appearance. It's been a while since they've seen him, so he must look completely different.

"Morres was originally a bit strange."

"Morres wasn't normally normal."

What, these guys?

Anyway, the same voice answered one after another, so he was

confused as to who said what.

With bobbed hair trimmed to the same length and the same face, there is only one thing that can tell them apart. It was just that one was wearing a dainty dress and the other was wearing cute shorts. Even the clothing designs are similar.

He doesn't know who their mother is, but is it emotionally okay for the children to dress twins like like this?

Seongjin exclaimed urgently as he struggled to hold on from the little kids who grabbed his arms and pulled him into the wagon.

"Hey, hey. I have to go to the gymnasium now. I'll play with you next time, so go see Amelia today. 'Kay?"

Today, he promised himself that he would definitely come and build the third layer, but what kind of a hindrance is this!

The twins looked at each other for a moment.

"Isn't Older Sister Amelia still confused?"

"Doesn't Older Sister Amelia need a little more time?"

Then, the two nodded to each other as if they understood what they had understood, and then began to pull Seongjin's arm again.

The pulling power of the little ones wasn't very strong, but that doesn't mean he can throw them out.

Seongjin, who had been dragged helplessly, looked back at Marthain with a face desperate for help.

"Hic, Your Highness being on good terms with your siblings like this....."

Marthain turned his head to the side and tried to hold back his tears.

That person is already messed up.

In the end, Seongjin had no choice but to get on the carriage with the

twins. Most of all, it was because Sir Marthain was blatantly blazing with eyes asking what he was doing instead of spending time with his brothers right away, throwing away training.

In addition, the Knight Commander of the Imperial Guard even volunteered to escort them.

"If it's Older Brother Marthain, it's reliable."

"If it's Older Brother Marthain, no need to worry."

But these guys.

Amelia is older sister and even Martha is older brother, but why am I just Morres?

"Because Morres is Morres?"

"Because Morres is none other than Morres."

Herna and Gades smirked strangely.

The carriage they rode in soon left the imperial palace and ran down the huge avenue toward the main street. It seemed that the imperial palace road was connected to the road that penetrated the entire city in a straight line.

As soon as the manicured tree-lined avenue ended, a sparsely populated shopping street soon became a bustling plaza lined with tall buildings. A colorful crowd busily fills the streets, and colorful quad carriages and large wagons run through the streets in rows.

He feel that it is the capital of the most powerful empire on the continent.

While he was staring out the window blankly, the twins announced their future schedule.

"We're going to the dressing room downtown."

"I have to go to the Salon de Mercy now."

".....?"

What is Salon de Mercy?

While he was blinking, Marthain, who was sitting next to him, tipped him off.

"It is the most famous high-end menswear store in the capital."

Why do kids go there to play? Aren't they only old enough to go to a children's clothing store?

"Then let's go see the new puppet show on Rue Bertrand!"

"It's a puppet show featuring a cruel hero and a pitiful demon king!"

Now, that's a good place for kids to go. But it seems that something was a bit twisted.

"Then go to the Monkey Watchtower in the fountain plaza and we're done."

"Yes, it can be said that we went around all the places we had to go to today."

Monkey Watchtower?

His head automatically turns toward Marthain.

"It is a pub with a lot of regulars because the price of alcohol is cheap. It is also a place often used by the knights of the Imperial Guard."

This time it's a bar. Why do children go there again?

What are the standards for them to play? And why should he follow them?

"Yeah, well, what are the selection criteria?"

"Yeah, yeah, why do we have to go?"

The two just looked at each other and smiled mischievously.

The Salon de Mercy was located in the center of Rue d'Este, lined with famous dressing rooms. It is a street where you can best feel the latest trends of the Kingdom of Brittany, which is said to lead the fashion trend of the continent.

At the entrance of De Mercy, the latest Brittany-style costumes are hung. Seongjin, looking at the narrow sleeves with ruby buttons hanging from the narrow waistline, looked tired, but the twins shoved him into the entrance and said.

"Have a good time, Morres. We'll come pick you up in a little while."

"Speak slowly and come, Morres. We'll come find you before it's late."

What? Didn't you ask me to play with you?

Seongjin was making a puzzled expression, but the twins were getting farther away, buried in the crowd.

As he turned to follow them, a roaring clerk's greeting caught him.

"Welcome, handsome young master! Is this your first time here? Come in!"

A woman in a flashy pink dress with heavy make-up approached him with an exaggerated smile on her face.

"Welcome. Salon de Mercy leads the latest fashion of Delcross! All the fine gentlemen of the capital are regulars here. Come on, this way....."

She tried to pull Seongjin's arm violently, but was blocked by Sir Marthain, who had intervened between her and Seongjin, and opened her eyes wide. Marthain yelled at the clerk so loudly that the whole store rang.

"How dare you say such rudeness! This is the prince of the great Holy Empire, Lord Morres!"

The people in the dressing room all turned their heads toward them.

Soon, people's eyes are filled with astonishment, and they start

whispering among themselves. Seongjin felt embarrassed for nothing.

Fortunately, de Mercy's clerk was a professional who had won against high-ranking people. She quickly cleared her bewildered expression and bowed respectfully to Seongjin.

"Forgive me for the rudeness. I made a mistake because I did not expect such a noble person to come personally."

Soon after, the other clerks who ran out lined up in a line from the entrance and bowed their heads in unison. Seongjin realized that he had completely missed the timing to leave the store.

"God bless Delcross! Greetings to the wise Prince Morres!"

All of the clerks, male and female, wore dark pink uniforms. While he was in awe of that monstrous sense, a large man approached Seongjin with light steps from inside the store.

He was holding a colorful fan and wearing high heels, wearing a dark pink fur over a flamboyant black and light pink outfit. In an instant, he knew at once whose taste the pink clothes of the store clerks were.

"Oh my gosh, what is this? Oh my gosh, Your Highness Morres! How do you keep getting better and better? Oh my, how nice!"

Sir Marthain's expression slowly hardened as he watched the approaching man, twisting his body in disdain. Fortunately, right before the knight commander exploded, the man gave Seongjin an appropriate example.

He was a seasoned person who knew well when a high-ranking person felt uncomfortable.

"Blessings to many generations of the Holy Imperial Family! Madame Justine of Salon de Mercy welcomes the noble Prince Morres."

It is a cool gesture that looks like a theater actor in a way because the arm movement is big and old-fashioned.

On the other hand, the end of the words was also strangely stretched, and it seemed that he was acting cute or playing a joke.

Seongjin looked closely at the man for a moment with a subtle sense of difference.

If it weren't for excessive makeup and flashy costumes, he was a man with excellent muscles and bones that could be called a good warrior. He has a massive build and well-developed muscles throughout, but he doesn't feel his Aura activated around his body. That means he's not an Aura user.

But why does Seongjin's intuition sound an alarm at the man? Sir Marthain must have felt the same way, so he whispered to Seongjin.

"Madame Justine is the most famous designer in the capital. He has a great reputation even within the imperial palace, but I never thought he would be like this....."

"He's not an Aura user, is he?"

"Yes, he is not. But strangely, prayer is wonderful. It's hard to believe he's just a designer."

The man smiled while the two of them whispered. As the red-painted lips draw an arc, a beauty point the size of a little fingernail moves together.

Seongjin, realizing that he was standing quietly waiting for him to state his business, hesitantly opened his mouth.

"Hmm, that... I'm thinking of making some clothes....."

It was an obvious thing to take out of the dressing room.

Madame Justine covered his mouth with a fan and let out a hum of laughter. His two eyes, which look more beaky with excessive eyelash makeup, draw a crescent moon sullenly.

"Ohoho! Is this the first time you have personally visited the Salon de Mercy? Queen Lizabeth has been a regular here for a long time."

"Is, is that so?"

"Yess. Aren't our clerks visiting the Pearl Palace every month to make

clothes for Your Highness? Today, it is an infinite honor that this Madame Justine will be able to serve Your Highness himself!"

Most of the clothes in Morres' dressing room must have been made by this person.

"Now now, let's go to the special room upstairs. We adjust the entire process from size to fitting so that the precious person is not uncomfortable."

That's right, once he could get out of this mess, he'll go anywhere.

Seongjin left behind the shop assistants and some customers whispering in the corner, and followed Justine up the stairs.

Now that he had come to the dressing room, Seongjin thought about getting a pair of clothes that he could wear comfortably while training.

However, while looking at the fabrics, embroidery samples, and various designs that Madame Justine had brought, the direction of the conversation began to flow strangely.

"Oh my! You don't like being too bright, and you don't like being too dark because it's gloomy, right? You definitely have an eye for the capital's fashion these days! These days, fabrics that are dark yet bright when exposed to light are popular."

He just said he didn't like it because he thought it would get a lot of dust when wearing white or black while rolling around the gymnasium, but suddenly strange fabrics with a rainbow sheen popped out.

"Ohohoho! You say to cut down on cuffs and thread decorations as much as possible! It is indeed a bold choice that is ahead of its time! Then, even if it takes time, how about enhancing the dignity by inserting small hand embroidery in every corner? The hem of the cuffs and the hem of the trousers are embroidered with precious stones and pearls!"

He asked him to remove as much obstacles as possible so that he could do radical training, and he said he would sew jewelry into his

clothes. Seongjin couldn't even guess what the finished clothes would look like.

Madame Justine hummed as he scribbled something in his design notebook, wondering what was so exciting about it.

Soon after, the clerks who came in trembled once when they said they were taking Seongjin's measurements. Seongjin, who thought it was all about height and waist circumference, learned for the first time why so many parts had to be measured when making human clothes.

His mind was completely tattered and he was sipping the juice that Justine had prepared for him in a daze.

"You look tired, Your Highness."

Seongjin snorted without answering.

Sir Marthain, in the middle of an exciting argument with Madame Justine about whether to have a peacock pattern or a butterfly pattern.

Knock knock.

It was then that a cautious knock was heard.

When Marthain opened the door, a young man with a weak impression crept in and bowed toward Seongjin.

"Glory to Delcross. Greetings Prince Morres, a long-time supporter of the Golden Truth Society."

Golden Truth... What?

T/N:

Just in case anyone jumps on me, Madame Justine is referred to as 남자 (man) in the narration. I'm taking the term Madame as something that's more like a title instead of a prefix, similar to how all knights

are called Sir regardless of their gender.

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Golden Truth Society.

An academic society that explores the truth of this world without prejudice based on pure academic curiosity.

Andrian Davis, a young man who introduced himself as the head of the society in the capital branch, was a scion of a fairly high status. His skinny, diminutive physique was typical of a corner scholar, but the tight, downturned mouth seemed a little stubborn.

"His Excellency Cardinal Kaplan is my uncle."

When he said that, Seongjin did not miss the momentary expression of slight contempt on the young man's face.

"Our society, which was once on the verge of extinction, was able to face a great turning point thanks to the prince. For the distant future of the empire, our members are always moved by the wisdom of Your Highness who has generously and silently supported us for many years."

"What, I'm touched."

"No! It is indescribable how deeply the indignation we feel every now and then when slanders come from ignorant people."

Of course, Seongjin had no memory of supporting them.

However, it was clear that now was not the time to explain about his memories since he was sick. It was because he got the feeling that the society that this young man was talking about was not a place that was normally active in the sun.

It is a matter within the Holy Empire, where the authority of the

Main God pierces the heavens. It is not only on Earth that a group that claims the truth is a perfect environment to be branded as a cult.

As evidence of that, the face of Sir Marthain, who was silently listening to the conversation next to him, was gradually hardening.

"When I heard that you suffered from a severe fever, I was terrified that something unpleasant might happen to you. It is a great honor to be able to meet you and say thank you, even if by chance."

"Um, is that so?"

"Yes, to be honest, I was worried that seeing you in person like this would hurt you, but I have no idea when I will be able to greet the prince, who rarely leaves the imperial palace....."

It seems that he stopped by the dressing room and heard that Morres had come by chance, so he came to visit on an impulse. It is said that it is a regular dressing room for gentlemen in the capital, indeed.

Marthain took a step forward and tried to say something, but Seongjin quickly raised his hand to stop him. The moment they showed a strange expression, he was sure that the young man would quickly run away.

He had to figure out as much as possible about what and how far Morres was caught up in the current situation.

"It is because I believe that your quest will always be of great help to Delcross. There's nothing I can do differently, I just wanted to help in a small way."

"Ahh, as expected....."

The young man seemed very moved. The little doubts and insecurities that had lingered in his eyes until just now had completely disappeared from him.

"Actually, there was some talk within the society as well. There were some terrible people who misunderstood your intentions under the pretext that Your Highness did not show yourself and only delivered donations. However, having heard the words from Your Highness

myself today, I know for sure what a foolish doubt it was. It is just overwhelming."

"Uhm. That's right."

It meant that there was no direct contact with the people of the society. Is it true that Morres was the one who sponsored it?

His mind was getting complicated, but the young man lowered his head and continued talking hastily.

"As you have an ignorant companion with you, if more than this was said then it will surely cause unnecessary misunderstandings. I'm going to leave now, so please take care of yourself. The only person we can truly rely on at Delcross is Lord Morres."

He glanced at Sir Marthain's hardened face and walked away.

Wow.

Suddenly, he felt like he had been hit hard in the back of the head.

"... Do you know anything about this, Sir Marthain?"

"I'm sorry, but this is the first time. Your Highness."

Marthain's face was hideous. As he approached Seongjin with the momentum of shouting at any moment, another clever and timid knocking sound was heard.

The two of them looked at each other's faces with an ominous premonition passing by.

"The irreplaceable great happiness of Delcross! With sincere gratitude to Prince Morres, who sponsors the Plague Society of Adelheit....."

Outside the door, a short, gourd-headed man was bowing respectfully.

* * *

When the twins returned to the Salon de Mercy, Seongjin made

friends with a total of three groups.

Golden Truth Society.

Plague Society of Adelheit.

Blue Republican Revolutionary Front.

All of them are unusual organizations that wouldn't be strange if they were immediately accused of being a traitorous group and killed.

Morres you crazy bastard! What the hell is the Prince of the Holy Empire doing all the time!

– While I'm gone, practice quietly. Don't make trouble.

The last words that the Holy Emperor left before doing closed prayer come to an unusual resonance only after reaching this point.

"Our Salon de Mercy is also a place for social gatherings of highly educated young masters."

Madame Justine, who was seeing him off, said, rustling a handle fan. Seongjin glared at him without answering.

You bastard is the most suspicious.

There was no way that those people would have gone up to the special room without the tacit permission of the dressing room.

Above all, no matter how tumultuous it was, he couldn't erase the suspicion that the Madame's influence must have had a big impact on Morres' visit being known to people in various groups in that short time.

Either that or not, Madame Justine just smiled as she stroked her dark pink fur.

Soon after, when Seongjin climbed into the carriage with the twins, he raised his long arms and bowed deeply towards the carriage.

"I look forward to seeing you again from the bottom of my heart.

Prince Morres."

A heavy tone that doesn't even stretch at the end of the word¹.

It was his true voice, spoken for the first time by Madame Justine.

Surprised, Seongjin looked back at him through the window, but the carriage had already left. In an instant, Salon de Mercy was moving away.

Clatter clatter.

Herna and Gades were sitting side by side in the seats across from Seongjin, staring at him.

"Did you have a good time, Morres?"

"Have you had a good time, Morres?"

"....."

Seongjin didn't know what to answer.

What do these children know? Did they guess in advance who would approach Seongjin?

It was obvious what the position of the prince of the Holy Empire would be like if it became known that he was sponsoring such militant groups. Are they planning on taking advantage of Morres' weakness and threatening him?

Considering the possibility that it might be a coincidence, he had no intention of speaking openly about those strange organizations in front of the twins. But at least this one must be asked.

"You guys, did you know? What are you up to?"

"Um, are you upset about this? Everything is for Morres."

"Yeah, are you a little sad? We think of Morres quite a bit."

"....."

They don't deny that there were any special intentions.

The twins added, as if admonishing him, with resolute faces, as if they were aware of Seongjin's complicated mind.

"Now you're going to go to some social gatherings by yourself, Morres."

"You must not be under the protection of His Majesty Father forever, Morres."

Seongjin sighed.

If he pays close attention to these kids, he will only get answers that go round and round as before. Even if not, the information currently given to Seongjin is extremely limited. If he sharpen his edge too much now, he might miss out on things that he can at least find out.

First of all, let's adjust the rhythm a little bit.

"... Where next? Didn't you ask to see the puppet show?"

At Seongjin's words, the twins smiled brightly at the same time. It was a smile of infinite innocence on a face as smooth as porcelain.

* * *

Bertrand Street.

Decades ago, this was an unsightly street lined with shabby warehouses located next to the market.

Then one day, a theater company from Brittany rented a shabby warehouse and started performing, gradually transforming into a theater district.

Named Bertrand Avenue after the most famous actor in the troupe, this place is now home to three large opera theaters, three huge ballet theaters, and dozens of theaters and small theaters, it has become a cultural street where various other theatrical performances are held.

Performances were often held not only in theaters but also on the streets, with one-act plays to promote plays, arts performances from other countries, and small puppet shows for children.

They were usually played on a small simple stage set up in a plaza.

The place where the twins led Seongjin was also an insignificant simple stage where the performance had just begun.

A small window in the middle of a large plank is the entire stage. There are no seats, so children stand huddled in front of the stage waiting for the performance.

Seongjin was a little taken aback because most of the children gathered around the age of five or six. I think this is a very young age for the twins.....

Anyway, the show started. A few burning candles placed in a large oak barrel next to the stage are lit, and the red curtain opens to reveal two small puppets.

'What's with the condition of the doll.....'

It was a shoddy doll that couldn't even be called a stuffed toy, let alone a marionette.

As flimsy dolls with eyes and mouths roughly patched with cloth and stitched together appeared swayingly, a disappointed sigh flowed from the mouths of some children.

However, even that disappointment dissipated as the narration flowed. It was because the voice with strange magic captivated the children at once.

[This is the story of two demon kings from another world. The story of the Demon King of Dreams and the Demon King of Fire making a promise and betraying each other. A story about an unfinished fight.]

The yellow and red balls of cotton that looked like cheap leftover poop seemed to be the two demon kings.

'... Didn't they say it was the story of a hero and a demon king?'

Seongjin wondered for a moment, but soon began to focus on the puppet show.

There was a hypnotic resonant in the husky voice that resonated as if he was chanting lowly. It is a voice with a strange charm that makes it impossible to distinguish whether it is a woman or a man, old or young.

[The Demon King of Dreams had an important mission. They swore to protect precious dreams from a terrible catastrophe that threatens the world. So, the Demon King of Dreams decided to become a powerful Demon King of Stories someday.]

A red lump of shit exited the stage.

In the middle of the small stage, only a yellow mass remained, making a spleen decision. The expression of the doll, which seemed to be tongue-in-cheek and sticking out, was not so important.

[They knew they must fight a hero to become stronger. They soon found a suitable warrior and gave battle. But unfortunately, the opponent was a very cruel person.]

A dirty gray lump appeared next to the yellow lump. And the yellow and gray lumps did a few head-butts.

Is that scruffy hunk a warrior?

Are you doing that as if it were a battle?

Embarrassed, Seongjin looked at the twins holding his arms, but the two of them kept their eyes on the puppet show with serious faces. He shrugged once and looked straight ahead again.

[The Demon King of Dreams realized that they could never defeat him with their own strength. So they locked him in a dream and ran away. Their dream of becoming the Demon King of Stories was thwarted by the hero like that.]

Children's sighs flow. It seemed that they genuinely felt sorry for the demon king's escape.

Guys? Aren't you supposed to cheer for the hero?

[At that time, the Demon King of Fire appeared. He said he would help the Demon King of Dreams in crisis.]

The red poop appeared again.

After that, the story progressed swiftly. It is embarrassing to even call it a puppet show, and most of the plays are stories that only lead to narration.

The Demon King of Fire promised to go into the dream and get rid of the hero in his place, but in reality he intended to eat the Demon King of Dreams itself.

On the other hand, the Demon King of Dreams was planning to bury both of them in a dream and kill them if the Demon King of Fire got rid of the hero.

Beneath the candlelight swaying in the wind, the shadows of hidden dolls dance gloomily.

For young children, it was an overly dark story full of petty betrayals. And the highlight of the gloom began when the hero reappeared.

The cruel hero succeeded in defeating the Demon King of Fire, and he beat the demon king for three days and three nights and half a day. Even for the last half day, only the face was slapped.

One by one, the children began to whimper, saying that they felt sorry for the demon king. Even to Seongjin, he was a terrible guy.

"Wow... What a bastard. That cruel guy....."

This is why he's called a cruel hero. At this point, even if it were him, wouldn't he side with the demon king?

Seongjin, who had clicked his tongue, suddenly felt a strange gaze and looked down. Herna and Gades had been staring at his face for some time.

What? Why? What?

T/N:

1. Usually Madame Justine talk 'playfully' by making the words in a sentence longer (like "yeess" or welcoomee") but in this sentence he didn't do that.

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The puppet show came to an end.

A yellow lump approaches the side of the red lump lying on an angle.

[The Demon King of Dreams fell into deep sorrow after seeing the death of the Demon King of Fire. Although they faced each other, they were once allies fighting the same enemy. So, they decided to mourn him who died a miserable death at the hands of the evil hero.]

Why is the story like that?

What kind of children are those who fought to the death until now?
Where did the hero go again?

[The Demon King of Dreams honored his sad death by calling their friend's name.]

The voice that recited the narration was low, but deep emotions of sadness that could not be hidden came out in it. Before he knew it, the children were holding their hands together and weeping.

Is this what collective hypnosis is like? He thought something was strange, but Seongjin also felt a strange sensation as if a corner of his chest was frowning. It was as if something directly stimulated his brain and elicited a mental change similar to emotion.

He can only speculate that the puppeteer's voice might be the cause, but there was no way to confirm this.

The voice with that strange magical power said calmly.

[Goodbye forever, Al Fahas, the Demon of Fire.]

Jeeeee. In an instant, a tinnitus spread in Seongjin's head as if something was cracking.

".....?"

[Rest in peace, Al Fahas of Fire.]

Crack. Seongjin felt a slight dizziness from the small shock that rang once again.

"Bye, Demon King of Fire Al Fahas!"

"Rest in peace, Al Fahas!"

The children gather their mouths and shout.

"Goodbye forever, Al Fahas of Fire!"

He feels nauseous.

While trying to calm his shaking stomach, Seongjin suddenly thought. Something is very wrong with this.

Herna and Gades didn't chant along with the children. They just looked up at him with slightly worried eyes while holding Seongjin's arms as if to support them.

The context of the story is poor, and the puppet show, which has no coherent theme, suddenly ended with a heartwarming ending.

The children who had been mourning the Demon King of Fire for a while left their seats one by one, and now only a shabby plank with a curtain down and a few burnt candles remained on the simple stage.

As if the narration and puppet show were conducted alone, one person was tidying up the stage while taking care of the puppets. They have a slender physique and wears a long, loose robe, so it is difficult to tell whether they are a man or a woman.

They wear a shabby half-mask that reveals their slim lower body, and their long silver hair is tied and hung down below their waist.

After the puppet show ended, Seongjin, who had calmed down like a lie, tried to approach the puppeteer who was cleaning the stage. It was impossible not to know that the strange phenomena and puppet

shows that Seongjin had experienced earlier had something to do with the Demon King of Gehenna.

But there were two pairs of arms pulling him back.

"You mustn't meet that person yet, Morres."

"That person won't tell you anything, Morres."

But wasn't it these guys who brought him here?

Seongjin didn't mind and tried to move again. Then, Herna and Gades came hanging onto his arms, this time carrying their entire body weight.

"Father Holy Emperor wouldn't like it if he knew you were here."

"You mustn't make trouble for His Majesty Father any more than this."

Seongjin stopped walking this time. It was because the eyes of the twins, who always seemed relaxed, are more desperate than ever.

He stood there for a moment and thought.

What the hell do these kids know?

How reliable the twins' recommendation is another matter, but what is the possibility that Seongjin will get additional information if he ignores these guys' words and contact the puppeteer?

In addition, when the Holy Emperor was mentioned, he remembered the last request he made before entering closed prayer.

-Don't make trouble.

Come to think of it, today might have been the day he really just broke his words. Of course, most of the cause was because of these unknown children.

Above all, his premonition, which is sometimes shown in unexpected places, strongly conveys the feeling that now is not the time.

After glancing at the puppeteer, who was still busy cleaning up, Seongjin was meekly led by the twins' hands to the carriage.

Sensing a strange gaze from somewhere, the puppeteer turned around.

However, apart from the occasional glances of the busily walking passers-by, no one paid much attention to them. In the distance, only a small carriage was moving away from the plaza, and the streets where the sunset had begun to sink were relatively quiet.

Was it an illusion? They tilted their head.

The distinctly dulled senses of the body were not very reliable.

"I wondered where you went at this time, what are you doing with the kids?"

From the other side of the plaza, a tall man approached the puppeteer waving his hand. He was a very sleek-looking young man with healthy tanned skin and shiny black hair.

The clothes, which were comfortably buttoned up with a couple of buttons, were quite classy, and the confident smile that he must have had from birth lingered on his firm chin.

The puppeteer bowed their head respectfully toward him.

"Prince Leonard."

"Hey, didn't I tell you to call me Leo? This is an informal visit. Romaine."

"Yes, Lord Leo."

Leonard approached with great strides and comfortably placed his arm on the small puppeteer's shoulder.

"Listen anyway, Romaine. It's already been several days since I entered the capital and asked for an informal meeting, but these scoundrels still have no news."

"Is that so?"

"Isn't it frustrating? How many times have I been contacting them from a few months ago to get some official papers, but all they've done is brood over it."

Leonard grumbled as he stared into the void with a face full of dissatisfaction.

"So what if he's the Holy Emperor? He can't be that amazing, just playing hard to get."

Of course, Leonard had no way of knowing that the Holy Emperor had been disapproving of him since before – because he was the kind of guy his daughter was interested in.

And the fact that now he's completely out of the limelight for things he hasn't yet done.

"Perhaps your request for an audience will not be accepted."

Romain answered calmly. It wasn't a voice with a strange resonant sound like the puppet play now, but a thin but normal male voice.

"Shit! Why?"

"It's not that he doesn't accept it, it's that he can't meet you. Lord Leo. Since yesterday, the spirits defending Delcross has greatly diminished. Perhaps the guardian left the capital."

That's why it is possible for him to perform such tricks right in front of the imperial palace.

Romaine didn't bother to say that.

Hmm. Leonard said with a serious face, resting his chin on the arm over Romaine's shoulder.

"There is only one way now. Handsome guy."

"... Yes?"

... Who are you talking to?

Leonard, who was well aware of Romaine's shy face under the mask, laughed with a chuckle.

"Don't you know? There is a beautiful rose that has not yet ripened in that imperial palace. Didn't that guy care for his daughter a lot?"

"You are so confident."

Romain slipped back his shoulders, which had begun to feel heavy, and crossed his arms.

"You should have seen the princess' eyes looking at me at last year's birthday party... I'm willing to bet. She's a pitiful girl who fell in love for the first time."

Romaine's eyes deepen under the mask at the prince's confident declaration.

Leonard is like a ghost when it comes to women. If what he said was true, things might be easier than expected.

The most obstructive was a simple way to effectively pressure Delcross and tie the Holy Emperor's hands and feet.

"So, Romaine. You too, stop doing these useless things with the kids, and think about a way to get in touch with the princess naturally."

Got it?

Leonard tapped Romain on the shoulder with a smile on his face, then turned around and waved.

Again, head to the nearby pub. If the request for talks is not going to be accepted anyway, he must be trying to change his mood until the birthday party.

Romaine, who was staring at the back of the prince who was moving away, suddenly muttered to himself.

"Neither the Hero nor the Demon King of Fire could kill the Demon

King of Dreams that was not talked about. It's the only way he can do this nonsense."

A voice no one heard spread hollowly in the middle of the empty plaza.

* * *

Dusk fell and darkness settled everywhere. Seongjin, who had been dragged around all afternoon without knowing why, now had his final destination in front of him.

Monkey Watchtower. It is a small pub with many regular customers from the Imperial Guard.

"It won't take too long here, Morres."

"Just say hello to the owner and leave, Morres."

Herna and Gades, who dropped him off in front of the fountain plaza, didn't even get off the carriage this time.

After warmly waving to Seongjin and Marthain, who were looking at each other with bewildered faces, they slammed the carriage door shut.

"....."

"First... Shall we go in, Sir Marthain?"

"... Yes Your Highness. I don't even know what it is anymore."

The two of them were determined to go wherever they wanted to go.

With weak steps, they trudged toward the small wooden door of the tavern. Beyond the door comes the chatter of already drunken guests.

Creak. When the stained wooden door opened, the smell of alcohol rushed in along with the heat inside.

The outside is small, but the inside is also a narrow bar. Five rough wooden tables against undecorated wooden walls were all the

furniture.

Surprisingly, every table is packed full of customers in this clumsy shop. Holding large wooden goblets one by one, they were laughing and talking loudly about what was so exciting.

I heard that the price of alcohol in this house is extremely cheap. Of course, they only deal with poor quality dark beer.

When Seongjin and his party entered the entrance, the drunken guests gave them a quick look, but they didn't even recognize who they were, and they didn't seem very interested. Soon they turn their heads again and laugh or scream.

Marthain also kept his mouth shut and followed closely behind Seongjin, as if he had no intention of yelling at them to serve the prince in this atmosphere.

The store owner was an elderly man. He was dressed in an old leather vest and apron on a well-groomed figure, and the round, shiny top of his head stood out.

He was wearing a black eyepatch over his right eye, and judging by the long scar protruding from the eyepatch, it was a knife cut.

He waited for Seongjin to approach and asked in a gruff voice, spitting out a thick wooden pipe.

"What did you come here for?"

"I just came to say hello."

Seongjin responded politely. For some reason, honorable words naturally come out for this old man.

"Hmm....."

The old man chewed on his pipe and studied Seongjin closely.

Somehow around the time he doubted whether he knew who he was, the old man stroked the empty crown of his head a couple of times and said,

"You are too young to share a drink. But it's a bit late to say hello."

"....."

"My name is Breman. Well received. I will give you an answer soon."

What is this? Was the greeting some sort of keyword?

Seongjin was thinking about it, but Breman issued a toast.

"Cheers."

Seongjin and Marthain faced each other.

"Old man, one more drink here!"

"Give me here too!"

Just then, orders started pouring in. He wanted to ask something more, but he couldn't stand the atmosphere. Turning around and walking out the entrance, just before closing the wooden door, Breman called out to them.

"Anyway, be careful! Since he is away for a while, flies are attracted as if they were waiting!"

Seongjin looked back, but the owner had his back turned and was standing there filling a new beer glass.

When he arrived at the Pearl Palace, it was already after it was completely dark.

Seongjin was almost a super corpse. It was because so many things had happened in half a day, and after watching the puppet show, his physical condition had dropped dramatically.

First of all, he was very hungry. As he leaned back in the seat without energy, Herna and Gades came up to him as if they were sorry.

"You worked hard all day today, Morres."

"It went well. Great work, Morres."

Of course, after the twins snacked on snacks in the carriage whenever Seongjin and the others were gone. It was even worse.

"Then, good night, Morres."

"Sweet dreams, Morres."

Seongjin, who waved roughly at the twins who came to say goodbye with bright faces, stumbled into the lobby of the Pearl Palace, dragging his dangling feet.

And he was at a loss for words at the tremendous sight that unfolded before his eyes.

Numerous gift boxes of various sizes, and various attendants holding them, fill the lobby of the Pearl Palace.

Art and antiques were randomly piled up on one side of the hallway, and bouquets of flowers that couldn't find a place to put them were scattered all over the stairs.

And the letters piled up like a mountain on a tray. A huge number of invitations to the Third Prince to social gatherings were waiting for him.

The amount is so huge that one would believe that all the people in the capital wrote letters to him.

One day.

All of this happened just one day after the Holy Emperor entered closed prayer.

26

[Call me now, this is no place to be. Huwaaangg]

How do I call you?

[Call me, Lee Seongjin. Whimper.]

Hearing someone's sad cry, Sungjin opened his eyes.

What. Was that really a dream?

His mind slowly returns to reality. It is the morning of the Pearl Palace as always.

He rubbed his tired eyes and rose from his seat. Exhausted, he stretched out until the morning to sleep, but perhaps because his mind was busy, he wasn't tired at all.

Normally, he would have stretched and ran to the gymnasium, but now he wasn't in the mood for that at all. Seongjin just blankly sat on the bed and recalled the events of yesterday.

"Don't worry. We are on the side of Father Holy Emperor and Morres."

"We just want to help with what we know."

Herna and Gades assured Seongjin, who was staring at them from the other side of the carriage. He was on high alert after the puppet show.

"Al Fahas. What is that? Is that the name of the Demon King?"

Seongjin asked what he was most curious about. As soon as he heard the name, he felt strangely upset and his stomach churned.

But the twins shook their heads.

"It's a different name. They are denying the real thing by calling the wrong name."

"It's a more insignificant and inferior attack than a long, long slap in the face."¹

Seeing an expression of sincere indignation on the twins' faces, Seongjin averted his gaze for no reason.

But it was strange. Now, no matter how many times he repeat Al Fahas, he doesn't feel the same shock as before. When he asked, Herna and Gades nodded as if it were natural and briefly explained to Seongjin what the puppeteer had done.

The reason the offended person performed the 'funny' puppet show was to use it to create something called a flame barrier.

The 'bad' puppeteer created an 'insignificant' flame image with unclear boundaries, and tried to overlay it on the real demon king and the world. Because of that 'unreasonable' action, the blow that the demon king received also affected some of Seongjin.

I'm not sure what you mean.

When he asked why the puppeteer was doing such a thing, they said it was because the 'nasty' guy was a 'terribly bad' guy who threatened the safety of this world.

More than that, don't you guys just really hate that puppeteer?

"What binds someone to this world is the name he is given, Morres."

"If you keep denying your name, you will eventually be unable to set foot in the world, Morres."

Anyway, this is what made it certain.

The twins knew about the Demon King of Gehenna and seemed to understand that he had some sort of relationship with Seongjin. Maybe it's too much speculation to assume that they even knows

Seongjin's real identity?

Besides, he doesn't know why, but these kids seemed to be trying to help the demon king who disappeared anyway.

Then.

"Do you guys know what the demon king's real name is?"

He had a little bit of expectation, but unfortunately the twins answered with a sullen face.

"That's probably something not even Father Holy Emperor knows."

"We don't know what His Majesty Father doesn't know."

"This is the Holy Empire. Why do you, the children of the imperial family, try to help the demon king?"

"It's because Father Holy Emperor willingly allowed him."

"His Majesty Father seems to think he's needed."

After all, all these twins talk about was the Holy Emperor.

"The twins don't know what even the Holy Emperor doesn't know. If so, what the twins know means that is also known by the Holy Emperor....."

Seongjin was muttering blankly while staring into the air when a knocking sound came.

"Prince Morres, did you cough?"

As always, Edith comes in and sets the water bottle and cloth down on the table. Soon after, she pulled back the curtains and ventilated the room, telling Seongjin.

"This is a message from Lord Marthain. There is something he needs to find out this morning, so he asks the prince to meditate alone and review swordsmanship."

It reminds him of Sir Marthain, who left the Pearl Palace last night

with a very confused face.

Knowing that the prince he was serving was suddenly involved with various radical groups, he must have felt the need to confirm the facts as quickly as possible.

Golden Truth Society.

Plague Society of Adelheit.

Blue Republican Revolutionary Front.

What on earth was Morres originally thinking when sponsoring such organizations?

'Well, it's no use if I think about it now.....'

If he finds something, Sir Marthain will explain it to him. He don't know why, but he cares a lot for Sungjin.

At least, if Morres did something wrong, he didn't seem to have the personality to inform others, even though he would try to rectify it.

Seongjin decided to put aside various doubts for a while and focus on training. For now, he decided to focus on what he could do.

The Holy Emperor also told him to train. If something goes wrong, won't that guy come forward and help?

He think he knows the whole story to some extent.

Anyway, once the closed prayer is over, he think he should have an open conversation with the Holy Emperor.

* * *

Even without Sir Masrthain, the resident knights of the Pearl Palace, once disciplined, were still the same.

As soon as Seongjin entered the gymnasium, they rumbled and straightened up the ranks, and everyone greeted with a loud voice.

"Greetings to the Third Prince!"

"Uh, good job everyone."

Until recently, it was a little awkward because they were fighting without words. Seongjin smiled shyly and headed to the corner of the gymnasium.

Let's start the day clean with meditation.

Before sitting down and meditating, as a habit, check the ripples of the aura inside his chest. After that, he felt something calming down.

Breathe slowly and begin tracking the flow of Aura. The minute flow that seeps into the body through the inhalation and gathers in the lower abdomen.

The circulation in which it circulates here and there along the core in the lower abdomen and then spreads throughout the body.

And, like when absorbing the spirit of monsters in the past, he spread the Aura evenly to the skeleton, muscle fibers, and even the skin.

Marthain said that he shouldn't just try to forcefully twist the flow of Aura. Of course, that didn't mean to let the Aura flow on its own.

He was told to guide the direction gently on a line that does not go against the flow and lead to the lower abdomen. Also, when you draw out Aura from the core, do not disturb its natural flow and flow it from the center to the periphery like water.

That is, flowing from where enough is needed to where it is needed.

In the past, when absorbing the spirit of monsters, Seongjin did not try to move the flow of spirit itself. He just clearly recognized what to strengthen with it and where the flow should be.

Maybe Aura management is similar to this? Is it necessary to twist the flowing water with force?

All he needed was to draw the flow where it fell short. To do so, it was to accurately recognize the desired place. It was what he desperately wanted from the absence of Aura. It was to materialize that wish into a clear image.

Isn't that what it means to go to the place where the heart goes?

There is something to refer to the words of the Holy Emperor.
Sungjin thought.

Above all, the sense of controlling the flow of the huge Aura that the Holy Emperor had experienced not long ago was still vivid in Seongjin's memory. Recalling the refreshing flow, he tried to collect the energy that spread and pull it to the core.

A gentle wind was blowing around Seongjin before he knew it, but he didn't realize it. The fact that some of the knights who were training were looking at him with surprised eyes.

Round and round. It's fun to see the gathered Aura quickly create a round orbit. Even if he does not try to press together with force, the flows drawing round and round circles gradually converge to the critical angle on their own and eventually form a layer.

One, and another.

A small smile appeared on Seongjin's lips as he sat with his eyes closed.

"I've seen something like that before. So, back in the day, when Lord Baltazar was meditating....."

One of the knights who was watching the scene with a blank face suddenly muttered. It was Maria, a high-ranking knight who requested to be dispatched from the 1st Knights of the Imperial Guard to earn money for alcohol.

All of the resident knights at the gymnasium had stopped practicing and were sitting huddled together watching Seongjin. The low-ranking knight Haven, who was sitting at the end of the line, pouted.

"No, no matter how you do it, are you comparing a beginner to Lord Baltazar?"

"Then have you ever seen anything like that? How does the flow of Aura materialize like that?"

Haven, who was speechless, rolled his eyes wide and reluctantly replied.

"Umm... Like the Aura storm that His Majesty the Holy Emperor caused a while ago?"

And he was stunned by all the knights' ridiculous glares.

His Majesty the Holy Emperor was no match for him.

"Genius....."

All the knights fell silent at a single word that sounded like a sigh that came out of someone's mouth.

Genius.

Until now, no one had spoken out, but everyone thought of it at least once while watching Sir Marthain and the Third Prince training for the past few days.

No matter what method he learns, he quickly masters the movements, the honesty of wielding the sword until he corrects it as soon as he is pointed out, the sword dance that instantly falls into a state of trance and rides on an instinctive rhythm.

And from the moment he sensed Aura, the Aura around his body were being activated at a rapid pace.

In the appearance of the Third Prince, they could never recall the lazy and dull pig from before.

With such a genius talent, why had he been doing such stupid things?

"... Shit!"

One of the young knights sitting at the far end spat out a curse word and then jumped up and left. He had a long, torn scar on one side of his forehead.

Haven tried to grab him in surprise, but Sir Kurt stopped him and shook his head.

"Leave him alone. That guy will have complicated thoughts too."

"But....."

"Wouldn't that be a bit futile? In the end, I wonder why the captain had to leave the Knights like that."

"....."

The rest of the resident knights again began to look at Seongjin and the wind blowing around him in silence.

For a long time, absent-mindedly.

'Is the 5th layer a bit unreasonable at once.....'

How much time had passed, Seongjin sighed and opened his eyes.

He wanted to meditate a little more while he was away, but it didn't seem like the incredibly strong repelling force would be offset so easily.

It will probably take quite a while to make the next layer. As Marthain said, these are things to do slowly over time.

Besides, he wants to wield a wooden sword soon.

Seongjin, who tried to get up thinking that far, was startled for a moment and collapsed again.

When he came to, an angel was squatting in front of him and staring at him.

"... Older Sister?"

Amelia was pretty as always. Her light pink dress and her hair, braided with a red ribbon and pinned up, are neat and pretty. Dressed so cute, she sat on her knees in front of Seongjin, quietly resting her chin and looking at him.

"When did you come? What are you doing here?"

"Yeah, I was thinking of having lunch together and I was watching

you meditate. I don't know what it is, but it looks great."

Oh yeah? Seongjin looked around him in a cold sweat.

On one side of the gymnasium, he saw the resident knights training with stiff movements due to nervousness. How long have they been doing this?

Whether or not she knew Seongjin's bewildered feelings, she mumbled with a calm face.

"You become so strong because you train like this."

".....?"

Amelia's clear gray eyes grow dim again.

She often looked at Seongjin and made those eyes. She seems to be staring into the distance, or as if recalling her old memories.

"You're such a great child, Morres."

Seongjin brushed off his seat and burst into laughter.

"Is there anything great to say? I just started what could be called seniority. We still have a long way to go to get it right."

"No, even to me who doesn't know much, it's so extraordinary."

Amelia stood up from her seat holding Seongjin's outstretched hand, and emphasized it once again with a voice full of unfounded confidence.

"Trust me, Morres. You will become incredibly strong in the future."

Well, I don't know why you're so sure, but thank you for believing in me, Older Sister.

"And you'll probably become a cool young knight who looks good in black armor."

Suddenly, why black armor?

"Isn't that the perfect look for the demon of the frontlines? Cold-blooded and heartless."

No, but as a prince of the Holy Empire, being a demon is a bit much.

"The Black Demon of Delcross that makes others tremble in fear just by looking at him. Isn't that wonderful?"

... Uh.

This older sister, who looked like a fairy, seemed to have Second Grade Syndrome2.

T/N:

On a random note, Morres and Amelia calls Nate 아버지, but Herna calls him 성황 아빠 while Gades calls him 아빠 폐하. There's also some moments where Nate was called 아바마마. These kids have so many different ways to refer to the parents I had to make up some new terms in English for it. The way the twins call him, 'dad' would have been more suitable than 'father'. But 'Dad Holy Emperor' and 'His Majesty Dad' sounds a bit weird? At least weirder than using father. On one hand though, using dad instead of father shows how the twins are still very childish. What do you guys think though? Should I just keep using father or should I adjust and change to dad? Let me know in the comments! (Do people even read the T/Ns? lol)

1. They're talking about Seongjin slapping/punching the Demon King to death lolol.

2. Chuunibyou. Quoting Google, "Early teens who have grandiose delusions, who desperately want to stand out, and who have convinced themselves that they have hidden knowledge or secret powers."

"Actually, I also recently went to Lieutenant Dimross to learn how to practice."

Amelia said as she tore the pre-dinner bread.

Recently, at the recommendation of the Holy Emperor, she started studying this and that, and she learned it at the same time.

Sir Dimross is the Lieutenant of the 1st Knights of the Imperial Guard. A mature knight with extensive battlefield experience, he is famous within the imperial palace as a master of spearmanship and the Wirose technique.

If asked who was the strongest swordsman in Delcross except the Holy Emperor, everyone would undoubtedly pick Balthazar, the commander of the 1st Knight of the Imperial Guards.

When he was in full swing on the battlefield, his insolence in breaking through a siege alone on the southern front and wiping out a large army of pagans is still talked about like a legend.

However, it was clear that even Balthazar still was at the level where Dimrose gave him a hand when it came to spearmanship, at least he was at the level of being the strongest on the continent in terms of pure spearmanship.

"But why is Wirose? Sir Marthain said that it is a practice that is a bit burdensome for beginners to learn, right?"

Seongjin stopped chewing the bread and tilted his head.

There is a reason why most of the knights are initiated through the Banahas seniority method. This is because the flow of swordsmanship and the flow of Aura are consistent and intuitive without conflicting

parts.

Even if you don't, if you adjust the Aura separately, use your swordsmanship properly, and go back to the direction of the Aura in a hectic state, the introductory difficulty will go up exponentially.

On the other hand, Wirose is different.

-I'm going to say this about the standard martial arts of the Holy Empire, but Wirose is a bit of a sinister martial arts.

Marthain gave such an evaluation with a chewed face.

With one of the most basic thrusting movements, the Aura is sequentially divided into two directions to maximize break-through.

Here, the process of overlaying the Aura on the weapon also basically goes in two directions. When it came to the final movement of spearmanship, only the weapon had to be rotated by overlaying four-direction Aura on it, it was truly a monstrous technique.

This is why it is so rare to find a knight that touches the extreme of Wirose.

Amelia replied in a dejected voice.

"Did I know that beforehand? I just answered spearmanship when Father asked what I want to learn."

Ah, so that's why he attached the strongest spearman.

Since that guy is in the state of turning Aura 'as he pleases', he probably wouldn't have cared too much whether it was in four or ten directions. Do you understand what the difficulties of beginners are in the first place?

"But why are you suddenly using spears? Aren't you usually more familiar with the sword?"

"Umm....."

She looked at Seongjin with strange eyes and smiled.

"Someone I know is good at throwing spears. It was pretty cool, so I wanted to try it too."

With just one flick of the hand, the castle wall crumbles.

The soldiers of the enemy army could only gasp.

As Amelia starts to explain by patting her hands, the escort driver standing behind as well as Edith, who is in the middle of serving meals, look at her with red cheeks. She is just as lovely as her face, they're about to die.

Hey, everyone. Your cute princess is making a radical statement that she wants to blow up the enemy's castle with her own hands. Yes?

"So, I started spearmanship, but even though I practiced it, I had no idea what I was doing. I can't understand Lord Dimrose's explanation at all."

Seongjin was also well aware of how vague the explanation of the martial arts sounded to a beginner who had no knowledge of martial arts and was just beginning to feel his aura.

Even though he said his Aura was depleted, didn't even he, who was a monster hunter with a lot of bones, get lost in Marthain's explanation for a while?

"But seeing you practice today, I thought I discovered something. Ah, I also think that this is training....."

The girl's white cheeks are rosy, and her clear eyes twinkle like stars.

"Somehow, I get the feeling that seniority is going to become more and more fun."

It is the face of someone who is fascinated by something. No matter what this kind of person is passionate about, it is bound to produce results quickly.

Seongjin smiled heartily, thinking that sooner or later Amelia might make a leap forward in seniority. Until he heard the next words that followed.

"I never thought all things for revenge would make life so much fun."

No, Older Sister. Do you really want to learn spearmanship to get revenge?

You say you're going to hit people with the power to break down castles?

He can see the way the escort driver and Edith send support from the bottom of their hearts towards the beautiful girl who is full of enthusiasm.

Without asking, 'Our princess, fighting! I don't know who that person is, but just end them!' You must be thinking about something like that.

All of a sudden, Seongjin felt really sorry for the person who was going to be avenged.

* * *

Sir Masain, who said he would return for the afternoon class, never showed up at the gymnasium after that.

Well, let's review swordsmanship. Seongjin performed a sword dance in order from movement 1 to movement 5 by himself.

But then a strange thing happened. He was excitedly swinging his wooden sword, but unlike before, he felt that something was breaking.

"... Hmm?"

Seongjin tilted his head and tried the 1st and 2nd movements again. He was the hardest to learn and the most confident. Swish swish. Hook.

"... Hmm?"

It was the same anyway. The tempo he had been accustomed to before was subtly twisted, which hindered his successive development of his movements. Why is this happening all of a

sudden?

Hmm? Uh? What?

He lost his way and was wielding one expression over and over again, when someone cautiously spoke to him from the side.

"... That, Prince Morres. You shouldn't weave Aura together like that. If you don't develop the basics of seniority first, the connection between the layers will go wrong."

Seongjin turned his head.

The one who spoke to him was the resident knight with whom he was quite acquainted. He remember thinking that his small body and slightly protruding front teeth gave him the impression that he would be shy.

He suddenly pointed it out, but he was even more startled and hurriedly shut his mouth. He stopped the training that the other knights were doing and focused his gaze here.

"Ah, I am very sorry! I don't know, I will stop... interfering with your training....."

"Oh, no, it's not like that. But what about you?"

"Yes, Your Highness! I am Haven from the 3rd Knights of the Imperial Guard!"

The knight quickly put his hand on his chest and lowered his head. However, what Seongjin paid attention to was something else.

"So, that... Did you say weave Aura?"

Seongjin stood next to him and slowly went through the movement 1. He tilts his head and unfold it once more.

The knight who introduced himself as Haven reflexively trembled whenever Seongjin swung his wooden sword. It was as if he thought he would strike him down with a wooden sword at any moment.

"... Seriously?"

Seongjin understood the knight's words only after repeating the first movement three times.

After haphazardly forming the 4th layer during morning meditation, the Aura flow was now strong enough to have a tangible effect on the movement. That's why Marthain said that the section where the introductory training for seniority begins is from the 3rd layer.

Unbeknownst to him, he was pouring it into his muscles at will in a way that used the spirit of the old monsters. So the movements get awkward and the beat gets twisted.

Seongjin smiled broadly at the knight who was still cowering nervously.

"Did you say Sir Haven? Aren't you amazing? I didn't even know that I was leaking Aura, how did you find out?"

Haven blinked his eyes involuntarily at the feeling that the gymnasium suddenly brightened.

The Third Prince, who always looked fat, was a boy who laughed quite a lot.

"That, there are often people who neglect the basics of seniority and get over it, but later their movements get twisted. It goes wrong starting with movements 1 and 2. You can see it in action. This is a common mistake made by inexperienced squires."

Haven was diligently explaining to Seongjin without even realizing it. The appearance of being nervous about being hit by one was already gone.

"Ah, that's why you knew I was shedding freely! I went to Aura again and I could see it."

"How do you see the Aura flowing through your body when it's not external air? If you just move the Aura correctly, the motion will change a little, so everyone sees it and corrects it."

"Right. Do you know how to shed your Aura just by looking at your movements....."

Seongjin nodded.

"That means you have a high understanding of each movements, right? As expected, people who are at the level of imperial palace knights are amazing."

He was genuinely in admiration.

To be honest, until now, he had been ignoring the resident knights because they were mediocre. He thought it would be worth trying to some extent without an Aura as long as his physical strength recovered a little.

However, even these low-level knights had very specialized knowledge about Aura training and swordsmanship. It is the moment when the resident knights are seen again.

A proud look passed across Haven's face for a moment, as if he had heard the quiet admiration, like talking to himself.

"Then, how should I practice from now on? The layers suddenly increased today, so I haven't learned how to weave them properly from Sir Marthain yet."

Before he had a sense of Aura, he had heard how to weave a couple of shapes for a while, but there was no way he could hold a proper movement with it. Should he wait for Marthain.....

Haven flinched at Seongjin's question, but someone else's voice interrupted from behind.

"Binding the Aura to the core is itself a training. Your Highness."

"You're.....?"

She was a knight with a slightly unfamiliar face. Her long, wheat-colored hair was tied up casually, and her hair was sticking out here and there, but her facial expression was very solemn and looked quite old.

As her face hardened slightly at the careless question, Seongjin quickly apologized.

"I'm sorry if I've met you before. I don't know if you know, but my memory is hazy after I got sick....."

"Oh no, Your Highness! I am Maria of the 1st Knights of the Imperial Guard. It hasn't been long since I was dispatched to the Pearl Palace. My greetings are late."

Judging from how she was waving her hands, it seemed that she was the type whose expression hardened when she was nervous rather than angry.

"So, you bind the Aura?"

"Yes. That's right."

Seeing that her voice cracked high as she answered, Seongjin thought that she must be someone who is more nervous than she looks like she has a lot of experience.

Of course, he didn't realize that most of the tension was because of himself, who was rumored to be trash.

"Well, there is no one who teaches introductory practice as solidly as Sir Marthain. Even if we explain it, it's easy to make strange habits anyway, so I thought it would be better to practice tying the Aura to the core instead....."

According to her explanation, even skilled knights sometimes deliberately train with their Aura tied to the core.

It is a process of clearly recalling before and after weaving Aura to remind them of proper Aura operation, and correcting the basics of swordsmanship, which tends to go wrong depending on the habit of weaving Aura.

In addition, detaining and turning the Aura that tries to circulate throughout the body is itself a training that makes aura management skillful.

"That... Isn't that a great idea?"

Seongjin's eyes shone. If the Aura flows uncontrollably and the movements are twisted, wouldn't it be a natural solution if he deliberately practiced not spilling it as she said?

He stood for a while and contemplated the core. The Aura is spinning well in the lower abdomen.

He lowered the wooden sword a couple of times, trying to keep it there. The Aura that was habitually flowing down his arm was pulled back to the core.

"This....."

It's a bit tricky, but he guessed it will work?

"Thank you, Sir Maria! I will give it a try!"

Seongjin shook her hand brightly and soon immersed himself in a new practice.

Pull with a single pole. The Aura that was habitually spilled all over the body is captured in the core.

The movements that had been cut off began to regain their flow little by little.

Not only the Aura flowing from the core, but even the Aura absorbed through breathing did not spill on his limbs. All Aura that interfere with movement are excluded from swordsmanship.

It was a very new experience. The energies that he had habitually used before came back with a clear form.

In what form and in what order, it was only after completely blocking the Aura that it was more clearly recognized.

Little by little, the layers finally connect completely, and the movement begin to soften like water. Seongjin started to dance with the sword in the rhythm again, in a trance.

All of the resident knights at the gymnasium stopped training and were watching the Third Prince frantically wielding a wooden sword.

"Senior, let's be honest. Were you embarrassed to throw your words away?"

A red-nosed knight asked Maria teasingly.

"I didn't know he could really do that....."

Maria shook her head. She said it in a daze, but she said it was because tying her Aura was never a difficulty that beginners would try.

There were many people who struggled for a long time to release the Aura from the core in a distinct form to their limbs. It is not for nothing that introductory practice is called the realm of talent.

However, as soon as that young prince built more than three layers, he was circulating it naturally through his limbs without knowing that he was spilling it.

In addition, the Aura that has already flowed smoothly is completely tied back to the core?

It was an Aura operation in a higher level than pouring out with a form.

Prince Morres must be a real genius.

Among the resident knights looking at him as if possessed, one young knight with a gloomy face turned around and quietly left the arena.

28

It was late, when the sun had already set and darkness had fallen, when Sir Marthain returned to the Pearl Palace.

Seongjin had just finished dinner and was holding open a picture book he had borrowed from Amelia.

There were a lot of professional books in the library of the Pearl Palace, but when he searched to learn letters, he couldn't find any easy books for children.

It was clear that Queen Lizabeth had not considered that Morres' knowledge level at all when she first created the library.

It was the angelic Princess Amelia who extended a helping hand to Seongjin, who was worried about how to start studying letters.

She treasured all the picture books she read as a child, and willingly lent them to Seongjin, who said he had a fading memory of how to read.

Occasionally, on the day they had lunch together, she would open the picture book and slowly read it to Seongjin. She also listened intently to Seongjin's voice as he stuttered and read it.

-It has been a long-time dream of mine to read books with my family.

To Seongjin, who was apologetic for making her waste time, she smiled as she was rather happy.

Thanks to this, Seongjin had reached the level of reading a simple storybook by himself, albeit at a slow pace.

Well, considering that he told the Holy Emperor that he wanted to read philosophical or religious books, there was still a long way to

go.

So today, while eating dessert, he was flipping through a children's book with cute animal pictures on it, when he heard a knocking sound, and Marthain entered the room with a very tired face.

"It is much later than expected. I'm sorry. Your Highness."

Seongjin silently closed the book and looked at him.

Today, Seongjin made a lot of progress in his training. That's why he desperately needed Marthain's advice, but he didn't feel like blaming him when he saw him walking in with a haggard face.

"Okay, you said you had something to look into. Is the job done well?"

Looking at the atmosphere, it doesn't seem like there was much success.

Sure enough, Marthain shook his head with a gloomy face.

The Golden Truth Society, Plague Society of Adelheit, and the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front.

Suspicious organizations that Morres is said to have sponsored.

"First of all, we investigated all the ledgers of the Pearl Palace, which contain records of the use of personal funds, but no records were found about these organizations."

From the morning, he scoured the administrative officer of the Pearl Palace and investigated every detail of sponsorship and donations within five years.

However, only one orphanage and one small theater on Rue Bertrand were the only regular sponsors, and there were only a few cases of occasional sponsorships to relief groups for the poor.

There he considered two possibilities.

First, it is possible that Queen Lizabeth sponsored these organizations

in his name on behalf of Morres.

Second, there is a possibility that the imperial palace forces trying to harm Morres sent sponsorship money in his name.

So, from then on, he rushed to the main palace and investigated all the records of funds in the internal affairs department for several years. The secretary in charge and the administrative priests were frightened when they thought that a financial audit would start unexpectedly.

And the result was clean. Most donated to orphanages and poor relief organizations. Occasionally patronage of arts organizations.

At least, funds within the imperial palace had never flowed directly to those suspicious organizations.

"And....."

Seongjin made a tired face. Just by listening to it, I could clearly feel how much Marthain had to shovel today.

"Of course, it is not impossible that among the organizations in the sponsoring records, there are ghost groups that are only on the records, or that the records have been washed several times here....."

Marthain blurted out his words. Judging by the atmosphere, tomorrow he's going to carry out each sponsor list and investigate one by one to see if the organization really exists and whether the funds are properly invested.

No, that's it! Stop it, you stubborn man!

How are you going to investigate it all by yourself?

Seongjin waved his hand and said.

"Sir Marthain, there is no end to that. The Sir only investigated the details of donations and support, but don't you think about the possibility that someone made a false purchase history of expensive items such as art and siphoned off the funds? Are you going to investigate all purchases made to the imperial palace within a few

years?"

"....."

"What if they don't have the goods? If it's damaged or sent as a gift somewhere, there's no proof, right? No, they might have just handed over the goods. Or that the artworks in the palace storage are forgeries and the real ones are in the auction house."

Marthain's face turned pale. He doesn't think he'd ever thought of that possibility.

"Or how about this one? What if I listened to someone's request and asked for support in return?"

"... Did you ask for a price!"

Sir Marthain was about to pass out.

No, this guy. It's not that he did it, but it's a possibility.

Well, I'm not sure if Morres really did that.

Seongjin decided to appease Marthain.

He knocks on the sofa and Marthain stumbles over to him and sits down. It was only after Edith handed over the cookies she had left for dessert that he seemed to come back to his senses a bit. That's why he's going to eat some rice.

"Come on, Sir Marthain. What I said is, in the end, a matter of possibility. The odds of it actually happening are extremely low. How could it be normal to siphon off the imperial palace's funds?"

The light slowly began to return to Marthain's eyes, which had been half-fazed.

"In addition, there is something absolutely necessary to realize the aforementioned possibilities. It is the presence of helpers outside the imperial palace."

"That word....."

"Now we don't have to track my money transfer history, but we have to track my social interactions from before."

Seongjin smiled brightly and held out a large tray to Marthain. There was a tray stacked with invitations to invite the Third Prince to social gatherings.

"Now that you're back, would you like to read invitations with me? As you read, explain who these people are."

And he's also studying the spelling at the same time.

Sir Marthain's complexion began to turn black, but Seongjin had nothing to shy away from.

Wouldn't it be enough to be thankful that you prevented the shoveling from starting again tomorrow?

So they hung on sorting invitations until late into the night.

First of all, it can't be a temporary event, but what seems like a regular meeting.

All invitations to personal events, such as birthdays and engagements, were blown.

Gatherings in places too far from the capital were also excluded. Morres' lady-in-waiting said that he rarely left the palace for long periods of time.

Some invitations, such as gatherings focused on noble ladies and academic conferences related to theology, that could be confirmed that they had no contact with Morres were also removed.

After culling the rest, only three invitations remained.

The first caller was Orden Siegsmond. It is a clean, white letter with an old-fashioned border.

"This is Grand Duke Siegsmond. He is the son of the current Marquis of the North, and the grandson of Sir Vincent Siegsmond, who was famous as a great general in the past. He is also famous as the

disciple of Balthazar, the best knight on the continent."

The Siegmund family is not a central aristocrat, but they are a great aristocrat that no one can ignore because of their great power.

It is said that the Grand Duke also has a reputation throughout the continent for his outstanding martial arts. It is said that he is regarded as an idol among the young masters of Delcross, such as easily sweeping the championship in martial arts competitions held in several countries.

Every year before the birthday party, he comes to the capital and has a meeting with young masters who follow him.

"Rather than being close friends, I think it's an invitation to all the high-ranking young people in the capital."

Marthain added.

It's a meeting right before the birthday party, so there's still plenty of deadline, so let's put this aside for now.

The second is Ricardo Scarchapino. He is an aristocrat from Ortona and the second son of a wealthy man.

Wait, Scarchapino?

That Scarchapino who is having a marriage talk with Morres?

"Probably the richest family in Delcross. Prince Ricardo is a very gregarious person, and is known for having regular meetings with the children of powerful families."

Correspondence is also brilliant in gold and smells like money.

Discussing the situation on the continent, changes in the economy, and trends in the art world, it must be the most mainstream meeting in Delcross.

It's doubtful that this kind of person really has anything to do with Morres.

Oh, come to think of it.

-Still, you used to go to the town house to see your friend once every two months.

He remembered what Edith had said in passing. Did Morres say that the only friend he interacted with was the young master of Scarchapino? Could it be this person?

Seongjin looked at the invitation once more.

Meeting ten days later. He'd better go here first.

The third caller's name is Kenneth Diggory. He was the fourth son of the second son of Cardinal Digory, head of the administrations.

What? Which position is a bit delicate to say that this is important?

Marthain also tilted his head.

"He's not a well-known figure in the social world, but I didn't know they had regular meetings like this. I heard that he entered the theological academy, but I don't think he made much public appearances after that."

That is to say, he is not well known. Seongjin stroked the smooth black envelope and was lost in thought.

It seems to be a somewhat inferior meeting to invite the prince, but considering the prince's reputation as a trash, it seems that Morres will be treated as a human being only at this level.

Most of all, the last phrase in the letter bothered him.

-The prince's old friend, Jonathan McCalpen, is also looking forward to seeing you again.

Did Morres have any other friends besides the young master of Scarchapino?

"Does Sir know this person named Jonathan?"

At Seongjin's question, Marthain shook his head.

"Sorry. I don't know the details of his personal connections. At least he is not a well-known person in the social world."

"Hmm, I mean....."

The meeting is just three days later. It's the fastest, should he just that he's getting some fresh air?

Until then, Seongjin thought so lightly.

Time passed smoothly after that.

Marthain, who beat the unsuitable detective role, returned to the gymnasium the next day. He looked at his disciple, who had built to the fourth layers at once while he was gone, all dumbfounded, and then sighed.

"No, why is someone who can do this well until now....."

Sir Marthain, didn't you already say something like that before?

Well, it's not that he can't understand his feelings. Hunter Lee Seongjin has to be a bit amazing.

Anyway, the long-awaited introductory process of Aura practice has finally begun.

As soon as Seongjin started class, he thought that he would be able to wield a sword while freely spilling his Aura.

However, he had to revise his thoughts right away, because Sir Marthain taught meticulously, slowly pointing out each movement.

Even if you think you've mastered one type, you don't immediately move on to the next one, just repeat it until it's fully absorbed in your body.

He doesn't know if he teaches well, but he knows that he pursues perfection in his movements to the point where there is no time to develop bad habits.

They said that it would be boring once they entered the initiation, but even Seongjin, who had a history of repeated training, progressed so slowly that it was frustrating. He practiced for two days with less meditation, but he still couldn't get out of movement 1!

Of course, the resident knights who were using the gymnasium together had different opinions.

"Prince, the progress is really fast."

To Seongjin, who was about to vent his anger, Sir Kurt spoke as if to soothe him.

"At this rate, movements 1 and 2 will all be finished within a week, right? Then you will graduate from the basics."

Is that so?

Sir Kurt was one of the few high-ranking knights, and he had a serious personality who did not usually say empty words. His words are quite trustworthy.

"Me, Your Highness. I entered as a squire! I only had movement 1 in 4 months! But considering the average of the knights, it's not even slow!"

Sir Marthain was so harsh that he almost deserted at that time.

Sir Claudia, whose round face and freckles were her charm point, pouted.

In the meantime, Seongjin has slowly made friends with other knights besides Maria and Haven. More than half of the knights who volunteered to earn money from here and there were mostly casual and cheerful.

Occasionally, as in the beginning, there were people who glared at him with contempt, but considering Morres' reputation in the past, that might be appropriate. Seongjin decided to ignore the slight rudeness.

While he practiced in the gymnasium and occasionally read children's

books, time passed quickly, and the day of the meeting arrived.

With Sir Marthain and Sir Kurt as escorts, Seongjin left for a quiet residential area on the outskirts of the capital. Even back then, it was a light-hearted outing.

That was until five or six young men in black robes greeted him all at once.

"Welcome to the meeting of the Black Prophets."

Seongjin involuntarily stopped breathing.

Another dubious eccentric group was here!

29

On the morning of Kenneth Diggory's meeting, Seongjin meditated at the gymnasium as always and devoted himself to one movement.

After training a little earlier than usual, he took a shower and got ready to go out.

In the meantime, there had been one more major clothing repair, but no one would be able to look at Seongjin and think of the old fat boy.

The limbs that had not yet grown were elongated without any flab, and good-looking muscles were firmly established here and there in the body where the fat had disappeared.

Seongjin smiled happily at the suit that was quite sleek.

Looking at it this way, isn't Morres a pretty handsome guy? Well, the genes of the parents of good boys and girls don't go anywhere.

With only two men, Sir Marthain and Sir Kurt, as escorts, Seongjin rode the carriage toward the meeting place on the outskirts of the capital. Until then, he had the mindset of going lightly to get some fresh air.

The carriage left the city center, up and down a couple of hills, and began passing sparsely run-down mansions. The wagon rattled badly because of the poor road surface.

"It's not a neighborhood where the capital's aristocrats usually stay. I can't believe there are social gatherings in a place like this."

Looking at the slightly dreary old houses, Sir Marthain made an impression. He said then he should have known something was wrong.

Not long after, Seongjin and his party arrived at a huge mansion that was, to put it mildly, antique, and objectively looked like a ghost would pop out at any moment. The garden, apparently untouched by the gardener, was overgrown with overgrowth, and withered ivy completely covered the fence and the mansion.

"....."

"Is it right where people live?"

There was a rare look of nervousness on Sir Kurt's face, who was always gentle.

They were looking for an abandoned house, but soon a servant appeared from the entrance and escorted them into the mansion.

The party arrived at the banquet hall after walking for a long time through the old corridors that were not properly cleaned and were covered with spider webs. Anxiety that something is going wrong grows little by little.

The escort knights were stopped at the entrance of the venue, but Seongjin shook his head quietly at Marthain, who was about to protest. Still, they've come this far, so shouldn't they at least check what kind of meeting it is?

Besides, just in case, Seongjin wore a sword borrowed from the armory around his waist.

Even though he is a beginner in swordsmanship, he is a monster hunter with decades of fighting experience. He was confident that at least one part of his body would be taken out no matter what happened.

Creak.

The door opens with a heavy sound, and soon the whole view of the banquet hall comes in at a glance.

Seongjin, who entered the room, flinched at the moment.

It was because six young men wearing black hooded robes pulled

down to their noses all stood up from their seats and approached him.

Even in broad daylight, the banquet hall is covered with thick curtains and does not let in any light. In the middle was a single large mahogany table.

Under the dimly lit candles here and there, the long shadows of young men stretch out in various directions and sway gloomily.

What? What's this the gloomy group that look like they will launch a demon summoning circle right now?

"Welcome to the meeting of the Black Prophets."

The young man at the forefront takes off his hood and says.

he wondered where this might be the head of the demon worshipers, but the exposed face was more normal than he thought and had a good impression.

The young face, which seems to have barely passed the terms and conditions, is handsome and sincere. What the hell is a guy like a church brother doing here?

"I have heard a lot about you. My name is Kenneth Diggory. It's an honor to meet you, Your Highness."

The greeting voice is obviously polite, but he doesn't even take a simple short bow toward Seongjin.

It seemed to be left to be seen whether they looked down on Morres, or whether the group itself was in an atmosphere of excluding excessive greetings.

Seongjin nodded without answering and looked around the rest of the people. Seeing the generally calm reactions, it seemed that no one was actually acquainted with Morres.

Oh, except for the guy on the far left over there.

When Seongjin's eyes met, that chubby robe was visibly embarrassed

and flustered.

Maybe it's that guy? The link between this organization and Morres.

"I've heard a lot about you too. It's a pleasure to meet you, Kenneth."

After briefly greeting the hooded young man, Seongjin opened his arms as he approached the chubby robe.

"Jonathan, Jonathan McCalpen!"

He smiled brightly and squeezed the shoulder of the guy who was slowly backing away.

It's you right? Where are you going to run to? The culprit who lured Morres to such a suspicious organization.

Seongjin put one arm around Jonathan's shoulder, who was trembling, and smiled as he looked around at the rest of the crowd.

"Now then, I want to introduce you guys formally, right?"

Seongjin, who had a few words with the members of the Black Prophets, learned surprising facts.

First, these six black-robed young men, including Kenneth, were all classmates at the Theological Academy, or seniors and juniors. Jonathan McCalpen is also two years Kenneth's junior.

"The priests do not try to explain the questions that arise to anyone. They just tell you to believe, and keep suppressing those who don't!"

"... Aah, that's right. It's bad to force people to blindly believe in something for no reason."

"So the religious indoctrination and oppression that has covered this continent is preventing people from escaping from the swamp of ignorance. What do you think, Your Highness?"

"Oh, I think it's a real problem."

"Exactly!"

What the hell is the normal curriculum for, why are these kids so angry?

Is this okay? Holy Imperial Theological Academy?

Second, most of them were bloodlines of wealthy high-ranking priests in Delcross, a theocratic society. It's just that they are collateral, or even direct, or they are alienated bastards who are hit by many children and don't get attention.

Yeah, like Kenneth, the fourth son of the second son.

"The theocratic society is an outdated social structure that has fallen far behind the times. Look at the many kingdoms and principalities that have been subjugated to Delcross! They do their best to keep the cardinal sent from Delcross out of politics. What about the result? Look at the brilliantly developed countries like Rohan and Brittany!"

"... Of course. It is right that religion and politics should be separated. Naturally."

Rather than attempting to separate theocracy, it was probably to avoid Delcross' interference in internal affairs.

"This current situation in which direct descendants of high-ranking clergymen inherit high-ranking positions regardless of their ability! If we can't break this link, the future of Delcross will never be bright!"

Seeing the guy clad in black spouting overheated eloquence while swinging his arm, Seongjin just nodded quietly.

That was right. It's just that he's benefited from being a high-ranking priest's family, but he looks even more angry because he's not in the line of succession.

Thirdly, Seongjin assumed that Jonathan had seduced the idiot Morres, but in reality, Morres had been begging Jonathan McCalpen to introduce him to this group for about a year.

No, did you really do something useless like that? This trash!

"Due to the nature of our gathering, it was virtually impossible to

invite the prince of the Holy Empire to this place. I think you will fully understand how much pressure we are feeling right now."

Kenneth spoke in a calm tone, occasionally glancing at him as if examining his temper.

"But you said you were close friends with Jonathan, a member. We also had to take into account that you have not spared a lot of financial support for the activities of our Black Prophets over the past year."

Seongjin almost opened his mouth wide in surprise.

Were there any other organizations that Morres supported?

"So, the members' opinions came together that it would be difficult to ignore the prince's request to visit the meeting any longer."

Jonathan, who is sitting next to him, begins to become visibly restless. Seongjin narrowed his eyes and glared at him.

He thinks he found at least one outside helper who stole the palace funds, but he thought he'd have to take a closer look at him once he got out of here.

"To confess now, I may have secretly believed in the many bad rumors surrounding the prince. Our friend Jonathan is also shy, so it's a bit difficult to solve misunderstandings....."

Jonathan's face is now pale.

Guess he wasn't very active in introducing Morres to this organization. Well, those rumors were all true, so he can't really blame him.

"However, seeing the prince in person like this today, I realized once again how foolish our prejudice was."

"Yes, even our members, who claim to be prophets to dispel the ignorance of prejudice, have not been completely free from gossip."

"I am deeply reflecting."

"Couldn't you say that you are the only one of the members of the Holy Imperial Family who can properly see the twists and turns of this empire!"

As soon as he hurriedly cheered for something, it seemed that the members' liking for Seongjin had risen significantly.

And fourth. In fact, what he found out earlier was nothing compared to this.

"There was a long hesitation before meeting the prince, but today our members made a decision here."

At Kenneth's calm declaration, the other four members, except for Jonathan, put their black hoods down to their noses again. Jonathan belatedly put down his hood, but his chubby face was clear that he wanted to cry.

"I am going to officially accept Prince Morres, who is working hard to bring a new future to the continent, as a member of the Black Prophets!"

The black robes nodded in unison. One of them held out the same black robe to Seongjin.

"Uh... I appreciate your decision."

Seongjin hurriedly put on a robe to hide his embarrassed expression.

"Well then, Prince. Please prepare your heart."

Kenneth puts on his hood, speaking in a solemn voice.

"Now, as a Black Prophet, it is time to enter into the mysteries of this world."

"....."

Seongjin's mind was becoming infinitely more complex now.

Aren't they just young people with Second Grade Syndrome who are a little dissatisfied with society? What else is the mystery of the

world?

Kenneth nodded, and a black robe pushed hard against an empty bookshelf in the corner of the venue.

Creak. The bookshelf spun around, and soon a small alcove appeared. It was a secret space with a dark staircase leading down to the basement.

This is where the atmosphere gets really weird.

Soon, the Black Prophets holding small candles began to descend the basement stairs in a row. Seongjin was caught in the middle of the heat, unable to do this or that, and had no choice but to follow them in silence.

Occasionally stroking the hilt of the sword hidden under his robe, Seongjin descended the seemingly endless narrow staircase.

The lightless stairs became increasingly dark, and it was uneasy to rely on small candles, but before long, small green moss began to appear around them.

At the end of the stairs, a damp stone wall covered with moss soon follows. There were a lot of green spores floating around that gave off a strange glow, and Seongjin had to try hard not to inhale them.

They walked for a long time along the passage lined with stone walls.

The passage widened little by little and eventually ended in front of a huge stone wall. When the group paused at the large door in the middle of the stone wall, Kenneth, who was walking the furthest behind, slowly approached the door and turned toward Seongjin.

"Behold, Prince."

As he pushed the door back, Kenneth's gaze was fixed on Seongjin's face. He spoke to him in a low, slightly exaggerated tone, as if he were performing a play.

"This is the truth that this country hides under the mold of religion, the mystery of the world!"

Creeaak.

Seongjin's eyes widened as the stone gate slowly opened.

That's right. The fourth is the most important.

The fact is that these demon worshipers did indeed summon something into this world.

A large space surrounded by stone walls that looks more like a huge cavity than a room.

In the middle of the space, surrounded by moss and glowing green, a black lump that could only be described as a giant maggot wriggled ominously.

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'Fuck me.....'

These are the words that came to Jonathan McCalpen's mind as soon as he saw [it].

The last time he saw it three days ago, it was just a black mass the size of a man. It wriggles when you touch it, and occasionally emits a strange moan like 'queaek'.

But what about now? It was bulky enough to occupy more than one-third of the room. It swelled more than six times in a few days. The surface of [it] continues to ripple black as if it were the surface of a stormy lake.

In addition, tentacles or roots extending from [it] were densely entangled in the room like a spider's web. Strangely shining moss that had not been seen before is spread in a deep blue color as if to cover the area around it.

Something is wrong. Something is going very wrong. What the hell has happened here in the past three days?

It wasn't just Jonathan who was surprised. The other prophets are also looking around with bewildered faces, as if this is a sight they have never seen before.

Only Kenneth Diggory, the creator of this surreal landscape, was watching them with a gentle smile.

'I shouldn't have set foot in a place like this in the first place.....'

Jonathan backed away in a cold sweat, but Prince Morres passed him and stepped in front of Kenneth.

"The caterpillar of Bantra Moss. Fortunately, the channel isn't open yet."

He was more calm than expected. His face was a little hardened, Jonathan thought, but he looked a little angry rather than nervous. Maybe it was because of his eyes, which became fiercer after he lost weight.

Prince Morres.

The shame of the Holy Imperial Family, the biggest trash in Delcross.

Compared to the last time they met two months ago, the prince now looked like a completely different person. At first, Jonathan said he was wondering if he was right.

As if it wasn't just his appearance that had changed, he, who would have been making a fuss before looking for Jonathan, is now just quietly moving his eyes and scanning the entire room.

Before long, the gray eyes that met Kenneth again were not fear or astonishment, but pure doubt.

"Why is a monster of Gehenna here?"

Ahahaha. Kenneth laughed loudly and happily.

"You know this? It is as the Sage said! He said that perhaps the prince would be able to share our mysteries with him. Indeed, bringing you here was not a wrong choice!"

"Sage?"

"Yes, soon you will be able to see him too."

Kenneth said that and slowly started walking toward [it]. The roots-like things tangled on the floor wriggled violently as if they were earthworms the moment his feet stepped on them.

"Brothers, chosen prophets. There's nothing to be afraid of! Evidence that our mystery is getting closer to the moment of truth has only now emerged."

Kenneth, coming up close to [it], turned to the prophets and said.

"Everything is according to the prophecy of the Sage."

His hard face was filled with unprecedented confidence, and for a moment Jonathan wondered if he was being overly frightened.

As expected, the members who were not sure what to do and kept an eye on it noticeably regained their stability.

"Everything is according to the prophecy of the Sage."

"Everything is according to the prophecy of the Sage."

Hahahaha.

Loud laughter reverberates through the wide space.

"How lucky you are, prince! Because at this very moment when the mysteries of this world open, you can be with us prophets."

Saying so, Kenneth's eyes had a strange glint in his eyes, like that of a fanatic.

Aah, everything is going crazy. Jonathan sat down on the floor, thinking.

The roots of the monstrous creature that moves little by little. The strange enthusiasm of the prophets, who are trembling with anxiety inside, but expect something to begin.

Only one, the still young Prince Morres, stood at the center of the mess, maintaining his composure.

He opened his mouth to Kenneth in a cold tone.

"Did the Sage say that? That if you only fill it with three people, something will open."

Stop. Kenneth looks back at the prince in amazement. There was a stern expression on his straight face for a moment, but Prince Morres didn't mind and continued.

"It's not the mystery that you guys think about. It's a channel that opens. Coordinates to connect that damn thing's consciousness to its community, a signal to call other bantras here."

"... What?"

"You don't want to reform Delcross, but you want to destroy it?"

For a moment, Kenneth Diggory's face contorted terribly.

"What are you talking about!"

"I'm saying that Sage deceived you."

"Nonsense! Such nonsense.....!"

Shaking his body, Kenneth began to lash out at the prince. He, who was a promising student at the academy, now looked like a madman who had completely lost his rationality.

"Are you going to deny the mysteries of this world! Are you with those hypocritical priests! I didn't mean to call you here! After all, you are also the blood of that filthy Holy Emperor!"

However, even in the face of the violent rage aimed directly at him, the prince's gaze did not waver in the slightest.

"Then answer me. Kenneth."

Jonathan found out for the first time that a person's pupils could look colder than the metal on a sword blade.

"Didn't you really throw people at it as food?"

What?

For a moment, Jonathan's mind went blank after hearing the unbelievable words.

People? What?

Then, as if cold water had seeped in, his head, which slowly returned to reason, began to think.

Was there really no price to pay for a black mass underground that had not seen any change for almost a year suddenly grow so big in a matter of days?

Come to think of it, where did the servant who stood guarding the door whenever he visited this stone chamber go?

Why didn't the maid who cleaned the conference room of the prophets every time brought tea to them today?

The expression disappears from Kenneth Diggory's horribly distorted face like the ebb tide. Jonathan could see the answer he didn't want to know in his face.

"... This crazy!"

One of the prophets threw off his hood and shouted at Kenneth. It was Astley Vecher, the junior who first founded the Black Prophets' Association with him.

"You fed that thing? Are you insane, senior?"

"... What?"

Kenneth, whose expression had completely disappeared from his face, stared at Astley with only his eyes wide open. Jonathan got goosebumps because it looked like explosives on the verge of exploding.

"How can we bet that such an obscure thing is really the mystery we are looking for? It's just the words of the Sage! But throwing people in there? Is that true?"

"....."

"Calm down, Senior Kenneth! Didn't I always say that the Sage is suspicious somewhere?"

Astley stepped right in front of Kenneth and he grabbed Astley's black robe almost simultaneously.

"... Kuck!"

Kenneth Diggory smiled softly at the junior who struggled while being grabbed by the collar.

"If you've always had so many questions, why didn't you tell me earlier? Astley. I have no choice but to give you the first chance to encounter the mystery."

"... What!"

Astley's face went pale. Instinctively, he knew what Kenneth was up to.

Sure enough, he dragged his junior by the collar and started to move towards the ominous mass.

"Three people. He said it would take three lives to open the door of truth."

"Wa, wait.....!!"

"I have nothing to say. Now, as a member of the proud Prophets, please be the final key to completing this great moment."

Jonathan gritted his teeth as he looked at Astley, who struggled and was being dragged helplessly.

It's a thing has grown enormously in just a few days. he had no idea what that thing would become if it ate one more person.

He needs to stop it... But there is no strength in his legs.

It was then that Prince Morres opened his mouth.

"Sorry, but."

Schwing. A well-honed sword was pulled out from within the black robe.

"No matter what you do, that channel won't open."

Jonathan looked at his face casually and was at a loss for words.

The prince showed his teeth and smiled.

A light wind blew from the tip of the sword held upright, and at that moment the prince kicked the ground.

* * *

Crash-

The old mansion shook slightly from the sudden, weak vibration. Marthain and Kurt, who were sitting in the hallway and having a boring time, stood up in amazement.

Crash-

A series of vibrations are transmitted along the floor. Dirt and dust poured from the ceiling.

"... It sounds like it's ringing from the ground?"

Could it be an earthquake?

The two pushed away the servant who tried to dissuade them and hurriedly ran toward the banquet hall. Earthquakes were rare in Delcross, but in preparation for the odds, the prince had to be evacuated from the old mansion.

"Your Highness!"

However, the banquet hall was empty. Soon, Marthain's face contorted when he discovered a secret staircase leading to the basement at the corner of the banquet hall.

"No way....."

Crash-

Vibration rings again. The epicenter is obviously right below the mansion.

The two of them met each other's eyes, and then both of them quickly ran down the stairs.

Queueek!

After inserting several knife needles, the bantra caterpillar wriggled madly and let out a vomit-like scream. It's truly a mystery how a thing that doesn't even have a proper vocal organ can make such a sound.

Because of the rubber-like thick skin, the sword couldn't go very deep, but it struggled to die. Fluffy dust fell from the sturdy stone walls.

Leaving it wriggling as it was, Seongjin dragged Kenneth Diggory's droopy robe.

This guy, is he okay? He forgot the Aura flowing through his body and hit the back of the head as hard as he could, and he felt something unpleasant.

"Hey, don't get distracted there and come out here."

He said to the prophet who was sitting in a daze.

It looks like he still can't get out of the shock of almost becoming food for the caterpillar, but he still wanted to hurry up. If he got accidentally swallowed by the glowing caterpillar, this would be difficult. As it turns into a pupa, the channel will open.

The rest of the prophets had already been pushed out toward the corridor.

He winked at Jonathan, who stumbled up, and fortunately, he was quick-witted and quickly stepped out to help the fallen man. Of course, when he stepped on something like a wriggling tentacle, he was frightened and froze.

"You're okay. It's just like antennae or roots. It's not dangerous yet."

As if he was somewhat relieved by Seongjin's words, he carefully avoided the roots and began to pull out the prophet.

Well, the moment it turns into a chrysalis, it will become a monster tentacle that entwines and kills everything that moves, but if he tells them that now, it will have the opposite effect.

Fortunately, the clever prophet soon recovered from the shock and started walking on his own feet, and the party worked together to drag Kenneth Diggory out of the stone wall room.

"Now take this guy upstairs. Go and call my escorts."

Jonathan looked at him in surprise at Seongjin's words.

"Yes? How about the prince?"

"I have to do something with that guy first."

Jonathan made a very moved face, wondering what he was thinking about Seongjin's answer.

No, it's not like that. It's not what you think.

He could have waited for Sir Marthain and Sir Kurt to come here, but Seongjin decided to try his hand first.

Although the final nutrient supply to become a pupa was blocked, there was also a slight possibility that the caterpillar, feeling threatened, could open the channel while undergoing incomplete metamorphosis.

Above all, Hunter Lee Seongjin had never left a wriggling monster alive.

While Jonathan and another prophet supported Kenneth Diggory on both sides, Seongjin grabbed his sword and headed back to the stone-walled room.

"Uh, is blood flowing from Senior Kenneth's nose?"

"Didn't he get hit in the back of the head? Why did his nose bleed when hit from behind?"

"Could it be brain damage....."

It's dangerous here. Get out of here quickly, you guys!

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Crash crash crash-

The thick tentacles pop up here and there and knocks on the stone wall. The caterpillar, deprived of food and suddenly hit by a blade, switched to the maximum attack posture to exclude the enemy.

Boom.

Seongjin clicked his tongue as he quickly lowered his stance to avoid one of the tentacles that had been swung wide sideways.

If it was Seongjin in his prime, he would have closed the distance in a single step and smashed his core with a single punch, but in his current state, it was not easy to dig into the vicinity of the caterpillar. It is not easy to set foot properly thanks to the roots that have become more wobbly.

Seongjin, who hit a tentacle flying in front of his nose with his sword while turning his body sideways, slid backwards as if he was tumbling back while avoiding the tentacle that flew in behind him. After tapping and beating like this, a sense of crisis came over him that it might really be attempting an incomplete metamorphosis.

If he can only tell where the head is.

Seongjin frowned as he rolled to the side to avoid the successive tentacles.

It looked like chewed gum, but surprisingly, it also had a basic digestive system and nervous system. It has a mouth and eyes, and there is also a part that can be called a head. And in his back of the head is an important organ he needs to break first.

Bartosh. Its official name is the Bartolomeo organ.

It is a transforming organ of the nervous system that is commonly found in clustered monsters.

In the early days of the Gehenna Gate incident, there were times when its own research was actively conducted, such as dissecting monsters and analyzing specimens.

Of course, the research faded after they learned that there was no solution other than killing all the superhumans. It was also the cause that the intellectuals capable of systematic research died one by one.

Anyway, after it was known that the transparent coffin-like crystal found in the back of the monster was a channeling organ, the hunters first learned the location of Bartosh and how to break it when they first went hunting.

It was because the difficulty of hunting doubled when the demonic spirits launched a linked attack through channeling.

'For now, let's shave off the covered flesh as much as possible.'

Seongjin made up his mind as he cut off the two long-shot tentacles with one sword. If most of that rubber clay-like mass of flesh comes off, you will be able to tell where the head is.

Fortunately, the blade of the sword he was holding was quite good, so there was no great difficulty in cutting the outer skin of the caterpillar.

Of course, some of the knights' supplies were of good quality, but there was no way they could easily cut through that thick monster's flesh with just a simple piece of metal. This was possible because the blade was covered with Aura.

Seongjin didn't recognize it properly, but he was overlaying Aura on the blade as a trick to deal with the monster's spirit.

'Somehow, I think my cutting skills have improved compared to before?'

Is it the effect of formally learning swordsmanship?

While he was vaguely thinking about that, he was trimming the small roots of the caterpillar, when he heard urgent footsteps in the distance, and Marthain ran into the room.

"Your Highness!"

Marthain's eyes widened as he ran inside screaming vigorously. It was because the prince was swinging his sword as he hopped between things that looked like turbulent black dough.

Sir Kurt, who ran into the room after him, also found Seongjin and the caterpillar, and opened his mouth with a stupid face. His jaw dropped.

Seongjin ran quickly towards the entrance of the room. The caterpillar sensed a new intruder and threw out its huge upper leg with all its might.

Slash.

Fortunately, the movement of the tentacles was not very fast, so he was able to easily cut it before it reached Marthain and Sir Kurt. Seongjin blocked their way and warned them.

"Be careful not to touch that black thing. You'll be pulled towards its torso immediately."

In an instant, his body was pulled back in a roar. Marthain grabbed Seongjin by the hem of his robe and quickly pulled him backwards.

With a stiff face, he got between Seongjin and the caterpillar and drew his sword.

Sir Kurt, who came to his senses, also pulled out his sword and reflexively slashed one of the upper limbs.

"... What is that?"

"It's the caterpillar of Bantra Moss! It's a monster!"

"A monster? What is it? Is it different from seawater?"

It might be different? First of all, monsters don't exist in this world.

Just as he straightened his sword again and was about to run towards the caterpillar, a sudden strong grip grabbed his shoulder and his body swung to the side. It was Marthain who turned Seongjin around, but he had an ugly face that seemed like he would shout at him at any moment.

"What the hell are you doing here when something like that comes out?"

No, why do you think it's my fault, Sir Marthain?

This is unfair! This thing was raised by Kenneth Diggory! I don't even know where it came from!

Meanwhile, Sir Kurt shouted as he gallantly charged at the caterpillar.

"Is it okay to slash them all, Your Highness?"

"Ah! Watch out.....!"

Sir Kurt, who was running towards the center of the caterpillar while dodging the tentacles, stepped back in a moment of fright. A round mouth suddenly appeared in the center of his torso.

A large opening with two rows of hideous hook-like teeth quickly engaged, making a terrifying grinding sound. Snap!

Sir Kurt, who almost jumped into the caterpillar's mouth in an instant, muttered like a groan.

"Good lord....."

Marthain quickly ran to the side of Sir Kurt and cut down one of the tentacles aiming at him. In the meantime, the caterpillar's mouth disappears again into the black flesh, as if it had never appeared before.

Seongjin poked his head out over the entrance of the stone wall and gave a belated instruction.

"Sometimes a mouth protrudes from the middle of the torso! If you get bitten and it gets even a little bit of nourishment, you might turn into a chrysalis, so be careful!"

"... Is that a creature with something like a mouth, Your Highness?"

Marthain asked with a pale face.

What, are you surprised with the mouth?

Seong-jin suddenly became very curious about how they would react if they were asked to accurately find and destroy only the 5 cm diameter organ attached to the end of the central nervous system that passes through the caterpillar's larynx.

The caterpillar's resistance was persistent. It was noticeably slower than the first time, but still a large number of tentacles flew in nonstop.

Seongjin, whose body was itchy, tried to enter the room hesitantly, taking advantage of the confusion, but Marthain, who managed to notice this, glared at him with fierce eyes.

Sheesh. Okay, got it. He'll stay put.

How did Lee Seongjin, the last hunter of mankind, end up like this?

It must have been their first time dealing with monsters, but they were still considered advanced knights. Marthain and Sir Kurt quickly adapted to the indiscriminate attacks of the tentacles and wielded their swords skillfully.

Their swords had a distinct external air that could be clearly distinguished even in Seongjin's eyes, so the power itself was different from his clumsy swordsmanship.

With a sharp swing, three or four pupae were blown away, and the caterpillar's body itself, which was a short distance away, began to be cut apart.

However, it seemed that it rather aroused a sense of crisis in this monster. Seongjin swallowed, noticing that the caterpillar was

occasionally shaking as if it had been electrocuted. That's a signal to try incomplete metamorphosis!

"We need to quickly find and destroy his core! Sir Marthain! Sir Kurt!"

At Seongjin's cry, the faces of the two change into grotesque expressions.

Yes? Pick something out of that rotten dough and attack?

But he doesn't have time to elaborate.

"Can you deal one blow so strong that the outer skin is pushed out at once?"

It is difficult to distinguish because it is wrapped in a thick outer shell that is highly deformable, but once the outer layer is pushed out, that caterpillar also has a certain structure with a distinct structure.

If only the head was briefly exposed with a strong attack, Seongjin was confident that he could immediately smash the Bartosh. Of course, it would be perfect if the attack destroyed the core at once.

"Strong attack... you say?"

Marthain's face became serious. When he suddenly stopped moving, the quick-witted Sir Kurt started covering the caterpillar and Marthain by blocking it.

Whoosh.

As Marthain concentrated his mind, the blade of the sword began to faintly vomit sword blades. The Aura slowly rising from the blade seemed to become more and more distinct, and then the air surrounding the blade grew stronger.

Then, what slowly appeared was an Aura Blade that shone bright gold.

It shines brightly, embodying the blade of a clean sword that extends an inch longer than his sword.

He said that he was ahead of the Decaron Knight, and indeed, even among the imperial knights, those who had reached it were able to be counted by hand.

Holding that long golden sword, he took a step forward.

Slash.

For a moment, he swung it so fast that it seemed like there was a solid yellow line horizontally. It was a silent blow without even a sound.

Kwakwakwakwa!

Masain was holding the sword, but belatedly, a strong shock wave rushed in. The stone wall shakes as if it were going to collapse, and the fragments of the cut off tentacles are thrown here and there.

It was a great power comparable to Seongjin's fist in his prime. The thick outer skin of the monster is pushed back in an instant, revealing the outline of a caterpillar covered in a thin rubber film.

It wasn't just the skin that was pushed out. Marthain's attack cut off the caterpillar's hideous snout as well as about a third of its body at once.

Unfortunately, the long, horizontally cut sword narrowly missed the core. It must have been unavoidable because it was a sword attack wielded without a clear goal.

And Seongjin did not miss the light that began to flicker brightly from the side of his head. He drew his sword and ran towards the caterpillar's head.

"Your Highness!"

Seongjin jumped on top of the caterpillar's head, leaving Marthain's startled cry behind, and stabbed the blade of the sword precisely at the point where the body joint and the back of the head were connected.

The outer skin that had already been pushed back returned to its

original position and the flickering light was covered in an instant, but his long experience was able to accurately pinpoint the Bartosh's location.

Thump.

The familiar feeling of something like a hard coffin colliding with the tip of the sword was transmitted.

However, the depth of the attack was a little too shallow to completely destroy it in one blow. It must have been because the amount of Aura he was using was too small.

Today, Lee Seongjin loses face several times.

"Sir Marthain! Destroy its core!"

Crack.

Seongjin shouted as he pushed Aura into the sword and stabbed it a little deeper. I felt a crack in the Bartosh, but it was too soon to be relieved. In order to completely block the channeling attempt, you also need to destroy the core and completely get rid of it.

Fortunately, the caterpillar, which had part of its body blown away by Marthain's attack, did not completely cover the glowing core even though it was covered with an outer shell. Sir Kurt instinctively thrusts his sword down toward a faintly glowing spot within his torso.

Crack.

At that moment, the caterpillar started shaking like crazy.

"Your Highness!"

Screeeech!

Along with the voice of Marthain screaming, the agony of a caterpillar that vomits out that it is dying shakes the inside of the stone chamber.

Seongjin gave strength to the sword embedded in it and held on on top of its head with his teeth clenched. Will the Bartholomeo organ get destroyed, or the core completely deactivated first? He couldn't be a little bit off guard until it was completely silent.

Slither.

Something started to wrap around Seongjin's body. These are the roots of the thing that started to become active as the pupae progressed.

Beeeeeep. Its outer skin trembles with strange tinnitus.

Gurgle. Suddenly, the eyes of the round guy are exposed outside the skin, and those pupils are focused on Seongjin.

The sword-embedded Bartosh blinked.

The pale blue light confined to its core also flickers.

Blink. Blink.

And.

The caterpillar stopped moving completely at some point.

In an instant, like a lie, the surrounding is enveloped in silence.

"... Heuk!"

Seongjin let out the breath he had been holding back.

It was close. The channel was just about to open.

Ironically, it was the roots of the Bantra that were wrapped around here and there that supported Seongjin's body, which almost slipped due to loss of strength in his legs.

"Your Highness!"

"Are you okay, Your Highness!"

Marthain and Sir Kurt rushed towards Seongjin. In particular,

Marthain's face was completely white, and it looked as if he would run out of breath at any moment.

It's not worth the worry. Seongjin waved his hand at them frantically.

"I'm... Okay."

It was then that Seongjin's ears caught a strange sound.

[... Seongjin... Lee Seong...]

'.....?'

At first, he wasn't sure. Who in this world knows Seongjin and calls him by his name?

[Lee... Seongjin.....]

But really, somewhere, he hears a voice calling his name.

Seongjin looked around and suddenly looked down.

It is the Bartosh with his sword embedded in it. A monster's channeling organ with a hazy light hovering around it.

[Lee Seongjin.....]

Beyond the organ of the Bantra, where there was still a faint light, something was calling for Seongjin.

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"Your Highness!"

"Are you okay, Your Highness!"

The young prince, who was performing a feat of stabbing the monster body with a sword as if he were in a rodeo, exhaled.

"I'm... okay."

Kurt clicked his tongue. He thought he wasn't a normal human from the time he went to and from the gymnasium, but where did that persistence come from, sticking a sword in its neck until his opponent died?

Besides, look. Those calm eyes, as if that was nothing.

Anyone who sees him will think that he is an old war veteran who has mastered seawater subjugation.

Rather, it was Sir Marthain, the commander of the knights, who had a pale face while tearing off the unpleasant tentacles that were wrapped around the prince's body with his hands.

Where did all the momentum that he used to beat the resident knights go? Can that be solved by hand?

Kurt raised his sword and cut off several tough tentacles that were pulling the prince's body.

He doesn't know what happened, but it was settled anyway. That's what he thought.

So when the prince's body suddenly fell forward, Kurt didn't immediately realize what had happened.

"... Your Highness?"

Sir Marthain, who had accidentally received Prince Morres, who had suddenly collapsed into his arms, called out to him in dismay. His voice became desperate after examining the prince's condition for a moment.

"Your Highness!"

Sensing unusual energy, Kurt quickly cut off the remaining tentacles and knelt down towards him.

"What happened, Sir Marthain?"

"Sir Kurt....."

Sir Marthain's face, looking up at him, was blank, as if his soul had been drained.

"... His Highness is not breathing."

* * *

[Lee Seongjin.....]

It was a call he could never ignore.

[Lee Seongjin.....]

Before Seongjin could even recognize it, he responded to the sound.

No, rather than a response, it was just that his soul reacted to it automatically. As if he reflexively listen to every sound that calls him without being conscious of it.

Whoosh.

He feels a strange sense of floating, and his consciousness is quickly separated from reality. A dull sensation as if he is submerged in water and looking at the sky through a huge screen of water.

-Your Highness?

It seemed that Marthain's voice could be heard in the ringing ears, but it went away in an instant.

His vision suddenly distorted, and at that moment, his soul began to be sucked into something helplessly.

Uh... I, seem to have messed up?

Seongjin realized that his soul had left Morres' body. Compared to the fear of being exorcised by a high-ranking priest or the Holy Emperor in the past, it was a really futile ending worthy of a sigh.

So easily?

No matter how possessive it is, can the soul escape the body so easily?

Passing through the thick clouds and the warm fog at great speed, his soul was flying in the dark night sky before he knew it.

Music sounds from somewhere. The small notes that looked like a music box or a xylophone suddenly became five separate lines and began to stretch. Seongjin couldn't tell whether he was listening or watching.

[Lee Seongjin.....]

The faint voice calling him continues.

He doesn't even know how to get back to Morres anyway, so let's focus on what's right in front of him. When Seongjin decided to listen to his voice, the soul that responded to his will now began to run at an incredibly fast speed.

He flew like a shot through a cluster of stars. The stars twinkling in the distance start to grow long like the teeth of a comb.

Even though he was flying directly, Seongjin felt dumbfounded. It must be a lot farther away than it looks, but it stretches like this. He had no great knowledge of physics or astronomy, but if this was space, he was already flying at a speed far exceeding the speed of light.

After all, he don't need to study or anything. After death, everything becomes clear like this.

How much time has passed.

The last sparsely connected star disappeared, and now his soul was floating in an infinitely deep black space. Seongjin's soul trembled in instinctive fear that his existence itself would disappear.

It wasn't that there was darkness there, it was so black because there was nothing there. Was complete absence so piercingly cold?

If it had not been for the faint light that surrounded his soul, if it had not been for that call that seemed to be cut off, Seongjin's soul might have lost its strength and froze and shattered at any moment.

And there it was.

A small light that looks precarious like a candle that will go out at any moment.

[Lee Seongjin.....]

A small soul that now looked like a handful of dust was flickering red, occasionally letting out Lee Seongjin's name like a sigh.

That's right. There is no other person who called him by his name other than this one.

Seongjin, who felt a little pity for his ungainly figure that seemed to fly away at any moment if he blew it, carefully wrapped his hands around the demon king's soul.

Well, he doesn't have a body, so he doesn't know if it's okay to call it a hand.

[Lee... Seongjin?]

Suddenly, enveloped in unexpected warmth, his soul flashed a faint red light rapidly. The strange feeling was conveyed intact.

[Yeah.]

[Lee Seongjin?]

[That's right.]

[Really Lee Seongjin?]

You bastard, if you call me one more time, I'll throw you away.

As if his fierce will had been conveyed, the demon king's soul trembled for a moment. And then the next thing he spit out is this.

[Why are you here?]

What, punk? Is that what the person who called me here should say?

However, the feeling of crying came from the demon king's soul.

[You should call me there! What would we do if you were summoned here?]

[.....]

[We're doomed. Now we are done.]

Then why are you calling me incessantly? I was fine, and then suddenly flew away.

The Demon King sniffled at Seongjin's grumbling.

[I couldn't help it. This is a space of nothingness where everything is scattered in an instant. If it hadn't been for the barrier by the Holy Emperor, I would have disappeared the moment I flew here.]

He said that his spirit was kept alive thanks to the Holy Emperor. Seongjin nodded his head as he looked at the group of white lights surrounding him. Guess this was the barrier.

Of course, it was the Holy Emperor who blew this guy to this place, but now it seems that he is just grateful, so there is no need to remind him on purpose.

[Now, the only bond that holds my soul is you. So I had to constantly remind myself of your name by repeating it over and over again.

Otherwise, my soul would have been scattered long ago.]

[.....]

[I don't know how long I've been here either. The concept of time is also strange here.]

So he kept crying. The demon king didn't say anything, but Seongjin could feel what he had swallowed. Remembering the sorrowful cries he heard from time to time in his sleep, he felt a bit salty.

And surprisingly, the words that the demon king spat out one after another were apologies to Seongjin.

[Sorry. I didn't mean to bring you in on purpose.]

[Uh.....]

Seongjin didn't know what to answer for a moment. He thought this guy would just set fire to him and stick to him, saying 'I won't go alone, kuhuhuhu'?

However, the only feeling conveyed from the demon king is pure guilt.

In the end, Seongjin gave a rough answer like, "Oh, well," and soon shut up. The two of them wandered around in the dark space without speaking for a while.

Surprisingly, the immense fear of being weighed down by the emptiness that he felt when he first came here felt a little diluted just by having someone to share his thoughts with. Seongjin, who had been watching the demon king's soul occasionally blink in red light, suddenly muttered to himself.

[What will happen to Morres if I fly here like this?]

[Since the soul is gone, wouldn't he have died as it is?]

Aah, yes. He really is dead. He feels a little sorry for Sir Marthain and Sir Kurt, who followed him as an escort.

While he was thinking that, his heart became strangely calm.

The demon king seemed to feel the same way.

[Originally, it was going to be like this from the beginning. Our souls should have flown here wrapped in flames. It should have been scattered and died a complete death.]

[Oh. I see.]

He said that the Flames of Gehenna suddenly evolved and brought them to the Main World. At first, the memory of the demon flying to the void and talking about something is vague.

[We haven't completely left the Main World where Morres was yet. This place is similar to the boundary between the dimension and the void.]

No one was listening, but suddenly the demon king lowered his voice and whispered.

[I didn't come here, but in fact, the Main World Delcross belongs to is going to be in great danger soon.]

What does that mean all of a sudden.

Could it be that, like Sigurd District 34, the Gate to the Demon World will open?

However, the demon king's explanation was a bit serious.

[High-ranking demon lords and lords of the alien dimension are paying attention to this place. Occasionally, I feel the frightening eyes staring at Delcross intently.]

The demon king's soul trembled with fear.

According to his explanation, the souls of the owners of the gaze have such a high level of soul that even if they attract attention, their souls will be crushed flat. That was why he broke down and lowered his voice.

Had it not been for the barrier of the Holy Emperor, the demon lord's soul would have perished long ago just by indirectly feeling that gaze.

[I don't even know their names, and even if I did, I couldn't say it out loud. However, I do know a little about some high-ranking demon lords.]

According to the Demon King's explanation, it was like this.

Unlike the rulers of the alien dimension who open the gate like Gehenna and look for opportunities to invade directly, those high-ranking demon kings are said to enjoy spreading their attributes in that world and subtly infiltrating it.

Before the invasion starts in earnest, the entire world is trampled on and ruined.

And their nature was the real problem.

[They are the Lords of 'Famine' and 'Plague', and 'War' and 'Death', respectively.]

Oh. They sound like a lot of trouble just by listening to them.

Doesn't that mean famine, plague, war, and death are going to unfold on a large scale in this world?

And when the disaster swept through once like that, the next time the high-ranking demon kings and alien monarchs would directly open the gate and attack. What kind of total mess is this?

The demon king's soul shone brightly. If he had a body, it would feel like tilting his head.

[In fact, I've never seen so much attention focused on a single world.]

He knows very well that it is going to perish desperately as much as there is interest in it.

[When will the invasion begin?]

[Who knows? Because they are guys whose concept of time is very different from that of the human world.]

Seongjin got a little serious. It was only for a while, but it was a world he had been attached to while living as a Prince of Delcross, but he didn't want to let it perish like Seongjin's old world.

The faces of Sir Marthain, Queen Elizabeth, Edith, Amelia, the twins, Sir Kurt, and the other resident knights of the Pearl Palace pass by.

And Father, His Majesty the Holy Emperor.

Does he know about this?

[Come to think of it, that's what I'm wondering about.....]

Seongjin suddenly became curious.

[Isn't there definitely a God in this dimension? Why does God stand by such an invasion?]

Seongjin was originally close to an atheist in his world, but rather than saying he didn't believe in God, it was closer to not being interested in the existence itself at all. He would die too busy fighting monsters, so he was not in the mood to cling to something with no clear evidence.

Well, among his colleagues, there were devout believers who devoted themselves to prayer the more difficult it was.

But this world was different.

There is a certain proof of God called divine power, and there is the Holy Emperor called the representative of God.

In addition, Seongjin now realizes the existence of the soul, and he also learned about the beings who seem to be in an adversarial relationship with God.

At this point, it becomes rather difficult to remain a pseudo-atheist any longer.

[But why does the God who takes care of this dimension only look at those guys looking for opportunities?]

Seongjin asked the demon king a question, but the answer came from an unexpected place.

[It is because the Main God who takes care of Delcross is not a personal god, son.]

Yes?

Seongjin looked back and saw a form, wrapped in bright light, staring at him with arms crossed. The light surrounding him is spreading so widely that the souls of Seongjin and the demon king are buried in the light.

Suddenly, Seongjin realized that the cold that pierced his soul had gone.

[You said you wanted to study theology and philosophy, didn't you? You don't know anything at all.]

Uh.....

Why is this man here?

33

The boundary between the world of Delcross and the void.

In the depths of the darkness, where the void was so vast that all presence was crushed, a soul that boasted a most radiant presence suddenly appeared.

It was the Holy Emperor. It's the Holy Emperor... right?

Seongjin had to doubt his eyes for a while at his unexpected appearance – Although he couldn't be sure that he saw with his eyes because he was in a spirit state.

He was the same as the Holy Emperor that Seongjin knew. A calm face as always, a long white court robe draped casually like a cape in a comfortable outfit.

The only difference is that everything is wrapped in dazzling white light. The light was so overwhelming that the demon king's soul died again and collapsed into Seongjin's arms.

In addition, there is something like a golden crown floating above his head. It was an unusual crown with sharp golden thorns stretching out in a circle.

When he sees it shining brightly, he wonders if it is a halo or something.

Somehow, the Holy Emperor with a very holy aura appeared, and he was scolding Seongjin for not studying.

[You are the prince of the Holy Empire. Shouldn't you at least have the minimum knowledge of the Main God worshiped by the empire?]

In addition, this man, for some reason, his expression was more

diverse than usual. Looking at Seongjin, the expression of pity is revealed without filtering on his face.

Uh, is this really the time to nag?

[And if this happens, couldn't you call me on your own? It shouldn't have taken too long to find you.]

[That, I mean.....]

[I told you not to cause trouble. I don't know where you got that fearless attitude from... Tsk.]

He clicked his tongue. This man just clicked his tongue!

Normally, he had a poker face that made it impossible to know what he was thinking, but the Holy Emperor in his soul state was somehow overly honest in expressing emotions.

But anyway, Seongjin felt unfair.

[No, Father, Your Majesty the Holy Emperor. Even though I died suddenly like this, I still protected Delcross from the threat of demons! I stopped the Bantra Moss from rushing into the capital in droves!]

Right. At least, a gate incident was about to happen in Delcross.

At this point, isn't it worth taking pride in that he behaved shamelessly as a prince?

[That... Well done.]

The momentum of the Holy Emperor has softened a little. His gaze briefly turned to the trembling red soul fragment hiding in Seongjin's arms.

A disapproving look passed by, but he didn't say anything about the demon king. Seongjin, feeling pricked for no reason, hugged him a little deeper as if hiding the insignificant soul.

[That said, isn't it a problem that you left your body like this? Thanks

to that, I also had to leave suddenly, which became a very awkward situation.]

As the Holy Emperor slightly frowned, Seongjin asked in a puzzled way.

[What situation? Aren't you in the prayer room right now?]

Then he hummed. He pretends to clear his throat and averts his gaze.

This man, what are you doing right now, throwing away all your schedules?

Oh, come to think of it, isn't it just good timing? Seongjin thought.

When I asked if he could see my soul, he said, "Do you want to die?" But didn't I just die?

The last time he came and got caught in a storm, he was too flustered to ask, but Seongjin thought he should point it out clearly this time. It is clear that he obviously knows Seongjin's identity, but how long is he going to treat him as his own little son?

[That, Your Majesty the Holy Emperor. Can you tell me what my soul looks like now?]

[.....]

[How did you know I died suddenly? How did you find me so quickly after flying to the boundary of the void again?]

Even Seongjin, who had no concept of dimensions, could tell that the distance from Delcross to this place was unimaginably far away. There is no way that it would be possible to find the soul of Seongjin, who had flown on its own, by searching here and there blindly.

He stared blankly at Seongjin for a moment, then put on a sullen expression and kept his mouth shut.

What is it that you don't want to say?

It was then. The fact that the demon king, who was hiding in

Seongjin's arms, conveyed the feeling of terrible fear as if his breath stopped.

They're looking here.

[What the hell.....]

In an instant, the Holy Emperor's robe wrapped in light covered Seongjin's head.

Looking at him with a puzzled expression, not knowing why, the Holy Emperor turned his head and stared somewhere far away with cool eyes.

Is it too much for Seongjin to feel that his face looks rather pale, even though he is a soul?

[You've been here too long. It drew unnecessary attention.]

As soon as he finished speaking, Seongjin felt it too. A deep gaze that scans them somewhere.

It rides leisurely as if a bug is crawling on the skin, and each touch is as sharp as being stabbed with a sword. The weight of that awfully pure malice made him choke.

Is this the gaze of those high-ranking demon kings and alien monarchs? It was said that the soul would be flattened with just the gaze, but the gaze of monarchs of different ranks was so heavy.

Even though he was surrounded and protected by the light of the Holy Emperor, the touch was so vivid that he was horrified, and Seongjin was gnashing his teeth to control his trembling soul without realizing it.

[It's still one guy, but more guys will come soon. We can't delay any longer.]

In the words of the Holy Emperor, he felt a rare feeling of nervousness.

Seongjin realized. This person, he knew that this world was targeted.

[Go now. Don't worry too much about Marthain.]

The Holy Emperor raises the corner of his mouth, and puts his thumb and middle finger on Seongjin's forehead as if he were about to flick it. Seongjin instinctively prepared for the shock and grabbed the demon king tightly in his arms.

[Go back. [Morres].]

Snap.

* * *

Something like water droplets dripped down his cheeks. Huh? What is this?

Besides, why does his body keep shaking like this? Shake shake.

Kuek. It hurts! It hurts so much. Stop. Sto.....

"... Keugh!"

When something like a small scream leaked from Seongjin's throat, the shaking of his body stopped for a moment.

"Your, Your Highness!"

"Your Highness!"

Cough cough. Seongjin bent over and coughed several times.

What? His heart really hurts like crazy. He thinks it hurt less than this when he was kicked by a monster in the past and his entire ribcage collapsed.

He heard someone whispering cautiously next to him.

"Sir Marthain, isn't his ribs broken again?"

Uh, Sir Kurt? What's that? Again? Againn?

He thinks he just heard something he can never overlook?

Seongjin, who had wrapped his chest and rolled over to ease the pain for a while, finally lifted his head and looked around. The pain was so great that even tears welled up in his eyes, blurring his vision.

The place where he lay was just outside the stone chamber where he caught the caterpillar of Bantra Moss. Inside the entrance, you can see a black mass and tentacle roots that have lost their strength and have dried up and twisted.

And there were quite a number of people surrounding Seongjin who was lying down.

Sir Marthain, Sir Kurt, and one paladin he's never seen before.

And in the back, a group of people in shining silver armor.....

Among them, the paladin standing right next to Seongjin lowered his stance and raised his hand over his chest. He was a tall man wearing short armor and wearing glasses, and although his sharp eyes made him feel sorry for him at first, he seemed to have a very bad temper.

Soon, a white light seemed to wrap around his hand, and the chest pain subsided in an instant.

"How many times has this been, Marthain? You guys don't have a proper line. If you had done CPR twice, his ribcage would be completely crushed."

Okay. This is all because of Sir Marthain.

Wanting to say something, Seongjin looked up at him and was at a loss for words.

Marthain had a face that had gone out of his soul. He rolled up his sleeves to press on his ribcage and held his hands together, staring blankly at Seongjin.

He had been performing CPR for so long that he was sweating and breathing heavily, as if he had just sprinted through the gymnasium.

Above all, his face is a mess of tears or sweat. What the hell is that like for a grown adult?

Uh... If it's like this, what am I supposed to say?

I'm the one who had my rib broken, so why do I feel like I should apologize?

"Ahem, ahem....."

All eyes were drawn to the sudden sound of clearing coughs from behind.

Among the knights in silver armor lined up behind them, a man who seemed to be the leader took a step forward and opened his mouth to Seongjin's group.

"Now that the prince has woken up safely, would it be all right if we, the Knights of Saint Marcias¹, take it over from here?"

He was an elderly knight in splendid silver armor. His oddly angular forehead, sunken eyes, and thin mouth that looks a bit cunning catch his eyes.

Above all, his eyes. Those cold eyes that glanced down at Seongjin were too full of malice to say that they were directed at the prince of the Holy Imperial Family.

"The prince is the main suspect in this case. Therefore, he, like the other suspects, must go through a fair interrogation process....."

Is that something to say to the prince who died and came back to life?

As if Seongjin wasn't the only one who had such thoughts, Marthain's face, which had been expressionless until then, slowly began to look ugly.

"How dare you say this his face!"

Marthain growled at him with a grimly contorted face. Not only the old knight, but even Seongjin flinched at the eerie killing intent that spread in an instant.

Some of the knights lined up unwittingly reacted and pulled out their

swords. Schwing, Schwing.

Schwing.

Sir Marthain and Sir Kurt also pull out their swords while blocking Seongjin's way. In an instant, the air around them froze tight.

An volatile situation.

Fortunately, someone quickly intervened between Marthain and the old knight. It was the paladin who seemed to have a bad personality from earlier.

"Sir Durand."

He raised his hand slightly toward Marthain, immediately lifted his glasses once, and opened his mouth to the old knight. Perhaps because he was so tall, he looked down at the old knight, but because of his impression, he somehow seemed to look down on his opponent.

"As you know, all religious and legal issues that arise with Prince Morres are entrusted to the leader of the Knights of Saint Aurelion in the absence of His Majesty the Holy Emperor. This also includes the Heresy Court's right to investigate and prosecute."

The old knight called Durand replied with a dissatisfied face.

"Regardless of the legality of the exception, Sir Katrina is currently absent. Isn't she assisting with His Majesty's closed prayer?"

"And in Sir Katrina's absence, the authority is to pass to her lieutenant, Francis Argen."

"... What?"

The old knight's face crumpled terribly.

"Therefore, unfortunately, the demand to hand over the prince's recruits cannot be established in the first place. It is purely my prerogative to decide now whether or not to see him as a suspect."

Durand shouted in a fit of fuss.

"Sir Francis! You are not an Inquisitor, but a mere lieutenant, recklessly trying to infringe on the Heresy Court's inherent authority?"

"What....."

The young paladin laughed and spit out a magical sentence that could overcome any situation.

"This is His Majesty the Holy Emperor's command....."

"Such a cheeky bastard!"

The old knight's eyes were burning with anger. His hand went to his waist as if he were going to draw a sword at any moment, and Francis calmly searched his chest and handed out a letter.

"He said that it could come to this and told me to deliver it to Sir Durand directly."

Durand hesitates and accepts the letter. It was an enforcement official issued through the formal certification process of the administration. And in the official document, there was only one sentence written in a beautiful handwriting.

-Don't be too mean and wait for me.

Durand's hands trembled, but he couldn't carelessly throw away the letter. It was because on one side of the letter, there was even a large jade seal stamped on it.

"This... This is impossible! I will tell this to Cardinal Benitus right now!"

"Don't worry about that."

Francis said plaintively, pulling up his glasses. From Seongjin's point of view, he seemed to be on his side, but he was a talented person who looked very hateful even from his side.

"Without a single misspelling, an official document with the same contents should have already reached Cardinal Benitus by now."

"Kuaaaghh!"

Seongjin, who turned his eyes away from the old knight who let out a roar of anger into the air, relaxed his body and closed his eyes.

Oh, who cares. Settle it yourself.

First of all, too many things happened today.

'Hey, are you all right?'

[... Yeah.]

When he asked a question, a small response came back.

While flying back to Morres' body, he was worried that he might have dropped him, but fortunately, the demon king's soul seemed to have returned safely with him. Seongjin smiled a little relieved at the presence of a familiar soul that felt like before.

Rest a little for now.

When he wakes up later, he will ask him what his name is.

* * *

At the same time, in a slash-and-burn village in the corner of a mountain range on the west side of the continent.

The Holy Emperor, Nate, wakes up and was disappointed to find himself surrounded by a group of savage bandits.

'They really left me behind.....'

"Runing away, you bastard? Come on, fess up! Who the hell is behind this! Are you Asein's spy after all?"

"Is there a snitch here? If you don't fess it up, things won't look good for you, you bastard!"

A bandit grabbed him by the collar and pulled him up, tapping his sharp dagger on his cheek, threatening him.

Nate let out a quiet sigh.

T/N:

1. Changing it back from 'Holy Knights of X' to 'Knights of Saint X' because belatedly realized that's a more accurate translation. Sorry for the confusion.

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On the western side of the continent lies a long, rugged mountain range stretching from the south to the north.

This lengthy range starts from the border between the kingdom of Flanders and the Asein Republic, passing through Rohan, climbing northwards, and getting increasingly treacherous until it ultimately becomes the boundary of the habitat of the sea beasts.

In the past, it was called by various names like the White Eagle Range or the Blade Range, but now, the people of the continent simply referred to this colossal range as the 'Western Range.'

At the beginning of the Western Range, near the Flanders kingdom border, there existed a small flower village, established only a few years ago. It was a small village built by a minority of Flanders people who had lost their homeland during the war with the Carthago Republic and sought refuge in the mountains.

Recently, the village population ballooned to nearly a hundred as refugees flowed in from Rohan. Needless to say, there was a severe shortage of housing, supplies, and food.

The transformation of the little flower village into a den of bandits was almost instantaneous.

One reason was that many of the new refugees were former thieves who had fled from Rohan, being chased by the Rohan's suppression squad.

Coming down from the mountain with a few rabbits caught in his traps, having not had much luck with hunting, Aslan noticed a strange carriage parked in the village square.

'It's smaller than usual...'

Aslan asked the man standing next to him, "What did they steal this time?"

"I'm not sure. It seems to be a peddler crossing from Asein to Flanders."

"Ah, really... what are they all doing? This is already the nth time this month. What will they do if the Asein Archduke organizes a suppression squad?"

The man shrugged as Aslan scowled. "Well, what of it? It doesn't seem like a proper merchant, and would Asein really care? They say it was an easy score with no escorts."

Listening to the man, it seemed the peddler and his party were found by a search party scouting the mountain. With just one carriage carrying a sack of food, three prisoners, and two low-ranking mercenaries, they were stealthily slipping out of the old trade route, which merchants seldom use these days. The merchants and mercenaries, upon encountering the bandits, immediately abandoned the carriage and fled.

"There were prisoners?" Aslan asked, puzzled.

Why would a peddler be transporting prisoners across the border?

"They're all guys who received capital punishment. Sometimes, Carthago sells these guys for a cheap price. They put them in the dark mines and make them dig until they die."

The dark mines of Carthago were the absolute worst. It would probably be better for those guys to just die here.

The man said this, shook his head and walked away.

Sure enough, three men were dragged out of the carriage following the sacks of food.

One was completely disfigured with burn marks all over his body, making his face unrecognizable. Another had a hollowed-out eye socket and all of his fingers cut off. Seeing their horrific appearances, Aslan unknowingly furrowed his brows.

The last man, who looked relatively unscathed on the outside, had a dark brand on the back of his head visible above his loose robe. Even from a glimpse, one could tell it was a dreadful brand given by the heresy judge.

The mark of a devil worshipper.

In some sense, he was the worst condemned criminal among the three.

The three were transported to the leader's place.

'They'll probably check their background before they kill them.'
Thinking this, Aslan turned away from the square and left.

Aslan was an orphaned boy from Rohan. He did not know what his parents looked like, and as far as he could remember, he had always lived among a gang of thieves in Rohan. He didn't even know his exact age. From various information picked up from the gang, he could only guess that he was probably not older than 16.

In the rough and uneducated gang, Aslan was a remarkably standout boy. He was naturally calm, intelligent, and quick to learn. He learned various fighting techniques shown by the gang members and helped a hunter-turned-thief, learning how to set traps. One thief, a former village guard falsely accused and on the run, even taught him basic aura manipulation.

There were a few people in the gang who had bad luck and met the gang, but thanks to their useful skills, they survived. People like Seymour, the medicine man, or Gustav, the low-ranking priest. They generally held resentment towards the gang, but they were relatively kind to young Aslan. He soon learned to read and how to harvest medicinal herbs from them.

Not much later, Aslan, despite his young age, held an undeniable position within the gang.

He was the one who led the most companions among the fleeing thieves, setting out for the south early and successfully establishing his own power.

At first, Jerome didn't care much for young Aslan, but as he got to know the various talents that Aslan possessed, he began to grow fond of him. Gradually, he started seeking out Aslan more frequently for various matters. From preparing hangover remedies and simple medicines to organizing a list of stolen goods, there were many problems scattered around that were difficult to solve without Aslan. Among them, included discerning aura users.

He had been mentally preparing himself, assuming that they would be looking for him soon, and sure enough, the leader's confidant called for Aslan. By the time he arrived at Jerome's quarters, two corpses were already being carried out. They were the burned prisoner and the one missing fingers he had seen earlier.

At the gruesome sight of their completely battered faces, Aslan momentarily furrowed his brows before stepping into the shack.

"Those two bastards had their tongues cut out. They just made annoying noises, so I couldn't see any reason to keep them alive." Upon seeing Aslan's face, Jerome explained his unasked actions with an irritated face. Considering they were no longer in a state to work properly, their deaths were an expected course of events.

Jerome was a cruel man. His strength was as formidable as his towering physique, and his fist was quick to fly at the slightest provocation. His wife became crippled from being beaten, and his son became limp-legged after being thrown as a child. Presumably, it was Jerome who had smashed the faces of the two prisoners.

Naturally, Aslan's gaze drifted towards the third prisoner standing before Jerome. He was in a better state than expected. There was fresh blood at the corner of his mouth, suggesting he hadn't escaped being hit, but it was a relatively lenient punishment.

Jerome pointed to the prisoner with his chin and spoke to Aslan, "This guy is an apothecary. He used to be a priest, but was declared a heretic and tried after conducting research on the plague."

In other words, a useful person for our village. The third prisoner's survival rate had exponentially increased.

"Check if this guy is a trained aura user."

Jerome, despite his hasty disposition, said it with an icy demeanor.

Although he's been boldly robbing the trade top these days, Jerome is essentially a cautious man. Even with a prisoner with such a harsh brand, he does not completely rule out the possibility that they could be spies sent from Asein or Flanders.

Aslan approached the prisoner and examined him carefully. The man was taller than he appeared, and his frail body, wrapped in a loose robe, felt typically priest-like. He didn't appear weak, but it seemed difficult to assume he had received professional physical training. Above all, it felt as though the flow of aura around him had almost stopped, a characteristic of those who were extremely weak or bedridden.

"This guy is not an aura user. Rather, his aura is unusually weak for a living person."

Jerome nodded. "Well, if the body of a man who's been through a heretic trial is normal, that would be even stranger."

Aslan, thinking that his task was over and turning to leave, another order stopped him.

"See if his knowledge is really useful by taking him with you."

Ah, Aslan hesitated to respond. He wasn't exactly thrilled about the idea.

Jerome's order to 'take him along' essentially meant that Aslan had to take care of everything from food to sleeping arrangements for him. There was no deadline, and if the prisoner escaped by any chance, the responsibility would entirely fall on Aslan.

"Hmm..."

As he was hesitating to respond, a sharp voice rang out from inside the shack.

"Why bother? Just kill him, father."

A boy with a nervous disposition limped towards them. It was Jerome's son, Kaien, who had been unable to walk properly since he was thrown as a child by the man.

Unlike his robust father, the boy often victimized by violence had a somewhat twisted and frail physique. However, he strongly resembled his father's cruel temperament, and Kaien's face was always distorted with rage towards his surroundings.

Even now, his fierce eyes were full of malice as they roved over the prisoner.

"Why do we need two apothecaries? We already have this guy." He pointed to Aslan with his chin.

"Apothecaries are valuable personnel, Kaien."

Hmph. The boy snorted at his father's answer.

"Ah, father, think about it. Haven't we been robbing the trade top recently? Even if you're worried about the reaction from the Archduke of Asein, a perfect apothecary appears just in time?"

"Hmm....."

"Would you use him when it's creepy? Why do you keep him alive at risk?"

"He's been tried as a heretic and branded. Do you think he's a spy sent by Asein?"

"But why does he look fine to me? Isn't that strange?"

"That's my business, not yours."

"Ah, let's just kill him off. It's simple, isn't it?"

"Shut up. Get lost before I land a punch."

Aslan felt a headache coming on from the nerve-wracking argument between father and son.

Kaien, that bastard, was always hell-bent on killing everyone in sight. Jerome was no different, but Kaien's stubbornness was somehow provoking a sense of rivalry. If a third party was having such a headache over this, the prisoner whose life was hanging by a thread was just blankly observing the father and son's bickering.

"Uh, then I'll take this one with me."

Jerome, with an annoyed look on his face, didn't even bother to look in his direction and just waved his hand dismissively.

Aslan took hold of the hem of the robe of the prisoner, who had been standing still until then, and hurriedly left the shack.

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The prisoner followed along obediently, as led by Aslan. He was so compliant that Aslan couldn't help but suspect he was planning an escape.

Aslan sneakily glanced at him, but the prisoner's face was so impassive that it was impossible to read any emotion. Not even a trace of relief for being alive or anxiety about what was to come could be found. He had been through the infamous heresy trial; perhaps that had affected his sanity.

"Hey, you should be grateful to be alive. Jerome usually doesn't spare greenhorns who come flowing in like you. He's a man full of suspicion, you see."

The prisoner gave him a sidelong glance before responding. "Well, thanks."

It seemed he was aware that Aslan had willingly taken on this burden for him.

But what's this unexpected sense of camaraderie?

"At least the worst part is over, so as long as you do as told, you won't die so easily. Anyway, let's introduce ourselves. I'm Aslan."

"Nei....."

Nei?

"They call me Bart."

Ah, it's an alias.

Clank clank

The sound of metal clashing echoed loudly each time he moved. The prisoner had thick shackles on both arms, connected by a chain that wasn't very long. It seemed to greatly hinder his movements.

"We're going to have to do something about this first to get anything started....."

Wondering if it would be alright to remove the shackles, Aslan soon shook his head. What good would it do if he escaped? Branded as a devil worshiper, the prisoner wouldn't be able to set foot anywhere on this continent.

Their destination was a blacksmith shop at the edge of the Weapon Village. It had a small furnace and a worn-out anvil. It was questionable whether it should be called a blacksmith shop, but that's what it was.

"I can't remove these." The blacksmith, Max, rubbed his reddened nose as he spoke. He had crawled out from a midday drinking session. "These aren't the kind of shackles made to be unlocked. They've been welded together with heated iron."

Looking at the smooth wrists of the prisoner, the blacksmith cocked his head, "There's no scar from the shackles. Interesting."

Aslan grimaced. Expecting him to walk around the treacherous western mountain range with a shackled man? Who are they trying to kill?

"How can this not be done? I need to send him to pick herbs in the mountains starting tomorrow."

"Well, we could try heating it up in the furnace and hammering it....." Max, holding up a bottle of liquor, shrugged his shoulders.

"And what, risk losing his hands?"

That's a problem. He had asked him to work, but if he lost the ability to work, it would indeed be an issue.

As Aslan pondered alternatives, Bart, the prisoner, was staring blankly at his own shackled wrists. "Who would've thought they'd

resort to this....."

His tone suggested it was the first time he had properly noticed the shackles, despite having worn them all along.

His mental state really seemed unstable. The thought of having to manage him gave Aslan a headache unlike any he'd felt before.

For now, they decided to at least cut the chain connecting the shackles. Soon, Max picked up a hefty hammer from a corner of the blacksmith shop and began hammering the chain.

Bang, bang, bang

But the inebriated man's work was terribly clumsy. After nearly smashing the prisoner's hand a few times due to the hammer slipping, Aslan took the hammer away from him.

I'd better do it myself. I can't watch this nerve-racking scene any longer.

Bart, having calmly placed his hands on the anvil, watched their actions with a placid face. He was indeed a man without a sense of urgency.

Holding the hammer and aiming at the chain, Aslan concentrated. The chain wouldn't break with just a few hits, so even though he was a novice, he planned to use Aura to end it quickly. Although he hadn't received proper training and thus wasn't officially qualified, he could channel the Aura he had accumulated into his arm and weapon for a brief moment when he concentrated. Considering he had taught himself this, it was quite a commendable talent.

He took a deep breath and, with a swing at the moment of exhalation, he hit hard.

Screech A sound far different from Max's echoed in the blacksmith shop.

Screech, ding

After hitting it in the same manner a couple more times, one of the

chain links shattered with a crackling sound.

Ho-ho. Max, who had taken a sip of his liquor in the meantime, swallowed and admired. "Did you use it?"

Aslan nodded. Max already knew about Aslan's unique talent, as he often had to repair his weapon when Aslan accidentally broke it while clumsily flowing Aura through it.

Surprisingly, Max wasn't the only one who noticed.

"I didn't expect to find an Aura user in a place like this." Bart stood up, rotated his wrist, and then turned to speak to Aslan. It was the first time he had looked directly at Aslan.

"I wouldn't go as far as to say I'm an Aura user," Aslan responded a little awkwardly, inadvertently thinking of Bart's strangely chilly eyes.

"Just hammering away, and you recognized that?" Max, the blacksmith, asked as if amazed, and Aslan silently nodded his head. "Remarkable. This kid pulls off these tricks once in a while, but you're the first one in this village who's realized what he's done."

Then he whispered to Aslan, "What did this guy do before?"

"He was a former priest and a devil worshipper, now an apothecary."

The blacksmith belatedly discovered the mark on the back of Bart's neck and clicked his tongue. "A divine punishment, I suppose. Your life won't be easy." He patted Bart's back as if to console him, shook his bottle, and disappeared into the forge.

From then on, the two wandered around the flower village. It was already too late to do anything else, and it was better to let Bart, who would be living with them from now on, get acquainted with the village structure.

It was also necessary to build some rapport with the villagers. As the village was made up of rough bandits, it was best to avoid the unfortunate incident of Bart being considered suspicious and getting stabbed while wandering around alone.

The villagers were gathered in groups, setting up drinking games or throwing daggers, and chattering. Some of them were also loudly bragging about their plans to raid the regular trade caravan soon.

Although they stared at Bart fiercely, as if to pick a fight as he passed by, they quickly lost interest and turned their heads upon seeing Aslan. This was because they were well aware that Jerome, the boss, appreciated the young boy's talent.

"Do you see the high cliff over there? That's the boundary of this village."

Aslan, who had been living alone since leaving Rohan, felt a little excited, even though explaining this and that was actually tedious.

Bart turned out to be a better conversation partner than expected. Although he did not show a strong reaction to Aslan's words, he had a unique atmosphere that gave the impression of listening carefully.

"If you follow the trail up there, you'll find abandoned fields. They say it used to be a farm just two years ago, but it was completely abandoned when Jerome and his gang settled here last year. I tried to use at least a part of it, but I couldn't dare to start a fire on the mountain alone. Oh, by the way, have you ever farmed before, Bart?"

Bart shook his head.

Well. Although there were black smudges here and there, he basically had a skin that seemed as if it had never seen sunlight before, clean. His hair was also messily growing out but strangely enough, it seemed to be well maintained, with a good texture.

An air of dignity, something that couldn't be completely concealed by his shabby robe, subtly seeped out, leading Aslan to speculate whether Bart, before being judged, might have been a high-ranking clergyman.

"Do you want to try farming?"

Right. Above all, his tone was quite heavy. Even though he didn't look that old.

Aslan shrugged his shoulders in response. "Well, more than that, I've been thinking that I want to live off something other than thievery. The truth is, this place is also precarious because the village is growing too large, and the frequency of the raids is decreasing. At some point, a suppression force will hit here too."

"....."

"But although I think so in my head, I don't actually know how to live that way. I don't know any other way to live because I've been with the band of thieves since I was a child. Still, when I was a child, I tried to do other things, like learning how to hunt and gathering herbs, but the more I learned, the more I got involved with the band of thieves."

"... I see."

"Also, I don't like robbing and killing. The people in the band of thieves said that it was too unfair that only we were being robbed, so we were giving back to the world. But if you think about it, the dead merchants didn't do anything wrong to us, right? So I think I feel guilty. Gustav always told me to live according to my conscience."

"....."

"Ah, Gustav is a priest I used to know. He got caught up in an extermination squad and died."

Thinking of Gustav made Aslan's nose tingle strangely. Aslan, rubbing the bridge of his nose, momentarily wondered why he was even sharing this story.

Meanwhile, Bart, who had been silently listening, looked a bit serious. "Even if you're not familiar with something, you tend to adapt once it hits. It seems there's not much time, so how about going down the mountain now?"

What? Time? Aslan cocked his head. "Well, it's not like I haven't thought about it, but as long as Jerome is here, it will be difficult. Some of the original villagers from this flower village ran down the mountain last year. Do you know what happened to them?"

"....."

"They were arrested by the guards of Flanders and immediately executed."

That's right. It is a difficult task for naive people who have only been digging the ground and living their whole lives to suddenly switch to being thieves at the command of the bandits who came from the outside. Eventually, a few who resisted led their families and secretly went down the mountain.

When Jerome heard the news of their escape, he showed no reaction. He just sneered.

Amazingly, as soon as they arrived near the village, they were arrested by the waiting guards and beheaded on the spot. The reason was that they were heinous criminals, and among them were children who were merely sucking their fingers.

They were not even given the chance to clarify their identity, let alone a moment to comment on the bandits occupying the flower village.

So, Aslan had been suspicious. He thought there might be someone in Flanders's guard who was in cahoots with Jerome. The fact that Jerome was boldly looting the upper echelon seemed plausible enough.

"Now it seems like we won't be able to get away forever. But since I came here, I haven't directly mingled with the looters. Jerome seems dissatisfied with that, but well, it's not like he's so desperate that he needs to borrow the hands of a kid like me. I'm good at hunting, you know."

"Is that so."

"Yes, it may be difficult to completely wash my hands, and I may someday die at the hands of the extermination squad. But while I'm alive, I want to live uprightly."

'Ahahaha. I'm saying all sorts of things to someone I've just met.'

Aslan, feeling somewhat embarrassed, scratched his head and looked up at Bart. He was taken aback for a moment when he saw this stern-faced prisoner looking at him with a slight smile.

Although it was somewhat faint, it was definitely something that could be called a smile.

"You have quite exceptional thoughts for your young age."

Subsequently, a hand lightly came up to Aslan's head.

Pat, pat.

"Uh....."

Aslan didn't know what to say. It felt like he was being treated like an ignorant kid, but it was a compliment, so it wasn't exactly unpleasant. Above all, when was the last time he was treated so purely like a child by an adult?

Aslan, for some reason, engrossed in strange feelings, let Bart's hand be.

And soon afterwards, he was hit in the forehead by the iron chain hanging from the handcuffs.

36

By the time Aslan and Bart had returned to the village square, it was already getting dark. Night comes quickly in the mountains.

"We need to start gathering herbs from the morning tomorrow. We should have at least some results to show to Jerome, so be prepared to hit the mountain early."

Bart was staring pensively toward the top of the mountain.

Good grief, what an emotionless man.

"So should we rest for now? While I find you a place to stay, you can stay in my cabin."

As Aslan, who was leading the way to his dwelling, stopped in his tracks, spotting a figure approaching them.

It was a thin woman with a staggered gait, her face not clearly visible due to the fading light. However, seeing her oddly twisted left arm, Aslan realized who she was.

Marta. Jerome's pitiful wife who suffered daily abuse.

Upon a closer look, she had a face that suggested she might have been extraordinarily beautiful in her youth, but her harsh life in the village and Jerome's violence had aged her beyond her years.

The dark circles under her eyes and her somber expression made her look like a long-term patient who had just recovered from an illness.

In a thin trembling voice, she asked Aslan, "Hey, Aslan. Have you seen my Kaien?"

"Ah, I'm sorry, Marta. I haven't seen him."

"He went out with Jerome. Didn't you hear anything when you came to our house today?"

Aslan seemed to understand why she was anxious. She must be thinking that Jerome has taken Kaien somewhere and is beating him again. Aslan didn't care what happened to the miscreant Kian, but he felt sorry for Marta, who was worried about her son. As he shook his head apologetically, she bit her lip as if about to cry and walked away from them, staggering.

Aslan, unable to take his eyes off her for a while, murmured, "Poor woman. She was brought here in her youth by Jerome and ended up living with him. She's been beaten her whole life. When Jerome loses his temper, it's really no joke. She can't even leave because of her son, her only child..."

However, Bart, who had been staring at the retreating figure of Marta for a while, made an inexplicable remark.

"She's not worried about her son."

"...?"

"You're in danger too, Aslan." Bart turned to him and threw an unexpected question. "Have you ever made an enemy of a boy named Kaien?"

"...What?"

Aslan blinked.

An enemy? Wasn't that guy just universally hated by everyone?

Come to think of it, didn't he always give Aslan a particularly nasty glare as he walked by?

"I'm not sure. Why do you ask all of a sudden...."

Aslan, who was asking in confusion, suddenly shut his mouth because of the chilling sensation that overcame him. It seemed as if Bart's eyes were emitting a strange glow in the darkness. His pupils, which he had thought were a clear gray, now flowed with a strange silvery

metallic gleam.

"If you really need to go up that mountain tomorrow, you should be careful and avoid the usual routes."

"....."

There was not even the slightest intention for him to argue back, like asking, 'On what grounds do you, a newcomer to this village say such things?'

It was a strange sensation.

The spine-chilling feeling of standing in front of someone who seemed to see through everything about him. A nauseating feeling settled deep in his core, as though he'd received an order he could not possibly deny.

So the boy could only swallow and nod in agreement.

The next morning, the two of them woke up at the crack of dawn and set off for the mountain.

A little bothered by what Bart had said the day before, Aslan decided to explore beyond the abandoned fields, a place he usually didn't go. As he led Bart through the village square and up the trail to the fields, he felt unusually piercing stares.

".....?"

When the puzzled Aslan turned around, the men who had been staring at them turned their heads and pretended to be busy with their own work. Most of them were part of Jerome's bandit crew that had come from Rohan.

'...What's going on?'

Although they didn't say anything to them and were only staring, it felt suspicious, but he had no choice but to ignore it. Trying his best to ignore the uneasy premonition, Aslan quickened his pace. He needed to hustle to fill his gathering quota while exploring a new area.

As he climbed the unfamiliar mountain trail, Aslan was a bit worried. He had just started working with a new companion, and if his harvest was less than usual, Jerome might be angry enough to kill him to death.

However, that was merely an unfounded fear.

Bart was like a ghost when it came to finding herbs. Strangely, whenever he stared intently at a place, the vicinity would reveal a habitat of valuable medicinal herbs.

Did he have a good sense of smell, even the scent of herbs? Just like a hunting dog?

Aslan, who had been prepared to scour the whole mountain, gaped in disbelief.

The problem was that he was barely any help with the gathering itself. That's because whenever Bart tried to touch the herbs, his heavy shackles and iron chains crushed all the herbs nearby.

And it wasn't just the herbs that suffered. Any slight movement of Bart's hand would leave a deep bruise on his skin due to the thick cuffs. Looking at the quickly scratched marks and densely bruised wrists, Aslan clicked his tongue.

"I'll gather the herbs, you just sit over there."

At his words, Bart slumped down under the shadow of a tree with a gloomy look. It was a little funny to see someone who didn't even blink an eye when Jerome was killing people in front of him or when a blind hammer was flying around his hand, look so deflated.

'Anyway, how on earth his wrist was fine before?'

Fortunately, because the time to find the herbs had been significantly reduced, it seemed that Aslan could gather enough quantity even on his own. With a little more leisure, Aslan initiated a conversation with Bart while busying his hands.

"Bart, you mentioned before that you studied plagues, right? Did you belong to a certain school of thought?"

It was a story he had heard from an apothecary he knew before, Seymour. According to him, among pharmacists, there were some who were interested in the plague itself, so they formed a Plague Society and conducted activities.

The Plague Society had several traditional schools of thought, and the most radical one was said to have undergone a heresy controversy a few years ago, leading to the execution of all its members.

The Demon's Plague Society. Aslan speculated that Bart might have gotten that mark because he was associated with that radical school of thought.

"Were you part of the Demon's Plague Society?"

"Not the Demon's Plague Society, officially, it's full name is Kshantara Plague Society."

Bart replied in a nonchalant tone. He was staring blankly at something with his chin on his knee, but considering his lack of focus, it seemed more like he was lost in thought rather than observing something.

"The Society has always had its share of heretical controversies, but I don't think there's a single society that would get away after digging through all their plague research records in the first place. What brought them down was the internal rift among their members."

According to him, the decisive evidence presented at the trial came from research papers from within the society. it was not uncommon for radical debates to take place within the organization, and two members who had fallen out and had a grudge against each other accused each other.

Well, what a stupid turn of events.

"It was a society that did a lot of good work, and in the end, all the valuable research records were burned. It's a shame."

It seemed somewhat nostalgic, but apparently, he wasn't a member of that society.

"After that incident, most of the Plague Societies went underground. It would probably take quite some time for them to come back to the surface."

"Hmm, I see."

After that, they continued to exchange various stories. Mostly about the herbs they were gathering, and as Jerome expected, Bart was proven to be quite a valuable asset as an apothecary. Even Aslan, who thought he had learned properly from Seymour for a long time, felt that he paled in comparison to the knowledge Bart had about herbs.

"The first pharmacist I learned from was more of a traditionalist. He dedicated his life to revealing the effects and cultivation methods of herbs."

Bart explained in a quiet tone, "It seems that the apothecary who taught you was taught by the Adelheid school, which focuses more on connecting symptoms of the plague and the efficacy of medicine concisely, rather than the knowledge of herbs themselves."

He said that it's also a great school of thought, largely consisting of young apothecarists in the capital. Seymour must have been a better apothecary than he thought.

As the conversation drifted, and before he knew it, it turned into stories of Aslan's past.

Bart listened attentively to Aslan's monologue, especially interested in the story about deer traps commonly used in Rohan. He even murmured admiration at the story of how he'd taught himself to use aura after picking up the basics here and there.

Then, as Aslan was pouring out a tense situation where he was on the run from Rohan's suppression troops,

"Aslan."

Bart suddenly interrupted his speech and called his name.

"We need to return to the village now."

What? They hadn't gathered enough yet?

The midday sun hadn't even reached its zenith yet. However, Aslan quickly gathered his herbs and tools and stood up because Bart, who had gotten up and was looking towards the village, looked serious.

For some reason, there was an undeniable force in the words he said with a serious face.

Moreover, while immersed in the story and busying his hands without rest, they had gathered more than expected.

When they hurriedly moved and reached the village square, a fair number of people were gathered, buzzing.

They were gathered around something, muttering. As Aslan approached, they hardened their faces and glared at him.

"Aslan."

Jerome, who was standing in the middle of the square, called out to him.

"You returned sooner than usual. Did you happen to go near the waterfall today?"

Aslan swallowed hard. The waterfall to the east of the village was a place he often visited to collect silk butterfly grass. There were small traps set up nearby, so he likely should have checked there at some point today.

"I came back early because I needed to check the traps near the waterfall. Today, I wandered behind the fields in the north."

"I see."

As Jerome dryly replied and looked around, a few men nodded. Among them, Aslan could identify the faces of those who were particularly observant of him before they climbed the mountain this morning.

'What's this?'

An ominous feeling crept up on him.

Jerome, who had been scrutinizing Aslan's face, moved and issued orders to the men in the square.

"Scour the area around the falls for signs of the spies. Report back to me on any suspicious behavior today."

"Yes!"

"Yes, boss."

As the majority of the men in the square dispersed, Aslan could finally discern what they had been buzzing about.

It was a corpse. A conspicuously flamboyant member of Jerome's raiding party.

His name was Conrad, if he remembered correctly. He recalled the man boisterously declaring he would raid Asein's regular supplies just yesterday, heavily intoxicated. The man was dead, a dagger stuck in his back, his eyes wide open. One of his ankles was broken and twisted at a weird angle, and all his nails were missing, as if he had been tortur*d.

A spy.

Jerome had definitely said there was a spy.

His body shivered as if cold water had been poured down his spine. He stood in the square, trying to gather his thoughts, when Kaien, Jerome's son who hadn't yet left the scene, hobbled over to him. His usually fierce saembagan¹ eyes were exceptionally bright.

Step by step. Eventually, Kaien, who had hobbled right next to Aslan, twisted his mouth into a smirk, and whispered into Aslan's ear.

"...you're a sharp-eyed bast*rd."

T/N:

1. Sambaegan is a Korean term used to describe eyes that have the sclera (white area) visible on the left, right, and bottom. You may have heard eyes like this referred to by their Japanese name, sanpaku, in the past. Traditionally, sambaegan were thought to represent a physical, physiological, or spiritual unbalance. These days, however, they're recognized for what they are—mysterious, unique, and just as beautiful as any other. Eg: BTS's Taehyung. (cr. Koreaboo).

Martha could never forget the first time she locked eyes with the child.

The young one wrapped in a fur coat stared intently at her without shedding a tear. The child's obsidian eyes seemed so deep and dark, they were like mirrors reflecting not a glimmer of light, as if they were devouring her reflection from their glossy surface and even sucking in her soul.

For a moment, Martha barely restrained the impulse to throw the fur coat away.

"...you're one sharp-eyed bast*rd."

Aslan felt frozen, unable to move a muscle. Kaien's words carried a great deal of implication. He was the one who caused all this, and Aslan was his target.

Could his words be true? If so, how and why?

As Aslan's face hardened, Kaien sneered and walked past him, with a limping gait. Aslan could only watch, mouth shut, as Kaien moved further away from the square. Aslan and Bart were moved to Aslan's shack under the watchful eyes of several bandits. This indicated Jerome's suspicion had not yet cleared.

"We need to check the traps we set..."

"Are the traps the problem right now? Read the room, bast*rd."

At Aslan's words, one of the bandits spat out a glob of spit and locked the door from the outside. It was a clear sign of confinement. Well, it's fortunate that they weren't locked in the makeshift jail used as a village barn.

Drained of strength, Aslan slumped down, leaning against the wall and slid onto the floor of the shack.

"Bart."

Bart, who seemed deep in thought, turned to look at him.

"Did you ask Kaien yesterday if he harbored any resentment?"

"..."

"Do you think this could really all be Kaien's doing?"

Bart's eyes glistened with a strange silvery glow as he looked at Aslan in the dark shack.

"Don't let that kid's words sway you. It's all calculated provocation."

Calculated?

Staring blankly up at Bart, he began to explain in a calm voice.

"The first is to make you doubt him and work hard to clear your own suspicion. As for you, you don't know whether he's responsible or not, and there's no way to confirm it. But if you know someone is framing you, it's easy to fall into another trap by reacting rashly out of a sense of crisis."

"Ahh..."

Indeed. Aslan was contemplating whether Kaien was trying to frame him, and whether he should pursue Kaien out of the shack.

"The second reason is to observe your reaction and see to what extent you are aware of the situation, and whether avoiding major suspicion was pure luck or not."

"..."

What was Aslan's reaction then? Thanks to Bart's warning, he had a sense that something was about to happen, and thus had honestly responded to Kaien's insinuation.

Now, Kaien must be sure that Aslan knows something about the matter.

"...He's a smart kid. Perhaps he had this situation in mind when he persuaded you to take me."

What?

"Persuade... you say?"

As Aslan's eyes widened in surprise, Bart casually tilted his head and responded, "Didn't you say Jerome was a suspicious man? Even when you arrived, he had a stronger intention to kill me. It was the kid's insistence that changed his mind, wasn't it?"

...Was that so?

"Whether it's you or me, if one of us is suspected of being a spy, it works out for him."

Aslan realized that he knew nothing about Kaien.

How did he perceive him until now?

The son of Jerome and Martha. The boy who became a cripple from Jerome's abuse, pouring his rage onto the world. A boy who wanted to kill everyone in the world and who spewed hate at every opportunity. A boy whose existence was nothing but a nuisance to everyone.

But what if every aspect of that behavior was calculated?

"Eh, I mean.... Isn't that too far-fetched?"

Although he tried to brush it off with a hollow laugh, Aslan himself did not sound convinced. If Bart's words were true, then what was Kaien's purpose in behaving this way? No, could he gain anything from this behavior?

Aslan racked his brain for a moment but couldn't think of anything. After all, he couldn't fully comprehend Kaien's words, let alone guess his complicated intentions!

Arrrrrgh.

As Aslan was wildly tousling his hair, Bart glanced at him for a moment before walking over to one side of the shack. He leaned against the wall and closed his eyes.

"These things will sort themselves out with time. You'll be flustered soon, so it's best to rest and save your strength."

He did seem a bit tired.

Aslan instinctively sensed the aura around Bart, but it was still at the level of a dying patient. It was surprising that he had been able to move around the mountain with him since morning with that level of aura.

Ah, speaking of which.

"If there's time, should we treat the wounds first?"

Aslan hurriedly stood up and began gathering medicine bottles from the shelf. These were salves to prevent wounds from worsening and to help bruises heal faster. They were all made by Aslan himself, according to Seymour's special prescription.

Even just trying to move his hand, his wrist felt ragged. It might be better to put something on the inside of the handcuffs. He had just attempted to move his hand when he noticed his wrist had become chafed. Perhaps it would be best to pad something on the inside of the handcuffs.

At first, Bart didn't understand what was going on, merely observing Aslan's actions, but as Aslan approached with a medicine bottle and clean cloth, he finally seemed to understand what was happening.

"Ah, if it's about that...."

He tried to dissuade him belatedly, but Aslan was quicker, grabbing his handcuffs.

"....?"

Aslan, who had been absentmindedly fiddling with the cuffs, widened his eyes in surprise. Bart's wrists were smooth, as if they had never been bruised.

"What?"

He looked at Bart's face, then at his wrist, and then said again.

"What?"

Hmm. Bart averted Aslan's gaze and hid his hand beneath his long robe. "Didn't I mention that I was a priest before becoming an apothecary? It's natural for someone with divine power."

"But, Gustav didn't have this kind of ability?"

Despite being a lower-ranked priest, Gustav was quite a potent wielder of divine power. But even he couldn't recover so quickly without praying fervently and using his divine power. No, even then, it wouldn't have healed this cleanly in an instant.

Besides, hadn't you lost all your divine power while being judged for heresy?

The mark of a demon worshiper was not a regular mark.

A mark indicating that one has been stripped of all blessings from the Lord, and even lost the right to salvation for their soul. An eternal punishment from which one cannot escape, even in death. It was not called the worst punishment and extreme penalty for nothing.

"The Lord pities and takes care of even His lost young believers in such a way."

Aslan's face twisted.

Does that even make sense? Suddenly preaching heresy, you demon worshiper.

"Just to confirm, you aren't a spy disguised as a prisoner...right?"

"...I'm not a spy, but...."

"But?"

"...."

"Ah, seriously! What did I get myself into with Jerome!"

'Just like that. Maybe I should go and poke Jerome about all this.'

For a moment, Aslan glared at Bart with a scowl, then soon let out a sigh, and started wrapping the piece of cloth he brought around Bart's wrist. Bart quietly observed and let him do his thing as Aslan wrapped the cloth thickly around, layer by layer.

Finally, having meticulously tied the knot, Aslan tidied up the medicine bottle, grumbling, "It's better to heal quickly without leaving any scars. But it wouldn't look good to others either."

If someone witnessed a bruise disappearing so quickly, they'd immediately suspect him as a spy. It seemed Bart hadn't considered this, his eyes widening briefly before he nodded.

"Right, thank you."

Aslan suddenly felt strange. He had heard a similar expression of gratitude yesterday, but he felt a subtle difference in its warmth today.

"So...you really aren't a spy?"

"...No."

"The only one who could be a spy is that bast*rd, boss. No doubt about it." A rough-looking bandit growled, rolling up his sleeves.

"He's definitely the one who killed Conrad! If we just get rid of that demon worshiper, everything will be sorted out!"

"He only arrived yesterday. And one of the bodies we found has been dead for at least three days." Jerome waved his hand dismissively, looking annoyed.

"Damn it, why are you making this so complicated!"

"Right, boss. There's nothing wrong with killing a suspicious person in the first place, right?"

"It's weird that he suddenly showed up in the mountains. And it's also weird that he purposely came through the trading route that merchants rarely use, right?"

As his followers' agreement with the man began to increase, Jerome's gaze changed. "Or maybe someone wants to pin the blame on him and get rid of him? Or maybe there's a rat amongst us who needs to shut him up."

"....."

The atmosphere in the hut froze in an instant.

Jerome was a formidable leader. He was so competent that, prior to Rohan's punitive forces sweeping the mountains, he pre-empted by rallying his men and demonstrated his formidable power by migrating south. As a result, his men followed him without any hint of hesitation.

However, he was as suspicious as he was competent. And those who were even slightly suspected by him never lasted long in the band of bandits.

"...Could it be that damned Aslan's doing?"

A bandit, who had been keeping a wary eye, cautiously opened his mouth.

Two bodies had been discovered near flower village the previous night. After midnight, the search party returning to the village found the violently tortured bodies to the east of the village and reported it to Jerome. Those guys had been holed up in the brothel for days, drinking themselves into oblivion after robbing the upper echelons a few days ago, and the village hadn't even noticed their absence.

Jerome and the bandits thought of Aslan first when they saw the bodies. He was the only one who usually roamed the eastern mountain, hunting and gathering medicinal herbs as an excuse. And there had been ominous rumors lately that there were signs of

organizing a punitive force from Asein, or that Asein had already sent spies before the punitive operation.

However, Jerome, who had been about to immediately catch and kill Aslan, hesitated due to a snide comment from Kaien, who was teasing from behind.

-Why would that bast*rd do it? Does he have the capability?

At his words, Jerome regained his composure and started to ponder. His habitual suspicions started to creep in.

Come to think of it, why would he do that? Was it something he did alone? If he was killed out of anger right now, wouldn't it leave them without any clues?

So Jerome ordered his men to keep an eye on Aslan's movements. If any decisive evidence or suspicious-looking guys appeared, they planned to take their time, catch the guy, and force all the concealed facts out of him. But today, a new body was found.

Apparently, a dead subordinate was found rolling near the waterfall where Aslan often went, with a dagger stuck in him. The bloodstains on his back were still not dried. However, at that moment, Aslan was seen wandering somewhere completely different. The case was now at a dead end.

"It's got to be him, hasn't it?"

"Didn't he also survive alone in the previous band of bandits? That's suspicious too. Maybe he's colluding with Rohan's punitive forces....."

Leaving the murmuring subordinates alone, Jerome sunk into thought.

Although he was too angry to think yesterday, he could not rule out the possibility that someone who knew where Aslan usually went tried to frame him.

If so, who could it be? Kaien, his son who disliked Aslan, came to mind first.

But yesterday, Kaien ended up dissuading Jerome from killing Aslan.....

Jerome's eyes turned towards Kaien, sitting with his fat face at the back.

Just then, the door of the hut was suddenly flung open.

"Boss! Boss! It's a disaster!"

One of the haggard-looking subordinates rushed towards Jerome and, panting heavily, began to spill out words hurriedly.

"From the cliff, Mrs Martha fell off the cliff, and her condition is....."

".....!"

Jerome sprung up from his seat with a stern face.

38

Martha hailed from a rural town in Rohan, known for producing high-quality grapes.

Her beauty was quite renowned in the area, and the townspeople even speculated that she might soon become the mistress of a lord and live a life of opulence. That was, until a band of bandits transformed her village into a desolate wasteland.

Martha became the woman of Jerome, the leader of the band of bandits.

Though she was unexpectedly forced into a marriage she hadn't chosen, she soon adapted to her new life. Whether laboring under the hot sun in the lord's vineyard or living as the wife of the gang's leader, there wasn't much difference in the hardship she had to endure.

Jerome, despite sometimes losing his temper and resorting to violence, generally cared for the beautiful Martha. However, another misfortune soon struck her. At a time when she was heavily pregnant, she was punched in the abdomen by a drunken Jerome. She collapsed, vomiting blood. She regained consciousness only a day later, but by then she had already miscarried.

Seeing her sitting in the cabin in a daze, Jerome awkwardly watched her. Not long after, he brought her a baby wrapped in a small blanket and dropped it in front of her. It was a handsome baby boy with soft red hair and obsidian-like black eyes.

Martha could never forget the moment her eyes first met the baby's.

The infant, swaddled in the blanket, stared at her without crying. His black eyes, deep and dark like they could reflect no light, seemed to consume the reflection of her own sorrowful state, even seeming to

suck away her soul.

It was terrifying. So very terrifying.

Martha felt an immediate impulse to throw the baby away, but a vague fear that the child would retaliate somehow left her paralyzed.

"He's... beautiful," she managed to say, tears streaming down her face as she smiled. Jerome, failing to realize that her tears were born of fear, not joy, looked pleased.

The baby, named Kaien, grew rapidly.

The few women in the village envied Martha as they touched the pretty face of the child, who looked like a porcelain doll. Jerome, too, was satisfied with the quiet child who hardly cried.

The only one who felt uneasy was Martha, who spent most of her time near the child.

Whenever she couldn't feed him on time or catch him when he stumbled while playing, his black eyes would gaze at her emotionlessly, causing her heart to clench with extreme fear.

Whenever a drunken Jerome raised his hand towards Kaien, Martha would throw herself in front of the child, desperately trying to shield him from the blows. The fear of something terrible happening to her from the child if she failed to protect him filled her with baseless anxiety.

Was she going mad? She often questioned her sanity whenever she saw the innocent face of the sleeping child.

Was it because he wasn't her biological child that she couldn't love him enough? She wondered if she was unjustly hating and fearing the intelligent and observant Kaien, who had taken the place of her unborn baby.

However, her anxiety soon turned into reality.

One day, while she was away doing laundry with the other women, Jerome, who had returned home early and sober for once,

unexpectedly struck the child. That day, Kaien was thrown against the hut's wall, severely twisting his left knee. Despite the severe injury, which made it impossible for him to walk properly again, Kaien silently stared at Martha as soon as he opened his eyes. His gaze was chilling to the bone.

The next day, a drunken Jerome came home and began to severely beat Martha. It was an unprecedented level of violence. Although his subordinates and the neighboring women eventually pulled him off her, Martha's left elbow was completely ruined that day.

It could have been a coincidence. But when she opened her swollen eyes, Martha came face-to-face with Kaien, who was smiling at her for the first time.

* * *

"I wonder how much he has figured out, huh, Mom?" Martha repeated Kaien's words in a daze.

"I thought that if I sent off an attractive lure, he'd naturally start searching from familiar places. What did I miss? Maybe I should have just left Dad alone as he suggested yesterday?"

Staggering. The path up the cliff was treacherous.

"But if he dies too soon, won't the suspicious Dad unnecessarily start poking around elsewhere? Killing Aslan so easily made me feel nauseous. So, I wanted to buy a day more, but I guess I was too greedy."

Tears flowed down her cheeks uncontrollably. Regardless of Martha's will, her feet faithfully moved towards the edge of the cliff.

"That's why I need you, Mom. If you do this right, everything will be resolved."

She had imagined that her difficult life would someday end, but never in this way...

"I guess you were useful at least once, Mom."

Remembering Kaien's face, smiling at her for the second time, was the last thing she did before her foot hit the edge of the cliff.

* * *

Bang.

Startled by the brusque opening of the door and the rough men barging in, Aslan, who had been dozing against the wall, quickly got up. Bart was already standing, watching the intruders.

Before he could even ask what was happening, one of them commanded with a stern face.

"Get ready. Someone fell off the cliff."

Fell off the cliff? The tall cliff to the west?

That couldn't possibly end well.

That was what Aslan thought, but the intensity in the atmosphere from the men who pushed their way in was far from normal. It seemed that the fallen one was quite important.

Quickly gathering a few trauma medicines, painkillers, and bandages, he headed out of the hut with Bart.

When they arrived at the bottom of the cliff, quite a number of people had already gathered around.

Before he even got to the patient, Aslan realized the person was beyond saving. The patient, whose limbs were twisted in all directions, lay immersed in a pool of their own blood. The smell of blood filled the air.

Only when he got closer did he recognize the person was Martha. Jerome, with his stern face, was quietly looking down at her who was laying there in such a horrific state.

Feeling the silent pressure, Aslan hurried to Martha's side and knelt down.

But no matter how hard he thought, there was nothing he could do. Her skull was shattered as if it had been crushed, she was still breathing, but it didn't seem like she would last long. Her pupils, already out of focus, were flickering randomly.

Bart, who had quietly come up next to him, handed him a small pouch from the herbs he had brought.

After looking at Bart's face once, Aslan took the pouch, struck the flint, and a small flame caught. The pouch filled with medicinal herbs began to burn slowly, emitting a heavy medicinal scent.

"...What is that?"

At Jerome's stifled voice, Aslan answered, "It's a herb with analgesic effects. It will help relieve the pain."

"....."

And they silently stayed by her side.

After some time, her breath completely stopped and her pupils dilated. Jerome closed Martha's eyes with his own hands and kept his hand on her eyes for a long time without saying anything. When he finally opened his mouth, his voice was utterly somber.

"...Who found her?"

"Hans from the search team. He was off duty today and was chopping wood..."

"Lock him up in the barn."

There was a gasp from the men. Hans, who was pale, rushed to Jerome and fell to his knees, trembling.

"Boss, I-I alerted everyone as soon as I found her! Why am I..."

"Then tell me, who pushed Martha off the cliff."

"...What?"

Ignoring the stunned Hans, Jerome spoke coldly, "If no one pushed her, then you're the culprit."

"That can't..."

"What the hell are you doing?"

He slowly stood up and scanned his men. Some of them, noticing his rage as if he was ready to kill someone, held Hans, still in shock, and hesitantly backed away. Jerome, who had been glaring at them, then looked down at Aslan, who was sitting by Martha's side. His gaze was so fierce that Aslan froze like a mouse in front of a snake.

"So-called healers are utterly useless."

Spitting out his words as if he was chewing them, Jerome turned and left his spot.

Those left at the bottom of the cliff were all at a loss, simply staring at each other's faces. Regardless of the truth of the accident, they were now unable to predict where the wrath of that filthy-tempered leader would strike next.

Aslan was also slowly pondering Jerome's last words, when suddenly the sound of someone weakly collapsing onto the ground echoed. It was Kaien. The boy was trembling all over, his face pale as if he had seen a ghost.

But considering his state in the face of his mother's death, Aslan simply thought, 'so that human waste did have a human side.' However, he soon realized that wasn't it. Kaien's gaze wasn't directed at Martha, but somewhere else.

More specifically, standing next to Aslan...

"Bart?"

Bart and Kaien were looking at each other.

When Aslan unintentionally glanced at him, he was so shocked that he momentarily held his breath. Bart's face was always cold, but now it looked utterly impassive. Yet, a fit of intense anger was vividly

conveyed by him. Compared to Jerome's bravado, Bart's wrath brought a terrifying pressure that was on another level.

Perhaps it was due to his cold eyes. In those eyes, which reflected the afternoon sunlight in a peculiar silver light, lay a chilly coldness that seemed to freeze anyone just by being seen from the side. It was no wonder that Kaien, being on the receiving end of such a gaze, reacted the way he did.

After glaring at Kaien for a while with his sharp, blade-like eyes, Bart finally opened his mouth. His calm voice carried a supremely restrained rage, making Aslan shudder involuntarily.

"Was it your doing that the souls in the mountains ended up like this?"

"You... who are you...?"

"I thought I'd observe a little longer to see what kind of mishap would interfere and cause such actions, but this is ridiculous. What were you consuming? Do you understand the meaning of it?"

Consuming? What?

Confused by the nonsense, Aslan looked puzzled, but Kaien seemed to understand. His eyes widened in surprise, the whites glaringly evident, making him appear almost frightened.

"What, what... How do you...!"

Kaien began to retreat, sweating and faltering, still sitting down.

At that point, a few of the bandits finally noticed the odd atmosphere and intervened. They were the pillaging fellows who had been watching Aslan since morning. Rolling up their sleeves, they narrowed their encirclement with grim expressions. However, now that most of the bandits had left with Jerome, the remaining bandits, aside from the few looters, seemed confused about what to do with Aslan and Bart.

In the meantime, a wobbling Kaien managed to stand up and started to hobble away.

Now was their only chance. Aslan thought. Given Jerome's last mood, it didn't seem like he intended to keep Aslan and Bart safe any longer. And it seemed Bart was thinking the same way.

"Prepare yourself, Aslan. We have to leave this place now."

Thud. In an instant, Bart swung his arm and punched the guy standing right in front. No, it wasn't a punch... The guy's forehead was indented in the shape of a handcuff.

"...!"

"That bastard!"

"Kill him!"

The encircling bandits attacked all at once. And in no time, they were all knocked down by Bart, groaning on the ground.

Thud, thump.

It was truly a splendid blow.

It was hard to believe that a frail-looking man could knock down the bandits so effortlessly. He merely dodged the punches raining down like a storm, and sent a punch... no, a handcuff to their vital points along the shortest path.

What was surprising was that Bart did not seem to be using any aura at all. He was truly only swinging the heavy handcuffs and chains efficiently, smashing the bandits' heads. Soon, there were no bandits left standing at the bottom of the cliff. All were left with the mark of handcuffs imprinted on their heads like a stamp.

The power of the handcuffs, which could easily crush wrists, was indeed tremendous. Even Bart, the user, seemed surprised at the destructive power. He stared at his own wrist for a moment, then murmured in admiration.

"I thought it was just a bad joke, but this friend is much more prepared than I thought."

No, I don't know what you're thinking, but I don't think that's it, Bart.

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Having escaped the cliff, they ran towards Aslan's hut. Regardless of their intention to flee, they reasoned it would be best to bring along basic weapons and food. Above all, since all the bandits they were with had been knocked out, it would take some time before news of their escape reached Jerome.

Food rations and flour, flintstones, and various medicinal herbs. Even as he stuffed a few traps and weapons into his bag, Aslan's mind was in turmoil. Sooner or later, Jerome's subordinates would probably block off all paths leading down the mountain. Since they are likely in collusion with the village guards, entering Flanders was not an option.

Should they head towards Carthago then? Despite the longer detour through the mountain path, if they could get across safely, it might be the best choice. However, if the checkpoint guards discovered that they had come from Flanders, they would be treated as spies. Although currently at peace, Carthago and Flanders are still at war.

'...Is Asein Republic the only choice after all?'

No, the immediate priority was to survive from Jerome. They would seek refuge deep within the western mountains, where the search teams wouldn't reach.

How long would it take for a gap to form in the guards? A week? A month? Or would they have to wait for an entire season?

As Aslan busied himself with preparations, Bart, who had been quietly observing, offered some advice.

"You won't need that much. No matter how you look at it, the escape won't take more than three days. It's best to keep ourselves as light as possible."

".....?"

Aslan paused and looked at Bart with a hardened expression. Thoughts began to resurface in his chaotic mind, particularly Bart's words that he had previously ignored.

– It seems like we don't have much time, how about descending the mountain now?

– ...you'll be flustered soon, so it's best to rest and save your strength.

Did he know in advance that this would happen?

Perceiving the doubt in Aslan's gaze, Bart added with a smirk while scanning the outside of the hut. "I may not know this place well, but judging from the current chaos, I can hazard a guess. It seems like a punitive force will be mobilized soon."

...What? Why would he suddenly say something like that?

However, without any further explanation, Bart left the hut saying, "We've wasted too much time. We need to leave now."

Aslan, after removing some grain sacks and the heavy traps, hurriedly tied up his bag and followed Bart.

Though they hadn't known each other for long, Bart's words hadn't been nonsense so far. It wouldn't be a bad idea to keep in mind the possibility of a punitive force and escape as far as possible.

However, when Bart mentioned the punitive force, a familiar face came to Aslan's mind. It was Max, the old blacksmith, with whom he had formed a shallow bond since coming here. Max was a quiet old man who drank and had a kind demeanor. Aslan wanted to save him, at least.

"I may not know much about Max's past, but here, he's just a blacksmith."

Would the impending punitive force take that into account?

Considering the innocent Seymour and Gustav, who were confined in

the previous bandit group, were brutally killed by Rohan's punitive force, it was highly likely Max wouldn't survive if left here.

There were countless reasons why they couldn't take him.

Jerome might have already released his men into the mountains under the guise of catching spies. Given that situation, running away with an extra burden was practically impossible.

Max was slow and couldn't climb the rugged mountains. He was an old man who knew nothing but alcohol, and there was a chance he might already be drunk and fallen asleep in the blacksmith shop.

Jerome's men were in their prime, experts at fighting and pillaging.

On the other hand, what about their own side? A handicapped half-man and a prisoner shackled with heavy cuffs. Even though the prisoner turned out to be stronger than expected.

Instead of giving a response, Bart looked into Aslan's eyes and asked, "...Won't you regret it?"

"....."

Aslan hesitated. He knew that depending on his answer, both he and Bart could be in danger. Logically, he had basically declared that he was ready to die. But Aslan had developed an inexplicable trust in Bart. He had this strange belief that if he really wanted to, Bart would somehow help.

Moreover, if it was completely impossible, wouldn't Bart have told him so?

Aslan once told Bart that even if he were to die soon, he wanted to live honorably while he was alive. If they left an innocent, weak, and good-hearted old man and ran away, he would probably regret it for the rest of his life.

Looking straight into Bart's eyes, he nodded strongly, "Yes, I won't regret it."

For a moment, a faint smile appeared on Bart's face, as if recalling an

old memory.

Thud. With a light tap on Aslan's head, Bart turned around without another word.

Unfortunately, when they hurriedly arrived at the blacksmith's workshop, old Max was completely drunk.

Hiccup. Seeing the old man, who couldn't even recognize his visitors with his eyes half-open, a look of defeat appeared on Aslan's face.

'...Was I wrong after all?'

However, Bart walked past him with long strides, and placed one hand on the swaying old man's head. Soon, a bright light seeped out from his hand, wrapping around old Max's entire body.

Whoosh.

"Uh... Mom?"

Old Max's eyes, which had been bloodshot, suddenly returned to normal, and widened in surprise.

"Huh? My hangover is suddenly gone? Huh? My back? My chronic knee arthritis?"

Ignoring the old man who was still confused, Bart started walking toward the path leading to the mountain. Aslan, who had been following him, quickly pulled on old Max's arm and spoke urgently.

"I'll explain later, for now, just follow us. We don't have much time."

"Hold on, let me grab my liquor bottle....."

Although the old man was flustered, Aslan ignored his words and pulled his arm strongly. This wasn't the time to accommodate the old man's drinking habits.

Fortunately, sensing the tense atmosphere, the old man seemed to realize the seriousness of the situation and followed them without any further objections. Seeing that his pace was not slow, it seemed

his claims of no longer having chronic arthritis weren't unfounded.

Bart occasionally stopped to gaze at the empty air, then quickly determined a direction and walked briskly. His stride was unhesitant, unusual for someone who hadn't been in the flower village for very long. They managed to enter the deep forest without encountering any mountain bandits, making their way down a secluded path.

Beep!

The sound of a horn echoed from behind. It was the emergency horn, rung in the flower village whenever there was a major incident. It seemed their escape had been discovered.

Immediately, the entire village was in uproar.

Shouts. Murmurs. Another horn.

The group held their breath and moved away from the village at a fast pace. After some time walking along a small path, one of the search party members burst from the bushes with a sword. It was their first encounter with an enemy.

"Aha! You were here! But where..."

However, he couldn't finish his sentence. Bart, as if he knew of his arrival beforehand, swung his fist without even looking at him.

Thump. The bandit, with a clean hit to his nose, fell powerlessly and disappeared into the shrubs.

Bart stopped again and stared into the void. This time, he changed his course, walking down a path that wasn't really a path. It seemed as if he was gauging something as he moved forward, but Aslan couldn't fathom what he was seeing with those eyes.

Not long after, they encountered another search team consisting of two people. This time, the battle ended before the men could open their mouths. This was because Bart, who suddenly darted out, took them down with swift punches.

Thump, thwack. His movements were extremely efficient, not

wasting a single moment.

Old Max's mouth fell open in shock.

"Eh? So, what did that guy used to do?"

Well, he used to be a priest and a demon worshipper, and also an apothecary, but I don't even know anymore.

Bart changed his direction once more.

From then on, they didn't encounter a single bandit and were able to climb the mountain until late in the evening. Considering that the search parties should have spread across the entire mountain, it was almost miraculous.

They tore through their rations and walked without rest. Occasionally, the tired old Max would start to drag his legs, but every time that happened, Bart would approach and pour his divine power into him, rejuvenating him.

"Oh! My old ailment, gout?"

The old man's face brightened instantly. His usually hunched back was now straightened.

Somehow, he seemed a bit younger. It must be my imagination, right?

Bart also shared his divine power with Aslan a few times, and Aslan felt the tension in his muscles relax and a surge of energy course through his body. Aslan broke into a cold sweat. Is this what divine power can do? There's no trade-off, it seems like a scam.

In the distance, they saw small torches moving around the foot of the mountain. The search had intensified with the setting of the sun. Fortunately, they had enough distance, and as soon as they crossed one mountain ridge, they couldn't see the torches anymore. Soon, everything was shrouded in darkness.

They walked a little more along the dark mountain path led by Bart. It was deep into the mountains, a place even Aslan had never been

before. Just like a lie, a small cave appeared, and only then did Bart stop. His face was etched with unmistakable fatigue.

"We should rest here for today."

Aslan quickly prepared a camp. He gathered nearby leaves and dry moss, spread them out, and laid down the thin blanket they had brought. The three of them huddled on the blanket. The night in the mountains was chilly, but being pursued, they couldn't afford to light a fire.

Thankfully, thanks to the generously bestowed divine power, Aslan and old Max felt healthier than they had in a long time. Aslan didn't hesitate to wrap the only thick blanket they had around Bart. Bart seemed utterly exhausted despite having energetically beat up the bandits all day, and his exhausted body still looked frail. Without a word, he wrapped himself in the blanket and closed his eyes, quickly falling into a deep sleep.

"...What on earth is happening? And what's this about a punitive force all of a sudden?"

Just in case Bart might wake up, the old man lowered his voice and murmured. Aslan had followed Bart's words without much thought, and thus he had nothing particularly to say to him.

"I don't really know either. Hasn't there been a rumor lately that Archduke Asein is organizing a punitive force?"

However, old man Max tilted his head in confusion.

"Wasn't that just some nonsense Rodrigo was spouting off by himself initially? About a month ago, he was going around blabbering about the Asein's punitive force and spies or something, and then suddenly, everyone in the flower village started talking about it. But was there any truth to that rumor?"

Rodrigo started this talk?

Aslan furrowed his eyebrows and fell deep into thought at the unexpected words from the old man.

Rodrigo was a refugee from Ortana, and reportedly, he was one of the bandits who joined Jerome's gang after establishing himself in the flower village. He was more active than anyone else in wreaking havoc under Asein's rule recently, but why would such a person worry about a punitive force?

If Asein's punitive force was really just a baseless rumor, then where did the punitive force Bart mentioned come from?

Aslan turned to look at the person who might have all the answers, but he was sound asleep, not even making a sound with his breathing. The boy scratched his head.

"Well, do you think I know? Anyway, if we keep going this way, we should cross over to the Carthago border. I'm not sure if we'll be able to pass through the checkpoint, but if we succeed, we can completely break away from the bandits."

"...I see."

The old man nodded his head.

"So, we're finally leaving this place."

"....."

In the dark cave, Aslan couldn't see old Max's expression, but he felt a slight lump in his chest at the hint of regret in the old man's voice.

In order to conserve body heat, the boy and the old man sat a little closer together and soon fell asleep side by side.

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The flower village, filled with bright torches burning late into the night, seemed as if a festival was being held. Except that the torchbearers were murderous bandits.

"We've divided into teams and spread out for the search, but their tracks remain elusive. Judging by their probable direction of movement, it seems they're heading towards the northern gate of Carthago, but we can't be certain."

"From the very beginning, it wasn't easy to track them as they deviated from the path..."

Jerome, with his cold face, was listening to the report and murmured out his words. "We've sent out all our search teams, and you're saying we've yet to encounter even one of them?"

"One of our search teams was attacked, boss. But not much time had passed since they fled, so they're likely far from that location by now."

"We also have a missing member from one of the search teams. We're suspecting he may have been attacked too..."

"It's hard to find traces in the dark. Even if we were to deploy trackers, it would have to be after the sun rises tomorrow."

Rodrigo was standing next to Jerome, listening to the report, then he glanced at a corner of the hut.

Compared to his usual demeanor, Kaien was quietly sitting there, holding his head. To anyone watching, he looked like a young son despondent over his mother's death. However, Rodrigo, who had known Kaien rather well, was aware that he was not the type to be so concerned with such matters.

For some reason, the boy's current state didn't seem normal. And his suspicion was accurate. Ever since Martha had died at the foot of the cliff earlier, Kaien was suffering from severe headaches. That suspicious devil-worshiper had done something to the boy.

'My head hurts...'

Kaien bit his lip.

He was simply trying to completely devour Martha's soul, which he had been feasting on for a long time, before she died. The soul of the dead didn't taste good, after all.

[Eeehhh, Kaien—]

[Why me! Why me! Why me!]

[Aslan, Aslan, Aslan, Aslan...]

Sounds of strange cries from beyond the mountains could be heard. Sounds only audible to Kaien in this place. Ordinarily, these fools' wailing was somewhat amusing to him, but now it was only intensifying his headache.

The scattered soul fragments strewn across the mountain were the remnants of his unfinished meals, poor things that had died before he could fully devour them. He had resolved not to waste such resources again, but an unexpected intruder had interfered.

'What was that thing...?'

He initially thought it was just an ordinary person, but the soul that faintly revealed itself in front of Kaien was shrouded in an extraordinary light. Kaien had never seen a light so brilliant and overwhelming.

And from the moment it revealed itself, Kaien was tormented by strange tinnitus and severe headaches. Even the attempt to interfere with another person's soul resulted in overwhelming nausea.

As the boy was groaning in a cold sweat, Rodrigo cautiously approached him. He was one of the souls Kaien had been voraciously

devouring recently.

His weakened soul had already become a puppet, obediently following Kaien's orders. Unlike Martha, who was sensitive, Rodrigo was too dense to recognize this sense of incongruity himself.

"...Go to the Carthago gate, Rodrigo."

Kaien commanded without even looking at Rodrigo's face.

Regardless of their escape route, they would eventually have to pass through the gate of Carthago. With a booze-addicted old man amongst them, they wouldn't be able to hide in the mountains for long.

"Kill them all."

Rodrigo trembled involuntarily at the strange madness flowing in the boy's triclops. It was a fear that had been engraved deep into his soul without him even realizing.

"Kill them all, Rodrigo."

* * *

Aslan woke up early at dawn.

The reason was that he heard what seemed like a soft conversation next to him.

"...Yes, have they arrived? You must've struggled to keep up with the time. Let Enrique know the meeting point too."

"So, how's Morres doing?"

"That was a bit premature. Was there a need to rush?"

What are they talking about?

"That underground thing, I guess. Seeing that he tried to use it immediately after I left, it didn't seem like an important piece to him."

"...No, it's not that I intentionally avoided it..."

"...Sorry, I didn't run away because I didn't want to play chess."

Ah, this was Bart's voice. But he was not conversing, but rather, talking to himself.

"Alright, let's stick to this. For the time being, let's play chess twice a week..."

"...I mean, it's not that I don't want to..."

He really doesn't seem to want to. His voice was becoming more and more strained.

Aslan opened his eyes and inadvertently called him.

"...Bart?"

The sight of him sitting, leaning against the cave entrance was visible. He was undoubtedly alone, but who had he been talking to?

But with his sleep-riddled, blurred vision, something unusual caught his eye. There were two forms wavering in front of Bart, as faint as mist.

Ghosts? Pale pink and light blue shadows...

Aslan blinked, and suddenly those strange shadows had disappeared. Rubbing his eyes again and looking, there was only Bart at the entrance of the cave.

Had he seen something nonexistent due to fatigue?

But something captured Aslan's attention more than the ghosts he saw in his sleep-addled state, and it was Bart's face. The face of Bart, who was silently staring at him, seemed strangely unfamiliar.

Aslan hesitantly asked, "Uh, Bart. Was your hair always that color? It seems a bit darker..."

Even under the dim morning light, his hair, which Aslan had thought

was dark brown, definitely seemed darker than yesterday.

His face also seemed slightly different. Before, his features were clear and handsome but gave a somewhat vague impression, but now, his features seemed more distinct and somehow better? Huh?

The only thing that hadn't changed was the silver-gray iris that occasionally shone with a strange gleam.

Bart, at Aslan's words, tugged his hair and examined it from side to side, then nodded. "I've been here for a while. I suppose my synchronization rate is gradually increasing."

Synchronization rate? What's he talking about?

As he blankly stared at him, old Max, who had been squirming behind him, opened his eyes and yawned. "Geez. Sleeping outside at this age. But somehow my back doesn't hurt in the morning, it's bearable."

He didn't seem to feel anything strange about Bart. Perhaps because the changes were too subtle?

Aslan shook his head on his own, Bart got up and dusted off his robe.

"It's a race against time now. They will eventually chase us to the Carthago portal, so our goal should be to get to the portal as fast as possible, without worrying about leaving traces."

So they had been mindful of their tracks until now. I thought we were just running away blindly?

When Aslan gaped at him, Bart lifted one corner of his mouth.

"If they try to track us by the book, they should get lost a bit."

Well, shall we get going?

Soon, a waterfall of divine power poured over the two men's heads, announcing the forced march ahead.

Surprisingly, they were able to reach the well-maintained passageway

by midday. They had crossed the tough western mountain range in a single day, taking an old man with them. Of course, it was the end of a hellish march, chewing rations while walking, and constantly overlaying divine power.

Although their bodies kept recovering, they were still exhausted, and it was a schedule that greatly drained their mental strength.

In a few hours, following the passageway down, they would reach the Carthago portal. Relief crossed the faces of Aslan and Max.

"It's too early to relax. If they've been riding horses through the well-maintained passageway since yesterday, they could catch up."

Even Bart, who said this, looked pale.

Aslan looked at him with a somewhat worried expression. The body, which was still not activated by aura, was anxiety-inducing, never knowing when it could collapse, and the cloth beneath the handcuffs that had been swung around since yesterday was already soaked in blood here and there. Of course, if the cloth was untied, the actual arm would be just fine.

More than anything, was it okay to continuously pour out so much divine power like that?

Bart walked with a trudge along the roadside, and upon reaching a large rock, he sat and spoke, "We may be pressed for time, but we need to wait for our point of contact here."

"Point of contact?"

"Isn't it impossible to sneak out of the gate?"

Ah. Aslan and old Max's expressions grew grave.

The fact that they had been trying hard to ignore until now. Even if they safely arrived in Carthago, how would they, with their identities uncertain, get through the gate?

Fortunately, it seemed Bart had some kind of solution. With a nonchalant tone, he muttered into the air.

"This guy better not be too late....."

Just as he said that, someone suddenly swooped down in front of them. It was spooky how the person had appeared out of nowhere on the open thoroughfare.

He was a man clad in dark attire, and except for a long wound stretching from his lip to his chin, he looked like a demure young man similar to a scholar.

The man, after taking a quick glance at the retreating Aslan and old Max, approached Bart and knelt down on one knee.

"Your Majesty."

He seemed to know Bart.

Your Majesty? At this unexpected form of address, Aslan was frozen in place, but Bart cracked a faint smile.

"My senses have become dull, I didn't even know you had arrived, Enrique."

"It's No.21, Your Highness."

"....."

As the man responded bluntly, Bart, feeling something unusual, shut his mouth.

Sure enough, the man soon started pouring out his complaints in a hard tone.

"What the hell is going on here? Do you know how surprised I was to hear that you ordered me to investigate the top and the Flower Village, and then the next night you suddenly showed up at the Asein Branch? Why didn't you just wait there like you did before, and I'll take it upon myself to bring you news? What the hell was so urgent this time?"

"Well, sorry about that, Enrique. For some reason, I had a bad feeling about this....."

"It's 21, Your Majesty. Thanks to you, the central branch of the guild in the capital is now in complete chaos! You give a pile of complicated and difficult orders, then just disappear like that, how the heck do you expect the people working underneath you are supposed to do?"

"Well....."

"Is that all? What about your notice to rendezvous from across the border? Even the fastest messenger in the continent can't move like that! Even though I had to gallop my horse without proper sleep from Delcross to here for the last three days, do you know how much....."

The man trailed off. Despite his blunt and simple tone, there was a vividly felt, rising anger that was not fully suppressed within it. Aslan merely blinked, watching the two.

Bart, too, seemed to have picked up on his intense resentment. He tentatively reached out towards the man's forehead, and then a bright light emerged from his hand, making the man's tired eyes appear refreshed in an instant.

But what the man was focusing on was something else. He grabbed the handcuffs that had come close, then looked alternately at the blood-soaked bandages and Bart's face, asking.

"What is this?"

"When I woke up in Asein, it was like this. I was confused at first too, but it turns out to be quite useful for hitting people in emergencies."

The man's expression turned strange.

"Don't tell me this was filled to be used as a weapon?"

"...Hmm."

Bart's face visibly darkened.

"Tell the head of the Asein branch to express any complaints verbally."

"I'll try, but I'm not sure. Isn't this a complaint to come and listen in person since there are so many grievances?"

"....."

"Now that Your Majesty can't use an aura, who else could cut only the handcuffs with an aura blade, without cutting Your Majesty's arm in this area, other than him?"

At his blunt words, Bart, surprisingly, lifted his head with a slightly brighter face.

"I had been considering something. I felt sorry to ask that young boy, but....."

Then, Enrique, or 21, looked sharply at him.

"I can guess what you're thinking. Cut only the handcuffs, and the vein of the arm will naturally attach itself. Or, even if the arm falls off, it can be reattached. Is that what you're going to say? Sorry, but I can't cut this lump of iron with one strike."

"No, rather than that....."

"Don't tell me you want me to just cut off the arm. I won't do it."

"....."

Wow, the range of thoughts is indeed different when one has superhuman healing ability.

Listening to their conversation, Aslan, who had been watching from the side, unconsciously swallowed hard and thought so.

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Enrique, or rather, the man who called himself No. 21, had already finished preparations for the group to pass through the Cartago gate.

He had hidden a small cart in the bushes a little distance from the rendezvous point, filled with various trade goods and provisions commonly carried by peddlers. Outfits for the group to change into, as well as official identification badges issued in Asein, were ready.

And, creepily enough, a coffin was placed in one corner of the cart.

As Aslan and old Max fumbled to change their clothes, No. 21 gestured silently towards the coffin for Bart, who was standing blankly.

"...Is that meant to be my place?"

"Do you think you can pass through a regular gate with the stigma of a devil worshiper, Your Majesty?"

Nathaniel: If you have a complaint, just say it. Why is everyone, Justin or you, acting like this lately?

Enrique: Aren't you good at pretending to be a corpse? Just hold your breath for a few hours.

The two squabbled for a while, but eventually Bart surrendered to No. 21, who was grinding his teeth and saying, 'wouldn't it have been nice if you had given me more time to prepare?'

Clickety-clack, clickety-clack. With a well-groomed mustache and the unique bread-shaped hat of Asein merchants, No. 21 began to drive the cart.

Aslan and old Max sat comfortably in the cargo hold of the cart,

eating dried fruit and seasoned jerky from their bags, easing the fatigue of their long forced march. Only Bart, crouched silently within the open coffin, was gloomy, and for a while, the journey continued peacefully.

The change came when they were almost at the Cartago gate.

"...Something's wrong, Enrique."

Bart, who had been sitting quietly for a while, suddenly opened his mouth. He was still staring blankly into space, his chin resting on his knees, and at the sight of the eerie glow in his eyes, Aslan got up from his seat in alarm.

No. 21 must have noticed the strange gleam, too, because without a word of protest, this time from No. 21 himself, he halted the carriage.

"Turn the cart around."

No. 21's eyebrows raised slightly.

"We'll run into the pursuit team."

"I don't think they're likely to be too suspicious of us heading in the opposite direction, so I suggest we turn back and continue on our way to the gateway to Asein."

"....."

There was silence for a moment at his words. If taken literally, it was suggesting they turn back along the road nearly all the way back to Flower Village. It would take a whole day.

Just over that hill was the gate to Carthago. How did we get this far.....

"We are close to our destination, Your Majesty."

But Bart dismissed his opinion with one sentence.

"I have a bad feeling."

"....."

No. 21 chewed his lips for a moment, but soon obediently drove the cart onto a forest path beside the highway. It seemed he was trying to turn around on the narrow road by making a detour.

"Wait, what the hell is..."

Old Max, who didn't understand, tried to say something, but Aslan quickly silenced him. Judging from their experiences so far, he didn't think Bart would act unnecessarily. They soon left the rough forest path and returned to the highway. They began retracing the exact path they had come.

And not long after, they ran into a group of riders galloping towards them from a distance. It was the pursuit team from the Flower Village.

While they had considered the possibility of them galloping through the highway overnight, Aslan felt his heart sink because he hadn't expected the pursuit team to catch up so quickly. Aslan and old Max quickly pretended to be asleep, pulling their hats low. Their throats went dry in an instant.

There were seven in the pursuit team, and they were obviously in a hurry. One of them at the front glanced back at the cart as they passed by.

However, it seemed he could not even imagine that they would be in a peddler's cart full of foodstuffs, driven by an unfamiliar coachman, coming from the opposite side. They quickly turned their gaze away from the cart and spurred their horses towards the gate.

Clickety-clack, clickety-clack. The pursuit team quickly grew distant.

Phew. Aslan exhaled the breath he had been holding only after the pursuit team completely disappeared from sight. The tension that had been draining his blood gradually subsided.

Old Max murmured softly, "That was Rodrigo just now, wasn't it?"

Aslan nodded. It might have been a coincidence, but somehow it was

unsettling to think that the person leading the pursuit team was the same one who had spread rumors about the Asein punitive forces.

"Enrique."

Bart, who hadn't even bothered to hide in the coffin because he had guessed the pursuit team wouldn't inspect the cart carefully, was still staring somewhere and commanded No. 21.

"Hide the cart and observe the pursuit team's movements."

Without a word, No. 21 turned the cart into the bushes by the roadside. As soon as they were far enough away from the highway, he stopped the cart and quickly disappeared from the driver's seat.

His movements, whether appearing or disappearing, were truly ghostly.

"Um, Bart... Your Majesty?"

Aslan spent a while observing before hesitantly calling out to Bart. It was the first time he'd directly called for him since No. 21 appeared, and he felt unusually nervous. If he didn't know any better, it wouldn't matter, but knowing that the other party wasn't of ordinary status, he couldn't help but be cautious.

Bart quietly turned his head towards him. His usual cold face showed no sign of discomfort. Aslan sighed in relief and asked him a question.

"I've wanted to ask since yesterday...but I had no chance. Did they really send a punitive force from Asein? How did you know that the punitive force was coming?"

From their conversation with No. 21, it was clear that Bart had a purpose in coming here, but it didn't seem like he knew about the situation in the Flower Village from the start. He nodded and responded obediently.

"I felt the gaze of surveillance from within the mountain occasionally. Professional trackers who do not easily reveal their traces; the search party from the Flower Village probably didn't detect them. Yesterday,

several military messenger birds flew up from the base of the mountain. It was impossible not to realize that military action was imminent. It is not a battleground with Carthago, so if they gather an army, there can only be one purpose."

"Military messenger birds..."

Aslan hadn't noticed at all. When could he have seen that?

"If it weren't for the various chaotic situations like yesterday, someone in the Flower Village would have noticed it quickly."

Indeed, with the spy incident and Martha's death, the entire village was in chaos yesterday.

But at the base of the mountain?

"Could it be, are they Flanders' men?"

Weren't Jerome and Flanders's guard in a colluding relationship? Why are they attacking the Flower Village from there?

If that's true, why did the sudden rumors about Asein's punitive force and spies circulate?

However, Bart tilted his head slightly to the side and replied in an indifferent tone.

"The only place that seemed capable of organizing a punitive force was Flanders."

"Most of the places looted so far are Asein's territories, why would Flanders..."

"It's simple. If you know the corruption of the people of Archduke Asein, that rotten old man, it's easy to guess."

His explanation was roughly this. Archduke Asein had let his territory be looted for a long time, likely waiting for the damage to accumulate enough to demand a large amount of reparation. Trade with Asein cannot be cut off, so he waited until Flanders judged that the anticipated reparation was greater than the cost of organizing a

punitive force right now.

They'd pocket most of the reparations instead out of the territory, and let others take on the costly bandit suppression. Then they wrap it up as diplomatic achievement and collect money from the territory again.

What is this, they're totally thieves.

"..."

Aslan, who was about to cry out 'thief', silently closed his mouth. There was still a lot he was curious about, but he couldn't ask rashly.

Why did you come to this Flower Village? What are those cryptic words you said to Kaien yesterday? Why are you bothersomely dragging me and old Max around?

He was slowly getting a grip on the identity of this suspicious royalty.

The dignity inherent in his body and the natural way he treats people lower in status. The man who could blatantly call that Archduke Asein a rotten old man. The one who has the vast divine power he has never seen before.

Above all, there was only one person on this continent who could be called His Majesty.

No. 21 returned to the carriage after quite some time had passed. His already taciturn expression seemed to have turned more serious, so Aslan felt that something unusual must have happened.

"The bandits were in collusion with Carthago."

His Majesty Bart listened to the report without any particular disturbance. The only ones utterly surprised were Aslan and old Max. As they looked at No. 21 with wide eyes, he continued with a grave face.

"It was unclear whether the entire gang of bandits was involved, or only a portion of them. However, the individual leading the pursuit team seemed to have been in contact with them for quite a long time.

It appeared as if he had passed on information about His Majesty and his party through secret letters long ago."

Rodrigo.

Suddenly, Aslan felt a chill creeping up his spine.

Max whispered hoarsely next to him, "Then if we had proceeded straight to the gate...."

He couldn't finish his sentence, but everyone could guess the outcome.

They would have most likely been executed on the spot, just like the Hwa family that was killed in Flanders last year.

Agent No. 21 quickly knelt in front of the gate and bowed his head. "We have failed in our investigation. This is a failure of the guild. We apologize, Your Majesty."

"We simply didn't have time to investigate. I know well the hard work the guild does. Would the guild have had any business in the western mountains if it hadn't been for that child?"

"But..."

"I already had some suspicion that there were traitors from Carthago lurking in the background. Don't worry too much about it."

King Bart showed great magnanimity and dignity, dismissing the minor mistake that could have put his life at risk with a nod of his head.

Of course, he was still crouching inside the cart.

Afterwards, they quickly drove the carriage away. Although they had once passed by the Carthago gate unnoticed, if their party did not arrive, the pursuit team would inevitably start to suspect the carriage they had once passed by.

They took minimum rest to ensure the horses didn't tire out, but they planned to keep as much distance as possible from the pursuit team

until they reached the official road.

"Um... I can't help but be curious. Who exactly is that gentleman?"

Max, who was taking turns driving the carriage with Agent No. 21, quietly asked him. No. 21 glanced back at His Majesty, who was half-burying his head in his knees with his eyes closed.

After hesitating for a moment, Agent No. 21 finally shrugged his shoulders and opened his mouth.

"Well, it won't matter. You two have already become targets of intensive management by the guild because you're too deeply involved in His Majesty's affairs. I trust you won't be loose-lipped."

Aslan and Max perked up their ears and focused on No. 21's voice.

"That gentleman is His Majesty Nataniel, the sovereign of Delcross and the greatest ruler of the continent. Henceforth, there must be no lacking in your treatment of him."

Max dropped his jaw.

The... what? That gentleman wearing iron chains marked with the brand of devil worshipers?

"No, then what about that brand...."

Aslan, who had an inkling of his identity, was also curious. How could the most noble cleric on the continent, His Holiness, have the brand of cursed devil worshipers on his back?

"Well, His Majesty is, of course, not a devil worshiper. Due to circumstances, he disguised himself as a prisoner..."

"So you're saying that he branded that damned mark on his own body? No, what kind of horrendous act is that!"

Max shivered.

"Of course, it wasn't branded on His Majesty's real body!"

"What do you mean by that? If it's not his real body, then who is that gentleman?"

Hmm. No. 21 furrowed his brows. The more he tried to explain, the more it felt like he was losing control of the information.

He glanced at King Bart and sighed, "His Majesty's real body cannot leave the cathedral under normal circumstances. That body is an artificial body, or a homunculus, which His Majesty's soul inhabits when it needs to move far..."

Aslan and Max turned as pale as death at the mention of the word 'homunculus'.

Even they, simple country folks, had heard rumors about the devil worshipers of Delcross who shook the continent a few years ago. A heretic group that denied the authority of the deity and sought to explore the truth of the world, they created a cursed life form with the help of the devil's power, a homunculus.

Fortunately, it was exposed by inquisitors before it was completed, leading to a large-scale purge where all those involved were burned at the stake.

But did that mean that the cursed life form still existed? Moreover, the act of transferring the soul into that artificial life form, which was even abandoned by God, was it not an act that only devil worshipers would commit?

Max muttered with a trembling voice. "So, so does that mean that His Majesty, the representative of God, is actually a demon...."

"...is not a demon worshiper."

Agent No. 21 ran a hand over his face in fatigue.

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One day before the Inquisitors raided the headquarters of the Cornsheim family.

The guild, having caught wind of this in advance, carried out the task of smuggling out some of the scholars and research records as instructed by the Holy Emperor.

In the midst of this, the Holy Emperor's eyes lit up upon seeing the artificial lifeforms lined up in one corner of the laboratory.

"They seem useful. Smuggle out a few."

The guild executives all looked at the Holy Emperor in utter shock. After all, wasn't the decisive reason the Cornsheims were labeled as devil worshippers precisely because of this artificial lifeform research?

Yet he spoke incomprehensible words with a calm face.

"This has nothing to do with those so-called demon races or whatnot. It is a technology that belongs to the rules of the material world."

During the period of the great purge, most of the artificial lifeforms—homunculi—were burned, but in the end, the guild succeeded in secretly smuggling out three dolls without the Inquisitors' knowledge.

"These are just empty dolls in human form."

"When a soul enters, they will move properly. That's how they are structured."

Then how do you put the soul in?

While everyone was puzzled, the Holy Emperor began testing this and that by directly transferring his own soul into the dolls.

The very act of a soul freely entering and exiting was not something ordinary people could do, but well, since it was something His Majesty the Holy Emperor was doing, everyone in the guild accepted it. They simply wondered at first what the human-shaped dolls would be used for.

Soon, the guild members unwittingly witnessed moments when a doll that had been lying still suddenly opened its eyes or got up and walked around.

As the Holy Emperor said, the moment a soul entered, the doll truly began to move like a human, and showed the wondrous sight of slowly transforming into the Holy Emperor's appearance, synchronizing with the entered soul.

However, the Holy Emperor's trial run of the homunculi encountered an unexpected obstacle. Forcibly synchronizing a soul with an artificial lifeform consumed too much mental energy in the process of entering and exiting. So once he entered a doll, he couldn't easily move his soul as he did when using his original body.

His senses were also greatly dulled, and the Holy Emperor had to struggle for a while to adapt to this.

Above all, the biggest problem was that the dolls, which existed outside the rules of this world, couldn't accept aura at all.

Needless to say, the Holy Emperor, who wielded aura as easily as breathing, was extremely inconvenienced. Aura was the fundamental force of life. Lacking it meant becoming listless like a dying person.

Fortunately, there were no restrictions on using sacred power, probably because it belonged together with his soul, the Holy Emperor explained.

So what are you going to use that for?

The guild executives were puzzled to see the Holy Emperor, who could shatter the guild building with a single light gesture, staggering around like an invalid inside a doll.

The Holy Emperor seemed a bit dissatisfied, but in any case, after

finishing the experiments, he assigned the dolls to each of the guild's major branches far from the capital.

And in fact, the Holy Emperor demonstrated the true value of that doll on the southern front two years ago. The southern front, which had been at a disadvantage, instantly recovered with the participation of a single priest with infinite sacred power.

With the additional feat of the First Prince Owen rampaging like a madman at the front lines, the front continued to move southward until it settled at its current position.

During that period, the Holy Emperor in the capital was engaged in seclusion prayer, and no one doubted that it was the care of the gods answering the prayers.

Well, that was the whole story.

How was he supposed to explain this to the boy and old man who were shocked before his eyes? Twenty-one was at a loss.

What saved him was the calm voice that suddenly came from beside him.

"The gods have purified the wicked and made them instruments of the divine to care for the continent."

Huh? The eyes of the three simultaneously turned towards the coffin.

The Holy Emperor had already raised his head and was looking at them. And in that moment, they clearly saw it. The extremely sacred aura that permeated the Holy Emperor's body.

Enveloped in a subtle, iridescent light, he continued speaking in a gently resounding voice as if making a prophecy.

"This is proof that nothing in this world can ever escape the will of the gods. Even the trivial struggles of devil worshippers are thus under His will."

Ah, it was truly a divine sight!

Although the subject was crouched inside a coffin wearing shackles, that fact did not detract in the slightest from the supremely noble majesty and the subtle, spreading sacredness.

...Probably.

Old man Max, who had experienced the divine miracles bestowed by the Holy Emperor several times over the past two days, had tears welling up in his eyes, moved by emotion.

"Forgive me... Forgive me. My ignorant self, with eyes so darkened, committed the great sin of doubting the representative of the gods."

"How can one blame a sin born of ignorance? You are forgiven."

"Ah..."

The old man was greatly enlightened and almost let go of the reins of the cart.

Aslan made a subtle expression but seemed to roughly accept it, and only Twenty-one stared at the Holy Emperor with narrowed eyes.

Where do you get your scripts from?

If you're going to explain, do it properly. You're still clumsy, Enrique.

Half-listening to the search team's report, Jerome was heavily drunk for the first time in a long while. Martha's wretched final moments kept flashing before his eyes, and he couldn't bear to be in his right mind.

"Boss. The movements of Flandor's border guards seem a bit strange. Since we sent all the search teams up the mountain, the news is a bit late, but the search team returning from the Asein checkpoint says they spotted a situation where troops seem to be concentrating at Flandor's border guards."

"Rodrigo headed towards the Carthago checkpoint. We'll have news soon, so how about reducing the search personnel a bit and paying

attention to Flandor's side as well?"

However, Jerome gave no response. From the beginning, the Viscount of Carthago, who had been in collusion with Rodrigo, had infiltrated Flandor's checkpoint guards. If there were any suspicious movements, he would have certainly received word from him.

Moreover, for some reason, someone's voice kept echoing in Jerome's head.

[You've already lost Martha. All you have left are these stupid subordinates. If the Grand Duke of Asein ends up sending a subjugation force, you'll have nothing left.]

[Catch Asein's spy.]

[Asein's spy comes first.]

"Asein's spy comes first. Find that bastard."

"But Boss..."

"I won't say it twice. Catch Aslan and that prisoner."

When Jerome glared fiercely with reddened eyes, the bandits flinched in surprise and avoided his gaze. The subordinates, who had been watching his mood, soon disappeared one by one, and eventually, Jerome was left alone in the hut. He continued to silently tip back glasses of strong liquor late into the night and until dawn.

"Martha..."

Now that there was no one to hear, the name he rarely called flowed out so easily.

Ever since he first saw her over a decade ago, the beautiful Martha naturally belonged to Jerome. Even without specifically calling her name, she was by his side and breathed only in his grasp. Until yesterday, Jerome had no doubt that her every move, and even her life, was in his hands.

Could that be called love? Even Jerome didn't know.

However, because Martha had been so perfectly subordinate to him until now, Jerome could no longer imagine a life without her.

Stubbornly downing more alcohol, Jerome eventually collapsed on the table and began snoring when morning was almost upon them. Someone carefully approached his side—none other than his adopted son, Kaien.

Having waited a long time for Jerome to pass out, he quietly walked beside the table and clicked his tongue.

Jerome was a rare human with a strong defensive wall around his soul. Unless he was dead drunk or passed out like this, it wasn't easy for Kaien to directly interfere with him.

He couldn't even muster the courage to nibble at his soul, and could only give a few suggestions to the heavily intoxicated Jerome. Moreover, the alcohol was so strong.

Thinking back to his childhood when he thoughtlessly touched Jerome's soul like he did with Martha and was thrown against the wall, it still gave him chills. It was the first day he confirmed that his ability was not omnipotent.

The next day, he succeeded in taking revenge by inciting the soul of Jerome, whose defenses had become noticeably weaker due to alcohol, to use violence against Martha. Even Jerome himself didn't seem to know, but his soul was always looking only at Martha. The day after he assaulted Martha, his soul would take on a bruised color and noticeably lose energy all day long.

Kaien didn't understand Jerome's feelings at all, but he could at least tell that Martha's misery was the most effective punishment for Jerome.

It was the same this time. Jerome's soul, whose defenses had become markedly weaker since yesterday, was wailing in agony.

[Martha Martha Martha Martha]

Fortunately, the headache and tinnitus that had been tormenting Kaien were now gradually subsiding. He approached the drunken

Jerome and snatched his soul with one hand.

Just as kind souls had a fresh and sweet taste, strong and sinful souls also had their own deep and rich flavors. And Jerome's soul, which he had nibbled on bit by bit whenever he had the chance, was quite palatable as he recalled.

Kaien tore off one of the limp soul's arms and raised the corner of his mouth crookedly.

Until his soul was completely devoured and he died, Jerome would never know what his soul had been gazing at all his life.

It couldn't be more amusing.

Aslan's group diligently traveled through the night. Except for briefly stopping the cart at dawn to rest the horses and catch some sleep, they drove the cart nonstop along the thoroughfare.

Here, His Majesty Bart's terrifying ability shone once again, as whenever the horses were about to collapse, an exceptionally powerful sacred power would unfailingly pour over them.

The forcibly invigorated horses had to pull the cart again in bewilderment. Seeing the deep light of confusion rising in the round, gentle eyes of the beasts, Aslan felt a bit sorry for them.

However, by midday, they had to abandon the cart and move on foot because the search teams were densely patrolling near the slash-and-burn village. At this rate, they would likely encounter search teams frequently all the way to the fork in the Asein highway.

It was impossible for their group, whose faces were well-known, to pretend to be merchants, and it seemed better to avoid the search teams while moving. Carrying simple provisions, they hid the cart in the bushes and began walking along the thoroughfare.

Still, having comfortably sat and traveled while taking turns sleeping through the night, the group's stamina was high. Unfortunately, with the exception of His Majesty Bart.

Even though he seemed to be recovering from fatigue with his immense sacred power, a body that couldn't move aura looked extremely precarious.

"Shall I carry you on my back?"

When Twenty-one said that, unable to bear it any longer, His Majesty smirked and patted his back. He must have thought it was a joke.

The journey on foot proceeded more smoothly than expected. Twenty-one was truly a ghostly fellow. On a quiet road with no one around, he would suddenly signal the group to hide by the roadside, and without fail, a search team would pass by shortly after.

Aslan inwardly wondered what kind of organization this guild was that such a person belonged to.

However, not long after noon, something strange happened to His Majesty Bart.

"Mores..."

Suddenly stopping in the middle of the road, he muttered to himself, his complexion turning extremely pale as he blankly stared into the air. Twenty-one, who had been walking ahead, glanced back and hurried back to him in surprise.

"Your Majesty?"

And Aslan saw it.

Ah, those eyes again. Eyes that had become purely mechanical, reflecting everything.

If the image formed by the light of this world was not captured, what was reflected in those eyes, and where did it exist?

His Majesty stared into the air like that for a long time, as if glaring, then finally closed his eyes and heaved a deep sigh.

"...I told him not to cause trouble."

"...?"

The group approached him in puzzlement.

"Enrique."

"...It's Twenty-one."

Although he habitually responded, concern was evident on Twenty-one's face.

His Majesty quietly looked around at the group surrounding him, not understanding the situation, then placed his hand on each person's forehead and shared his sacred power. It felt like he was preparing for something bad in advance, making Aslan very anxious.

"An urgent matter has come up. It seems I'll have to be away for a bit, so Enrique, I'll leave everything to you. It will be a bit tough, but I believe you can do it."

At the sudden words, Twenty-one's face stiffened. His Majesty grabbed his arm and continued speaking as if entrusting him with a task.

"Remember. Your first priority is to get those two people beyond the Asein checkpoint."

"But Your Majesty..."

Twenty-one's lips quivered as if he wanted to argue, but His Majesty's voice was resolute as he looked directly into his eyes.

"That comes first. Understand? If it's not feasible, abandon the homunculus. It will most likely come to that."

"..."

"Leave the rest to me."

And the moment those words ended.

His Majesty's body literally crumpled to the ground like a doll with

its strings cut.

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"Leave the rest to me."

With those final words, His Majesty's body suddenly collapsed, devoid of strength.

"...!"

21 quickly caught him, standing nearby. At a glance, his sudden loss of consciousness and limp form appeared gravely critical.

A moment later, Aslan rushed to his side, and out of apothecary's habit, checked his pulse. The boy's face quickly turned ashen.

"His pulse...!"

Aslan felt dizzy at the unbelievable reality.

"Bart... His Majesty's pu-, pulse has stopped?"

This wasn't mere unconsciousness, but dea...

Aslan's hands trembled violently.

21 also seemed momentarily flustered but soon reassured the group with a composed voice.

"His soul has merely departed somewhere for a while. There is no need to worry."

"What has happened to His Majesty Bart?"

"Did I not tell you? This is not his true body. It's alright."

He is rather skilled at gallivanting about as a mere soul and playing with corpses, 21 inwardly added. Having hastily adjusted His

Majesty's disguise, he lightly hoisted the body onto his back and rose to his feet. Aslan anxiously offered to share the burden, but 21 shook his head.

"A homunculus is very light, unlike a human body."

True to his word, even while carrying His Majesty Bart, 21's movements remained largely unchanged. Under his lead, the group once more hastened their steps toward the junction of the state highway.

However, the problems arising from His Majesty's absence began from that point onward. Before long, Old Man Max's pace noticeably slowed, clearly exhausted.

To make matters worse, encounters with search parties roaming the mountain's base steadily increased in frequency. After narrowly evading their eyes for a time, misfortune finally struck—they were spotted by a pair of searchers before managing to hide.

21 swooped in like the wind, slashing one man's carotid artery with a dagger, but the other stumbled back and put an emergency horn to his lips.

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With the shrill blast of the horn, a shortsword soon plunged into the bandit's chest, felling him. But from here on out, their flight would become a desperate race against time. A look of dismay flickered across the group's faces.

They urgently sought to depart, but upon noticing Old Man Max's condition, sharply inhaled. He had already turned deathly pale, perspiration pouring down his face.

"Haah! I... can't run anymore. It's over now. Hah! Leave me behind."

Glancing back and forth between Old Man Max and His Majesty, 21 briefly wavered. But soon, as if having made a decision, he bit his lip with a resolute expression.

"This won't do. I will carry you, old man. Let's leave His Majesty here

and depart as quickly as possible."

What? Aslan cried out in shock.

"Then what about His Majesty? I'll, I'll carry His Majesty!"

"That won't work either. From here on, we'll be running at full speed to the Asein Gate. We can't do that while carrying baggage."

"But..."

"Speed alone won't suffice. We need something to hold their attention."

The group gasped. Not only would they abandon His Majesty, but now he suggested tossing him to the bandits as bait?

"To some extent, he likely anticipated this possibility as well. His mentioning to abandon him wasn't a mere request."

He said there was a high probability it would come to this.

"In any case, as this is not his true body, it's not dangerous."

"But, but even if there's no immediate danger, won't he eventually return to this body?"

Aslan wanted to cry.

Why had things turned out this way? Where had it all gone wrong?

Was it his fault for not knowing beforehand, as an insider, that the bandits were colluding with Carthago? Or was it his fault for stubbornly insisting on bringing Old Man Max despite their desperate circumstances?

No, perhaps the root of it all was surviving in Rohan and coming to this damned slash-and-burn village. Ah, everything was his fault.

His Majesty Bart had asked if he would regret it. Aslan now knew the answer.

He was in the midst of regretting every single thing he had done.

In the meantime, 21 carefully leaned His Majesty against a roadside boulder and approached Aslan, who still stood there sobbing, at a loss for what to do. Gripping the boy's shoulder tightly, he spoke through gritted teeth, emphasizing each and every word.

"Listen carefully."

"The most useless thing in this world is worrying about that man's safety. Do you understand?"

Yet those words sounded so desperate, as if 21 was talking not to Aslan but to himself, trying to steel his own resolve. Aslan could only meekly nod, eyes brimming with tears.

Hoisting the dejected Old Man Max onto his back, 21 tersely spat out,

"Let's go."

Even then, the group glanced back at His Majesty several times, only hastening their heavy steps upon hearing the hurried approach of footsteps from all directions.

Meanwhile, blissfully unaware of the group's desperate pace, Nate freely set off, having casually tossed aside the homunculus.

Using a bit too much energy to break free had left him quite fatigued. Still, it felt far more comfortable than being trapped inside the doll, slowly drowning without any outlet.

As Nate gradually regained his strength, his speed also steadily increased. However, despite shooting forward like a beam of light, he grew anxious as the presence of the barrier he had created grew fainter and fainter. Just how far did that fearless kid intend to go?

[Emperor Daddy!]

A tiny blue light, like a bead, suddenly popped into existence and rapidly circled around Nate. It was Herna, always one step ahead.

[Morres killed that Diggory brat's bug! But I had no idea he would

get sucked into the opened channel. I'm sorry!]

[It was something no one could have predicted. You have nothing to apologize for.]

And in that Diggory brat's eyes, you're the brat, Herna.

[Daddy His Majesty! The Knights of St. Marcias are coming.]

A small pink bead appeared next, gently settling upon Nate's soul. It was Gades, always one step behind.

[That Durand brat is dead set on entangling Morres this time around. He's all fired up.]

[If it's that matter, I've already told Francis... By the way, child. No matter how you look at it, Sir Durand is hardly a brat, is he?]

He already has a grandchild as big as you, Gades.

The twins never seemed to pay any mind to respecting their elders.

[The Puppeteer is still in the capital. He's hanging around with that greasy guy from Rohan.]

[He has no connection to the Diggory brat, but just in case, I told Bremen to keep an eye on him.]

Herna and Gades followed along, circling Nate as if out for a stroll.

Among Nate's children, only these two could open channels. Thus, compared to the other children, they shared relatively more information with him.

[Emperor Daddy, this is as far as we go.]

[Daddy His Majesty, you must return safely.]

But as they were still young children, they couldn't maintain the channeling for long.

Glimpsing the twinkling light of the small twins bidding him farewell at the edge of the planetary system, Nate sped up and plunged into

the outer nebula.

The presence of the barrier had grown so faint that it was nearly undetectable without extreme focus.

Passing through the five melodies flowing between nebulae, at one point, a round, sparkling gray bead-like object attached itself to Nate's side. Its clear, transparent gray also resembled someone's eyes.

[Your Majesty.]

Cornsheim.

Nate furrowed his brow. Of all times for this detestable fellow to show up.

[You must remain in your rightful place. Cease being swayed by the schemes of wicked beings.]

The thought waves emitted by the Cornsheim's leader carried an exceedingly dry timbre. Just hearing it, Nate was greatly displeased as that stiff face and inhuman voice came to mind.

Increasing his speed even further, he spat out a curt thought.

[Piss off.]

[...Your Majesty must not forget his true role.]

At the same time, gray beads began to multiply one by one around Nate. The clan members were attempting to connect simultaneously.

[Your Majesty, Your Majesty, Your Majesty...]

[Your Majesty, Your Majesty...]

Soon, dozens of round beads surrounded Nate. They flickered their light in unison, like blinking eyes. Blink, blink, blink.

Your Majesty, Your Majesty, Your Majesty.

Without clearly stating their intentions, they continued to call out to Nate as if demanding something from him. They remained as sinister

as ever.

[Don't pry as you please. Close the channel, Cornsheim.]

Whoosh. Responding to his will, a powerful wave swept through the surroundings, centered on his soul. The small beads collectively ceased their flickering, shocked by the impact.

It was already difficult to maintain composure in soul form, unlike when in one's true body. No, it was closer to deliberately refraining from controlling emotional shifts. Even now, as he began to feel displeasure, an ominous aura started to radiate from his soul.

The small beads, seemingly frightened, observed Nate's mood for a moment before beginning to wink out one by one. Now, only the leader of the group that had first appeared remained.

[Your Majesty. All things must flow according to the natural order. You must cease clinging to that which has already departed.]

Light began to gather in Nate's right hand, soon forming the shape of a long rod. It was the manifestation of his sword, Nutcracker.

There would be no further warning. Clearly understanding Nate's intentions, the Cornsheim's leader faded away, leaving behind a small lament.

[Please do not blindly trust your premonitions...]

With his disappearance, Nate was left alone in the vast outer space.

Once more straining his senses to the utmost, he could no longer detect any trace of the barrier's presence. While wasting time with the Cornsheim bunch, his son's soul had already drifted immeasurably far away.

In any case, to disrupt him so needlessly, it would have been better to just leave them for the Inquisitors to sweep away.

With no other choice, Nate began to advance aimlessly in the direction he had last sensed the presence.

He felt somewhat uneasy but not entirely without hope. If his son were to call for him even once, Nate would never miss that voice.

How much time had passed?

Advancing outward, ever outward without any fixed destination, Nate began to grow impatient. Even though the sense of time was vague in this place, it still felt like a considerable while since he had lost track of his son's presence.

[Where in the world are you and what are you doing...]

He simply couldn't understand that child. In this situation, shouldn't he call for his father at least once?

Was the child fiercely independent or just thoughtless?

It was precisely that moment.

-Father, Your Majesty Holy Emperor...

It was a fleeting, faint thought, as if brushing past.

Rather than a proper call, it was merely a momentary recollection, but...

For Nate, that was enough. He shot forth in the direction the thought wave had come from.

The place he discovered his son was nearly at the boundary between dimensions. Unaware of just how terrifying a place the Ye was or perhaps not caring, the brat was floating about in the darkness with a serene face, embracing a single fragment of a soul.

Nate felt the back of his head throb, an sensation that should have been impossible for a soul.

[But then why is the god who oversees this dimension just watching as those fellows lie in wait for an opportunity?]

In the cold that seemed as though it would instantly freeze and shatter a mere lowly soul, that was the extent of what he had to say.

Nate was a bit dumbfounded.

This kid always said he was curious about many things, yet he never seemed to have any intention of actually studying.

[That is because the chief god who oversees Delcross is not a personal god, my son.]

If you had properly read even just Chapter 1 of the Introduction to Theology, no, even just the preface, you wouldn't be saying such things. Always shirking your duties at every turn, just what do you plan to become when you grow up?

Of course, his son also thought of the Holy Emperor as a fellow who avoided work and slacked off, but Nate was blissfully unaware of that. Well, even if he knew, what could he do? Forcing upon one's child the things one couldn't do oneself was the so-called parental privilege.

As he enveloped his wide-eyed son, who was staring this way, in light, Nate finished his preparations to launch into a scolding session.

T/N:

Herna and Gades are calling their dad with a mixed up of titles and informal calling of Father here. So, they ended up calling their dad like, "Imperial Dad" or "Holy Dad".

For those who forgot who is Diggory, he's the guy who nurtured the worms in the basement and I believe have been feeding them humans for them to grow.

[Didn't I tell you not to get into trouble like this? Just where do you think your sense of danger has gone, acting so recklessly...]

[No, Father, Your Majesty. Although I suddenly died like this, I still protected Delcross from the threat of the demon realm!]

The brat even pouted as if he'd been wronged. He hadn't even finished half of what he wanted to say, but now that he'd grown a bit, he knew how to argue against his father's scolding.

As Nate opened his mouth to say more, a certain scene suddenly flashed through his mind.

It was the sight of the outskirts of the Delcross capital, shrouded in black smoke. Part of the residential area was completely shattered, and casualties could be seen here and there. The Knights of St. Gracia were visible, carrying out rescue operations.

On one side, the Knights of St. Marcias and St. Aurelion were together battling against giant moth-like monsters. The odds were in their favor, but the damage to the knights was no trifle either.

And far in the sky, an ominous hole wrapped in a black whirlwind could be seen. From that huge open black hole, an immense number of moths kept flying in.

The vision ended in a fleeting moment.

This was the brief illusion created by Nate's premonition. The catastrophe that surely would have occurred had his son not intervened.

Once aware of the anomaly, Nate would have returned and shut that gate, but the damage that would have occurred in the meantime was

not something even he could ignore.

In the end, he had no choice but to say with a disgruntled face,

[That... you did well.]

Hmph. Seeing his son's face instantly turn confident, Nate realized he had completely missed the timing to scold him.

Feeling somewhat deflated, his eyes fell upon the small soul his son was holding. Now reduced to a trivial appearance, that ominous red-flickering thing was undoubtedly one of the wicked beings that deserved a thrashing. It was likely the very thing that had dragged his son into this mess.

However, as he had done initially, Nate decided to ignore that irksome thing this time as well.

When his son, who had been ill with a fever not long ago, entered the audience chamber, the moment Nate first saw him, he could sense it. That worthless thing would remain by his son's side even in the distant future.

—I pray you do not blindly trust your premonitions.

The man, Cornsheim had said that, but that old man would never understand.

Some of those premonitions were not mere foresight, but an inevitable future that must come to pass. That child's path would continue to embrace wicked beings alongside him.

[Can you tell me what my soul looks like now? How did you know I suddenly died?]

Unaware of Nate's tangled thoughts, the brat threw out difficult questions with an innocent face, chirping away. This clueless thing.

Moreover, it seemed they had lingered too long at the dimensional boundary. Suddenly, an unpleasantly sticky gaze sweeping over them could be felt, so Nate swiftly added another layer of barrier to his son's soul.

It appeared they had caught the attention of one of the unsavory beings that occasionally coveted this place from the outer realms.

After the two connected primal worlds separated and the dimensional wall weakened, those things would sometimes gaze this way with eyes full of greed, as if looking at an exceedingly appetizing meal. However, the fiends who seemed ready to charge at any moment would poke around the boundary a few times before meekly returning.

Perhaps they were simply waiting for Nate, who stood guard against them, to die. Their concept of time was difficult for him, a human, to fathom.

In any case, he had to send his son back first.

[Go now. Don't make Masain worry too much.]

Surely that boy was blaming himself this time as well. That stubborn fiend shouldn't be too shocked.

Nate once more impressed the designated location for his son to return to upon his soul.

[Return, [Morres].]

And you brat, let yourself get hit just once. There's a limit to making people worry.

He flicked his son's forehead, imbuing it with his own feelings.

Thwack.

Guh. The brat's soul vanished in an instant, heading toward Delcross.

After watching the direction the child had flown off for a moment, Nate soon drew out Nutcracker in his right hand and quietly waited. Because among the sticky gazes sent from afar, multiplying one by one, one fiend was flying toward the boundary at rapid speed.

The pressure bearing down upon his soul grew heavier and heavier.

Before long, a black smoke-like substance began rising around Nate's soul. No, with its sticky and heavy texture, it was closer to mud than smoke. It steadily increased in volume, then soon began pouring out as if to fill the empty boundary.

Grooooooan.

Following that, an eerie resonance, perhaps a moan or a sigh, began to shake the boundary. Whatever its confidence, the fiend was directly gracing this place with its presence, even pulling along part of the hell it belonged to.

Nate spread the light enveloping his soul a bit further, pushing away the surrounding mud. Then, as if finding it ridiculous, a phlegmy laugh rang out. Hahahaha.

In an instant, the scenery before his eyes changed. The surroundings had become a vast and deep cavity enclosed by black walls.

In that immense space of unknowable end, Nate's soul appeared as nothing more than a single shining dot.

The black walls were covered in finely wriggling protrusions that looked like cilia, but upon closer inspection, each one was a soul, starved to the point of being hideously emaciated. It was part of the hell the fiend had dragged along.

The fiend was a vassal of [Famine].

Soon, part of the wall before Nate split open, and a giant black octopus-like being covered in tumors revealed itself. It was wriggling its thousands of deformed legs, a gruesome shape that dealt a blow to the soul just by looking directly at it.

Hahahaha. As the deformed octopus laughed once more, the tumors densely covering its body trembled.

[Are you the king of this place? I was always curious, as He had His eye on you. But though you possess the caliber of a king, are you not still human?]

Indeed, upon examination, it seemed to think it was quite worth a

try. The laws of cause and effect were also ambiguous at the dimensional boundary, so it could pull up its main body without burden. That was why it had excitedly rushed over with its original form, not just its spiritual body.

He was a bit tired from fitting his soul under the rules of the primary world for the past few days, then escaping from there again. However, he wouldn't be looked down upon by the likes of this fiend.

Nate smirked and gripped the Nutcracker. But the fiend's next words caused his face to stiffen instantly.

[And what was that soul just now? What a pity, sending it away in such a hurry. Was that not also a young soul that looked extremely delicious?]

Slurp. The sound of the fiend licking its lips greedily was conveyed without filter.

Nate's eyes grew cold. He was involuntarily reminded of Kaien, left behind in the western mountains.

He had intended to lightly greet the guest who barged into someone else's home, but now the thought of sending it off nicely had vanished.

As he aimed his sword straight, the fiend let out a scoff in disbelief. Of course, at that light laugh, the walls of hell shook and the bound souls screamed, "Groooooan," but...

[To think you would charge at me with a mere spiritual body, not even your original form! Moreover, that spirit has yet to shed the lowly human habit of wielding a lump of metal! How utterly ridiculous!]

The octopus fiend spread hundreds of its thousands of legs to the walls, dragging its massive body outward while sneering.

As the fiend said, without his original body, Nate's greatest weapon, aura, was tricky to use.

Of course, if he put his mind to it, pulling aura all the way here

wasn't entirely impossible, but he was currently too far from Delcross. If he drew power here, the entire continent would instantly fall into an aura-depleted state.

However, by leaving his body behind, Nate also gained other options.

This was the boundary between dimensions. Even if he borrowed some unfamiliar power and caused a bit of a ruckus, the impact on the primary world would be extremely minimal.

Once his decision was made, execution was simple. A small red dot appeared at the tip of his sword, gradually growing and beginning to envelop the Nutcracker. It became an ominously glowing red blade, extending its length until it reached dozens of meters.

[...!?!]

The being did not know.

To Nate, swordsmanship was not some inescapable human limitation, but merely the most efficient way to move power.

Swish. The quietly swung Nutcracker drew a red line in the air. A long line that sliced through many of the fiend's legs, including one side of the hell's wall it had opened.

Kwaaang!

And the aftershock surged forth. The fiend's severed legs flew everywhere, and souls were pushed away up to dozens of meters on either side of the line, temporarily creating an empty space in the wall of hell.

[Wh-What?]

The octopus fiend looked at its severed tentacle legs in bewilderment. It seemed it never imagined there would be a power that could so easily ignore the caliber of its main body and penetrate it.

Seeing the dumbfounded fiend's appearance, Nate suddenly recalled the reaction of Balthazar, the commander of the Imperial Guard, when he first demonstrated this technique with aura. The stern old

man's eyes had grown as wide as saucers as he stuttered. Nate involuntarily grinned at the memory.

Back then, the knights, who had only focused on increasing the intensity and range of cutting, were astonished to the point of fainting at the idea of launching the aura blade and detonating the aura as is. In a sense, aura explosion also signified a lack of proficiency in aura manipulation.

Now, even Masain could imitate it to some extent, so it had become a familiar technique in the palace.

However, just now was excessively wasteful. Perhaps because the nature of this power itself had a destructive tendency, it seemed fine to conserve strength a bit more compared to when using an aura blade. Should he further reduce the width?

Swish. The subsequently swung red light had thinned to nearly finger-width. Instead, its length was far greater than before, reaching hundreds of meters.

Kwaaang!

A long gash appeared on the fiend's body, and the hideous tumors on its wounds all burst open at once. To the extent that one side of the hell's wall had been sliced through, creating a gap.

Through that open gap, emaciated souls began flowing out, screaming, "Aaaaaaah."

The deformed octopus finally seemed to realize the gravity of the situation. It swiftly extended its remaining legs toward Nate and shouted,

[Why? Why do you wield the [Calamity] of the vanished world?]

[I borrowed it for a bit.]

I had the authority because there's a necessary task. Separating dimensions can't be done barehanded.

Hundreds of legs with terrifying strength were swung at Nate. It was

an overwhelming force that would instantly crush any ordinary soul with a mere graze, but to him, it was an extremely inefficient and self-destructive attack.

In fact, the fiend's legs were smashing the very hell it had summoned. To the point that there were far more souls being crushed and vanishing after being struck by the fiend than by Nate's attacks.

If each of those legs had been wielded like the sword of a trained swordsman, even Nate would not have been able to face the fiend so easily.

Anyhow, since the other side was wasting strength, this side should conserve a bit more. Let's try drawing it out as thin as thread.

A [Calamity] line, so fine it was nearly invisible, came into being. This time, it was of tremendous length, reaching hundreds of meters.

Its power would not be very satisfactory if detonated as is, but there was no form more efficient for holding and swinging it. Nate swung that slender and long sword to his heart's content. The fiend's approaching legs were all severed, and the walls of hell began to shatter along the sword's trajectory.

Before long, the deformed octopus completely lost its strength and slumped down. The passage of hell it had summoned was already largely destroyed, mostly resummoned, and only fragments of the walls remained, supporting its body.

The starving souls clinging to the walls of hell were directly exposed to the chill of the dimensional boundary, unable to endure the bitter cold, and began freezing and crumbling one by one.

The octopus's appearance was truly wretched. Most of its legs had been sliced off, and the tumors on its surface had all burst, oozing pus. It seemed like a rotten, collapsing pumpkin settling down. What was thought to be a large tumor blinked like an eyelid, shedding pus-like tears.

Should he finish it off? Nate gripped Nutcracker and pondered for a moment.

However, what made him hesitate were the multiple gazes observing them from beyond. Particularly the gaze of [Famine], who had sent its vassal for amusement and was quietly spectating.

Eyes waiting for something to happen. Was it perhaps hoping he would draw more of the [Calamity] and lose balance? Or was another trap hidden?

Right then, a scene flashed before Nate's eyes.

A blood-red sky and a black earth covered in mud. Amid thousands of tentacles pouring down like rain, a sudden upsurge of dark red flames.

Within the storm of terrifying power sweeping away everything around it, the steadily growing flames eventually transformed into the shape of a giant sword, and the blade exploded as is.

The deformed octopus's legs and countless tumors burst, unable to withstand the scorching heat.

This time, even Nate was truly astonished.

The one to completely finish off this fiend someday was not Nate himself.

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[Ha ha ha.]

As Nate lifted his sword and suddenly stopped, beginning to laugh quietly, the octopus-like creature stared at him in confusion. Its swollen, crumpled eyes swaying in apparent unease.

Nate shattered his Nutcracker and slowly approached the deformed octopus. His laid-back demeanor was as though he was taking a stroll, yet it appeared more oppressive than when he was swinging [Calamity], making the octopus shiver unconsciously.

[Speak.]

He extended his hand, gently touching the creature's eyeball. The octopus couldn't dare to lower its eyelids, and only retched a sob in response.

[Why did your king use you as a scapegoat?]

Why couldn't he, himself, have choked the life out of this creature?

Why should he let this creature go?

Nate speculated it was likely related to the schemes of [Famine], who sent the octopus here.

Upon hearing this, the deformed octopus, forgetting its position, retorted loudly:

[Scapegoat?! This body, this body received the [blessing] bestowed personally by the Lord of [Famine]. How dare you distort his profound intentions!]

From its overly sensitive reaction, it seemed this creature had begun to subtly question its king's intent as well.

Regardless, Nate thought of a possibility from the creature's words.

[Blessing.]

Yes, blessing.

Nate's gaze slowly swept across its soul. Upon meeting his gaze, the deformed octopus was taken aback, noticeably shrinking in fear.

Nate's spiritual insight discovered a blessing engraved on a corner of the octopus's soul. A small phrase that was so subtly marked, it would be hard to recognize under normal circumstances.

—"I cherish you greatly, your enemy is my enemy, and whoever harms you will never escape my revenge."

Nate clicked his tongue.

"Such superficial..."

It looked like a simple blessing, but it was a decree from a dimensional king. In the boundary of the dimension, its effects would be preserved in full.

Right now, it might not harm Nate, but the karma of unescapable revenge remained and would eventually allow [Famine] to exert some power in Delcross's dimension. It could have caused a lot of trouble.

Meanwhile, the octopus, caught in Nate's gaze, could only sweat cold beads in silence.

Why had it regard him as just a human soul of slightly higher rank? This man, who effortlessly subdued him, the closest servant of the great ruler [Famine] and a monarch of a hell dimension, truly embodied the power befitting of a king.

Seeing his golden crown up close was too dazzling to stare directly at. On top of that, those frightening eyes seemed to pierce through the monarch himself. He must have been out of his mind. He regretted heedlessly running out at the playful words of the king, suggesting he would establish a stronghold.

However, the octopus's tribulations did not end there. It could feel the horrifying flow of karma slowly wrapping around it.

"What... what is this!"

Panicking, the octopus rolled its eyes around, but froze the moment it met Nate's cold gaze. A command that cannot be refused, a powerful blessing that could even manipulate the fate of a Demon King, was binding its body.

"Even though you're only at the boundary, you've entered my territory, so I shall also bestow a [Blessing] upon you."

Is this thing can be even be called a human?

As the octopus was slowly consumed by an unprecedented extreme fear, it thought blankly.

And then, a solemn declaration fell upon its soul.

—If you step into my domain again, you will forever suffer in the hellfire that incinerates even souls. Your king will end up being devoured by the one he intended to devour, without leaving a trace, not even a name.

With the pain of seemingly burning away, the letters of light were engraved on one side of the octopus's soul. Nate, touching the shaking creature's eyeball, spoke in a seemingly affectionate tone.

"Do you understand?"

Forced to face Nate's gaze with no way to avoid it, the creature's eyeball trembled in extreme terror. It was so white it seemed as if the creature's dark skin had turned pale.

"I will let you live. But if you ever return here, you will certainly die."

Once he gave his permission, the octopus was immediately freed from its terrible confinement. With a whooshing sound, its huge body started to be sucked away as if through a tiny hole.

The fragments of hell's wall, the frozen souls, and even the remaining

parts of the creature's body disappeared without a trace.

Tsk. Nate, clicked his tongue, averting his gaze.

There were still eyes observing his soul from afar, but now, none seemed to rashly approach anymore. After a momentary stare towards them, Nate began preparations to transfer his soul back to Delcross.

It was time to return to the homonculus's body..

Bang bang bang!

Jerome was roused from his sleep by the frantic sound of his subordinates searching for him. Whether due to a hangover or not, his body felt devoid of energy, and his mind seemed foggy.

'Have I been sleeping this long?'

Rubbing his rough face, Jerome got up from his spot and went outside. The sun was already halfway across the sky, indicating it was already afternoon. He felt strange. He fully woke up when his waiting subordinates reported their search results.

The prisoner, suspected of being a spy for Asein, had been found. However, they reported, he was already dead.

"An internal strife?"

Jerome asked, striding briskly towards the village square.

"We don't know. At least there were no visible external injuries."

"Wasn't he a heretic who received judgement? His health must have been abnormal since he got here. Died while trying to escape, didn't he? And was discarded?"

Reaching the square, Jerome found his men huddled around a small cart, murmuring amongst themselves. On the cart lay the body of the prisoner.

The prisoner appeared to be asleep. Touching the body to confirm, there was indeed no pulse as his men had reported. It indeed seemed like he was dead.

"Since when has he been like this?"

"Well... when we found him near the road intersection, he was already like this."

Jerome narrowed his eyes, glaring at his subordinate.

The distance from there to slash-and-burn village was not short. It would have taken at least a few hours to get here, so was that possible?

The body of the prisoner did not look pale at all. Even touching it, there was no coldness typical of a corpse. He was just lying quietly with his eyes closed, not even showing signs of rigor mortis.

While examining the stiff joints and body of the prisoner, Jerome suddenly seemed to notice something, quickly brushing the hair from his face and feeling the contours.

"Did he... always look like this?" he tilted his head.

He didn't notice when he first saw him, but why does his face seem familiar with his eyes closed?

Jerome grabbed the prisoner's chin and examined his face thoroughly. Feeling like he was missing something important, he couldn't easily pull his hands away from the man's face. As the murmurs of his subordinates grew louder behind him, Jerome, unable to find any distinctive features, finally gave up and stepped back from the cart.

"It might not be death. Put him in the barn for now and keep an eye on him."

Upon the order, his subordinates immediately swarmed the cart.

Jerome, still in a daze, left the square, rubbing his face with one hand.

"Uh?"

One of the bandits, who was pulling out the corpse of the prisoner, paused momentarily.

"Why? What's wrong?"

"It's strange. He... why is he so light?"

His comrade, who was pushing the cart to the side of the square, responded nonchalantly.

"What's so strange about that? Those priests or apothecaries are often skinny, aren't they?"

"No, it's not that..."

He couldn't explain this strange sensation. No matter how light a person is, there should be a weight corresponding to the volume of bones and flesh in the body. But this prisoner felt different somehow. The material of the body felt subtly different, it felt like he was touching something empty, not human, which sent chills down his spine.

"Is it just my imagination..."

Ignoring the eerie feeling, he carried the corpse towards the barn.

Meanwhile, one of his men stopped Jerome, who was stumbling towards the shabby hut.

"Boss."

He was a burly man with a carelessly grown stiff beard, an old subordinate who had been with him since Rohan.

"I... Martha's case really didn't work out. I've ordered the funeral preparations to be done properly, so don't worry too much."

He hadn't dared to speak up yesterday due to the unusual atmosphere, but seeing his dispirited leader, he felt he should say something comforting. However, Jerome's reaction was somewhat

strange.

"Martha?"

Jerome blinked his eyes in confusion.

Who was that again? Martha...

Furrowing his brows in thought for a moment, Jerome successfully recalled his wife, who had only died yesterday.

"Ah, Martha! Yes, that's right... You handle it as you see fit. You're doing great."

"...Boss?"

One of his subordinates, who knew about his deep affection for his wife, called out with a puzzled expression. Jerome, however, merely waved his hand dismissively at him and resumed his staggered walk toward the dilapidated shack.

If his subordinate could have seen Jerome's soul, he would have been shocked. His soul was in a terrible state, as if his entire head had been ripped off, leaving only half a body to float aimlessly.

Returning home, Jerome habitually shut the door and stared blankly around the shack.

Was he still drunk? His behavior today was unusually strange, even to him.

Why did everything feel so unfamiliar and numb? When he tried to think, his head felt heavy and foggy, and when he tried to recall past memories, they were faint.

His gaze fell on Kaien, who was sitting in a corner of the shack, eyes closed, dozing off. As long as Kaien didn't show his gruesome white-eyed eyes, he was just a tidy and pretty boy.

Suddenly, Jerome's body began to tremble as if he'd been struck by lightning.

That face...!

"Ahh...!"

Jerome fell to the floor, letting out a groan that sounded like a scream. Perhaps due to his paralyzed soul, he wasn't working properly. His realization did not materialize into thoughts or words, instead all he did was leaking out guttural sound while dragging his body backward.

"Huh...!"

Awoken by the noise, Kaien rubbed his eyes with a sleep-filled face. He soon spotted Jerome, shaking violently on the floor of the shack, and scowled.

"Why is he behaving like this? He's suddenly acting strange."

Even though all I did was rip off his head.

Kaien yawned and rose from his spot.

"You've been so noisy, crying 'Martha, Martha' and disrupted my sleep. Seems like I was a bit hasty. Who would have thought you'd turn out this way?"

Well, it doesn't matter anymore.

It was about time to leave; this place was nearing its end too.

Kaien approached the trembling Jerome, withdrawing the remaining fragments of his soul. At the same time, Jerome's eyes rolled back and he fell over, dead as a doornail.

It was merely days ago that Jerome, annoyed by the whining of prisoners whose tongues had been cut off, had beaten one to death with a single punch. But now, he'd ended up just like them. The irony was almost too much to bear.

Chewing on the ripped-out soul fragments, Kaien started to casually pack up his disguise. Rodrigo had yet to return from his trip to the gate, but there was no more time to wait for him. After all, he had

the new identity card Rodrigo had prepared, so he should be able to manage on his own.

But the strong lingering thoughts of Jerome's soul left a clear piece of information in Kaien's head. It was a common occurrence when consuming souls, but the revelation was enough to stop him in his tracks.

'That suspicious demon worshipper is in slash-and-burn village now?'

* * *

As soon as Nate regained consciousness, he was surrounded by a group of hideous bandits and became dejected.

'Did I get left behind after all...?'

He had told Enrique to abandon him when needed, but the man really did abandon him without hesitation.

At Nate's awakening, the bandits initially jumped in surprise, as if seeing a ghost. But soon, they approached him with grotesque grins.

"The boss was right. You were alive after all."

He tried to move, but his wrists were tied behind him with ropes, making it impossible to free himself.

These guys are quite cautious; they tied me up even when I appeared dead.

Furthermore, there were clear signs of injury on each of the bandits surrounding him. A cut on the forehead, a bandage soaked in blood on the head, a swollen, twisted nose. So, they all harbored deep resentment towards him, Nate.

"Trying to run away, you bastard? Hurry up and spill it! Who's backing you! You scum, are you really an Asein spy?"

One of the brigands grabbed his collar and his body was helplessly yanked up.

"There's an inside man here, right? If you don't talk soon, you'll never see a good end, you piece of shit!"

The group member tapped a sharp dagger against his cheek, making threats. Nate quietly sighed with a gloomy face.

If only he had asked Enrique to cut off his arm earlier.

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Let's briefly discuss the past.

During the period when young Nate was fully immersed in his culinary travels, there was a time when he was particularly focused on seafood dishes. While staying for a few days in a port city famous for its shrimp dishes, he encountered an old man with dark circles extending down to his chin.

He introduced himself as the guardian of Delcross and was currently in the midst of being worked to the bone fighting against a danger that had befallen the dimension he protected.

-Oh my...

Even then, the boy, who possessed innate spirit sight and exceptional divinity, could immediately tell the old man's words were not mere bluster. Sincerely hoping his sympathetic thoughts would be conveyed to him, Nate chewed on a crispy fried shrimp.

-Then help me out a bit! Don't just pretend to care with words!

-Oh my...

-You rotten bastard! Do you think I'm doing this for my own benefit? I'm telling you, the dimension you live in is on the verge of destruction!

The important thing was not whether it would be destroyed, but when.

-So the crisis is imminent. In a hundred years, no, at least within a few decades, a terrible calamity will befall this world!

A hundred years to a few decades. That was outside his range of

consideration.

Nate nodded.

-Please continue to stay healthy and work for the sake of the world.

-What?

A distinct vein popped out on the old man's forehead.

-You're the only one I can ask for help on this continent. You merely need to occasionally exercise my authority when needed!

-It's not like you can freely exercise your authority just because you want to, right?

-I'm not asking that much of you, a human! Literally, just assist me a bit, okay? Just lend a hand. At this rate, forget the dimension, I'll die first!

-Well, you see, I'm also scheduled to die within a few years, so...

Krahhhh! The old man looked as if he would breathe fire from his mouth at any moment.

However, not many years later, the guardian of Delcross was dumbfounded to see Nate, who had come running to him on his own two feet with a deathly pale face.

-Sir, when is the crisis of that world? What should I do?

It was just before Melody's childbirth, right after he had received news from the information guild that he had become the father of three other children.

* * *

'Is this not retribution from back then, old man?.'

Being violently shaken by a bandit, Nate sorrowfully thought this to himself.

It would have been better if he had helped the weary old man a bit

earlier. If he had taken a proactive stance and supported him from the start, he wouldn't have been aimlessly wandering around, recklessly falling in love here and there.

Then again, if that were the case, he wouldn't have met these children. A world without the children he had already met was now an unthinkable concept for him.

"You little brat! You got some nerve, huh? Planning to keep your mouth shut till the end?"

The man shaking him by the scruff of his neck lost his temper and swung his fist. Reflexively, Nate twisted his upper body slightly, narrowly avoiding the punch, and continued with his thought process.

By the way, what on earth could that kid Kaien be thinking?

The child seemed to have been born with spiritual eyes, just like him, but he never expected him to come up with the idea of devouring souls.

Was it because of his early childhood memories of starvation? Was his personality twisted because he was abused by Jerome? Or did he suffer a severe head injury when he was young that he could no longer think normally?

When he first learned that the child was doing such a thing, he was furious to the core, but when he thought about it, wasn't it all his fault for not finding and looking after the child in time?

"Huh? Did this brat just dodge?"

The bandit lifted his other fist, but Nate spun his body around the grabbed collar, wrapping his legs around the bandit's neck. He didn't have enough weight to bring the man down, but luckily the bandit lost his grip on Nate's robe and scrambled to support himself on the ground.

During that brief moment, Nate, who had quickly rolled to his side and gotten up, tripped the other bandit still standing there in shock, and with that momentum, spun and delivered a kick to the jaw of

another bandit standing nearby.

Choke! Cough! The bandits staggered, but they didn't completely fall.

Homunculus's body was overly light and he could not replenish his strength with aura, resulting in a disaster. It would have been better if he could wield handcuffs as before.

"That bastard? He's not just an ordinary prisoner, he was professionally trained!"

"Let's all rush him! Kill him!"

Aaaargh! The bandits rushed towards him one after another, but Nate was still lost in his own thoughts.

Let's just be glad I found him now.

It was fortunate that he had a bad premonition and hurriedly came here; if he had been waiting for the guild's investigation, he might have lost track of the child completely in the scorched village swept through by the punitive force.

For now, it seems I should find Kaien and have a little chat. I've already put a barrier on the child's soul at the bottom of the cliff, so now I can locate the child anytime.

Swoosh. As the bandit's fist swung wildly with terrifying momentum, he ducked to avoid it and simultaneously spun his leg behind, slamming the bandit's neck onto the ground. Crack!

Seeing another man rush from behind, he swirled his body, grazing past him. Using that momentum, he spun once more and kicked the bandit's jaw. Thump!

Spinning around was a bit tedious, but he gathered his strength and launched his attack, and this time he felt a solid hit.

He moved sluggishly towards the next guy.

"...This crazy guy!"

"How can he still move like that while stumbling so much?"

Indeed, a body without aura was in such a state that it could barely muster enough strength to land a solid hit, but fortunately, after landing a hit, the divine power recovered his body enough to land another.

In other words, Nate would not fall during the fight. It's just that the process was extremely strenuous.

He ran towards the bandit at the entrance. Using the momentum of his run, he leapt and kicked the guy's chin. Cough!

Unfortunately, he was a bit short on strength this time. The guy wobbled but didn't fall, blocking the entrance while the guys behind rushed towards him.

Nate promptly jumped back and headbutted the nearest guy's chin. If one strike doesn't work, hit multiple times.

* * *

"I never imagined that this would happen....."

When Kaien arrived at the empty barn, all the bandits inside were already down.

Nate had cut the ropes with the dagger used to threaten him and was considering cutting off his arm as well. He hesitated because the dagger was too short to cut off an arm without aura, and the heavy handcuffs were somewhat helpful in combat with the homunculus's body.

The boy who was quietly observing the barn opened the door in surprise at the unexpected scene, Nate called him quietly.

"Kaien."

The boy crumpled his face in displeasure and twisted his lips.

"What? How do you know my name? Who are you to call me?"

"....."

"What the hell is this mess? Did you do all this?"

His black fierce eyes flickered.

"Are you really a spy from Asein?"

"We need to talk."

".....?"

Kaien examined Nate's face for a moment. It was hard to read any meaningful emotion from his face, which never changed. As the boy looked at Nate's emotionless face, his own expression gradually ebbed away like a low tide.

His severely furrowed eyebrows relaxed, and his exaggeratedly curving lips straightened. He decided there was no point in consciously mimicking the faces of the bandits, and that it was unnecessary.

Soon, the two of them, looking at each other, wore similarly bland expressions on their faces, as if looking at a mirror.

Kaien glanced at the bandits sprawled inside the barn with an expressionless face. Seeing the newly stamped handcuffed guys showing no signs of regaining consciousness, he staggered inside and locked the door. Then, he slowly turned to look at Nate and asked.

"...What do you want to talk about?"

This was the first time Kaien had met someone like him who could see souls. There was some time until the punitive force arrived, and there was no need to refuse when the other party wanted to talk.

He also needed to figure out what the guy had done to him a while ago.

"Why do you eat souls? Since when have you been doing this?"

"Why do I have to tell you that?"

The boy seemed to ask out of pure curiosity, rather than in an accusatory tone.

"It depends on your answer how I should stop you."

"Like what you did last time?"

"Just like last time."

Upon Nate's nod, the boy's eyebrows furrowed this time.

That could be a problem.

"If that's the case, then our conversation is over. If you're intent on hindering me somehow, is there any point in talking to you?" The boy turned to leave as he spoke, but he stopped at the exit upon hearing Nate's next words.

"Have you ever examined your own soul?"

"...?"

"Do you really not understand the impact that consuming souls has on your own soul?"

It seemed to imply that it was having a negative effect on him.

Kaien quietly inspected his own soul. It didn't look much different from his usual physical body.

If there was a difference, it would be that the numerous souls he had gorged on for the past few days hadn't been properly digested, and they were poking out from various parts of his body.

[You want to kill Aslan, don't you? Why me? Huh? Why me?]

From his stomach, Conrad's face, stained with bloody tears, popped out. He was the one Kaien killed a few days ago by the waterfall, ripping out his nails with Rodrigo.

From his back, one of Rodrigo's legs was sticking out, and from his neck, Martha's right arm was dangling.

And Jerome's face, whom he had just finished consuming, was poking out from his side and howling.

[Argh! Martha, Martha, Martha!]

"Well, it's a bit of a mess."

This usually didn't happen, but it seemed that consuming too many souls in a short period of time caused the previously eaten souls to also pop out.

His casual reply caused Nate's expression to become slightly perplexed. He cocked his head and asked, "Do you not feel the pain that your soul is experiencing? The dark emotions of the souls you've consumed pouring into you simultaneously and unfiltered, is surely not something an ordinary human can endure..."

"My soul is in pain?"

Kaien cocked his head. It was something he didn't understand.

Since he was an infant, he had been an emotionless human. As he grew up, he gradually realized he was a bit different from others, but the clever boy quickly began to mimic the expressions of other bandits and slowly eliminate the discomfort others felt.

It wasn't difficult. Most of the bandits were always angry.

By frowning, screaming, and cursing, the bandits believed him to be one of them. That had been his way of life up to this point.

Maybe his soul was capable of feeling emotions like other people. After all, he could not see his own facial expression and hence had no way to confirm.

But, as long as he wasn't suffering now, wasn't that okay regardless of his soul's state?

Upon Kaien's words, Nate shook his head.

"Do you think your body will be fine while your soul is being ruined? You'll have to deal with it one way or another eventually."

"Um....."

That reminded him—Jerome, whose soul was torn apart, had half his body disappear in an instant.

Just until yesterday, the boy had scoffed at Jerome's idiocy for not understanding what his soul truly wanted as he tore Jerome's soul apart. But was he no different from that fool?

"Well, let's put that aside for now. So, why are you trying to stop me? The guys I ate had nothing to do with you, right? If there's a problem, it's my problem. What does it have to do with you?"

Nate then quietly locked eyes with the boy. "It's not that it doesn't concern me. Your every mistake will ultimately be my responsibility, and the problems you encounter will also become mine."

"What? Why would that be?"

The boy asked with a dumbfounded face, but upon hearing Nate's next words, even Kaien, the notorious Kaien, was left with his mouth hanging open.

"Because I'm your father."

Huh? What?

For a moment, silence flowed between the two.

"You are? My?"

When Nate nodded, Kaien made a strange face.

"How old are you exactly? At what age did you have me?"

"....."

Nate subtly avoided eye contact.

How could this seemingly young-looking person be my father?

How did he even find me?

Are you really a devil worshipper? Just when I thought I'd gotten out of the bandit's group, am I now a family member of a criminal?

Although he seemed a bit flustered and threw out these various questions, the boy seemed to accept the fact easier than expected. For the first time, he had met someone who could see souls like him, and it seemed very convincing when this person said they were family.

Moreover, Kaien would have started to notice more and more similarities between the two. Their overall impressions were quite different because of his intense red hair and the large whites of his eyes, but upon close examination, their facial contours looked quite similar.

"So, what is your name?"

"I'm Nathaniel Klein."

Suddenly, a very famous human name came out of his mouth, so it

took Kaien a while to recognize his identity.

...The Holy Emperor? My biological father is the Holy Emperor?

The boy's mouth hung open.

"So, the Holy Emperor who is famous for being unruly in this generation is....."

"....."

"So that's why your soul looked so different because you're a representative of God. But why don't you look like that now? Are you usually hiding your power?"

"...It's similar to that."

"I see, so I was the prince of Delcross."

That's not bad. Kaien's face brightened a bit.

Nate explained to the boy in a quiet tone.

His mother was a noblewoman of Rohan, whom he had met briefly in his youth and then parted. She gave birth to Kaien and met a group of bandits on her way back to Rohan, where everyone except Kaien was killed.

The Holy Emperor, who had learned of his existence late through the Information Guild, had disguised himself as a prisoner and came here to find him.

"Why go through all that trouble?"

The boy couldn't understand at all. Isn't it okay not to care whether he exists or not?

Just as he didn't seem to resent the fact that he was raised in a bandits' group, he didn't seem grateful that his father had personally come a long way to find his son. It just seemed like a useless and inefficient thing to do.

Nate gazed at Kaien's face for a while and then asked in a calm tone, "Will you come with me to the imperial palace of Delcross?"

It was a question as if there was a choice.

"What if I go?"

"You'll receive all the benefits that you can get as the 4th Prince of Delcross and my fifth child. The Blue Rose Palace, the palace of the princes, will be your home, and all the educational opportunities that a prince should enjoy will be provided. You can formally participate in the succession battle to become the future Holy Emperor, and based on the power and connections that others can't even imagine, you can try to pioneer something new."

"....."

"You can also build a bond with your kin. There are many of your siblings in the imperial palace."

Kaien grimaced a bit. It all sounded good but when he thought about it, but on reflection, they were not very appealing.

"What if I don't go?"

"I'll give you the fortress of Klanos. All supports will be provided excluding the authority of the royal family. You can travel the continent freely and settle wherever you want. The informants of the guild will visit you regularly to ensure that you're not inconvenienced. You will have no glorious authority, but at the same time, there will be no heavy duty."

"Hmm....."

"However, you must not commit crimes such as capturing souls or violating social norms."

The boy gave a sly smile.

"Can't you just pretend you didn't see me and leave me alone?"

"That would be impossible."

Nate firmly shook his head.

Kaien stroked his chin and pondered for a moment. Then the boy who opened his mouth had calm eyes.

"I've been trying everything to get out of Jerome's hands until now. I thought I couldn't get completely out of here unless I wiped out this damned thieves' group entirely."

The bandits, who must not reveal their den, never leave a betrayer alone. If anyone tries to escape, they either muster their strength to catch and kill them, or hand over the betrayer's information to the guards who are informed in advance for execution.

Unless Kaien wiped out all the bandits who knew his face at once, he would never be free from the risk of being a fugitive for life.

In Rohan, a still young Kaien failed to properly control information, inadvertently giving Jerome the opportunity to escape first. So this time, he went to great lengths to delay Flanders's punitive forces from realizing what was happening as much as possible.

"But after we get rid of the king of the bandtis, you're telling me that now the emperor of Delcross is my father? What's the difference? No, if I were to join the new pack you're ruling over, could I ever break free from you?"

"..."

"I'm not going to Delcross. Father."

Nate, after catching his breath for a while, slowly nodded his head.

"...Alright."

The two then exchanged various stories. Curiously, Kaien, who seemed to be constantly on guard and hostile, was more cooperative in the conversation with Nate than expected.

Of course, it was only because he found it pointless to resist once he realized that this man who appeared as his real father could control Kaien's abilities and beat down all the bandits.

Apart from the occasional hijinks of Nate tossing handcuffs at the stirring bandits, time passed relatively smoothly.

When asked why he held a grudge against Aslan, Kaien's face stiffened.

"Huh? Ah, that guy. He interfered a lot whenever I tried to plan something."

Didn't I try to plant more spies in the Flower Village in addition to Rodrigo? And I even hired an assassin to kill Jerome.

The boy grumbled.

"Since Aslan was extremely good at detecting all the aura users, I kept failing. Thanks to him, I had Rodrigo provoke the punitive forces to come faster, making him plunder the top of Asein like crazy, do you know how long it took to see the result, Father?"

It wasn't an unwarranted grudge for him. He candidly confessed that it was his doing that led to the death of Martha, the foster mother who raised him.

"After all, Martha would have been killed by the punitive force, right? It's better to make use of her until she's no longer needed rather than dying meaninglessly."

Kaien was firm.

Nate's heart felt a little heavier because the only soul he was able to save in its original form here was hers. Even though they were a band of bandit who ate robbery and murder for breakfast, it was certainly not a fair punishment to have even the soul ripped and devoured after death.

With a serious face, he once again warned his son.

"Keep this in mind. Your soul is at its limit now. If you try to consume another soul rashly, I can't guarantee what will happen."

But upon hearing these words, Kaien looked straight at Nate.

"You're not telling me that it's bad, are you?"

'Martha used to say that whatever I did was bad', the boy added.

"I didn't know you wanted such nagging."

"You were furious when you first saw me, weren't you? Saying I devoured Martha's soul."

Nate silently stared at the boy for a moment. The boy couldn't tell if those eyes, occasionally emitting a peculiar silver glow, were looking at Kaien's face or his soul. Maybe both.

"Do you know why that's a bad thing?"

"No?"

From the start, Kaien didn't understand the standards of good and bad.

"If I explain, do you think you can understand their pain?"

"Not at all?"

You think I would know others' pain when I don't even know the pain of my own soul.

"Then there's no need to say it, is there?"

"...You're weird..." Kaien scratched his cheek with his finger. "But it's strange. I find it very easy to talk to you. I think it's the first time I've had a conversation like this with anyone. I think I might miss seeing you more often in the future."

"..."

"Well, I should go. It's already late. The Flanders punitive force will be here soon. It's hard to run away when everything's in chaos, so it would be better for you to leave before it's too late, right?"

"I will send a spy from the guild later."

"To watch over me... Well, got it."

Kaien staggered toward the entrance of the barn. As he was opening the locked barn door, Nate called him.

"Kaien."

"Hmm?"

"You don't need to pretend in front of me."

"..."

From the first time Nate saw Kaien, he knew. He knew that Kaien's left leg was perfectly normal, with Aura functioning as it should.

For a moment, Kaien's face hardened, but then he slowly shook his head. "...Wow. Even Jerome, who is full of suspicion, was fooled for almost 10 years. You really are not an ordinary person."

Firstly, he pretended to limp to spite Martha, who had failed to protect him properly. Next, he did it to guilt Jerome into not striking him down too easily. And most recently, to completely leave the life of the bandits and gain a brand new life, the boy had continued the act of limping.

That long pretense would end today.

The boy, who opened the barn door and stretched his left foot out which had been pretending to be lame, suddenly paused and looked back at Nate.

"It seems like not knowing the state of your own soul is as good as being ignorant, so should I teach you something too, Father?"

"....."

"Do you know how your soul looked when you were talking about life inside and outside the palace to me?"

With one corner of his mouth tugged upwards, Kaien gave a mean-spirited smirk.

"Father, you really hate being in the palace, don't you?"

The boy waved at him briefly, then disappeared outside the barn.

* * *

The day was gradually darkening.

The Flower Village was in turmoil after they belatedly discovered Jerome lying dead in their lodging.

The leader has been killed, there's a spy, we're under attack! In the confusion, all the bandits out for search were summoned to the public square.

During this process, when they belatedly learned that Flanders' army was heading this way, they panicked and began to arm themselves and escape. However, the punitive force had already laid a siege and was closing in on the village.

Just before the siege closed in, Nate, who had barely managed to escape the village, was slowly going down the mountain with a blank expression. The problem was that even if he headed towards the Asein Gate as he was now, it was impossible for a criminal like him who had received capital punishment to pass through alone.

"Ah, Enrique."

Fortunately, he was able to meet Enrique, who was hastily coming up the mountain on a narrow path.

"Your Majesty!"

At the relieved shout, Nate momentarily gazed at his face. It was because Enrique's face, which found Nate, showed an obvious sign of relief.

Nate already knew that Enrique sometimes looked at him with a very uncomfortable gaze. In fact, even Francis tried to kill him.

But in times like this, he couldn't quite tell if Enrique wanted to kill him or was worried about him.

Passing by the rigid Enrique who had forgotten to make a proper

greeting, Nate patted his back. Of course, he didn't forget to pour out his divine power either. After all, he was aware that he had been too harsh on people today.

"The siege has already been completed. You would have had a hard time if we had passed each other."

Only then did Enrique quickly compose his expression and bowed his head to report.

"I safely handed over the two people to the guild members at the gate."

"You didn't have to rush back, but good work."

"....."

As he passed him and went down the mountain path again, Nate became lost in thought.

Kaien had said that Nate was a person he could talk to, which was natural. Nate knew very well of another person who showed the same symptoms as that boy.

That person also couldn't feel emotions from the beginning. He couldn't empathize at all with why others were suffering or sad, so even if those emotions were explained to him, he couldn't understand them.

Perhaps more than that is due to physical problems. Because that person's soul also reacted to sad things by crying and happy things by getting excited, just like others.

The pain felt by their souls is not unfelt. They simply don't know why it's painful.

Therefore, their faces often show a radical contrast, smiling while their souls are wailing.

The reason he didn't realize this when he first met Kaien was because both Kaien's face and his soul were glaring at him with a pouty face full of discontent.

That child left the world with a gleeful face for the first time, but his soul now.....

His train of thought was interrupted because Enrique, who had been following behind, asked out of the blue.

"Would you like me to carry you, Your Majesty?"

Nate thought, the man before him sure is making strange jokes today.

However, Enrique asked again hesitantly.

"...Are you okay?"

"...?"

What could possibly be wrong?

The sun was setting.

However, as the twilight spread and the sky darkened, the western sky suddenly brightened like never before. A massive flame rose, covering the entire valley that turned from the mountain ridge to the northeast. It was Flower Village.

Enrique glanced back with interest.

"It seems like it has started."

Nate silently gazed at the sight. His eyes were fixed on the transparent souls rising and moving gracefully through the air above the blazing mountain.

Souls. They were souls rising up towards the fiery mountain, moving as if dancing in the sky.

Perhaps some of them were struggling in agonizing death, while others were resisting leaving behind the regrets of their lives. Yet, to those watching from afar, they all seemed to be dancing carefreely.

Soon, the two of them turned around and hastened their steps along the path.

When they approached the Asein Gate, a familiar coffin came into view.

Enrique subtly looked at Nate, but Nate calmly entered the coffin without a word. Even if it was a grave waiting for him, he would have gone inside because he was so exhausted he felt close to death.

Swoosh. As the lid closed, his consciousness immediately faded away.

By the time they arrived at the guild branch, it was already pitch

dark outside.

Supporting Nate with a dazed mind, Enrique entered the building. Aslan and old Max were waiting anxiously with worried expressions. The color of their faces had turned paler than ever. Even Aslan had ran up to him and grabbed the hem of his robe and began to cry. Even the old man, with whom Nate hasn't had much of a relationship, cared so much for him, whom he's only known for a few days.

What a kind boy, Nate thought.

As they were sharing a touching moment, a loud laughter echoed from inside the lobby.

"Huhuhahaha! You're a slow poke, have you finally arrived now?"

A tall and muscular man with well-developed muscles walked out of the lobby, laughing heartily. He was Justin Asteros, the guild's powerhouse and one of the few Sword Masters in the continent.

"Kukuku, Your Majesty. I heard you had a hard time this time. Little Aslan says you're a total....."

The man was finding something amusing, laughing with a chuckle as he approached them. However, he suddenly stopped mid-sentence when Nate quietly extended his arms towards him.

The man's eyes widened as he saw the blood-soaked bandages wrapped around Nate's wrists. The previously lively atmosphere in the lobby cooled down instantly.

"Justin." In a calm tone, Nate called his name.

The man flinched and trembled.

"If you play this prank one more time, I'll impose a 30% tariff on all your goods in the future. Understand?"

"What?" Justin's eyes opened wide. "30% tariff... Hey! That's straight up robbery, isn't it? Even Asein wouldn't do such things! And why would you impose a tariff on what I import, huh?"

"You are importing, aren't you? The latest fad from Brittany."

"What...."

Justin's jaw dropped.

Are fashion trends considered imports too? Huh? Well, that's good! In return, I'll raise the prices! I'll raise them sharply! Do you know who our store's most important customer is? It's your wife!

The man, who had been grumbling for a while, soon took out his Aura Blade and cut off the handcuffs.

Clank, clank.

Watching the handcuffs fall neatly to the floor, Aslan let out a sigh of admiration. Wow.

The man, who seemed quite rough, was actually an incredibly skilled individual.

Nate, with his wrists finally freed after a few days, rotated them here and there. As Nate did so, Justin, who had been watching him closely, asked hesitantly,

"...Hey, are you okay?"

"...?"

"This guy, and that guy, why are they acting like this today. If they were going to ask if I'm okay, shouldn't they have refrained from playing tricks from the start?"

Before returning to Delcross, Nate received a brief report on the current situation of the Asein branch and the direction of handling this incident. Among them was the issue of the whereabouts of the two people he had rescued from the Flower Village.

Max, who has no family or ties, decided to live by helping with odd jobs in the guild.

He was beaming with the thought that he had finally escaped from

the bandit group he had been tied to for half his life. He didn't even seek his favorite alcohol, and it seemed that the cascade of holy power that poured in succession had suppressed even his alcohol withdrawal symptoms.

For Aslan, the range of choices was wider.

"This kid is talented. He's flawless as an alchemist, and even has an extraordinary talent to awaken his aura alone."

The child had been crawling in the bandit group since his childhood but was a rare child with a correct mind. The boy's face shone with joy at Nate's calm praise.

"Follow the child's wishes and help as much as possible. It would be good to continue studying as an assistant to a famous alchemist, or to write a letter of introduction as a squire to a promising knight."

But upon hearing that, the head of the Asein branch smiled quietly and made a strange gesture towards Aslan.

"Hmm, while waiting for you, I heard some interesting stories from this little one."

Suspicious of what trick was going on, Nate glanced at Justin, and Aslan stepped forward with a tense face. The boy walked up to Nate and cautiously knelt on one knee and bowed his head. He seemed to be imitating what Enrique does, and although the bow was awkward, it was quite serious.

The boy who had given a bow made an appeal to Nate with a slightly trembling voice.

"Bart... no, Your Majesty the Holy Emperor. I wish to be one of Your Majesty's person from now on."

A sigh could be heard from Enrique at his side.

"Another naive individual....."

Whether or not there was a noise from the side, Aslan looked up at Nate and spoke earnestly.

"I'm going to build up my sword skills and go to Delcross. I'm going to take the imperial knight exam next year and become a knight of the royal guard protecting you, always serving you by your side. I will do my best to make it so."

"....."

Nate was inwardly surprised by Aslan's unexpected words. It hasn't been a day since he'd escaped from the bandits group, but has already making plans for his life too quickly. Besides, isn't the process strangely specific?

Sure enough, there was someone who had stirred things up at his side.

"Hmm, I've promised to watch over his swordsmanship. The knight's examination? This great Justin will make sure he passes it through easily!"

Ha ha ha ha! After a glance at the proud and confident branch head, Nate met the gaze of the boy looking up at him with sparkling eyes.

"Aslan, you're still young. You don't need to set everything in advance. Childhood is shorter than you think. There's hardly enough time to try and enjoy things you've never done or enjoyed before, why don't you spend some more time thinking carefully?"

However, Aslan shook his head.

"If it weren't for Your Majesty, I would have surely lost my life to the hunting party today. My life now is as if it was given by Your Majesty. Then, isn't it right that the rest of my life should be dedicated to you, Your Majesty?"

He had been crawling desperately in the bandits group alone since childhood. He barely adapted, then the punitive force attacked, and he even crossed the border of Flanders on his own. Although he lived hard, the days were extremely lonely for a young boy.

But in the past few days following Nate, Aslan was able to feel an unprecedented sense of stability. He was able to firmly believe, rely on, and follow someone even in the tense situation of chasing and

being chased. The boy didn't want to lose that newfound sense of stability and bonding again.

"Aslan."

Nate opened his mouth to once again dissuade the boy.

But for a moment, the face of a grown young man overlapped with the face of the boy looking up at him. Nate immediately knew that it was Aslan in a few years.

The well-grown young man was wearing the uniform of the royal guard knights as he promised in his childhood, but it was torn and soaked with blood, presumably in the middle of a tough battle. Other royal guard knights who seemed to have cooled down around him could be seen.

He was standing with his sword pointed strenuously at the dark grey sky. He shouted loudly, staring at his unknown opponent.

—If I had known it would be like this, if that was the case, I would never.....!

That scene disappeared very quickly. However, the tone of desperation in the young man's shout made Nate ask the boy the same question again.

"...won't you regret it?"

However, the boy's eyes full of conviction were as upright as ever.

"Yes, there will never be such a thing."

"....."

"...Is it not possible?"

What could he say in front of those desperate eyes?

"...I look forward to the day when Delcross greets another excellent royal guard knight."

Nate could barely reply, clearing his choking throat.

Ripple, ripple.

Listening to the faint sound of water lapping, Nate opened his eyes. It was the small artificial pond in the heart of the imperial palace.

He hoisted himself from the pond's surface and slowly walked out. His thoroughly soaked robes were clinging heavy, dragging his body down to the pond floor.

A middle-aged woman with a gentle face approached him, holding a clean blanket. She was the commander of the always reliable and faithful Saint Aurelion Paladin Order.

"Your heart had stopped twice. Your Majesty."

That seemed to be the reason her face looked a little pale. She must have been under a lot of stress for the past few days. Francis, who always worried terribly about his commander, would have something more to scold him about later.

"You've worked hard, Katrina."

"Not at all. Did you find the prince?"

Before Nate could step out of the pond, he halted. He stared at the droplets falling from his hair and the hem of his clothes for a moment, then nodded.

"Yes, I found the child. He decided to live outside the empire as another Klanos."

"...I see."

Knowing the character of the Holy Emperor, she thought he would immediately bring the child back, but it seemed something did not go as smoothly as expected. As expected, Nate, standing still in his place, covered his face with one hand, sighing and making an unexpected remark.

"If I had known this would happen, I wouldn't have hated Solomon, that bastard so much....."

Katrina gasped unadvertently. It was the first time the Emperor had mentioned the former Emperor first.

Solomon Klein. The 16th Emperor of Delcross, a cool-headed ruler who had tightly ensnared the theological academy and the council in political weaknesses.

A man who merely frowned, sipping his wine while his young son vomited blood in front of him.

As a child, Nate had thought of such things absentmindedly as he watched his predecessor celebrate. After all, he and his mother's unhappiness stemmed from the man and if he could just kill him, wouldn't everything be resolved?

But when he received the same gaze from his own child, memories of his childhood came back to him with new meanings.

Even though his own son seemed to obediently converse in the end, a faint hostility toward him was occasionally conveyed from Kaien. The child probably thought that it would be better to seize the opportunity, kill him, and completely escape rather than living under the surveillance of the continent's greatest authority.

His own child hadn't done so for one reason only; he hadn't been able to find Nate's opening.

Worst of all, during his conversation with Kaien, the eerie malice transmitted from the boy's soul filled with black cracks was still vivid in his mind. The boy's soul shed black tears and relentlessly spilled out curses at him.

—I curse you! I curse you! All my pain is because of you!

—I'm going to eat your soul! Tear it to shreds with a hook and eat it all up!

Kaien, who could hear other souls but couldn't hear his own, would never realize his true feelings.

"Katrina, at first... I thought I would give the child freedom to speak."

The thoughtful commander silently listened to his words.

"But now I can't help but wonder. I'm afraid I might end up cutting the child with my own hands."

Nate didn't believe Kaien would always be docile, but he was not prepared to inscribe the spell of restraint, risking damaging the child's soul.

Could the deteriorating soul of a child ever recover? What if it's already beyond the tipping point and collapses? What should he do if it completely transforms into something wrong?

"I vowed never to raise my sword against my child again....."

Katrina looked at the droplets of water trickling down his chin for a moment, then quietly wrapped him in the blanket she had been holding.

"Your Majesty."

"....."

"Even if such a thing happens, it will never happen."

Her voice was filled with a gentle yet firm conviction.

"Your Majesty, you have given the prince what you wanted most."

Even though she was saying something contrary to his premonition, her voice remained firm, making him want to believe her.

"...Yes."

And that's why he always wished to be a person like this paladin commander for his children.

49

The day when the larvae of Bantra Moss nearly opened a gate in the capital.

Seongjin, who had literally been brought back from the brink of death, was immediately taken to the Pearl Palace and spent the entire afternoon surrounded and pestered by an assembly of physicians.

After undergoing all kinds of examination, including the rolling of his eyes and sticking out of his tongue, the chaos finally ended when he had undergone a holy power baptism by a priest summoned on short notice. Seongjin, after receiving a stern warning from Physician Ninnias to rest, was left sprawled on his bed.

Although he felt completely recovered, Masain standing next to the bed would glare at him whenever he tried to move even a bit. Not only that, but everyone in the Pearl Palace showed an exaggerated response to Seongjin's every move.

They didn't even let him hold a glass of water on his own, trying to spoon-feed him as if he was incapable.

Well, according to Sir Kurt, he was in cardiac arrest for over 30 minutes, so their concern wasn't unfounded.

But if it was that serious, didn't he completely pass the golden time for brain damage? Wouldn't that dumb Morres guy lose more brain cells than he already has?

To Seongjin's concerns, Francis, that foul-tempered paladin, scoffed.

"Don't make a baseless excuse. I arrived early and continuously poured holy power into you. If you feel your intelligence has decreased a bit, blame it on your natural brain capacity."

Wow, who is this guy? To be able to throw such harsh words without any hesitation at the prince of the Holy Empire.

Seongjin looked at this tall paladin with renewed interest.

Francis Agen.

One of the few paladins who had permission to step into the Pearl Palace, which was off-limits to regular knights altogether.

He was the lieutenant of the Paladin Order of Saint Aurelion and was responsible for all kinds of religious and legal issues of Prince Morres, acting in place of the current commander, Dame Katrina.

Minor royals' outings should always be reported to a legal representative. The lieutenant, who is also managing the Paladin Order in place of the commander, heard about the outing late and had to ride hard to catch up with Seongjin's group.

"Why did you have to pick a place designated as a 'caution area' by His Majesty the Holy Emperor for a social gathering? You, who hardly ever go out, why did you choose such a place?"

Caution area? Because of that larvae?

When Seongjin looked at Sir Masain, the man quietly shook his head.

How was he supposed to know and avoid a top-secret situation that even the knight commander of the Imperial Guard didn't know?

Anyway, when they arrived at the villa, the ground was shaking as if an earthquake had occurred, and when he arrived in the basement, Masain had just begun a rib-breaking procedure disguised as CPR.

Why does the commander of the Paladin Order, not the First Empress, become the legal representative when the Holy Emperor is absent? And why is the First Empress, who would have rushed in one step normally, nowhere to be seen now?

Seongjin momentarily had such questions, but he soon pushed them out of his mind. Francis was starting to scold Masain, who was still showing a dumbfounded face.

"Pull yourself together, Masain! Do you think His Majesty attached you to the prince just to be a mere swordsmanship teacher? Especially at times like this, you should be able to hold off the Inquisitors and the Orthodox Church!"

Masain, who is of the same age and had known the man for a long time.

"Anyhow, whatever you do, you're clumsy."

...It seems their relationship wasn't that friendly.

However, as he said, there seemed to be something wrong with Masain right now. His vacant face was like a person who lost a screw somewhere. His usual puppy-like demeanor was now intimidatingly oppressive due to his lack of expression.

Of course, it's not a common thing for the prince of the Empire to come back from the dead, but was it shocking enough to affect him that much?

"Don't worry Masain too much. Go now."

The words he had heard from the Holy Emperor during his near-death experience came to mind.

[Hey, people are coming.]

The demon king, who seemed to have been resting quietly for a while, suddenly spoke to Seongin. Seongjin himself was feeling an uneasy air at that moment.

Masain and Francis also seemed to have noticed the anomaly, as their faces hardened for a moment. Francis quickly approached the window and drew back the curtain.

Click, click, click.

A group of paladin knights in armor was quickly approaching the Pearl Palace from afar. As they arrived at the front gate, they spread out in a line and soon surrounded the Pearl Palace in a circle.

Silver gleaming light armor on top of the white robes of the Paladin Order. The golden chains and the pattern of the jet-black sword engraved on their clothes were symbols of the Paladin Order of St. Marcius, which Seongjin had seen earlier at the Diggory's mansion.

A few resident knights of the Pearl Palace came out late to block the entrance, but their demeanor seemed rather intimidating due to their numerical inferiority.

Meanwhile, Durand, the paladin leading the group, strutted into the gate and shouted arrogantly.

"The Inquisitor court hereby summons a witness! Hand over Prince Morres's whereabouts immediately!"

"These bastards really..."

Sir Masain grumbled under his breath. His distorted face looked eerily devilish as if he was about to rush out and start a fight at any moment. Seeing the usually soft commander turn into something akin to an unpinned grenade, Seongjin became anxious.

Thump, thump.

At that moment, Francis patted Masain's shoulder.

"Hey, pull yourself together. First, reorganize the knights you have and secure the entrance to the palace. Meanwhile, I will deal with this guy."

He pushed his glasses up and smirked. He looked more like a mastermind of an evil organization than a paladin.

Yes, fortunately for them, they had a dog, authorized by the Holy Emperor, who enjoyed exercising his power.

Durand, confidently leaning back and standing tall, frowned as a tall paladin walked out of the palace.

This guy again.

Francis intentionally walked right up to the old paladin. This forced

the shorter paladin to look up at him, allowing Francis to look down on him at will.

And so, a second battle between the two men unfolded at the Diggory mansion.

"Did I not mention that I have all powers surpassing the investigation and prosecution rights of the Heretic Inquisitors? Who dares to summon the prince at will?"

"It's just an inquiry investigation for Kenneth Diggory's case. There are no accusations against the prince now! He will not be harmed, so just hand him over!"

"There is none [now], but are you implying that in this process of investigation, charges could be placed?"

"Please refrain from baseless speculation! Of course, if a crime that we didn't know about is revealed during the investigation, that's a different story, but...."

"I see. Understanding that you are fully capable of doing so, as a religious and legal representative of the prince, I refuse to accompany you."

Sir Durand exploded in anger.

"Do you realize what you're doing right now? We need to be investigating the case, not wasting time! Quickly hand over Prince Morres' body right now!"

"Oh! I see. You hurriedly mobilized before the case was even reported because you couldn't waste time, right?"

"What, what did you say...."

As the old paladin stuttered in confusion, Francis stretched up one corner of his mouth.

"I might have chased after Prince Morres because I had a mission, but how was it possible for the Paladin Order of St. Marcias able to deploy even before the incident was known? You arrived almost

simultaneously with me."

"No, that's because...we received reports that the mansion was suspicious, and we were on alert...."

"Ah, so you were aware of the abnormalities but deliberately ignored them and waited for the situation to escalate, endangering the life of a member of the royal family..."

"What! We waited on purpose? What kind of nonsense is that!"

Sir Durand seethed in anger.

"Is that not the case? Then you're saying you were watching the mansion despite receiving suspicious reports and yet didn't know of the danger in advance. Isn't that a major blunder threatening the safety of the capital? I will formally accuse the person in charge and make sure they receive a fitting punishment."

The old paladin stared at Francis for a long time, his face flushed, then stormed off huffily.

Even after he left, the encirclement of paladins remained. Sir Masain, who had gathered the resident knights, blocked the front entrance, and the tension in the standoff intensified.

And shortly after, the dean of the Theology Academy, who was advising on this case, appeared. He was a well-groomed man with a shiny goatee, wearing a splendid robe.

"Prince Morres was present at the scene with the demon. All matters related to demons must be strictly handled. Our advisory council formally requests Prince Morres to appear before the heresy tribunal!"

Francis nodded seriously.

"That's true. You're absolutely right. But how do you, the dean, who wasn't even at the scene, know that this is related to a demon?"

"What?"

"How do you know it's a demon seed? Do you have any evidence?"

"No, just by looking at it...."

"As a paladin, I feel it's somewhat different from the aura of a demon. I didn't feel any magical energy. Ah, does the academy interpret the concept of a demon, as defined by the Lord, differently? So, are you suggesting a scholarly perspective rather than a religious one?"

The wrong answer could lead to a religious trial. The dean's face turned pale blue.

"Even if it's not a demonic species, it's undoubtedly wrong! So, if it happens to be a new threat from another world, for the sake of Delcross, the prince's testimony would be...."

"And how would you prove that it is a threat from another world?"

"That's why, I'm suggesting we should start investigating now!"

"An investigation? Can I ask what you will base your investigation on? Ah, are you suggesting to refer to forbidden texts like the [Otherworldly Apocalypse] from the Holy Empire...."

"You heretic! This man is speaking recklessly!"

The dean disappeared quietly, his hands trembling.

And the last to visit the Pearl Palace in the late evening was the stern old man who had previously encountered the saint at the main imperial palace.

"I didn't expect the Archbishop Benitus to visit personally."

"In a critical situation threatening the safety of the Holy Empire, who else but the head of the heresy tribunal, the Inquisitor, should step forward?"

The Archbishop glared with cold eyes, but Francis didn't blink.

"Your Eminence's efforts are greatly appreciated. But what brings you here?"

"Obviously, it's to request the presence of the prince. I heard you sent Sir Durand away. So, reluctantly, I had to step in."

"Why don't you interrogate the grandson of Archbishop Diggory first, considering the incident happened at his villa?"

The Archbishop sighed. "He suffered a severe injury to the back of his head. He's unconscious now, isn't he?"

"So, shouldn't we wait for him to wake up? Depending on his testimony, I, Francis Agen, will decide whether to allow the prince being summoned as a witness or otherwise."

"Are you saying we should wait for him to wake up without knowing when?"

"That's strange. With so many high-ranking clergies here, why hasn't he regained consciousness? Unless you're intentionally delaying the treatment or hiding the fact that he's awake..."

"What? You're not supposed to say that!" Archbishop Benitus trembled pitifully with his already frail body.

But Francis calmly threw another question, "Did you receive the official document sent from the Administration Office? His Holiness the Holy Emperor has been telling you, to be quiet. Ah, I'm merely quoting His Majesty's words verbatim. 'Don't go too far,' is the real content of the official document."

Archbishop's eyes were twitching.

"I, ah, haven't received it yet."

"Did Archbishop Diggory say that? The head of the administration office will turn a blind eye for a while? Delay his grandson's interrogation? So this is, what, a collusion between the Inquisitors court and the Administration Office?"

"No, you really... There are things that can be said and things that shouldn't be said!"

The Archbishop's eyes seemed to burst into flames. Against him, the

clever Paladin added one more thing.

"Ah, by the way, Your Eminence. You do know that the Pearl Palace is a region where only authorized clergymen are allowed by His Holiness the Holy Emperor, don't you?"

The Archbishop soon left the Pearl Palace after glaring at Francis for a while. He was trembling so much that it was worrying that he might faint due to high blood pressure.

Wow. Ultimate combat power indeed. Seongjin was genuinely impressed.

But that was not the end.

"Emergency duty for all resident Knights today! Masain, what are you doing standing there all blank!? Can't you arrange a proper shift for the guards?"

He yelled at Sir Masain, who still seemed out of his mind.

"Why are you just rolling your eyes? If you're feeling a little better, you should start moving. Are your ribs still hurting?"

He looked down at Seongjin with a sardonic expression, hinting at him.

So, in other words, the dog barks not only outside but also inside.

Such a stormy day passed.

People in the Pearl Palace fell asleep in shifts, amid a tense atmosphere. They were worried about a possible armed conflict at any moment, especially with the Paladin Order of St. Marcias maintaining a threatening stance all night.

But the next morning brought a sudden turnaround. The Paladin Order of St. Marcias had completely retreated from the Pearl Palace as if nothing had happened.

News had spread throughout the imperial palace.

The Holy Emperor's closed-door prayer had finally ended.

50

The imperial palace was bustling with people summoned since the morning. They were the five archbishops, who are the leaders of each faction, and the five commanders of the paladin knight orders.

The young Holy Emperor sat crookedly on his jade throne, supporting his chin with one hand, and gazing down at them with an impassive face. The archbishops and commanders were quick to realize.

'He's in a bad mood.'

The Holy Emperor's calm voice echoed in the tranquil palace.

"I can imagine that my long absence has caused everyone a great deal of concern. I believe that the Holy Empire's current prosperity is due to the hard work of loyal subjects like you all. How could I not appreciate it?"

"....."

None of them were ignorant of the fact that they were not summoned for praises.

"Furthermore, I heard there is even someone who does not only perform his own duties excellently but also takes the initiative to help others. Such an attitude, what a truly admirable attitude for a paladin to have"

What's more, the Holy Emperor, who usually prefers to be succinct, is being unusually verbose today. He's clearly in a very bad mood!

Sir Durand, the Commander of the Paladin Order of St. Marcias who had sent his knights to monitor an area outside his jurisdiction, was silently breaking out in cold sweat.

"Dame Agnes."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

An elderly woman, with her white hair neatly coiled up and dressed in the violet uniform of the Holy Knights, bowed in a rigid posture. It was Agnes Mayer, the commander of the St. Gracia Order, a long-standing spiritual pillar.

"I heard you requested to borrow some of the Imperial Guard knights this time. Are you planning to send the Fourth Missionary Unit to the southern front again?"

The sudden mention of the southern front caught the old paladin off guard, but she obediently responded.

"Yes, Your Majesty. The southern front has somewhat stabilized, but there are still some disturbances occurring. Regrettably, during the large-scale heresy uprising two years ago, we lost a significant number of our young knights. The newly supplemented young knights lack experience, so we thought we might need some help from the Imperial Guards for this missionary journey."

It was a fitting move for the St. Gracia Order, who always rushed to the most difficult front without sparing thoughts for their own wellbeing, following the path of their own saint, Gracia, also known as Saint of Servitude.

"There should be no need for the Imperial Guard for that matter. Don't we have plenty of seasoned and excellent knights who have the leisure to help others?"

Ah. Then the archbishops and commanders, who had finally understood the Holy Emperor's intent, turned their eyes in unison to Commander Durand.

The Emperor continued, directing his words to the anxious old knight, "Extending a hand of gospel to the heretics is one of the important tasks bestowed upon us by the God, but delivering a hammer blow to the heresy that threatens the empire is equally necessary. Neither of these tasks should be overdone or neglected."

He specifically meant that the St. Marcias Order should dispatch as many of their own to the southern front as much as St. Gracia Order have had.

"If your efforts continue, perhaps one day, the God's glory will also reach the barren south."

He was also implying that they should continue to dispatch forces consistently, taking care of their own bodies.

Almost involuntarily, Commander Durand cried out to the Holy Emperor, "Your Majesty! But if so, there will be a gap in the Inquisitors' duties...!"

The Holy Emperor didn't even glance at him but turned his head towards a stern-faced man standing on the right side of the throne.

A middle-aged man dressed in a deep gray uniform, nearly black. He was Sir Leandros, the commander of the Paladin Order of St. Terbacchia, and also the supreme head of all the inquisitors.

Due to the nature of his order, there were many times when his duties overlapped with those of the inquisitors.

When he caught the Holy Emperor's gaze, he glanced sideways at Sir Durand with a blank expression and bowed his head.

"I will do my best to ensure that the gap in the inquisitors' duties is not noticeable."

At this point, there was nothing left to say. Sir Durand licked his lips, then bowed his head at the sight of the Emperor's cold gaze.

"I will... make sure there are no shortages."

"Good."

The Holy Emperor nodded with a weary face. "Let's get to the main issue. The morning council is likely to be unusually long due to my prolonged absence, so I want to sort out the important agenda with you first."

There it was. Tension immediately spread across the faces of those summoned.

The most heated topic to come up in the morning meeting, perhaps.

"Let's talk about the anomaly that appeared on the outskirts of the capital. Dame Katrina."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Katrina, the commander of the St. Aurelion Order, bowed with her usual grace and took a step forward.

"Yesterday at noon, there was a confirmed movement of an anomaly at a villa on the outskirts of the capital. The villa was a vacant property under the name of Edward Diggory, the second son of Archbishop Diggory, but it has been used as a place for theological academy students, who support student Kenneth Diggory, to hold a social gathering called 'The Black Prophets' for the past two years."

Following that, Sir Leandros continued the explanation. His scratchy voice echoed throughout the audience room.

"We've had our Terbacchia inquisitors watching the place for the past year. Something suspicious was found in the basement of the mansion, but it was deemed not to be a demon species, so..."

The commander then cast a quick glance at Archbishop Diggory.

"...because those involved were students from the theological academy and children of high-ranking clergy, instead of taking the case directly to the heresy tribunal, we were keeping a close watch. This was a top secret known only to Your Majesty and the St. Aurelion Order."

Afterward, he coldly glared at Sir Durand and continued.

"Therefore His Excellency (Durand) will certainly need to report the process of acquiring that information in detail before His Majesty."

As Sir Durand subtly averted his gaze and furrowed his brows, Dame Katrina, who had been watching him, concluded her report, "The

anomaly suddenly became unstable, causing a disturbance and damaging the basement and part of the villa. However, Prince Morres, who [just] happened to be at the scene, rescued Kenneth Diggory with two of his own royal guard and personally eliminated the anomaly, saving the capital from threat."

Hmm-hmm.

Archbishop Diggory coughed uncomfortably. Although the Prince had saved his grandson, it was also Prince Morres who had inflicted a severe injury on the back of his grandson's head.

Next, the sharp voice of Archbishop Benitus rang out.

"Ha! You say he happened to be there, but this is like closing your eyes and shouting. And it's a mockery to say he saved the capital from threat. We still aren't certain who summoned that anomaly in the first place, are we?"

The other archbishops' eyes widened.

Is he boldly doubting the prince in front of the Holy Emperor? This old man has lost his nerve.

The Holy Emperor looked at Archboshop Benitus for a moment before opening his mouth calmly.

"I can see how you want to handle this. From now on, the heresy tribunal will cease its independent investigation and wait for the convocation of the Holy Council. Depending on the results of that council, I command that the trial will proceed."

Everyone nodded except for Archbishop Benitus. The Holy Emperor's command made sense.

Many of the members of the Holy Council, who oversee the Sacred Laws, are professors currently employed at the theological academy. They would be the ideal choice to decide the fate of the young students.

However, the obstinate old man seemed to have a different idea. He faced the Holy Emperor with fiery eyes and argued fiercely.

"That is not possible, Your Majesty! The investigation and punishment of heresy is the exclusive right of our heresy tribunal! Do you expect those soft people from the academy to make a proper judgement? The divine judgement upon the sinner should be stern, and the hammer against him should be merciless! Please revoke the command to halt the investigation!"

"So let me ask you this," the Holy Emperor asked the indignant old man. "Heresy trials are carried out based on the interpretation of the divine will by the Holy Council in accordance to the Sacred Laws. The analysis of the anomaly and the interpretation of the scriptures haven't even begun yet. On what grounds do you plan to judge these children without any relations to Sacred Law?"

"That...that is..." The elderly man hesitated for a moment, stammered. "Of course, based on the previous precedents...."

"Are you trying to fit the Sacred Law to the precedents? Interpreting the will of God at your discretion is also a grave sin. It's a shortcut to becoming a heretic."

"...."

Unconsciously, the other archbishops swallowed their saliva. The young Holy Emperor was so casually suggesting that the head of the heresy tribunal himself should be subjected to a heresy trial.

"Archbishop Benitus."

Towards the pale archbishop, the Holy Emperor commanded, "Leave the affairs of the Theology Academy to the Academy. My command not to interfere still stands."

"...."

As the elderly men closed his mouths in silence, it seemed that the matter was temporarily resolved.

"But, Your Majesty."

Suddenly, a thin voice interjected. It was Archbishop Diggory, the head of the administration. He was a short, chubby man, who kept

wiping his forehead with a handkerchief and rolling his eyes nervously.

"I apologize for my impudence, but the incident involves not only the students of the Theology Academy."

The Holy Emperor quietly shifted his gaze towards him, giving a slight nod. He was asking him to continue.

"At the scene of the incident, well... Prince Morres was also present...."

"...."

"I think it is too hasty to simply leave this to the judgment of the Holy Council. So... There might be the possibility that this was not led by the students, but there might be an instigator from outside...."

As Archbishop Diggory continued to speak, perspiration flowing down his face, the expression of the Holy Emperor observing him was utterly blank. However, everyone present felt the temperature of the real world drop by a degree.

Standing next to the throne, Dame Katrina glanced at the Holy Emperor and spoke on his behalf.

"My deputy, Sir Francis, has already provided me with a comprehensive report on this matter. I understand that the prince went to the villa in response to an invitation from the student Kenneth Diggory. To my knowledge, it was their first encounter."

"But, but! There were reports that Prince Morres has been consistently sending money to the group known as [The Black Prophets]. Maybe he's been leading this group from the beginning... Of course, it's just a possibility...."

"...."

"Shouldn't we thoroughly investigate that relationship first? Even if he's a member of the imperial family, in front of God's law, everyone is equal."

Ah. Katrina sighed internally. He's crossed the line.

Having served the Holy Emperor for a long time, she knew the man very well. Though her master's face remained cool as usual, the Holy Emperor was rarely but genuinely enraged.

The case of Archbishop Benitus was a bit different because he truly suspected Prince Morres. But Diggory was merely attempting to link Prince Morres in a desperate attempt to lighten his grandson's crime.

And the Holy Emperor never forgives such people.

"That's a fair point."

At the coldly uttered response, Diggory looked up in a half-hopeful, half-fearful manner. He soon turned pale because the Holy Emperor was faintly smiling. From experience, that was definitely not a good sign.

"Louis."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Suddenly, the air became so chilling that the chief chamberlain shivered in response.

"Immediately summon Dorian to investigate Kenneth Diggory's personal funds and their sources in detail. His grandfather personally reported that the Imperial Palace's funds had flowed into his grandson's hands, so isn't this extremely credible information?"

"What, no, what are you saying..."

Archbishop Diggory's eyes bulged.

In a flash, his grandson was not only being accused of heresy but also of embezzling the Holy Empire's national treasury, a major crime.

"If the investigation reveals that it's not the Imperial Palace's funds, then it would be right to consider foreign power involvement next. If an external instigator is indeed involved, then it would undoubtedly be the work of those threatening the Holy Empire, so also bear in

mind the possibility that Kenneth Diggory could be a pawn of a foreign country during the investigation."

"No, Your Majesty..."

"As soon as the Holy Council's disposition is decided, hand him over to the court immediately. The charges are embezzlement of the national treasury and suspicion of treason."

Diggory's hands were trembling. Now, whether the allegations were true or not was not the issue.

If suspected of treason, during that investigation process, his grandson would no longer be living.

"Of course, thoroughly investigate the allocation of the budget scheduled for Morres as well. Shouldn't all investigation processes be fair? Perhaps..." Stopping there, the Holy Emperor smirked, one corner of his mouth curling up. "Perhaps there might be some hidden expenditures I'm unaware of."

"Ahh..."

Thud. Diggory collapsed powerlessly to the floor.

Only then did he realize that the Holy Emperor had already finished investigating the areas of concern.

What have I done? I only wanted to lessen my grandson's crime in the eyes of the public because I was afraid, but now, the innocent boy is doomed to meet a cruel end.

As Diggory, perspiring cold sweat, blankly stared at the floor, the Holy Emperor briefly looked at him with a frosty gaze. The smile vanished from his face in an instant, returning to his usual stern expression.

"Surely, such an innocent young student wouldn't do such a thing. It was a joke. I believe his grandfather must have made some mistake."

However, no one in that place could laugh at that joke.

Kenneth Diggory had truly just escaped death.

51

The Holy Emperor soon left the audience room. Before the morning's official meeting, he had to meet with Empress Tatiana, who had been acting in his stead, to receive the reports during his absence.

He was expected to be extremely busy for a while.

As other archbishops and knights' commanders attending the official meeting began to leave one by one, only Archbishop Diggory remained, sitting on the ground in a daze. It felt as though he had briefly fallen into hell and been ejected out again; he was utterly drained.

"Archbishop Diggory."

Katrina approached and called out to him.

When Diggory looked up, he saw that Katrina, who usually had a gentle expression, now had a cold, stern face.

"You should consider yourself fortunate that His Majesty showed leniency towards children of your lineage. Do not forget that he overlooked your reckless words, worrying that they might affect that young Kenneth boy. Don't you realize that he protected the young students from the heresy tribunal because they were involved in the first place?"

"....."

"Suppose it wasn't academy students but someone else who dared to lure Prince Morres and put his life in danger. What do you think would have happened? That person would have been beheaded on the spot without a trial."

Diggory painfully realized that there was no exaggeration in her

words.

"During the morning official meeting, bear this in mind and be cautious of your words."

Having said this, Katrina also left the place.

Diggory remained, staring blankly at the exit where everyone had left. After what seemed like an eternity, he shakily rose from his seat.

That morning's meeting, despite the Holy Emperor's long absence, proceeded without a hitch. The Empress, a competent woman, had managed the state affairs smoothly in his stead.

The preparations for the upcoming birthday banquet were discussed with minor modifications. The expected major topic, the incident at the Diggory residence, was simply concluded by summoning the Holy Council, which was hardly worth mentioning.

* * *

A peaceful morning returned to Pearl Palace.

Sir Masain looked much better than the previous day, and Edith, who had been restless by his side, seemed to have regained her composure.

Just the night before, there had been a tense standoff among the heavily armed knights. It was astonishing how the atmosphere changed in a single day.

Seongjin wondered to himself if he should be amazed by the Holy Emperor's immense power or shocked by Morres's lack of influence.

"Should I train...?"

He mumbled this as he was having breakfast when Masain and Francis looked at him as if he was absurd, clearly thinking, 'How can he be so carefree?'

"Who could be this relaxed?"

"...I didn't expect you to voice that out, Sir Francis."

It felt like the gratitude for guarding Pearl Palace all night was being halved.

Seongjin decided to focus on what he could do. If he couldn't come up with a brilliant strategy to elevate Morres's standing in the palace, wouldn't it be better to learn the Banahas dual magic technique a little faster?

As he was firming up this resolution, an unexpected interruption occurred.

"Morres..."

Queen Lizabeth entered the room, her eyes filled with tears.

As always, she looked graceful and dazzling. Seongjin's expression stiffened.

No matter how many times he saw her, she was never easy to deal with.

"Mother..."

"Are you well? I heard you were involved in a significant incident."

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Oh, I was so worried yesterday. I couldn't come to Pearl Palace fearing misunderstandings. It was agonizing just waiting."

"...?"

What misunderstanding?

Seongjin was puzzled when suddenly, a fierce aura emanated from beside him. It was Sir Masain.

With a hardened face, Masain shot a brief glare at the Queen, then swiftly turned and left the room. His demeanor suggested not just a lack of respect but outright displeasure.

Francis, looking bewildered, quickly paid his respects to the Queen and hurried after Masain.

What kind of atmosphere is this?

Why is the stern captain of the elite guard, who always valued etiquette, behaving this way towards the Queen?

However, Queen Elizabeth's reaction was unexpected.

The woman, who usually grabbed those beneath her like catching a mouse with her authoritative attitude, just quietly wiped away her tears while looking at Seongjin without retaliating against the knight captain's rudeness.

Caught in an eerie foreboding, the Demon King commented, noticing Seongjin's unease.

[The queen has always had a peculiar reaction. It's as if she's trying to hide something from you.]

'...Hide? What?'

[I don't know.... I didn't really investigate at the time because I was busy gathering other more important information].

What kind of standard of importance is this guy talking about?

[But it was really weird. Ever since you arrived here and lost your memories, she always keep saying to herself, 'Is that true? Ah, it's a relief. A relief.']

Relieved that I lost my memory?

Seongjin's doubts only deepened. That woman, not long ago, even tried to test if he remembered his fiancées.

– Letting go of the past brings happiness to everyone.

Could it be that Empress Tatiana's words were aimed at Queen Elizabeth? With that thought, the woman with the sharp eyes before him looked slightly different.

The sight of her wiping away tears was both tragically beautiful and suspicious. Was every movement calculated? Even her handkerchief matched her dress, with the embroidery strategically placed.

Although Seongjin wasn't familiar with noblewomen's nuances, doubting her made all of her actions seem contrived.

"Always take care. Watching my child die in front of my eyes is hell itself," she said.

Unaware of Seongjin's complex feelings, the queen clutched his arm, her deep eyes looking up at him, "Morres, my child. I never want to experience that again."

At least the concern in her eyes seemed sincere. Seongjin awkwardly nodded with a smile.

Ah, this is uncomfortable.

Soon after, Seongjin rushed to the training grounds, practicing his swordsmanship intensely.

With his aura restrained, he demonstrated the Royal Knight's standard swordsmanship from the first to the fifth form. It was an impulsive move.

After some time, a contented Seongjin wiped the sweat off his brow.

"Ah, refreshing! There's nothing like practice to clear one's head!"

[Such a simple human.]

"Shut up!"

After cooling down, the energized Seongjin moved his aura more actively within his body.

"Hey, while you were gone, guess how much I've improved in controlling my aura? I might be a genius."

The Demon King chuckled as if amused.

[Doubtful.]

But when Seongjin skillfully executed the first form of Banahas quite plausibly, the Demon King's expression changed.

[Huh?]

"How's that? Impressive, right?"

[...]

The Demon King, caught off guard by the praise, remained silent. Even in Seongjin's opinion, he personally thought he executed the first form quite impressively.

"Wow..."

It wasn't just the Demon King who was surprised. The knights, including Haven, who were present at the training ground, stared at Seongjin in awe.

"Your Highness, what happened? How could you improve so much in just a day?"

"The first form is almost perfect. You could even move on to the second form now!"

"Uh, erm. Really?"

Seongjin smiled awkwardly. Upon reflection, after yesterday's battle, moving aura as per Banahas way felt smoother.

He had instinctively used what he had learned during the battle against the worm. The integration of these actions in combat resulted in better harmony between aura movement and physical action.

'Am I finally moving on to the second form...?'

The problem was that the instructor, who was supposed to teach him, was nowhere to be seen.

After yesterday's incident, Sir Masain, who didn't leave Seongjin's

side, had disappeared after seeing the queen and hadn't returned since. With him, the student ready, wasn't the swordsmanship teacher slacking off right now?

Seongjin paused his practice and looked up at the sky, pondering.

'The strike Masain showed yesterday, was truly incredible.'

A long golden sword made of aura and its silent, precise strike.

Followed by a massive shockwave that downed the worm of Bantra Moss.

What technique was that?

While Seongjin understood the part where the man's aura turned into the shape of a sword, why did the aura-infused attack explode? Did he intentionally cause the aura to go berserk?

Seongjin let his aura flow into the wooden sword he held, as he once did with the demonic energy, just enhancing the weapon.

The technique flowing within his body wasn't significantly different, so he wondered if the method to infuse the weapon might feel similar. He had wielded this technique with his sword while fighting against the bugs, and it hadn't caused any issues, so it would probably be alright.

Ziing. The wooden sword quivered slightly.

Unlike the demonic creature's pincer, the wooden sword was not as durable, and the flow of power running through it wasn't refined either.

"Still, it can handle this much power, at least."

Noticing the unusual energy, Haven, who was nearby, looked at Seongjin with wide eyes.

"Now, since I've infused the aura, if I vibrate it like this..."

Whirr. The wooden sword shook intensely.

"No, that's not it."

Seongjin stabilized the aura within the wooden sword, thinking that recklessly twisting the aura inside might only damage the weapon, without producing a powerful explosion at the desired location.

I'd have to stabilize it and let the aura run wild at the exact moment I struck.

Whoosh.

While swinging the aura-infused wooden sword horizontally, Seongjin tried to get the timing right.

After the swing... No, it's too late. By the time the aura starts moving, the target would have already been struck.

Whoosh.

So, I need to initiate the explosion the moment I make contact. Ah, that's a bit late. How can I make it go wild almost instantaneously?

Whoosh.

Again, the timing is a bit off.

The wooden sword vibrated vigorously and returned to its position.

Good, this time a little faster, swing at the same time...

Bang!

Suddenly, something did explode, for real.

Namely, the wooden sword.

Sharp wooden splinters flew in every direction, with some even hitting Seongjin.

"Your Highness!"

The guards in the drill hall rushed towards him.

[Eeek?]

Inside his head, the demon king was panicking.

What? Why?

Seongjin, without thinking, asked the demon king and immediately felt a sharp pain, looking at his right hand.

"Oh..."

The palm of his hand was bleeding profusely.

His vision reddened, likely because of the blood dripping from his forehead into his eyes. On inspection, splinters were embedded in various parts of his face and body.

[Eeek!]

'Hey, calm down. Why are you so startled?'

[Do you even realize how you look right now? What on earth did you do?]

Seeing the reactions of the surrounding knights, Seongjin's condition seemed dire. Haven shouted in panic.

"Your Highness! Your Highness! Are you alright? No, clearly you're not, what am I saying!"

"Summon the physician! No, get the priest!"

"For now, please lie down here! You're bleeding profusely. Please lower yourself!"

"Find Sir Masain!"

Ah, I shouldn't have done that. I'm going to get scolded by Masain again.

I had a near-death experience yesterday and made a scene at the Pearl Palace, and here I am again, just one day later.

Feeling guilty, Seongjin obediently lay down on the ground.

"First, remove the splinters, stop the bleeding..."

"Wait for the physician! Can you even see anything with all this blood? What if you accidentally push the splinter further in?"

"Where's the priest? Still not here?"

The knights were running around in confusion.

[Ahhh, Ahhhhhhhh!]

With the demon king causing a ruckus inside his head, Seongjin was disoriented.

"Ah! Sir Masain!"

Hearing one of the knights exclaim, he turned his head and saw Masain and Francis rushing towards him from a distance.

Oh, Sir Masain. He's looking a bit scary, running with that stern face...

Seeing Seongjin's condition, Masain's face went pale as if he himself was bleeding.

"Where's the physician? Did you call for the physician? Francis! Infuse him with divine energy for now!"

However, Francis, who was observing Seongjin calmly, shook his head with a stern face.

"There are too many embedded splinters. If I pour divine energy now, the wounds will heal with the splinters inside. Even if the physician treats him, that hand's injury seems too deep and might leave after-effects."

"So..."

In response to the desperate Masain, Francis spoke firmly.

"We need to see His Majesty immediately."

Seongjin was startled.

What? Excuse me? Wait a minute! I'm not ready for this!

Thus, this situation unfolded.

After finishing the morning administrative meeting and leaving the main palace's meeting room, the Holy Emperor came face to face with Seongjin, who was bleeding and being carried on a stretcher.

"..."

With Seongjin sheepishly avoiding eye contact, the Holy Emperor sighed deeply after a moment of silence.

"I told you not to be so reckless."

Uh, erm, I'm sorry...

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Divine power.

It was a blessing that God granted to this world and the most compelling evidence of God's existence.

However, it couldn't just be broadly defined as a sacred divine power of God.

The power of [Healing] that heals wounds and overcomes illness.

The power of [Blessing] that wards off bad luck and beckons good fortune.

The power of [Exorcism] discerns and eradicates evil.

Those who possessed divine power exhibited all these three characteristics. However, the degree to which one exhibited each varied among individuals. Typically, while one might excel in one aspect, the other two would be almost negligible.

For instance, the paladins of St. Terbacchia, who specialized in exorcism, primarily showcased the power of exorcism. In contrast, the paladins of St. Gracia, who dedicated themselves to service and sacrifice, often had many members skilled in healing and blessing.

Of course, high-ranking priests or archbishops possessed such immense divine power that they often exhibited strength in all three aspects. When they reached this level, they could perform feats that bordered on miracles, especially in their specialized areas.

But the spectacle unfolding here now was unparalleled in its resemblance to a [Miracle].

A dazzling white light enveloped Prince Morres, and shards of wood

expelled from his wounds in an instant, giving way to new skin growth. His hand, which had torn skin and ripped muscles, regenerated smoothly with new muscle tissue and soft, pristine skin.

All those numerous wounds vanished without a trace. Even the slightly sunburnt face from rolling all day in the training ground for the past few days brightened up.

It was as if an immense life force was poured into a single individual.

This was the scene of a [Miracle] as seen by ordinary people.

However, the clergies saw something slightly different.

The multicolored radiant aura surrounded the Holy Emperor and the prince. The faint scent of sanctity spread outwards. The occasional bright golden halo glimpsed around the Holy Emperor.

Who could dare doubt the representative of God after witnessing this scene?

The higher one's clerical position or the stronger the divine power one possessed, the more intense and emotionally overwhelming this scene was.

"Ooh..."

"O' Lord..."

Look at the high priests, completely overwhelmed, kneeling and making the sign of the cross.

Archbishop Diggory was sobbing uncontrollably, face flushed with emotion. Even the quirky Archbishop Benitus moistened his eyes while making the sign of the cross.

Of course, Seongjin, who didn't possess any divine power and felt nothing, was just bewildered. He was puzzled when everyone in the meeting room suddenly rushed out, knelt down, and started crying.

Eventually, as the wounds healed and the pain completely subsided, Seongjin stood up from the mat and looked at his perfectly healed

right hand in awe.

'Wow, so this is divine power...'

Even to the ignorant Seongjin, the Holy Emperor's ability was beyond ordinary. It was on a completely different level compared to the healing power Francis showed him a few times yesterday. Not only did the wounds heal without a trace, but even the blood loss seemed to have been fully restored, as he felt no signs of anemia.

The Holy Emperor withdrew his hand from Seongjin's forehead and spoke, almost as if he was exhaling,

"Didn't I tell you to just focus on your training?"

But Seongjin felt it was unjust.

"But, Father, I was training as you instructed? I even obeyed your orders..."

However, he couldn't finish. A sudden flick from the Holy Emperor's eyebrow stopped him, and a light smack came out of nowhere.

Thwack.

"Ugh!"

Seongjin rolled on the mat, clutching his forehead. Why did it feel more painful than getting hit by a wooden sword?

In any case, the Holy Emperor stood up, walked over to Masain, who was kneeling beside the mat with a downcast expression, and said, "Your Majesty..."

"Why do you blame yourself for that boy's antics, Masain? I sent you as a swordsmanship teacher, not a nanny."

Masain's face contorted, a mix of a smile and a grimace. The Holy Emperor patted his shoulder and turned his head.

"Louis."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"What's the schedule for this afternoon?"

The faithful chief chamberlain looked somewhat troubled. By date, it should be the day for the official audience with Prince Morres, but the backlog of official tasks was quite substantial.

"Your Majesty, I think..."

As the chief chamberlain trailed off, the Holy Emperor nodded and asked, "Is lunch ready?"

But Your Majesty. I thought you skipped breakfast...

The Holy Emperor waved off the chief chamberlain, who was struggling for words, and coldly looked down at Seongjin, who was still clutching his forehead in pain.

"Let's have a talk for a moment, son."

Gulp.

For some reason, an involuntary gulp escaped Seongjin's throat.

Seongjin was obediently led to the Holy Emperor's office. Although he was covered in blood from head to toe, neither of them paid any mind to it.

Following behind the Holy Emperor, who walked briskly with his robe fluttering, Seongjin occasionally sneaked glances at the back of the Holy Emperor's head. Somehow, the gentleman in front of him seemed a bit tired. Was it just his imagination?

Upon reaching the office and dismissing his attendants, the Holy Emperor sat down at his desk and pointed to the sofa opposite him with a nod.

"Sit."

"Yes."

"Explain."

"Yes!"

Seongjin diligently explained why he had let aura flow into his wooden sword and why he tried to make the aura in the sword go berserk.

He began with the spectacular strike that Masain demonstrated when slaying a bug, which naturally led to a brief description of the battle at the Diggory mansion. Since it was brought up, he also casually mentioned how much progress he'd made with the aura manipulation technique recently and how his proficiency had suddenly increased after the battle.

Perhaps subconsciously, he even thought this to himself: 'Since the Holy Emperor seems busy, I might as well talk as much as possible to kill time, that way he'll have less time to scold me.'

Surprisingly, the Holy Emperor, who seemed ready to reprimand him, just quietly listened.

"So, I was trying to time the aura's rampage when the wooden sword suddenly exploded, and well, that happened."

"..."

After Seongjin finished his lengthy explanation and discreetly tried to gauge the Holy Emperor's mood, the Holy Emperor, after a moment of contemplation, glanced at the wall clock and spoke.

"The technique Masain used is called 'Aura Explosion'."

Oh. It seems he's given up on scolding.

"It's called various absurd names among the imperial knights, like 'Storm Slash' or 'Sky-splitting Crescent', but you can ignore those. It's not unreasonable that it looked like an aura rampage to you, but the principle of the actual technique is a bit different."

The Holy Emperor briefly explained the essence of the technique.

The key wasn't letting aura to flow continuously into the weapon, but instead creating a thin layer of aura to be materialized externally, hence shaping the blade's surface. Therefore, one can only attempt this technique after reliably creating an aura blade.

What appears as an aura rampage is, in fact, sending the aura blade to resonate at a specific frequency, meaning, it's not about making the aura sway randomly but amplifying its destructive power through extremely controlled vibrations.

In conclusion, Seongjin wasn't ready to imitate it yet, and he should focus on building up his aura layer.

"The idea was interesting, but testing it on a weapon is extremely risky. Understand?"

"Yes..."

It was indeed too ambitious for a novice who had just started learning about auras.

While Seongjin was scratching his face out of embarrassment, a light knock sounded from outside the office. It was the chief chamberlain.

"Your Majesty, it's time for your meal."

The Holy Emperor sighed softly and got up.

"Well, even with my explanation, if you come up with something new, you'll want to try it again, won't you?"

"Um..."

Seongjin couldn't deny it, being well-aware of his own weakness for curiosity.

Moving towards the office entrance, the Holy Emperor reached for the sword hilt at his waist. With a metallic sound, a long blade was drawn. Silently, he extended it towards Seongjin.

"...?"

Instinctively taking it, Seongjin felt the weight of the real sword in his hands.

"From now on, you'll play with that instead of a wooden sword. No matter what prank you try, it won't easily break."

"Uh... Thank you?"

He had braced himself for a thorough scolding, yet he received a sword.

The Holy Emperor's lips curved up faintly in what could almost be called a semblance of a smile, which was a first for Seongjin. Then, the Holy Emperor gently patted Seongjin's head a few times and turned away.

Stepping out of the office, the Holy Emperor left with one final piece of advice.

"Morres."

"Yes?"

"Don't tell Masain that you tried to mimic him and caused an accident."

He was referring to the Knight Commander, who had been particularly guilt-ridden since yesterday.

With a stiff face, Seongjin nodded.

"Nutcracker?"

Outside the palace, Masain, who had been waiting for Seongjin to come out, saw the sword strapped to his waist and exclaimed with widened eyes.

Nutcracker? What's that?

Hearing his words, including Haven, the resident knights of the Pearl Palace rushed over.

"Eh? Nutcracker?"

"The Holy Emperor's beloved weapon? Is it really that Nutcracker?"

It looks ordinary, but seems like its a famous sword.

The Holy Emperor's Favorite, is it some kind of legendary weapon?
What's with the name?

Seongjin took a closer look at the sword.

The sword looked ordinary, like any other long sword without any particular decorations. However, its blade was thin and a bit shorter, but the hilt was long, making it easy to swing with both hands. It seemed more suitable for a boy of Morres's age rather than a grown adult.

The blade was made of a unique gray metal that had lost its luster. The blade wasn't particularly sharp either. It couldn't be considered a well-maintained weapon.

Isn't it too plain for a Holy Emperor?

However, the resident knights thought otherwise.

"So this is the famous sword that's so hard that it can't be sharpened with a whetstone!"

"Even when the blacksmith tried to forge it, it wouldn't heat up properly!"

"That legendary sword, supposedly made by a dragon to crack open walnuts in the distant past...."

Wait a minute. Are there dragons in this world?

But why would a dragon make a sword to crack walnuts?

Moreover, for a legendary sword, its name... Nutcracker? It doesn't evoke anything intimidating.

And...

It feels like it would be more effective at cracking human heads than walnuts...

Sure enough, Haven glanced around and whispered, as if sharing a secret.

"I've heard that when His Majesty was active on the battlefield in his younger days, thousands and thousands had their heads split open by that sword."

Seriously?

As Seongjin looked astounded, other knights began to add their own stories.

"Yes. That's right. There were so many crushed skulls that they could form a mountain."

"And the blood from that mountain formed a massive river..."

"Even now, it's said that in that place, headless spirits wail and wander every night."

"....."

What the hell did this man give me?

Even Francis, who was typically unshakable, seemed quite shocked this time. He furrowed his brow and looked at Seongjin.

"He's never been without that sword all this time. What did His Majesty say to give that sword to Your Highness?"

Seongjin tilted his head.

"He just said, while training, my wooden sword broke, so I should play with this instead. He said this one won't easily break."

Masain's pupils were shaking, as if deeply shocked.

"... As a substitute for a wooden sword... to play with?"

Tsk. Francis clicked his tongue.

"Masain. Isn't it time you let go of that unrealistic fantasy? That means it's not the legendary weapon you're thinking of."

Sir Masain seemed to have had an admiration for the Nutcracker.

"But still, that sword..."

"I should have known since the time when the Holy Emperor used to crack walnuts from the mountain with it during his younger days."

Ah, so it's really used for cracking walnuts after all.

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Seongjin was squatting down, staring into the campfire.

Crackle. Crackle.

From the foggy view and the strangely pale landscapes, even the red flames seemed to have their heat diminished. It was like watching scenes from an old film.

This must be a dream, Seongjin thought blankly.

- "What are you grilling now, hyungnim (brother)?"

He asked someone in a small child's voice. Then, a kind man's voice answered.

- "Freshwater crayfish."

- "Freshwater crayfish?"

- "Yes. I was dragged into the mountains for survival training a while ago and starved for several days. I'm grilling these because I remembered the taste of the crayfish I ate then."

- "Hmmm."

Seongjin, no, the child, then poked at the small crustaceans wriggling above the campfire with a stick in his hand, seemingly curious.

- "Where did you get these from?"

- "I asked the gardener to get some in exchange for money. It feels like I've been ripped off."

Haha.

A bashful laugh followed.

Seongjin couldn't see the man's face, but he thought the voice sounded strangely familiar.

And then, the two waited silently for the crayfish to cook.

Crackle. Crackle.

The savory smell was probably spreading all around. Seongjin couldn't smell anything, but he knew that the child in the dream was looking forward to tasting the crayfish.

Is this really a dream, or just someone else's memory?

The child patiently waited for the man to peel a crayfish for him, and finally, he was able to take a bite.

Hmm, how should I put it? It's more bland and mushy than I expected.

Seongjin couldn't taste it, but he could vividly feel the disappointment the child felt.

The child spoke a bit sulkily.

-"Hmm... Brother, this doesn't seem to taste good."

The man, who was also chewing on crayfish meat next to the child, laughed and scratched his head. A glint of bright golden hair seemed to show.

-"Yes. Actually, I just thought the same thing."

Chirp, chirp, chirp.

The birds of the Pearl Palace were chirping, flying in at the same time as always. Seongjin opened his eyes and blankly stared at the canopy above him.

'It's been a long time since I've had a dream.....'

Seongjin usually didn't dream often. In his previous world, he was too

busy fighting monsters in his sleep, and even after his soul inhabited Morres's body, he hadn't dreamt until now.

Moreover, the dream felt more like glimpsing into past memories than a simple dream, making him feel strange. He vaguely realized that the dream was of Morres's childhood.

[Why? What did you dream about?]

The demon king's soul asked in a clueless voice. It felt like he was stretching after a nap.

[Why? You didn't think souls need sleep?]

Is that so?

While Seongjin was surprised, the demon king grumbled.

[No, what do you want me to do then? I can't stay away from you, and I don't have anyone to talk to while you're sleeping. What else can I do but sleep?]

'Well... but...'

Isn't sleep for the brain to recover?

[Souls also need time to recover from fatigue!]

That seems plausible.

Anyway, Seongjin explained everything to the demon king. He had a hunch that the scene from his dream actually happened inside the palace, and he felt as though the child's perspective in the dream was that of Morres.

[Hmm.]

The demon king affirmed the possibility.

[You already know this place's language, which we assumed was because we're using Morres's brain. Then, there's no reason why you couldn't recall the memories of Morres stored in that brain.]

'So, it's like that?'

[If it's only this one time, I wouldn't worry, but if this continues, you might end up recalling all of Morres's memories.]

That didn't sound too favorable. Isn't it better to recall more memories?

But the demon king was considering a more serious assumption.

[Don't underestimate memory. Remember the time when you once mistook the language of Delcross for that of Sigurd-34 planet?]

That's right. To be honest, it still feels like Korean unless I consciously think otherwise.

[So, wouldn't it be the same with memory? At first, you might feel you can distinguish yourself apart from Morres. But if you continue to mistake his feelings for yours, his knowledge for yours, wouldn't there eventually be times when you overlap yourself with Morres?]

That seems plausible.

Lately, the demon king's eloquence seemed to be improving.

[Do you get it? To preserve your identity as [Lee Seongjin], you might need to come up with some special measures.]

Seongjin nodded seriously.

'Hmm, for now....'

[For now?]

"I need to train."

Training is the best for headache-inducing matters.

[Wow, what a simpleton.]

The demon king stuck out his tongue in disdain.

Having quickly consumed his breakfast, Seongjin rushed to the

training ground, beginning his meditation with great focus. His aura energy was noticeably increasing. He felt satisfied, thinking he might soon attempt the fifth level of aura.

And from Sir Masain, he finally learned how to weave Banahas 2nd Form.

"So, this is the Nutcracker..."

During lunchtime, Amelia, who had come to visit the Pearl Palace, curiously inspected the sword. She had come holding a new fairy tale book to lend to Seongjin.

Having been scolded severely by the Holy Emperor for not studying during his near-death experience, Seongjin passionately read the new book aloud.

"Listen. The representative... of God. The weak Dr, agon said..."

"Listen. The representative of God. The wicked dragon said."

"If my request... is rejected... soon, the spark of, disaster, will spread... in this land?"

"If my request is rejected, the spark of calamity will soon spread across this land."

Amelia, who had read the book to the point of memorizing it during her childhood, corrected Seongjin's reading without even looking at the book.

The book she brought was a famous fairy tale that reportedly contained the tales of the first emperor. The story was about the representative of God who overcame the temptations of a wicked dragon and eventually established an empire called Delcross, bringing peace and prosperity to the continent.

Indeed, dragons appear in fairy tales. But when he asked Amelia if she had ever seen a dragon, she looked at Seongjin with the kind of smile a mother might give when asked about Santa by a child.

Ugh, it seems that in this world, dragons are merely creatures of

legend.

And if you were to pinpoint the most malicious aspect of the dragon, the antagonist in this story, it would undeniably be the way it speaks.

Why is it using such an overly pompous and archaic tone? It's hard to read.

Having recently read books where cats meowed and dogs barked, the vocabulary difficulty suddenly increased too much. At this rate, he wondered when he would be able to read books on theology or philosophy.

As he was browsing through the poorly illustrated book with a deep sigh, Amelia was mumbling something incoherent while inspecting the nutcracker.

"I distinctly remember that in the past, Father, His Majesty, having this until the very end, but what changed that this ended up with you?"

What's she talking about?

"Well, unexpected occurrences might be a good sign. It must be!"

Amelia seemed to have convinced herself of something and nodded.

Right, this sister is living somewhere in fourth dimension. Sometimes I can't even keep with her conversation.

Amelia looked pleased as she examined and swung the Nutcracker from different angles.

She always talks about the satisfaction of revenge, but watching her like this, I'm wondering if she actually enjoys learning martial arts.

Just as Seongjin had predicted a while ago, she had been making significant progress in accumulating aura lately. Even as a beginner in aura initiation, he could sense that the aura around Amelia was becoming more active.

She had her struggles, especially with the initial stages of aura

cultivation, as she had started just a few days ago and the introductory initiation method was that notorious Weilo.

Wondering if there was a way to help, a brilliant idea occurred to Seongjin.

"Sister, the royal audience is soon, right?"

Considering that the Holy Emperor had returned from seclusion and was frantically dealing with official tasks, there probably wouldn't be any delays in the royal audience. Amelia nodded.

"Yes, why?"

"How about asking Father for help? It's amazing how that nobleman handles Aura."

Seongjin shared a story he'd heard from Masain with Amelia.

The impressive tale of how, for the sake of a nephew who struggled with aura, he had personally infused his own body with aura daily.

If it's Holy Emperor, perhaps he could easily do something similar? After all, he's the person who even blocked the otherworldly passage with aura.

Amelia admired and nodded her head.

"I didn't know that about Masain orabeoni (brother). Given how young he became the commander of the knights, I thought he was just a prodigy."

Orabeoni (brother)?

Seongjin tilted his head at the somewhat unusual term.

"..so Imperial Father is capable of such things. Amazing. I should ask him to teach me like he taught orabeoni (brother)."

Filled with ambition, Amelia's eyes began to sparkle like stars.

Hmm? I feel like this conversation is going off track.

"So, why don't you start by asking if that's possible? I am thinking of asking you to tell me the story about Sir Masain's uncle..."

"Yes, from Imperial Father... huh?"

Only then did she seem to realize that their conversation had gotten off track.

"Who else but Imperial Father could be brother Masain's uncle?"

Huh?

Seongjin's mouth gaped open.

"You... didn't know? I wondered why you kept mentioning brother Masain's uncle specifically."

Amelia smiled.

"I know you don't remember the past, but haven't you been frequently hanging out with orabeoni (brother) lately? I thought he would've told you. It's like him to keep silent on the matter."

Sir Masain's uncle is the Holy Emperor?

Seongjin had always imagined an elder master, not someone close in age. The revelation was a shock.

She patiently explained to the still-shocked Seongjin. The Holy Emperor was originally the 3rd prince of the previous emperor. Above him were two older princes and a princess.

Sir Masain is the second son of the eldest prince, Cameron. That makes him a cousin to Morres.

Although now bearing the name Klanos instead of Klein, and having lost the right to the throne, he's still quietly treated as a member of the imperial family.

"Wait..."

That reminded Seongjin of the twins he met previously. They clearly

greeted Masain as...

"Hello, Masain orabeoni."

"Hello, Masain hyungnim."

The way they said hello... huh?

W-Why didn't you tell me something so important, Sir Masain?

Amelia began, "Honestly, him and you Morres were somewhat distant before." She glanced at Seongjin and hesitated, "...In fact, you were the only one who didn't call brother Masain 'brother'."

While Amelia stopped there, Seongjin inferred more from her hesitancy.

Morres, you jerk! You've been mean and disrespectful to Sir Masain, haven't you?

A headache crept on Seongjin, and the demon king quickly spoke.

[Whoa, your blood pressure is rising. Relax! Relax!]

Does it look like I can stay calm?

How am I supposed to treat Sir Masain now?

Yet, the afternoon lesson time inevitably arrived.

Distracted, unlike his attentive morning self, Seongjin caught Sir Masain's curious gaze. Still, Sir Masain refrained from reprimanding him, probably because Seongjin usually had a good attitude.

As the sun set over the training ground, Masain, who had finished his meditation, looked at Seongjin who seemed like had something to say. As Seongjin tried to play it off, Masain, looking determined, bowed his head.

"I have a request. Please."

"Uh... Yes? A request?"

"Yes, could you lend me the Nutcracker for a moment?"

Masain's face was uncharacteristically serious. Without realizing, Seongjin nodded and handed over the Nutcracker.

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The Nutcracker.

The first time Masain saw the sword was about a decade ago from today.

At that time, Delcross was showing signs of civil unrest. Prince Brayden, the second prince, rapidly grew in power after absorbing the influence of the first princess. As a result, he seized the imperial palace, forcing the faction of the first prince to retreat to the northern gate of the capital to regroup.

Then suddenly, the 16th Holy Emperor passed away.

"That despicable Brayden! It's clear that he did harm to Imperial Father!"

First Prince Cameron ground his teeth with his eyes aflame.

Masain looked at his father Cameron with an uneasy face.

At the time, Masain, who was living in the imperial academy dormitory, was hastily brought here by the imperial guards who found him when the first prince's faction retreated from the capital.

His older brother Jayden and mother, the princess consort, could not flee and ended up dying during a clash with the guards during the retreat.

"That cursed Brayden! He's so blinded by the throne that he summoned the demon! I won't rest until he's torn to pieces!"

After losing his wife and eldest son abruptly, the first prince occasionally acted like a madman, venting his anger on his subordinates at random or spewing insults, believing groundless

suspicious as facts.

"A demon has infiltrated the imperial court, this holy Delcross royal court! Can't you see even with your eyes open! The millennia-old holy empire of Delcross is now at its end! Damn it! Damn it!"

Every chance he got, he fiercely glared at the direction of the imperial palace and ranted. Sometimes, he even brandished his sword into the air, eager to storm into the capital as soon as his forces were replenished.

Just when it seemed like an all-out war between these two factions was inevitable, a mediator appeared. This was a man named Richelieu, who had been sent from the royal family of Brittany and had temporarily visited the capital with the archbishop.

Even in his young mind, Masain found this strange.

The two brothers had drawn their swords against each other for the throne. They had already seen the blood of the princess consort and the royal grandson.

From now on, if one side wins, the other side will be annihilated. Where in this situation was there room for mediation?

However, for some reason, Cameron took Richelieu's suggestion of mediation quite seriously. The strategists of the first prince's faction held meeting after meeting, argued for and against, and eventually set up a small negotiation team.

The unfolding situation made Masain increasingly anxious. It seemed like a negotiation that had no chance of succeeding.

Especially with this man named Richelieu. Although half of his face hidden behind a mask, this man who occasionally gave a gloomy smile was not a comfortable presence.

As feared, the ominous premonition soon became reality. Cameron's party, who left to negotiate, never returned.

Only one of the blood-soaked escort knights barely managed to return, mumbling like a madman.

"The, the prince's words... all of them, they were true. There's a... there's a demon in the imperial palace! Gah!"

After he spat out these words, he suddenly spat blood from his mouth and died.

"It's a curse....." The priest who was by the side of the escort to treat him, drenched in blood, cried out with a trembling voice. "I can feel the energy of a curse. Everyone must escape from here!"

Soon, screams began to echo here and there from the first prince's camp. People started spewing blood and falling.

With only a few imperial guards, priests, and servants, Masain barely managed to escape from that hellish scene.

In just a few days, he had lost his parents and brother, but Masain didn't have the chance to fully comprehend his loss. He felt that the ambiguous and extremely ominous danger that had swallowed them all at once was approaching him swiftly.

Something bizarre was happening in the capital, beyond their ability to handle, and the demonic curse was still chasing Masain's party.

The remnants of the first prince's faction took Masain, the only remaining imperial heir, and locked themselves in the northern gate fortress. Then, unbelievable news began to flow from the capital.

"There is a demon in the imperial palace. The second prince was a demon worshipper and has been punished by the first prince."

"No, actually, the first prince was deceived and killed by the second prince."

"The third prince, who had gone missing long ago, returned. He's a notorious troublemaker, but he's unprecedentedly powerful."

"He swept away the demons in the imperial palace leading the paladins. He eventually became the new Holy Emperor."

Every piece of news was shocking, and it was impossible to tell what was true and what was false.

And the demonic curse, which had chased them from the capital, eventually swallowed the entire fortress.

Despite the prayers of the paladins and priests, it was only a matter of time before the people of the first prince's faction started vomiting blood from their bodies and dying. It was a terror too great to bear in a sober mind.

"Please take care of yourself. The only rightful heir to the throne is you, Your Highness Masain."

After the loyal knight commander, who reiterated this fact till the end fell down and spewed blood from his eyes, Masain was inevitably left alone in the tightly locked fortress.

The boy, sensing a lonely end, quietly sat in a corner and awaited death. He was in a numb state where not even tears could come out, possibly due to the intense exertion over the past few days.

It was only through his constitution unique to the imperial bloodline, which was highly resistant to magic, that he was able to endure alone amidst the cursed bodies of the demon race and a multitude of corpses for two more days.

Then, on the third day.

From morning, there had been an uproar outside the fortress, followed by a sudden silence. Then someone effortlessly cut through the tightly locked iron door and entered.

"They said everyone was dead, but look at these tricksters. There's a child still alive."

Bang!

A tall man revealed himself from behind the dust-stirring fallen iron door.

As the boy, Masain, instinctively squinted his eyes at the sudden rush of light, the man, sword in hand, strode towards him.

"Do I see a little bit of your childhood face? Are you Jayden, or

Masain?"

For some reason, the man seemed to know him, even though they had never met.

"... I am... Masain."

Perhaps it was because of the peculiar aura surrounding the man, Masain involuntarily spoke to him in a respectful manner.

"I see. Masain."

The man grimaced as he looked around the blood-filled fortress interior. Then, without warning, he extended his hand towards Masain's forehead. Before Masain could flinch, a light emanated from the man's hand and engulfed him.

"Huh?"

It felt warm. The minor injuries disappeared instantly, and vitality began to sprout throughout his body. His body, devoid of energy due to days of starvation, was suddenly overflowing with life.

Above all, the curse that had been clinging to him since the beginning was completely gone without a trace. It was a curse so powerful that even Masain, who was not a priest, could feel its malignant nature. But the fact that it vanished so easily was nothing short of a miracle.

He had survived.

Masain instinctively realized that he was completely freed from that horrific curse.

The moment he recognized this, his whole body began to tremble as if shaken by a wind. His body, which had not been greatly affected even as the people of the fortress died, started shaking as if it had just woken up.

The man tilted his head.

"Your body should be fine now, why are you shaking more than

before? Is there still discomfort somewhere?"

Then, a waterfall of light poured over Masain once more. The bright light felt like a symbol promising absolute safety, which caused a sudden swell of emotions and made him choke up.

Seeing the boy quietly weeping while hugging his knees, the man who realized it was not a physical issue stepped back. He slowly leaned against the door and quietly waited for the boy to calm down.

Masain was not unaware of how pathetic he looked right now. However, his tears wouldn't stop as the tension that had been stretched to its limit during those hellish days suddenly loosened.

How long he cried for, he didn't know, but the man sitting opposite of him suddenly jumped up and looked outside the fortress with cool eyes.

Then he approached Masain and extended his hand.

"Can you stand? We need to leave here now."

Masain nodded, grabbed the man's hand and stood up. Despite sitting motionless for several days, moving wasn't particularly hard, thanks to the man's divine power.

As he wiped his tears and looked up, he finally got a good look at the man's face.

He had assumed that the man would be much older, but he was a young man who still had the look of a boy. In fact, he didn't seem much older than Masain himself.

His neat black hair and clear grey eyes felt both foreign and strangely familiar, leaving him with a peculiar feeling.

The man glanced outside once more and then turned to look at Masain.

"Just follow behind me. Don't be too surprised if something suddenly appears."

Masain nodded, and the man smirked before turning around and walking out of the fortress.

They moved in silence for a while along the outer wall of the fortress, which had been devastated. The commotion from outside had been going on for a while now, and it seemed to have reached its peak.

Masain followed diligently behind the man, twirling the scroll he had received from him.

As the man strode ahead, he mumbled to himself, as if speaking into the void.

"Were you planning on burying it all if I hadn't found it?"

"That's my business to take care of, isn't it? Not something for you guys to worry about."

"I no longer trust any of you. The conversation is over. Close the channel, Cornsheim."

From his actions alone, he seemed mad, but his calm voice and clear eyes didn't feel strange at all. Masain merely thought that he must be handling some important task that he didn't know about.

It was a wonder that he came to trust a man he barely knew so deeply.

Suddenly, he drew a sword from his waist. It was a blunt gray sword without any particular decoration.

Soon, the sword was covered in a dazzling white light, and a pure white blade, half an inch longer than the sword, revealed itself. It was an extremely clean manifestation of external energy.

'An aura blade?'

Masain involuntarily swallowed.

A Sword Master? Such a young man?

Without a word, the man swung his arm lightly forward.

Boom!

In an instant, one side of the distant fortress wall exploded.

As Masain flinched in surprise, the man swung his sword again with apparent indifference.

Rumble! Crash! The building that seemed like a warehouse on his left crumbled down.

"...?"

What on earth is happening?

While Masain was startled, the man suddenly turned around and swung his sword in a long diagonal motion.

Crash—

With a terrifyingly loud noise, the fortress building where Masain had been hiding just moments ago collapsed in an instant.

Masain's jaw dropped without him realizing.

Just how far is it from here to there...!

But then, Masain saw something strange. Beyond the collapsing fortress, he saw dark objects scurrying away.

At a glance, he thought they were black wild dogs, but on closer inspection, they were dark starfish-shaped creatures. One of its five legs was raised like a head, the remaining four legs moved like a quadruped, and it was hopping around.

'Demon fiend...!'

Only then did Masain realize what the man had been swinging his sword at all this time.

The man's sword had been causing such brilliant explosions that he hadn't noticed, but upon closer inspection, there were devilish creatures the size of wild dogs hiding here and there in the fortress,

observing them.

"It seems the capital has turned into quite a comical sight during the few years I've been away."

The man sighed and turned back in the direction of the palace, resuming his walk. Perhaps due to the might he had displayed, the demonic creatures didn't dare approach too closely, instead following them from a considerable distance.

Every so often, when it seemed like those miscreants were closing the gap,

Whoosh! Bang!

The man's sword would swing again, promptly followed by another dazzling explosion.

Masain would probably never forget the overwhelming sights the man showed that day.

The modest grey sword, and above it, the brilliantly shining clean aura blade. It seemed like he was swinging it casually, but each motion was efficient, so precise it was even beautiful. A destructive force beyond imagination, so immense it could only be described as terrifying.

Each of these things was etched vividly into the boy's mind.

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It didn't take long for Masain and the man to arrive at the temporary campsite of the army stationed near the northern gate.

The hastily set up camp seemed to be bustling with imperial guards, close guards, and various paladins in their respective uniforms. Yet, it was astounding to see that, amidst the chaos, everything operated seamlessly without any visible confusion in the chain of command.

A knight with a rugged face, who was shouting commands at the soldiers, noticed the newcomers. He walked over with a stern expression. With his tall stature, half-graying hair, and shining eyes, he was a familiar figure to Masain.

The knight was Balthazar, arguably one of the most renowned knights on the continent, if not in Delcross.

It was a mystery when he had returned from the southern frontline.

He approached briskly, as if he was about to chastise them, but unexpectedly stopped in front of the man, saluted by placing his hand on his chest.

"Your Majesty."

Your Majesty? Masain looked up at the man in surprise.

Facing Balthazar, the man looked somewhat displeased.

"Why are you here and not at the imperial palace?"

"I'll return your question back to you. Why are you here instead of the imperial palace? What happened to your scouts, and why are you wandering around alone?"

"Why wait for scouts? It's faster if I just have a look myself."

"Hmm..."

Balthazar's forehead veins bulged, but before he could say anything else, the man swiftly changed the topic.

"Nevertheless, it was a success. I've managed to rescue Masain from the fortress. He managed to hang on even in such tough circumstances."

Only then did the paladin notice Masain standing behind the man. His expression subtly changed, somewhat questioning, as if to say 'Why him?' or 'Why of all people?'

He quickly recomposed himself, giving Masain an awkward smile.

"It's fortunate that you're safe, Masain-nim."

It didn't seem like he genuinely felt that way.

Balthazar turned his full attention back to the man.

"The imperial palace is securely defended by the 3rd Imperial Guard Knights and the Paladin Order of St. Aurelion. We've set up a makeshift barrack for you, Your Majesty, so please rest without concerns."

"Alright. I'll leave the cleaning up of the gate fortress to you."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Balthazar saluted and left, not even sparing a glance at Masain.

It was a stark contrast to the treatment he received just a few days ago. The man seemed to sense this subtle shift in atmosphere and clicked his tongue lightly.

But for Masain, a more pressing question arose. By now, it was clear who the man in front of him was.

"Excuse me, are you perhaps my uncle, Prince Nathaniel?"

Although it had been a long time, Masain had vague memories. A boy

who, among the bright blonde-haired royal family members, uniquely had black hair. While he never conversed with him, he remembered him as someone frail-looking.

The man blinked a few times at Masain's question.

"I didn't think you'd recognize me from the few brief encounters when we were young."

So it was him.

The man nodded at Masain.

"Yes, I am Nathaniel Klein. Although my coronation is still pending, I'm the current 17th Holy Emperor and, indeed, your uncle."

Finally, Masain understood the subtle reaction shown by the knight commander earlier. The sudden appearance of the one who had disappeared and should've inherited the throne would have been quite uncomfortable for him, knowing that Masain, a close associate of the first Prince, also an enemy to them, was in fact still alive.

His thoughts were abruptly cut off. A stern-faced knight in a dark uniform approached.

"Your Majesty."

"Sir Leandros."

Leandros, the knight commander of the St. Terbacchia Paladin Order and the leader of all inquisitors.

He had always kept his distance in the fight for the throne, yet when did they begin serving this man as their emperor?

"The fortress was deserted. The [Puppeteer] was already gone."

"Do you believe that person was the [Puppeteer]?"

They held a quiet, cryptic conversation.

"There couldn't be two with such a presence. I'm sure of it."

"Understood, Your Majesty. Then I will pursue him to Brittany."

After nodding, Sir Leandros respectfully bowed and withdrew. Of course, he didn't even glance at Masain.

"Hmm..."

The man frowned briefly, but Masain knew there was nothing he could do about it.

Before they could move a few steps towards the tent, another figure approached them.

It was a politely handsome middle-aged man, Archbishop Caplan, who was the real power of the current council and rumored to be the youngest to ascend to an archbishop.

"Your Majesty."

Noticing Masain, his face changed noticeably, an unabashed expression of incredulity spreading across his features.

"Wasn't this... wasn't this not planned, Your Majesty? What in the world..."

At that face outright asking why he was still alive, Masain was momentarily speechless.

A savvy politician like him wouldn't usually make such a mistake. But Archbishop Caplan briefly revealed his true colors, and the man's eyebrows twitched as the atmosphere suddenly turned cold.

"Archbishop Caplan."

Caplan trembled. The man was smiling faintly at him, and for the first time, Masain realized a person's smile could be as cold as a blade.

"Tatiana Caplan will become the Empress, and Klanos Castle will be handed over to Masain. What else are you dissatisfied with?"

"Your Majesty..."

"That's enough." The man cut off the Archbishop's words. "One should know when to be content. You never know when my mind might change." He smirked, and showed a sliver of tooth. "I might feel like overturning the board you've set."

The Archbishop's face turned pale. He glared at Masain for a moment before quickly regaining his composure and respectfully bowing.

"I apologize for my rudeness, Masain-nim."

Without paying any mind to the Archbishop, the man headed towards the tent. Masain hurriedly followed, acutely aware of the sharp gaze piercing them from behind.

"Caplan seems respectful, but he's rather ominous. I was going to eat here, but that might have been a mistake. We should be careful about eating or anything for a while."

The man clucked his tongue, and made a small gesture to Masain.

"Follow me. Let's start by cracking some walnuts."

Finally, they arrived at the tent. Despite its hasty construction as a military tent, it was quite cozy since it was to be used by the Holy Emperor.

He sat Masain on one side of the bed and rummaged around, pulling out a small bag of walnuts.

Unsheathing his sword, he slid a walnut into the gap between the sheath and guard. The sheath, the end of which was finished with metal, had a curvature perfectly suited to holding a walnut.

Click. The guard descended, cleanly splitting the walnut into edible pieces. It seemed like he often used his sword this way. Masain could only watch in amazement as the split walnuts piled up in front of him.

"The name of this sword is Nutcracker. Isn't it a name that suits its purpose perfectly?"

Wasn't it an Aura Blade?

"But why a nut, of all things?"

"Through years of experience. It's not an easy task to play a prank on a nut without cracking its shell."

Is it a metaphor? Somehow, it feels melancholic.

Masain thought as he held a nut to his mouth.

In that way, Masain, the son of the first prince and second in line for the throne at the time, was able to come under the protection of the Holy Emperor by receiving the fortress of Klanos and abandoning the throne.

The Holy Emperor put forth Archbishop Benitus as his guardian, and Archbishop Caplan did not openly attempt to threaten him, perhaps because of the Holy Emperor's gaze. Soon, Masain was able to return to the imperial academy as if nothing had happened.

"Is it true, you're troubled because you're not making progress with Aura Blade?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Masain had come to the imperial palace for the holiday. He quickly finished a semester back at the academy, but now he had to formally ask the Holy Emperor about his future course.

He originally lived in the Blue Rose Palace, but now the current Holy Emperor's sons were the new masters of the palace. It was natural that he, who had become a Klanos, could no longer stay in the imperial palace.

But as they talked about his life at the academy, he found himself discussing his troubles with Aura Blade. Why am I talking about this? Masain was momentarily confused.

The Holy Emperor was seriously listening to his story.

The two were sitting in the reception room of the Blue Rose Palace, not the main palace office, because the Holy Emperor, was living in the Blue Rose Palace for some reason, and had also decorated the

place as his office.

Although they hadn't met many times, from Masain's point of view, his uncle was a very fascinating person. Despite only a five-year age gap, he somehow felt like he was talking to someone much older.

Perhaps it was something like the maturity of a father. At the young age of 21, he was already the father of five children.

The son of the Empress, Logan, the son of the 1st Queen, Morres, the twins living in the capital's mansion, and Sisle, the daughter of the 2nd Queen, who was born not long ago.

Not only the safety of the Holy Empire, but also the lives of five children were on his shoulders.

Suddenly, the innocent laughter of a child came from outside. One of the princes, Masain was thinking absentmindedly, became startled, when the Holy Emperor suddenly stood up from his seat and dashed out of the office.

As Masain inadvertently turned his head towards the open terrace where the man had run out, he was momentarily stunned. Because a little one was perilously climbing over the railing of the balcony on the second floor across the room. It was a little boy with golden hair that had a faint grey hue.

The child looked around for a moment, swinging, and then fearlessly jumped down.

"Kyah! Prince!"

"Prince Morres!"

The screams of the servants were heard belatedly.

"It's dangerous...!"

Masain also startled, stood up from his seat. He could vividly imagine the sight of the child covered in blood, writhing on the ground.

Fortunately, that was just a figment of his imagination.

Whoosh—

A gust of wind from somewhere enveloped the child, and for a moment it seemed as if he would float away. In no time, the child arrived below the balcony and was embraced by the Holy Emperor, his radiant smile shining brightly. With slightly upturned eyes and a mischievous expression, he was truly a charming little boy.

"Morres! How many times have I told you not to jump from anywhere?"

"Dad[1]! This time do the 'whoosh!' 'Whoosh!'"

"...This kid..."

The Holy Emperor momentarily made a baffled face but soon indulged the child, playfully tossing him into the air.

Whooooosh!

The child soared upwards in one swift motion and then, enveloped by the wind, slowly descended back into the Holy Emperor's arms.

"Dad! Again! Again!"

With a faint sigh, the child took flight once more. Kyahaha!

It was utter chaos.

"I apologize for startling you, brother Masain."

Suddenly, a voice came from the side. Looking down, there stood a young boy with black hair, reminiscent of the Holy Emperor's aura, stretching his hand towards Masain. The little fellow was offering a handshake.

"Nice to meet you. I heard from Imperial Father that you'd be visiting. I am Logan, the eldest.[2]"

This kid was peculiar in his own right. Was he three, or perhaps four?

He seemed just a few months apart from the little one who was flying

around in the Holy Emperor's arms, yet he spoke with an uncanny maturity.

"Lately, Morres is obsessed with jumping from high places. The moment you take your eyes off him, he jumps."

No matter how closely the servants watched, if given a slight chance, he would jump. One day, in the middle of the night, he even opened a locked balcony and jumped out. The Holy Emperor had to rush over and use his divine power to heal a gash on his forehead.

They couldn't just lock the door and confine the child all day. The Holy Emperor's recent confinement in the Blue Rose Palace seemed to be due to this reason.

"In short, kids cause accidents if you're not watching."

The black-haired little boy remarked, shaking his head.

Masain was baffled. Even this kid...

The Holy Emperor seemed resigned to the situation.

"If he had been creature that understood scoldings, perhaps Lizabeth wouldn't have run away."

Ah, the 1st Queen went on a prolonged trip to the Asein Republic suddenly. It was all because of Morres.

The Holy Emperor sighed lightly and tapped the young child's forehead.

"Won't you stop causing trouble and greet brother Masain properly?"

"Brother Masain?"

The little one turned to Masain and smiled, extending his arms. He wanted to be held.

Before he knew it, Masain took the child from the Holy Emperor. The warmth of the child's weight brought a peculiar emotion surging within him.

After unexpectedly losing his parents and brother last semester and losing all his subordinates in the fortress to a curse, he had felt a void. He seemed to have adjusted, but Masain himself felt that something was off.

Right now, something was filling that emptiness.

"Hello, brother Masain?"

"...Hello, Morres."

Masain replied in a subdued voice.

"Dad said so. Starting today, you will always be with us."

"I... see."

"Yeah, so you'll also do the 'whoosh' for me, right?"

"....."

The kid had a peculiar charm.

Throughout his vacation, Masain found himself involuntarily rolling around with the kids in the Blue Rose Palace. Startled by Morres' unpredictable actions and occasionally reprimanded by the old-soul Logan.

And sometimes, they'd sit in the office, picking up walnuts the Holy Emperor cracked open, while the man offered unsolicited advice on following one's heart.

Those were the unforgettable days that would never return.

T/N:

1. He's calling Nate, appa-mama here
2. Not sure why he's called the oldest here, but maybe because he's the Empress's son

56

Upon turning 18, Masain graduated from the academy.

His initiation into aura took longer than most, leading to some struggles. Fortunately, he barely managed to succeed just before graduation, enabling him to pass the imperial knight selection exam.

Part of the reason for his late success was due to the Holy Emperor's interference. Under the pretext of helping his nephew, the Holy Emperor had merely provided nebulous explanations for a while.

– "Before perceiving the aura, one must first understand the vast void of this world."

– "It is upon this void that intent stands, and thereafter the aura appears. This signifies that the aura goes where the mind wishes."

– "It's not about moving with the heart infused in the aura. If the intent materializes as a mental image, the aura will naturally follow."

There was a limit to such nonsensical explanations.

At one point, the usually calm Masain lost his temper.

– "Uncle, please never consider teaching anyone again!"

– "....."

The Holy Emperor looked noticeably dejected.

Luckily, he was eventually able to provide critical assistance to his nephew's training. After much contemplation, he came up with the groundbreaking idea of letting the aura flow directly into Masain's body, allowing him to understand its movement.

Surprisingly, this method was incredibly effective. It catapulted

Masain to a level difficult for even those who had trained with the aura for years to reach.

Though his initiation was late, once he got the hang of the aura, his proficiency in its use skyrocketed. As his original sword skills were already excellent, he quickly became one of the top contenders among the new knights.

Dressed in the imperial guard's uniform for the first time, Masain entered the Blue Rose Palace with a shy expression.

"Wow! Brother! You really came to work here starting today?"

Morres, running around the garden with a red cloth draped over him, rushed over when he spotted Masain.

The boy had stopped jumping from heights as before, but he had recently become obsessed with a red tapestry.

It was an old decorative cloth stored in a corner of the warehouse, depicting the battle between the first king and the demon race. It was an antique piece, though somewhat damaged and hideous now.

Morres had taken to wearing that tapestry like a cloak. He never took it off, not even during sleep, making it impossible for anyone to intervene or even wash it.

Queen Lizabeth was disgusted, but even her hysterics couldn't overcome the boy's stubbornness.

"Your Highness, Prince Morres."

When Masain greeted him formally, Morres looked puzzled.

"Why are you speaking like that all of a sudden?"

"Since I've become an official knight serving the imperial family, I want to remain conscious of my duties."

"Hmm?"

Morres tilted his head, finding the explanation a bit complex for his

young age. However, assuming Masain would continue acting like a knight from now on, he accepted it and chuckled, clutching Masain's sleeve.

"So you won't be going to the academy anymore and will stay with us here?"

"Yes, that's correct."

While Morres beamed and clung to his arm, another child slowly emerged from within the Blue Coral Labyrinth.

"Congratulations on your official appointment, brother."

It was 1st Prince Logan, who, despite not yet being six years old, already had a mature demeanor.

"Thank you, Prince Logan."

"Eh....."

Logan seemed momentarily taken aback by Masain's response but soon gave a faint smile. Sometimes, due to his slightly droopy eyelashes, his smile seemed a tad sorrowful.

"So we'll see you in the palace every day now?"

"As long as there are no official duties with the knight squadron, yes."

"That's great. Imperial Father will be delighted."

Logan smiled warmly, but his eyes widened upon spotting the unfamiliar sword hanging by Masain's side.

"...A sword?"

Ah. Masain glanced at his new sword and smiled awkwardly.

"It's a gift from His Majesty. A bit extravagant for a graduation present."

On the day of his academy graduation, the Holy Emperor had sent Masain a sword through his chief chamberlain.

Though categorized as a long sword, it was longer and thicker than usual and slightly heavier. But it perfectly fit Masain, who was tall and sturdy. And the sword's design felt familiar to him.

The new sword's design, for some reason, reminded him of a well-known royal treasure.

The treasured sword, Mithtratis.

A sword of [Oath] handed down from crown prince to crown prince.

The famed blade, which was said to remain sharp even after severing a thousand necks, was in the possession of the first Prince Cameron during the reign of the former Holy Emperor. Now, after his death, it is carefully stored back in the imperial warehouse.

Masain had seen that sword his father carried several times, and remembered it as a brilliant and gorgeous sword with delicate golden reliefs engraved on it.

This sword was somewhat similar in shape to the Mithtratis. However, unlike the royal treasure sword, it had no particular decorations, and the guard and pommel were generally modest.

[T/N: Sword guard and pommel, is the hilt part of a sword]

Nevertheless, it looked quite luxurious with an overall subtle golden glow. Masain guessed it might be a practical sword made to imitate the excellent balance of the treasure sword.

However, Logan, who had been staring blankly at the sword, made a strange remark.

"Seems like Imperial Father really cherishes you, brother."

".....?"

Looking at Logan with a slightly cryptic smile, Masain blinked in confusion, not knowing what he meant.

Of course, if Masain knew what was happening in the Holy Emperor's office now, he would never have comfortably carried that sword.

"Why not just give him the Mithratis instead?!"

The situation was explosive, with Archbishop Benitus clutching the back of his neck and Armand, the dean of the Theology Academy screaming as if having a fit.

The Holy Emperor responded with a slightly plump-looking face.

"The Mithratis symbolizes targeting the Crown Prince. I have no intention of making the child who barely saved his life after becoming a Klanos a target again."

"But even so! That doesn't mean.....!"

"And where would you use a sword so laden with decorations."

"Then at least give him one of the other practical treasure swords.....!"

"Well, you should use good stuff if you have it. They're all going to wear out and break someday, it's a waste not to use them before that."

At this, Dean Armand fell backward, foaming at the mouth, and Archbishop Benitus clutched his forehead and cried out in a scream-like voice.

"Your Majesty! What do you think sacred artifacts are?!"

That's right.

The sword Masain received was the treasure sword Mithra, which could be said to be the origin of Mithratis. It was the Sword of [Oath] and at the same time, it was one of the few weapons recognized as a sacred artifact in the Holy Empire.

It was incomparable to the Mithratis in importance.

But even the Holy Emperor who graciously gave the treasure sword away, hadn't anticipated it at the time.

That his nephew would seal that sword in the warehouse before long,

and would not pick it up for more than a decade afterward.

A decade later, the once awkward young knight became a dignified Knight Commander of the Imperial Guards. The current Masain was older than his uncle who had taken him from the gate fortress for the first time.

And now, he was standing, holding the sword he had admired since then.

"The name of this sword is Nutcracker. Isn't it a name that suits its purpose perfectly?"

Back then, he should have told his uncle how terrible his naming sense was.

Masain chuckled and held the slightly lighter and thinner handle compared to the sword he usually used.

Woong.

As he injected aura into it, a sword cry that was slightly different from his own sword resonated softly. A clean and calm vibration, much like its usual owner. Masain enjoyed the sword cry, pushing the aura slowly until enough golden outer aura formed on the blade.

And then he started to swing the sword.

Seongjin watched silently from the corner of the training ground.

For the first time, he saw the Imperial Knight's standard swordsmanship seamlessly flow from the first to the eighth stance. A pristine swordplay, unfolded with aura, based on the Banahas's fluid techniques.

In the training ground, where twilight had passed and the surroundings were darkening, only the Nutcracker infused with aura faintly glowed in gold.

"Something... seems different?"

Without realizing, Seongjin muttered.

Although it was the same swordsmanship he had always seen in the training ground, what Masain now demonstrated felt different. It was different from the swords shown by the resident knights during practice, and even different from Seongjin's own.

They were the same movements but executed differently, the same flow of the sword, yet it felt distinct.

He couldn't understand where such differences stemmed from, even though they all practiced the same swordsmanship.

Unbeknownst to both Seongjin and Masain, Masain's sword moves resembled those of his uncle's swordplay of the past.

The sword trajectory that he always kept in mind during practice.

The trajectory of that beautiful sword he always aspired to emulate.

Soon, a clear golden aura began to stream from the Nutcracker.

The aura blade that shone as bright as gold. It was the same technique that effortlessly defeated Bantra's larvae.

Although he hadn't fully reached the realm of the Swordmaster and couldn't maintain the sword for long, a short moment was enough for him to display the technique he had always admired and practiced.

Swoosh. A long golden line appeared in the void.

This time, Seongjin could more clearly witness the essence of this technique. The afterimage of gold, detaching from the sword and drawing a long tail against the dark sky as it flew swiftly.

A moment later, a loud "bang" echoed in the air, followed by a fierce wind that enveloped the training ground.

Whoosh—

Facing the gust, Seongjin unconsciously mumbled, "...A crescent that splits the sky."

Although the Holy Emperor once remarked that it was a name that

could be ignored, the technique that Masain displayed indeed looked like a faint moonlight splitting the void.

Ending with that technique, Masain halted his movements and stood still for a moment, looking up at the sky.

Although it was an aura released without a specific target, it was still a slightly weak strike. He hasn't yet reached the heights of his uncle's skill.

The aura gradually diminished from the Nutcracker. The ringing sound of the sword also faded, soon falling silent.

After standing in the training ground for a while with his sword firmly gripped, Masain eventually turned to face Seongjin.

"It certainly doesn't seem like the legendary sword made by a dragon. But seeing that it shows no strain even when imbued with a strong aura, the Holy Emperor's words about its sturdiness must be true."

Masain smirked and offered the sword to Seongjin.

"It's well-balanced, but it doesn't quite suit my preference for weight."

When Seongjin took the sword, Masain hesitated as if he wanted to say something. However, he soon stiffened his expression, placed a hand on his chest, and bowed respectfully.

"Thank you for lending me the sword, Your Highness."

His demeanor was as respectful as when they first met.

Seongjin moistened his lips for a moment, then simply nodded without uttering a word.

He had many questions, but he couldn't bring himself to voice them. Right then, it suddenly occurred to him that, perhaps not only Queen Elizabeth wanted to forget the past.

The next morning, Masain headed to the imperial palace for the first time in a long while, seeking out the Holy Emperor's office.

"I wish to relinquish my position as the Knight Commander of the Imperial Guards, Your Majesty."

Although the statement was abrupt, the Holy Emperor didn't seem to be greatly disturbed. With his usual cold face, he quietly gazed at Masain without saying a word, then slowly nodded his head.

The one who changed over the past decade or so wasn't just Masain. Even before, the Holy Emperor had been a near-poker face, but after that incident, it became harder to find anything that could be called emotion on his face.

Occasionally, an odd glint like a curious light would appear in his gray eyes, and each time, Masain would feel greatly uneasy, as if his uncle was becoming something other than human.

For a moment, the Holy Emperor's gaze landed on the golden sword at Masain's hip, then met his eyes again. Masain awkwardly smiled and scratched his head.

"Well, I think there's no sword as comfortable to wield as this one."

"I see."

The treasured sword Mithra.

There must have been a great deal of torment before his nephew decided to draw that sword again after such a long time. However, neither of them would ever discuss it, not now nor in the future.

"Masain."

Just as he was about to leave the office, the Holy Emperor stopped him. When he turned around, the Holy Emperor spoke in a seemingly indifferent yet serious tone.

"Take good care of that child."

There was still no warmth to be found in his gaze towards Masain. However, having known his uncle for a long time, Masain could detect a faint hint of concern in his voice.

This time, Masain was able to respond with a genuine smile.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

And that morning, Masain sought Seongjin to inform him of his new appointment as the Head of Security at the Pearl Palace.

The faces of the resident knights who saw him carrying all his luggage turned pale. It goes without saying that they weren't exactly pleased.[1]

T/N:

1. Lol. The military-esque style drill training

Ever since Sir Masain became the head of security and began to live with him in the Pearl Palace, Seongjin's training progressed at an increasingly rapid pace.

First, since Masain's ease of commuting gave the man more free time, Seongjin's swordsmanship lesson hours significantly increased.

No, is the lesson time important? We're always in the same palace, aren't we?

Whether it's morning or night, whenever a problem arises, I can always find him and ask him questions.

Modern employees would instantly consider quitting if they heard about such a lifestyle, Seongjin thought to himself as he chuckled slyly. Each day couldn't help but be fulfilling.

[Your father is quite strange, too.]

Today, too, as he was wielding his Nutcracker sword till his palms were raw, he suddenly spoke at Demon King's question, who usually used to sing out of boredom.

'What's strange?'

[No matter how bad your reputation might be, you're still the prince. What could he be trusting to leave you so unattended?]

Seongjin paused and wiped the sweat dripping down his forehead.

'Um...'

Indeed, the term 'unattended' seems appropriate.

After all, his old man did provide him with high-quality meals and

just left him at the training ground.

'Maybe he's grateful just because I stopped messing around.'

At Seongjin's response, the Demon King snorted.

[Alright. Let's say that's the case. But what's strange is that you're the same. How long are you going to keep training? Now that you've got a new body, don't you want to do something else?]

'What's wrong with training? It's just fun.'

[If you have no complaints, it's none of my business, but still, put your hand on your heart and think about your recent lifestyle. Sleep, wake up, training ground. Eat, training ground. Isn't this a completely voluntary hermit lifestyle?]

Well, if you say it's a hermit's life, I can't argue with that, but the word 'voluntary' is very important here.

Plus, what Seongjin was concerned about was something a bit different.

'It's nice to swing the sword all day, but...'

Isn't this like a student without any academic pressure? It feels like everyone around me is cheering even if I don't study and only pursue my hobbies.

'...Is this really okay?'

When you think about it, as a prince, there should be some basic duties and etiquette I should learn...

Yeah, like royal education, something like that.

Besides, everyone knows Morres doesn't fully remember, right? Shouldn't they make him study even more in that case?

Queen Lizabeth, who even built a personal library, would definitely urge him to study hard, but she seemed cautious towards Seongjin and seemed to be waiting for the holy emperor's opinion.

'But is Pearl Palace totally abandoned? That's not true either.'

Without even him asking, the number of servants recently increased, which in itself a proof.

The number of resident knights had increased by about 30%, and the number of servants had more than doubled from before. It wasn't the emperor's intention to isolate Pearl Palace from the imperial palace in the first place, Morres just misbehaved a lot.

Thanks to one more maid who was good at making tea, Edith's face brightened as if she'd gotten rid of a decade-old constipation.

'...Well, it probably doesn't matter?'

In any case, Seongjin was satisfied with his current life.

The swordsmanship lessons were fun, and the number of his aura techniques increased rapidly. He's now tying the third Banahas technique after finishing the basic training. He was able to progress quickly as he had perfectly completed the first and second techniques.

He didn't know how long this peaceful life would last. However, since he was given this free time to solely focus on swordsmanship, it might be good to use it to its fullest.

Seongjin thought so, but most people seemed to think differently.

"Prince Morres, aren't you spending too much time in the training ground these days?"

Haven grumbled as he finished his morning training. Recently, due to a significant increase in the number of guards, a resident knight always followed Seongjin for personal protection.

Especially Haven, who became familiar with Seongjin, was a friendly person who comfortably approached Seongjin openly.

"What's wrong with training? It's good, isn't it?"

"But, aren't you still in your prime? You should go out, make friends,

and attend social gatherings. It seems like you're getting a lot of invitations to social events these days, aren't you?"

Shall I talk about my first social gathering, sir Haven?

Well, a monster suddenly appeared in the basement, and all the members who attended were detained by the court. Still, do you want me to go again?

"And you should also date someone. You've lost weight and now you're glowing. Don't you have a young lady sending flowers every day? With just a little smile, noble ladies would line up, but you're wasting that face training all day. It's so frustrating!"

Oh, those flashy bouquets, sir Haven?

Actually, it's a show by a clever 12-year-old girl named Chloe. That kid is pondering when it's most profitable to dump me.

Haven's lips protruded like a duck in response to Seongjin's nonchalant attitude.

"Well, at least go out and get some fresh air. It'll improve your mood, won't it be nice?"

This guy, isn't he just frustrated because he has to be tied to the training ground during duty hours? If it's that much of a bother, he could apply to cancel the dispatch and return to the 3rd Cavalry Division.

When he was told that, Haven shouted in shock, "No way, Your Highness! Isn't that too harsh between us? I'm saying all this out of consideration for you. It's really disappointing that you say it like that, you know?"

What does he mean 'between us'?

Ignoring Haven, Seongjin frowned and started swinging his sword again, but Haven, once attached, was tenacious.

"Come on, don't be like that and confide in me. You want to go somewhere, have a refreshing drink, meet pretty women! If you say

so, I, Haven, will follow you to the end!"

"...."

"Your Highness? Do you really have nothing you want to do?"

Thanks to him, something he wanted to do had just come up.

To shut that noisy mouth of his.

Hee-EEK.

Feeling something ominous in Seongjin's expression, Haven flinched and retreated. He really had incredible instincts.

'...Geez, why am I bothering with all this?'

Seongjin grumbled to himself, clutching his Nutcracker.

All because the nation is too peaceful.

If gates were opening here and there, monsters pouring out, causing chaos, people would realize how precious this trivial daily life is.

However, that evening.

Only when he met Edith, who cautiously asked if he was not going to meet his friend at the townhouse, did Seongjin realize that those around him were quite worried about his condition.

* * *

"I don't understand why everyone is anxious to send me out when I'm fine."

So, oddly enough, Seongjin found himself complaining in front of the Holy Emperor.

"It's ridiculous after finishing evening training. Everyone's looking at me like I'm some strange creature."

"...."

"Is it so strange to train all day? Thanks to that, my skills are improving fast, I don't understand what the problem is...."

Today was the first time Seongjin had had a consultation with the Holy Emperor since receiving the Nutcracker.

The Holy Emperor, who had been busy with piled-up national affairs, had managed to finish his work quickly and resumed the consultation. Probably thanks to his subordinates who worked like clockwork at the right time and place.

In any case, as he met with the Holy Emperor and explained about his training, he naturally started talking about the reactions of the people around him that have been bothering him recently.

The Holy Emperor, who had been listening silently for a while, nodded his head.

"I see. That's quite something. You haven't been practicing for long, but you're already close to the 5th level."

"Haha, you recognized it right away, didn't you?"

Seongjin scratched his head awkwardly and laughed.

As the Holy Emperor had said, his own aura circuit was almost approaching the 5th level.

After the fourth level, the process's resistance increased dramatically, taking longer than expected, but he was confident he would complete the fifth level within a few days. At this rate, he would be at the level of a squire just entering the ranks of a knight order.

According to Sir Masain, on average, it takes over 3 years to reach the fourth level and nearly 7 years to complete the fifth level.

Of course, most start training at a young age, not knowing much. However, the speed at which Seongjin progressed, completing all these steps in just a few weeks, was astoundingly fast.

The looks on the faces of Sir Masain and the resident knights of Pearl Palace were utterly priceless.

– Why hadn't someone so talented been discovered until now?

Even the young knight, who always scowled at Seongjin, was stunned momentarily. As expected, Hunter Lee Seongjin wasn't someone to be taken lightly.

While proudly sipping his tea, the Holy Emperor suddenly commented, "It's fortunate that you seem capable enough to present to the public."

Why is he still treating me like a child learning to walk?

He thought he was doing quite well, but this man knows how to kill one's spirit.

The Holy Emperor, looking at Seongjin's dismayed face, continued, "There's no need to be in such a hurry. Those who care about you aren't just saying empty words. Recently, you've seemed restless."

"Uh..."

Seongjin's eyes widened, and he was momentarily at a loss for words. Did even his father think he was too anxious?

Of course, it was true that he had increased his training time considerably after his near-death experience, but still...

"...Shouldn't I become stronger as quickly as possible? What I mean is..."

The high-level demons are coveting this dimension. You know this too, right?

Soon, famine, plague, war, and death will invade Delcross. The gates will open!

There was so much he wanted to argue, but Seongjin closed his mouth.

Perhaps it was because the Holy Emperor's gaze seemed much heavier than usual.

"Morres."

"Yes."

"Do you know where and what your brothers and sisters are doing right now?"

".....?"

Seongjin blinked.

Of course, he had heard about the whereabouts of his siblings. The Holy Emperor officially had seven children, and he heard that three of them had left the Imperial Palace for various duties.

However, he didn't have much interest or detailed knowledge about the whereabouts of the other princes and princesses, other than the twins and Amelia, whom he frequently interacted with.

Noticing Seongjin's puzzled look, the Holy Emperor began explaining calmly.

About First Prince Owen, who had been active on the southern front for years.

About the Second Prince Logan, leading the paladins in sea expeditions.

About the Third Princess Sisle, who was anointed a holy maiden and was on a long pilgrimage.

This was the first time the Holy Emperor had spoken directly about the other princes and princesses. After listening for a while, Seongjin asked with a hint of suspicion.

"So, you're saying I should stop my training and, like my other siblings, fulfill the [Noblesse Oblige]?"

He had thought it was a reprimand for neglecting his duties and lazing around in the palace. However, the Holy Emperor slowly shook his head.

"You're already training hard enough. Haven't I told you to take things a bit more relaxed? You're too young to be tied down by the stuffy duties of the imperial family."

"But..."

"Just remember, you have many family members around you."

"....."

"Now, let's talk about something different."

The Holy Emperor looked down, seemingly lost in thought. Then, he asked Seongjin an unexpected question.

"There are many countries on this continent, not just Delcross. How much do you know about them?"

"....."

Regarding the countries that dominate the continental political situation, Seongjin had some knowledge.

The Brittany Kingdom, which leads the food and clothing culture, Rohan, which has recently risen as an emerging power starting from the liquor industry, and the Asein Empire, which is slowly building power based on a merchants' alliance.

All of this was self-studied, even mastering the spelling without any proper lessons.

Since Delcross, virtually the strongest empire on the continent, has almost all the countries except the southern pagans under its control, there wasn't much to call a political situation other than interfering in other countries.

However, the explanation added by the Holy Emperor after hearing Seongjin's answer was unexpected.

Carthago Republic in the west, famous for wool fabrics, cheese, and bards.

Thriving maritime cities based on exceptional long-distance navigation and fishing skills.

And while it is now divided due to foreign interventions, the high-quality literature of the eastern Ortana, which once flourished as a splendid republic.

"... Are you suggesting that I should focus more on politics and diplomacy as a prince, rather than just swordsmanship lessons?"

He did nag about studying during the temporary experience. Is he hoping for the resumed lessons that Morres stopped before?

Apart from having a swordsmanship teacher, he thought it was enough to just gain common knowledge.

However, the Holy Emperor denied his guess again.

"It's just to say that there are many places worth taking interest in, besides Delcross."

"....."

Seongjin was now confused.

What does he really want to say?

Most of the time during the audience, the man who only listened to Seongjin's words was unusually talkative today. But maybe it's the mood, it feels like he's beating around the bush.

Looking closely at the Holy Emperor, Seongjin soon discovered a faint ripple of emotion in one of his cold eyes and was slightly shocked.

Anxiety or worry.

Has he been looking at him like this all this time?

"Do you understand? Morres."

The Holy Emperor spoke to the dumbfounded Seongjin.

"I may have some idea of what you saw and why you're so anxious. But remember that it's something you, still young, can't and don't need to handle."

""

"You just need to live like any other child, doing what you want."

"... Like a child?"

"Yes, like a child."

The person who probably knows better than anyone that Seongjin is not an ordinary child said so in a calm voice.

Prince Leonard of Rohan was carousing the taverns of the capital again tonight.

His normally handsome face was particularly gloomy today. Drinking and playing around wasn't just a one or two-day affair; when on earth would he have to kill time so pointlessly?

He briskly pushed away the woman who followed him out of the tavern, and with a leisurely shake of his liquor bottle, Leonard headed to the meeting place with Romaine.

"F*ck you, Holy Emperor...."

The person who provided the reason for his idle time. The Holy Emperor made it so expensive to meet face-to-face that even with Leonard's desperate requests, he hardly agreed to it.

What the hell is the problem?

He had suggested meeting with the Princess of Delcross as an alternative plan, but Romaine ignored it and kept his mind on something absurd.

So, he's wandering the streets like a drunkard, tempting others.

"...Romaine?"

In the dimly lit street, Leonard spotted the familiar long silver hair of a person who was pulling a staggering drunkard.

What on earth is he doing?

The drunkard looked rather disheveled, not a good sight. With his arm firmly wrapped around the man, Romaine was whispering something into his ear.

Soon, the two disappeared side by side into a deep alley.

Standing dumbfounded for a moment, Leonard took a sip of liquor and followed them into the alley.

He found the two after only a few steps. The drunkard was sitting on the ground with a vacant expression, and Romaine was piercing his chest with a sharp metal rod.

A small trickle of blood spurted out.

Soon, Romaine's soft voice, whispering to the drunkard, reached Leonard's ears.

"Now, forget everything that just happened. Sleep well at home for a few days, and everything will be better."

It was a husky and slender but definite male voice. Yet the strange resonance made it sound like a young woman.

Sure enough, the drunkard with glazed eyes looked at Romaine as if he were the most beautiful woman in the world, even as his forehead was soaked with blood.

"Now go home."

The drunkard nodded and staggered past Leonard and out of the alley.

After watching the poor man's retreating figure for a moment, Leonard turned and asked Romaine,

"You've been doing this a lot lately. Does it mean anything?"

"All results start with diligently sowing seeds."

Romaine replied, wiping the blood-soaked rod with a rag.

He had been planting strange things in people's chests with that rod for some time now, like a real farmer sowing seeds.

"You talk like you've become a priest of the real [Sowing] Cult."

It was a jab at Romaine acting like the remnants of the Sowing Cult. Romaine shrugged.

"At least I sow something more meaningful than they do."

"When are you going to see the results from planting one by one?"

"I've already found some collaborators. They'll do their best."

A few more people going around stabbing others with metal rods doesn't change much. Leonard scoffed.

"So, is it over? It might be faster to summon a demon instead."

When Leonard spoke jokingly, Romaine looked straight at him. Although his face was hidden behind a half-mask, his tightly closed lips looked very serious.

"Don't you know? As long as the current Holy Emperor is there, moving a demon race in Delcross's capital is impossible. Those with magic cannot endure even for a moment. Delcross is the place where demons cannot step in unless they borrow a human body or directly contract with a human."

"Yeah, you said that."

Leonard grasped the bottle of liquor, a fake smile on his face.

He had heard the same story from Romaine several times.

About a monstrous character who suddenly appeared in Delcross, the capital that was once nearly occupied by the demon race. In a flash, he wiped out the demons and claimed the 17th royal throne for himself.

After coming to power, he discreetly dried up the seeds of four factions known as the Dark Church, successfully uniting them.

The result was considered relatively good in cases where remnants of sects like the [Sowing] Church or [Repentance] Church remained hidden in the corners of the continent. The Church of [Rest], on the other hand, was said to have been completely annihilated, leaving

not even a corpse or bone fragment behind.

What could they possibly do against such a terrifying being?

From time to time, Leonard was overcome with a sense of hopelessness, wondering if they were hitting a sheer cliff with eggs.

"But the current guardian of Delcross is still human after all," Romaine said, looking up at the distant sky. "It's curious how he's maintaining his balance up to now, but it's undoubtedly a precarious tightrope walk."

Leonard could not fully understand his words. Romaine always avoided going into details about that balance.

Yet, whenever the story came up, Romaine's voice was filled with conviction.

"Such balance tends to collapse from a very small crack."

Leonard turned his head, following Romaine's gaze.

Off in the distance, in the direction where the royal palace of Delcross lay – where the Holy Emperor undoubtedly was.

"The limit will come someday. It must."

* * *

That night.

Because he couldn't concentrate, Seongjin ended his meditation earlier than usual and walked out to the balcony instead of lying down. He flung open the window, feeling frustrated as the words he'd heard from the Holy Emperor during the day continued to surface in his mind.

'...To live as a child, doing what you want?'

It seemed absurd the more he thought about it.

Morres was a full 15 years old. In this world, it's an age where you

can join a knight order or take adult responsibilities like the debutante's ball.

Some of the resident knights of the Pearl Palace at his age would flock to bars or linger around the red-light district. What's with this man treating him like a child still?

'Besides, I'm already doing what I want, right? I'm comfortably eating and sleeping while freely training....'

Hearing Seongjin grumbling to himself as he breathed in the cool night air, the Demon King quietly spoke.

[What's on your mind? You're not acting like yourself.]

'What do you mean, not like myself?'

He was a contemplative person, as far as he knew.

However, the Demon King's next words were an undeniable truth.

[Whenever something bothers you, you put everything aside and just train.]

'...Did I?'

It seemed like that was the case. Recently, focusing solely on training, he had pushed aside many unresolved issues that surrounded Morres.

Queen Elizabeth, who was hiding something from him.

The mysterious organizations that Morres allegedly sponsored.

And Jonathan McAlpin, whom he met to gather information only to get caught in a demon accident and end up incarcerated in the tribunal.

'I could dig into it if I wanted to, but...'

What use would that be?

After all, Seongjin was not Morres.

He had realized something when he experienced a near-death situation recently. He was merely possessing Morres' body haphazardly, not truly living as Morres.

The emperor had said so. The soul maintains its appearance in life because it continues to be influenced by the physical body until death.

But even when he was swept away by an aura storm to Gehenna, or when the Demon King's summon pulled him to the edge of the Void, Seongjin's soul remained unaltered, just as it was during his Hunter days.

'In the end, this body doesn't interact with my soul even a little.'

He was breathing and moving in Morres' body, but it was an unstable attachment where the body and soul were not in harmony. A precarious state where a slight trigger could send him flying far away, possibly never to return.

Can this really be called a living state?

Because swordsmanship training is quite fun at the moment.

So, with a carefree attitude, I lived by practicing as much as I wanted, and when the crisis of a dimensional invasion approached, I thought about lending a hand.

The Holy Emperor must have seen through that.

– You have so many blood relatives around you.

– Even if it's not Delcross, there are many places worth looking at with interest.

As Seongjin pondered over time, he seemed to understand what the man wanted to say.

The Holy Emperor wanted him, Lee Seongjin, to live a proper life as Morres, bonding with his siblings and becoming attached to this world.

'...Yeah, when I think about it, the biggest unresolved problem is the Holy Emperor.'

What the hell does he want to do, that guy?

A man who knew Seongjin's current situation better than anyone else. A man who could come and go across the vast boundaries of dimensions to find a single soul.

Why doesn't he think about finding his real son, but takes care of pitiful Seongjin as if he were his child?

"Hmm..."

After a moment of contemplation, Seongjin soon shook his head and slammed the window shut.

One way or another, the answer is one. Thinking about it alone won't solve the problem now.

It's annoying to waste energy on unnecessary things.

'I can't sleep, so maybe I'll meditate one more time.'

[...So that's how it is. I thought you were unusually worried for a long time. Don't you ever grow?]

Ignoring the Demon King's dejected voice, Seongjin spent enough time meditating until he fell asleep.

So life seemed to go on without any changes.

However, that day, the conversation with the Holy Emperor certainly left an impact on Seongjin. When he meditated or wielded the Nutcracker, the man's words continued to slip into his mind whenever he seemed relaxed.

After receiving a call from Madame Justine about the fitting of a previously ordered dress, Seongjin's decision to visit Salon de Merci was also for that reason.

"Wow, I don't know how many days it's been since I left the Pearl

Palace!"

As Seongjin climbed onto the carriage, knight Dame Claudia exclaimed in excitement. She had obviously been stuck in the Pearl Palace too long lately.

Accompanying Seongjin on his outing that day were also senior knight Dame Maria and junior knight Dame Claudia.

Unfortunately, Haven, who would have been most delighted to go out, was off duty that day.

"He took a few days off. He will probably spend the entire vacation in the liquor bottle. Even though the liquor isn't that strong, he really goes all out drinking it."

Although Dame Maria spoke disdainfully, everyone knew that she was the biggest drinker among the resident knights.

"Will that not cost a fortune? Aura users don't get drunk easily, do they?"

Could the aura circulating actively inside the body accelerate the decomposition of alcohol? Aura users seemed to sober up very quickly.

Most of the resident knights in the Pearl Palace were rumored to have come on assignment to earn liquor money.

In response to Seongjin's question, Maria shrugged.

"That's his funny point. He loves liquor so much, but since he can't afford it, he cuts off his aura and drinks. Thanks to that, he has been picked on by local bullies who didn't recognize him as an aura user countless times."

"That much?"

"Yes. The fact that his talent is mediocre but he is a master at using aura is because he practiced while drinking."

That's surprisingly a hidden benefit of drinking.

Destete Street, which he visited after a long time, was busier than before.

The Emperor's birthday celebration was approaching, and it was time for all the officials of the Empire to flock to Destete Street, where all the dressmakers were gathered. During the festival period, large and small banquets were held without a break, so it would not be enough to just tailor one or two new party dresses.

[Humph! Humans indeed love to waste energy on unnecessary things. What's all this fuss over such a trivial event?]

'...'

Although the demon king feigned indifference, Seongjin felt differently. The excitement was palpably transmitted.

Thinking about it, this is the first time the demon king has come to a busy street, isn't it? He might have really lived an unwanted secluded life. It feels a bit sad.

[...What? I suddenly feel really bad for some reason.]

What a quick-witted guy.

As the carriage wove through the crowds, stopping and starting, they finally arrived at Salon de Merci. The employees who had been waiting in advance lined up to greet Seongjin.

"Glorious light upon the noble Imperial family! We greet His Brilliant Highness, Prince Mores!"

Truly a splendid feast of pink.

Among them, Madame Justine[1], wearing an unrivaled shade of pink fur, was fluttering his fan and making a fuss.

"Oh my, Your Highness! Kyaa! You've become even more dazzling since the last time I saw you!"

It seems like he's as boisterous as ever. If Masain had been here, he would've thrown a tantrum on the spot[2].

Both Dame Maria and Dame Claudia, who were seeing the man for the first time, widened in astonishment.

Well, for the most renowned designer in the capital, he indeed had a rather unconventional character.

What was surprising was the significant curiosity the Demon King showed towards him.

[Hmm. A very, very peculiar individual.]

'People can be a bit noisy.'

[No, it's not the appearance that's the issue. Truly a fascinating human. Where on earth did this character spring from?]

'...?'

While saying this, in the meantime, Madame Justine, with intimidating muscles that surprisingly looked delicate, walked over with light steps, circled Seongjin, inspecting him, and then pulled up his red-stained lips.

"Oh my! Your body size has changed quite a bit since I last saw you! You've become slimmer and more firm! You seem to have grown a bit taller too. Goodness gracious! What would have happened if we had gone straight to Gabon? Now, now, shall we go to the special room?"

A foreboding feeling came over Seongjin.

"Could it be...?"

Madame Justine's eyes turned into mischievous crescents as he caught Seongjin's uneasy expression.

"Yes. As you guessed, we will inevitably have to measure your size from scratch again! Ohohohohoho!"

Damn it all.

T/N:

1. 1st appearance in Chp.23

2. Lol. Masain def try wearing the same expression as he did back then.

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To conclude, Madame Justine was a decent designer, deserving of his reputation.

Seongjin, who had tried on the tailored outfit after a bit of alteration following the size measurement, was a little surprised. The completed dress looked quite plausible.

With the material scattering rainbow-colored lights, large butterfly patterns, and the embroidered extravagant gemstones, all the strange elements were gathered, but instead of looking like a space shaman as Seongjin had anticipated, the finished product appeared surprisingly elegant, causing him to stand agape.

Madame Justine covered his mouth with a folding fan and chuckled softly.

"Ho ho ho. Because your highness has a face that it can fully support such a bold design."

Is the completion of fashion ultimately the face?

While Seongjin was marveling anew, Madame stealthily approached, fumbling with the pins stuck here and there in the dress, and continued speaking.

"Perhaps it's indeed fortunate that your highness hasn't ordered the party dress yet. It would have had to be entirely recut anyway."

"... Party dress?"

There's already a bunch of clothes in Morres' room, yet another order?

"Yes. You'll need at least 5 new outfits for the birthday celebration.

Some prestigious household members order over 10. They sweep away all the latest seasonal designs."

"10 outfits...."

"That's still modest compared to the royal events of other countries. The imperial family usually prefers elegant and neat designs, so there's not much overlap, and they don't order too many."

If one were to wear something similar to the imperial party dress, they would be accused of ignorance and finger-pointed for a long time.

"That's why some places prepare dozens of preliminary designs. In case the reserved dress overlaps with the imperial family's design, all the dresses under production get discarded."

So it is considered virtuous for the imperial family, who are hosts of the party, to decide on their party dresses as soon as possible.

"The birthday celebration is less than a month and a half away. It's already quite late, so it would be best to get all the party dresses tailored while you're here."

Thump, thump. Madame Justine forcefully straightened the lapel of the dress, then scanned Seongjin from top to bottom, his nostrils flaring with satisfaction.

"Hmm, doesn't the dress look different now that I've personally tailored it? No matter how well the staff at the Pearl Palace are good at their job, they can't do a satisfactory job like this."

"If it's so bad, why don't you come to the Pearl Palace?"

"I can't enter the Imperial Palace, that's why."

"...?"

Before he could ask anything further, Madame Justine placed his hand on Seongjin's shoulder and smiled. "Now, shall we take a look at the tailoring on the back?" Then, he lightly pushed him to turn him towards the mirror.

"...!"

A chill ran through Seongjin's body.

What's this?

Why does it feel so unpleasant?

It's like touching something void, something he shouldn't have touched.

Suddenly stiffening, Seongjin's unease was detected by Madame, who immediately withdrew his hand with a shock. His previously ingratiating smile was gone.

"..."

Seongjin, too, remained silent, glaring at Madame Justine. He had a strong feeling that something was wrong, but couldn't figure out what.

But looking into the dim eyes of the Madame, he was certain that the man knew why.

A chilling silence.

Dame Claudia, standing at the door, was disturbed by the heavy air and called out to him.

"...Your Highness?"

How long had they been glaring at each other?

Finally, Madame Justine broke the silence with his voice, now weak and somewhat hollow.

"...Your senses... are extremely keen."

"..."

"Indeed, the imperial bloodline is different in every way..." He seemed to want to say more but bit his lip, holding back. "...I will bring the design sketches."

With a cold look, Madame turned his eyes from Seongjin and gave a slight bow. Then he turned and left the special chamber, still with his light gait.

"Your Highness? What suddenly happened?"

Dame Claudia asked again, confused, but Seongjin was deep in conversation with the Demon King in his mind, leaving no time to answer her.

'...Hey.'

[Huh?]

"Didn't you say that guy was peculiar earlier? What's so peculiar about him, exactly?"

At Seongjin's question, the Demon King hesitated for a moment, then said,

[Hmm, I'm not quite sure how to put it. Uh... it's hard to pinpoint exactly what it is, but his body seems a bit off somehow? Like it's not moving properly. A feeling like it doesn't quite match with his soul? Like it's lacking in vitality?]

'...What's that supposed to mean?'

[I told you it's hard to explain. Anyway, he feels very different from the people of this world.]

'Different from the people of this world?'

[Yeah. I don't know why, but he smells of another world. Like, where is it... Ah, that's right!]

The Demon King, who had been mumbling, suddenly exclaimed with a bright expression as if he had realized something.

[Regular World! It feels exactly like a human from Regular World!]

Seongjin was taken aback by the unexpected answer.

Regular World.

A place referred to as a dimension higher than Sigurt-34 or Gehenna, known as the Imaginary World.

Following a giant flow that transcends dimensions, it maintains extreme stability.

According to the Demon King, these regular worlds often show a stereotyped appearance. It's because all the laws of the world are constrained by the same flow.

Thus, these worlds have a narrow range of change, and their stability is incomparable to the imaginary worlds. It's almost impossible to forcibly open a gate and invade from another dimension.

In other words, things belonging to the regular worlds cannot easily appear in the imaginary worlds or the main worlds.

But how can a person from such a dimension be here in Delcross?

"It's not like he's entirely a human from the regular world either. Souls from regular worlds are a bit unique and can be recognized at a glance. But that guy's soul doesn't differ much from the souls of Delcross."

That's why the Demon King found it hard to explain.

"But his body is different. Like other things from the regular worlds, I feel a single giant flow governing that body. That's why it doesn't blend well with this world, and I keep feeling a sense of discomfort."

On the surface, there may be no significant difference.

But since the substances that make up the body and the laws governing them are different, some differences are bound to manifest.

For example, the mass might be different.

He might be slightly heavier or lighter than other humans.

"Ah, so that's why.....!"

Seongjin finally understood the nature of the discomfort he felt.

The unpleasant feeling he sensed earlier was nothing else but his well-developed senses picking up on an oddly inappropriate load applied to his body with a slight exertion of force.

A human from the main world with a body from the regular world. In that case...

"Could that guy be undergoing possession like me?"

Seongjin, a human from imaginary world, became Morres of a main world.

Although it was a slightly different case, they shared the commonality of being souls who have entered the bodies of people from other worlds.

Could investigating Madame Justine reveal clues about Seongjin's current state?

"It makes sense to think so, but....."

But why does he feel so reluctant?

He feels like just covering it up.

[So, what are you going to do now? Want to confront that guy while we're at it?]

The Demon King asked, but Seongjin shook his head after some thought.

There were escort knights beside Seongjin now. It's not the time to suddenly apprehend the Madame and question him about other dimensions and whatnot.

Furthermore, it was the twins who first introduced Salon de Merci. It's highly likely they already knew about Madame.

If the twins know, then doesn't the Holy Emperor likely know as well? Is there a need for him to intervene and create confusion?

More than anything, Seongjin was caught in a strange feeling, not wanting to delve too deeply into his current state. Perhaps it was some sort of intuition, an unexplainable sensation.

[Really? If you say so, whatever.]

The Demon King trembled his soul once, like stretching, and then spoke once again.

[But you know, you seem to think a lot more now that you've become the Holy Emperor's son. If you had been as usual, you would have just turned everything upside down without pondering.]

'...Huh?'

[You can't resist your curiosity, can you?]

'.....'

Exactly, that's how it is.

Ah, it's uncomfortable. I want to go back to the Pearl Palace and swing around Nutcracker.

Madam Justine, who had left his seat as if to avoid him, returned to the special room a moment later, his face expressionless, carrying an enormous number of design books.

He then spread them out everywhere and passionately began to explain the design concepts, of course, maintaining an appropriate distance from Seongjin.

"Now, Your Highness. What do you think of this design? The sharp descending lines blending with the angular traditional patterns, doesn't it look very dignified? I named it 'Blade's Sovereign!'"

"Look here, Your Highness. This design is 'Moonlight's Glory.' It's motivated by the fairy tale of the moon fairy who announced the improvement of the first emperor. The shining silver jewels are beautiful, aren't they?"

To Seongjin, they were doodles, and he had no idea what to

appreciate about them.

With a blank face, he was giving half-hearted responses when, unexpectedly, someone began to engage passionately.

"A design with improvement as the theme for hosting foreign guests might be..."

"Ah, here the shade needs to be a bit darker..."

"This is good! The restraint in mise-en-scène radiates dignity..."

Dame Claudia. Did she like this sort of thing?

"Dame Claudia, you say? Finally, someone who understands me! How can there be such a fashionable person among knights?"

"Hehe! Even though I look like this, I studied Britannian culture when I planned to study abroad as a child."

"Oh, really! That explains it."

"Hehe."

After a heated discussion that went perfectly, five banquet outfits were quickly decided. Seongjin had no chance to intervene.

Lastly, waving his hands in a manner that meant they should do as they like, Seongjin left it to them.

Clothes are clothes; what's there to choose?

Thanks to Dame Claudia, time is saved, so let's hurry back and train.

Thinking this, Seongjin got up from his seat without delay.

"Your Highness."

Madam Justine, who had followed him to the entrance of Salon de Merci to see him off, cautiously approached and spoke, "It is difficult to explain in detail here, but I can assure you of this." Lowering himself slightly, Madam Justine whispered softly into Seongjin's ear, "Your Highness, I have been working for His Majesty for a long time.

You can at least trust me on that."

"....."

Seongjin stared at Madam Justine.

[His heartbeat is steady? It doesn't seem like he's lying.]

The Demon King quietly hinted at his side. True to his words, to Seongjin's eyes, Madam Justine's more serious than usual demeanor appeared sincere.

However.....

"Do you take it that my father's wish is the reason you cannot enter the Imperial Palace?"

"....."

"Yes. I'll at least believe that you are in my father's hands."

Crack. A crack appeared on Madam Justine's robust smile that had been covering his face.

After briefly staring at the man's stern face, Seongjin snorted inwardly and climbed into the carriage.

Right. It wasn't as simple as believing just because he acted obediently.

Seongjin's intuition, which had been alert since he first saw Madam Justine, was still sounding a warning against him.

Claudia Bowling was thrilled to bits.

Indeed, it had been a long time since she had left the palace and come into the city. With the recent increase in training and strengthening of the palace's defenses, she had been busy even on her days off.

Moreover, the high-quality designs she saw at Salon de Merci

perfectly satisfied her lustful desires that she had been ignoring.

Dresses reflecting her tastes for the banquet. How splendid it would be if Prince Mores wore them!

Maria, a knight by her side, subtly signaled her, but Claudia couldn't help but let out a frivolous laugh now and then.

"Hehehe."

Had other seniors knights heard it, they might have been shocked, but Claudia, who had not been a resident knight for long, did not dislike the third prince she was serving.

Regardless of previous rumors, the prince she saw was a rare genius in swordsmanship and diligent to boot. He lost weight in no time and became as handsome as a prince from a fairy tale.

'Sometimes he exudes an odd atmosphere not matching his age....'

The young prince, unaware of her thoughts, merely stared out of the window with his usual plump expression.

Meanwhile, the carriage seemed to make no progress, stopping and starting repeatedly. The crowds on the street had increased because it was late in the afternoon.

"It seems it will take quite some time to reach Pearl Palace. It looks like it will only get a little quieter after dinner," said Maria, looking outside worriedly.

Then the prince unexpectedly suggested, "Then, since we'll be late anyway, shall we just eat and then go home?"

"Eh?"

"If we have our meal first and go back after it gets quieter, we'll save a lot of time. What do you two want to eat?"

Images of famous restaurants flashed in Claudia's mind, even high-end ones she couldn't normally afford on a lower knight's salary.

"Will... expensive ones be alright, Your Highness?"

The prince nodded obediently, "Go anywhere you want to eat. I'll pay for anything."

Wow! The prince is the best!

But Claudia's excitement didn't last long.

The problem was a group of people from Brittany who came into the restaurant where they were sitting. They began to speak loudly in Brittania, uttering very unpleasant words.

"... Imperial family ... piglets ... fools ..."

"... shame ... Delcross ... ridiculous ..."

Claudia, who had once prepared to study in Brittany, understood some of it. They were clearly slandering Prince Morres, known as the fool!

Claudia glanced nervously, but the prince seemed undisturbed, just nibbling on a small piece of grilled meat.

'Well, His Highness wouldn't know the Brittania language anyway....'

Fortunately, or unfortunately, Claudia was uncomfortably nibbling her meal alone when it happened.

"... woman ... lowly origin ..."

"... vulgar ... low-class ..."

"... prostitute ..."

Those scoundrels were now targeting even Princess Amelia!

Claudia's face turned pale with these outrageous slanders when—

Swoosh.

Suddenly, Prince Morres pushed back his chair and stood up. Looking up at his face in astonishment, Claudia was taken aback.

The prince was smiling with his teeth bared, his face more ferocious than ever!

Then, striding over to the group of Briattanian citizens, Prince Morres said, in fluent Brittania,

"Come on. Bark your nonsense again, you bastards."

'...Did I come out for no reason?'

Pushed around by the crowd and stuck in a carriage for tens of minutes, Seongjin was feeling a bit regretful.

The two escort knights were anxious as if the congestion was their fault. Particularly, Dame Claudia had been fidgeting in her seat, stealing glances at Seongjin and looking somewhat uncomfortable.

Why is she like that? Is she hungry?

Seongjin pondered for a moment before speaking.

"Then, since we'll be late anyway, shall we just eat and then go home?"

That way, he could skip dinner and find some time for training.

"Will... expensive ones be alright, Your Highness?"

"Go anywhere you want to eat. I'll pay for everything."

Suddenly, Dame Claudia's eyes began to sparkle.

She must have been starving.

"This is a hugely famous restaurant on Destete Street. It's one of the few places where you can taste genuine Flanders-style meat pies!"

The place Claudia had led them to was a rather large and reputable-looking restaurant.

Even though it wasn't yet dinner time, it was already bustling with people, proving that it was indeed a popular place.

"...Is it alright to bring the Crown Prince to such an common place?"

Dame Maria looked around, bewildered. It was clearly not an upscale restaurant with private rooms for distinguished guests.

But Dame Claudia was adamant.

"What use is formality before absolute gourmet? We don't need any elaborate course meals. Freshly cooked, piping hot food is always the tastiest!"

Her argument was quite persuasive.

So they selected an available table.

"Here, you must try the traditional Flanders-style pork pie! The crispy pie filled with a thick layer of juicy pork is just incredible!"

"Is, is that so?"

"Yes. And you must have it with cheese. Flanders-style cheese has a unique charm different from that of Carthago!"

"....."

Dame Claudia, it seems, have a genuine passion for clothing and food.

He had seen many unexpected sides of her today.

The dish she highly recommended was definitely worth it.

"Wow....."

Dame Maria, who couldn't hide her discomfort while waiting for the food, was mesmerized the moment she took a bite of the pie. It was that delicious, a true Flanders-style meat pie.

"Hehehe. How is it? It's amazing, right?" Claudia asked, looking pleased, her freckled nose wrinkling with delight as she took a big bite of pie.

So Seongjin decided to see the outing in a more positive light. Maybe

this was the leisure that the Holy Emperor had mentioned.

As they were about halfway through their meal, the restaurant suddenly filled with customers. It was nearing dinner time.

With the national festival approaching and many foreigners arriving, he spotted people in exotic attire.

Next to Seongjin's table, a group of foreigners dressed in flashy, snug clothes, adorned with glittering decorative buttons, took their seats. They were men from Brittany.

Wait? Their outfits looked familiar.

"They seem to be people from Brittany."

Claudia muttered with food in her mouth.

Ah, it was the style he'd seen at the Salon de Merci. The latest trend on the continent.

Seongjin observed them with curiosity.

They all had a strong aura of magic. The flashy yet shallow swords each of them wore indicated they were likely knights escorting some high-ranking person.

Their surly expressions were strange, with smoothly shaved chins and flushed cheeks.

Is this what fashion has come to? In a few years, will all the people of Delcross look like that?

Seongjin shuddered at the thought of the pearl-decorated imperial knights with painted cheeks.

While he was pondering this, the Brittany men began to order their food with an arrogant attitude, soon starting to talk loudly among themselves.

"The crude food here, no matter how hard I try, I can't get used to it. These imperial bumpkins don't know how to cook."

"That's true. Tender sparrow dishes with Rohan's red wine would be the perfect match."

"Ah! Since the first day in the imperial capital, I've been homesick!"

They were openly insulting Delcross in the middle of the capital.

Their gall was astounding.

"How odd that they can gain weight eating this kind of food."

"Ahaha! You mean that famous pig from the imperial family? The one that's notoriously insane..."

"Right. Look at the one who calls him a Prince. Even the Delcross fools are laughable when you see them."

Suddenly, Claudia looked at Seongjin with a start, fearing that the prince, unable to control his temper, might do something rash again.

Seongjin smirked and quietly put a piece of pork into his mouth.

People talk ill even of their king when he is not around. Why would I get angry at them one by one when they don't even know who I am? This is all because of that bastard Morres.

Speaking of which, that jerk Mores, how badly must he have messed up to be cursed at by foreigners?

At that moment, the Demon King, who had been quiet until now, suddenly asked Seongjin,

[Can you hear what they're saying?]

'Of course, they're making such a loud racket. How could I not hear?'

[...You can hear that?]

'.....?'

What is he talking about?

As Seongjin was puzzled, the gossip at the next table was entering a

new phase.

"By the way, I heard a lot of young royals who have just come of age are coming to this year's coronation party?"

"It would be nice if our Prince Charles finds a good match this time."

"Yes. If he can snag one of the princesses of Delcros. Then he would become the son-in-law of the Holy Emperor!"

"Rumor has it that the first princess, Amelia, is quite beautiful?"

Seongjin unconsciously furrowed his brows, and one of the men, with a bowl-cut hairstyle, began to talk nonsense, waving his hand.

"Beauty? What's the use of that when she's of low birth?"

"Low birth?"

"No, she's the princess of the imperial family....."

Shh. The bowl-cut haired man lowered his voice as if sharing a big secret.

"Actually, the first prince and first princess of Delcross can hardly be considered proper imperial family members. Because they were raised improperly, they only came into the palace under the name of being the Holy Emperor's children. Everyone who presents themselves before the Holy Emperor's face won't say anything."

"Really?"

"Of course. Those so-called royals rolled around in the dirt with commoners most of their childhood, quite unworthy to be treated as royalty. That's the truth."

"Ha ha, that's true. No matter how beautiful a woman is, if she's of low birth, it's a different story."

The more these bastards talk, the more they seem to have no limits to their words.

Clang. Seongjin slowly placed his utensils down on the plate, feeling something boiling up inside.

"And that's not all. Do you think that princess is really the Holy Emperor's biological daughter?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

As if enjoying the shocked reactions of those around him, the bowl-cut haired man grinned.

"You know? There's a rumor that the first princess's mother was actually a prostitute. If that's true, who in the world can assert that her father is really the Holy Emperor?"

Clatter.

Seongjin was on his feet before he even realized it. They say that when a person gets too angry, they become calm, and that was exactly Seongjin's condition.

His whole body felt hot as if blood was boiling, but his heart rate slowed down, and his mind settled.

"Watch what you say! Someone might hear something that could cause trouble!"

"No, no. There's a point to it. Considering her mother never received an official investiture, it's not an outrageous story, is it?"

"Oh, I heard the current Holy Emperor was quite a playboy. Indeed, something like that....."

Thump, thump.

Seongjin started to walk towards the bowl-cut haired man.

Startled, Maria and Claudia, who were with him, belatedly stood up to follow Seongjin.

[Hey, hey. Calm down, okay? Hey, Seongjin!]

The Demon King began to panic, his voice urgent.

[Just bear with it a little. Huh? I know you're angry, but if you mess up now, you'll end up in an irrecoverable situation!]

What nonsense. Who says I'm going to mess up?

I'm just going to 'politely' protest their rudeness.

[Ah! His eyes have gone mad again. Are you planning to kill them all?]

...What does he think of me?

Seongjin snorted and stopped in front of the bowl-cut haired man.

The bowl-cut haired man, who had been blabbering nonsense, blinked up at the sudden approach of the young boy.

"...What can I do for you?"

Looking at the boy's fierce eyes and sullen expression, it seemed that the matter was not particularly good, but nonetheless, he asked courteously. The boy's attire and demeanor seemed like that of a noble's child.

More than anything, there was an undeniable intimidation or a kind of dignity about this boy that subtly emanated from him.

And Seongjin kindly responded to his question, welcoming the boy's visit to Delkros with a gesture of goodwill.

"Come on. Bark your nonsense again, you bastards."

At that moment.

Those who were seated at the table, the Brittanians, and even the escort knights behind Seongjin, all looked at him, their eyes wide in disbelief.

".....!"

"Brittania language.....!"

"Could he have heard everything we said.....?"

Even Dame Claudia stammered.

"How, Your Highness! How did you speak Britannia like that.....?"

What's all this noise about?

Noticing the odd reactions around him, Seongjin slightly raised an eyebrow, and the Demon King explained with a sigh.

[You just spoke in that strange foreign language.]

...What?

[You spoke in the language of Britannia. Understanding is one thing, but how could you speak it so naturally?]

It wasn't the Empire's common language?

He was sure that's what he heard.

As Seongjin narrowed his eyes and looked around, the Brittanians, who had been frozen until then, began to speak one by one.

"Are you from the empire? But I don't detect a Delcross accent at all."

"I've never seen a foreigner pronounce Arrhc so naturally."

"Could this man be a Britannian native?"

'Uh.....?'

Seongjin blinked in confusion.

These weird, muffled sounds. It was a foreign language he had never heard before?

[Tsk. So you were unaware. Well, that explains it.]

The Demon King clicked his tongue.

Out of curiosity, Seongjin turned to the bartender and spoke again.

"I am not a Brittanian. I am a proper imperial citizen. How dare you utter such nonsense within the Empire's capital, are you out of your minds?"

Oh, it worked.

Maybe that Morres guy was surprisingly proficient in foreign languages?

Given the sudden unexpected dialect, he became quite curious about how this mechanism worked.

But Seongjin had previously used the Empire's common language as naturally as Korean, even though he had never learned it. Adding a language or two more didn't make much difference.

Right now, he had more pressing matters to attend to.

With a tense face, Seongjin slowly met the eyes of each of the Bretonians, looking at him and spoke slowly.

"You just blasphemed the Holy Emperor, His Majesty, by calling him a wastrel. This can be seen as an insult to the Lord and a challenge to the authority of the Empire."

Admitting that the young Emperor had lived a bit recklessly in his youth was one thing. But he was not someone who should be called a wastrel by riffraff like you! Huh?

Caring for his children even in his busy life isn't something just anyone can do!

That gentleman is my father, and I respect him!

"And you dared to wag your filthy mouth about the most noble princess of the Empire. Do not think that this insolence towards the Imperial Family can be easily overlooked!"

Even I want to immediately bow down to praise my sister who has descended to this world, but what are these pathetic beings saying now? Lowly? Falls short?"

It would be good to engrave this clearly in their pathetic head.
Understand?

Our Sister Amelia is an angel!

[...You're surprisingly obstinate, aren't you?]

Why is this guy picking a fight again?

At Seongjin's words, the Brittanians' attitude clearly turned hostile. They all stood up from their seats, each reaching for their swords at their waists.

Seongjin could feel their aura intensify as they prepared to unsheath their weapons. Comparing them with the knights residing in Pearl Palace, they seemed to be roughly at the level of an intermediate knight.

Maria and Claudia were about to step forward and draw their swords too, but Seongjin quickly raised his hand to stop them.

It would be problematic if their side was the first to draw a weapon.

"What's this? A fight?"

"...Seems like they're about to draw their swords?"

"City Guards! Contact the guards quickly!"

At this point, the other patrons in the restaurant couldn't ignore the conflict between the Brittanians and Seongjin's party. With guests hastily avoiding the scene and staff running around trying to manage the situation, the restaurant quickly became chaotic.

"I would have spared you if you'd just prostrated and begged, but you're making a big deal out of this."

"Why? Getting cold feet now? You were the one who started this."

"You really intend to draw swords in a public place? It'll become troublesome when the city guards arrive."

"The one who will be troubled is you. We are the escort knights protecting the honorable Marquis Rabijuri's son. What a diplomatic outrage towards a foreign guest!"

"To mention diplomatic outrage after publicly insulting the Imperial Family..."

Seongjin's frustration turned into a hollow laugh, and the bowl-headed man smirked.

"That's just your claim. Can you prove it to the guards? Is there a witness here cultured enough to understand such a refined language as Brittania, you Delcross bumpkin?"

These bastards?

They're running their mouths thinking no one can understand?

"Now that you understand your situation, leave before the guards come. If you close your mouth and leave quietly, I will forgive your rudeness thus far."

So that's what he meant.

Seongjin smiled smugly at the bowl-headed man.

"Ah, is that so? I must have misunderstood. I'm sorry about that. You guys were just gossiping about the young lord, and it seems I've misunderstood, right?"

"Gossip... What?"

"That's how it was. You're saying that such injustices have been publicly committed at Marquis Rabijuri's place! Treating the knights harshly and skimping on their wages? Anyway, the higher-ups are even more stingy."

The smug smile vanished from the bowl-headed man's face.

"What, what nonsense are you talking about!"

"When the city guards arrive, I'll 'properly' testify. These poor fellows

were just airing a bit of their grievances about their own lord's tyranny. I'm the one who misunderstood their complaints, and that's what caused this trouble. Right?"

The Brittanian men stood agape.

What's this guy going on about?

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The abrupt words from Seongjin left the people from Brittany utterly flustered.

"What are you blabbering now...?"

"Ah, ah. Even if you have a lot of complaints, you should have at least maintained a certain level of decorum when gossiping. Saying that the Marquis is XXX or slandering young master Ravioli as an XXX—these are things too disgraceful to even utter from my own lips."

"What is this guy spouting off about...?"

It was obviously a bunch of bullsh*t. But then...

What would happen if this lunatic actually goes and blabbers all this to the guards?

The helmet-styled guy quickly put his thoughts together.

A disturbance involving a foreigner. Certainly, to avoid petty squabbles, all details investigated by Delcross's guards would be relayed to Brittany without exception, including this baseless talk.

And those reports would first reach their employer, Marquis Ravioli.

If the boy outright states that they insulted the royal family, this could escalate into a major diplomatic issue.

Therefore, the Marquis might actually try to prevent the issue from going public. He would claim that the boy falsely accused innocent people, and he wouldn't hesitate to use his influence and money to support this.

But what if the boy simply claims he heard 'gossip about the Marquis

Ravioli?'

It wouldn't turn into a diplomatic crisis, and his claims would ironically gain credibility since it could be seen as a minor event that could happen to anyone. The young heir of Ravioli might just send them back to Brittany without hearing their excuses.

And they would have to face a furious Marquis, angry that they had insulted him right in the heart of the empire.

'No way...'

The helmet-styled guy looked at the boy in front of him with suspicious eyes.

'Is he saying that rather than waiting for the Marquis to cover this up, he'd minimize the issue but make sure we get what we deserve? Don't tell me... Surely not, is it?'

Such a young boy wouldn't have thought that far, surely.

But looking at that face...

'His expression...'

A slight twist in his lips, the boy wore an unsettling smile.

—I'm ready to make you all pay, no matter what it takes.

An impending sense of crisis overwhelmed him as if the boy would resort to anything if provoked!

The helmet-styled guy opened his mouth with a slightly trembling voice.

"Do you think the guards will believe such nonsense? Anyone can see that this is an outrageous false accusation!"

"A false accusation..."

Seongjin grinned, pulling up the corners of his mouth into a malevolent smile.

"That's your claim. But do you have any proof? Can you show evidence to the guards that you didn't say those things? If you have a third-party here who understands this backwoods Brittany language, bring them out. You XX."

"Eeeek!"

The faces of the men from Brittany flushed redder than beetroot.

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who was lightly scratching the surface while applying medication, was also going through similar thoughts.

'I hate to do it, but there's no other way. Best to keep the details under wraps.'

If he had known from the beginning that they were speaking in Brittany's language, he would have considered different options rather than confronting them in public.

'I have the moral high ground. But given that the birthday celebration is soon, it's in the best interest of both Delcross and Brittany to keep this quiet.'

Brittany wouldn't publicly admit their knights openly insulted the imperial family. They're already under a lot of pressure from the empire; admitting to more diplomatic issues wouldn't be beneficial.

The same goes for Delcross. Publicly filing a complaint with Brittany won't gain them anything tangible, but the rumor will tarnish the imperial family's reputation.

'Also, escalating this with physical violence isn't a good picture either.'

Causing a ruckus in a civilian restaurant would already be subject to public scrutiny. If the instigator turns out to be the disgraceful prince of the imperial family, it would be a humiliation that could reverberate across the entire continent.

—"That loser actually drew his sword on a foreigner who visited for the birthday celebration? To think this is called a thousand-year-old kingdom. The level of hospitality is truly remarkable."

At this point, the question of who was right or wrong in the altercation might be meaningless.

'I wish they would just draw their swords first. They're more cautious than I thought...'

Seongjin narrowed his eyes and examined the men with shaven heads in front of him.

In reality, he had been purposely provoking these men while keeping his Aura bound and at a low active level. With their numerical advantage, he thought if he showed even a hint of weakness, they might impulsively attack.

Despite rising as if they were about to charge, they hesitated, gripping their swords but not unsheathing them.

The hesitation stemmed from various practical considerations. Starting a bloody altercation would be a headache for both sides.

In that case,

'Maybe I should just wait like this and then go to the guard post...'

Seongjin quietly considered his options as he kept an eye on the men from Brittany.

Just then, there was a commotion at the entrance, and a group of armed knights and guards swiftly entered the restaurant.

Considering how quickly they responded, it was an impressively fast deployment.

"Halt right there! This is the Capital's Guard!"

"Remove your hands from your weapons immediately!"

The presence of the guards was overpowering, and the men from Brittany reluctantly raised their hands. Although they had been stubbornly confronting Seongjin, their faces showed signs of defeat when faced with the Capital's Guard.

"See? It would've been better if you had just apologized in the first place."

Seongjin also removed his hand from the hilt of his sword and flashed a wry smile at the men.

"I commend you for not drawing your sword to the end. Had you done so, there would have been no excuse for your immediate execution for attempted regicide. But from now on, you should be careful with your words."

"Regicide, what are you talking—"

"Ah, didn't you know?"

Seongjin tilted his head and then broke into a rare, bright smile.

"I am precisely the piglet of the Imperial Family you were talking about."

The faces of the Brittany men went from puzzled to horrified.

* * *

It turned out that the person arrested for causing the disturbance in the restaurant was none other than Prince Seongjin of Morres.

The Capital's Guard was understandably not pleased.

Regrettably, the knights who were accompanying him were of no help. Maria, who didn't speak Brittany, was still puzzled about what the issue had been.

"Please cooperate with the investigation, Your Highness. Stop beating around the bush."

"I've been cooperating since the beginning. As I said, it was just a minor misunderstanding."

"What was the misunderstanding?"

"Do we need to talk about it now that the misunderstanding has been

resolved? I can't go into details since it involves the honor of the Marquis of Ravioli. We merely had a gentlemanly, polite argument."

"Oh, please, stop the nonsense."

"But Your Highness, witnesses say you were ready to draw your sword—"

"That's also a misunderstanding. We were conversing in Brittany, which may have given off the wrong impression. You know how guttural and harsh Brittany can sound, right?"

"Eh?"

"To the untrained ear, it might sound like an elegant language, but it feels like it was specifically designed for cursing."

"...What?"

The knight writing the report glanced at the Brittanians standing to one side with puzzled expressions.

The Brittanians, too, were individuals who could speak the imperial common language to some extent. Naturally, they understood most of what Seongjin was saying, but they only occasionally blushed, unable to offer much in reply.

This was understandable. They had freely gossiped about the royals in front of the prince of the imperial family. Moreover, they had been in a tense standoff in public view for a while, so they would have had no room to argue even if they were immediately executed for blasphemy.

They were simply anxious that the prince, who was leaving hastily, might blurt out something ridiculous in front of the guards.

A moment later, the person responsible for the detained Brittanian knights hurriedly visited the guard post after hearing the news.

Young heir of Ravioli, Charles.

He looked even younger than a boy representing his family; a small

boy younger than Morres himself.

Like the detained knights, the young master had neatly combed hair and was wearing a forehead ribbon. Fortunately, his youthful face naturally had a youthful blush, reducing the discomfort to Seongjin's eyes.

'Should I suggest to my father a cultural isolation policy? Or at least a ban on forehead ribbons...'

Upon facing him, Seongjin seriously thought so.

"I sincerely apologize if our knights have committed a great impropriety, Your Highness," Charles, the marquis's young heir, paid his respects in the somewhat awkward pronunciation of the imperial common language.

"This is all due to my immaturity. On this joyful day when the birth year celebration is not far away, they made a mistake out of excitement, so I ask for your generous forgiveness."

"Hmm..."

Seongjin's eyebrows slightly raised.

He starts off with an apology before even getting into the details?

"Huh? But we haven't even begun to listen to the circumstances of your lordship's knights?"

The knight appeared puzzled, but young marquis Charles quietly shook his head.

"An unfortunate incident. Could it not simply be that my ill-informed knights have unwittingly shown disrespect to Your Highness?"

"No, but..."

"I am truly sorry to Your Highness."

"..."

Seeing a young noble from a fairly reputable foreign noble family speak so humbly, the knight seemed at a loss for words.

It's even more awkward because the one in question is a child.

In this situation, it becomes uncomfortable to explain the details of who is right or wrong.

"Well. If his lordship Ravioli apologizes to this extent, detaining them further would tarnish our honor. What do you say? Let's consider this water under the bridge and move on amicably?"

The knight who was drafting the document shot a glaring look as if incredulous.

"How can we just consider this a non-issue when an armed conflict has broken out right in the middle of the imperial city, and there is a formal report about it, Your Highness?"

"It was a misunderstanding, I tell you."

"What nonsense. There is a restaurant that clearly suffered damage, and there are witnesses who fled in the middle of their meal. How can you say such a thing...?"

Then, Charles, who had been listening from the side, looked at the knight with wide eyes in disbelief.

"Even so, I have already ordered compensation for the restaurant where the incident occurred, more than three times their loss of business. However, there is no one who was 'actually' damaged or 'really' hurt."

"What? But..."

Feeling the hesitation from the knight, Seongjin added,

"If you're hesitant to decide on your own, can you call your superior here? I can personally explain everything in detail to him. If needed, I can even arrange a meeting to report 'directly' to my father."

"..."

The knight's face turned sour.

He had been bothered by the prince late into the evening, and now he might even have to face the Emperor. Who will his stressed-out superior vent his frustrations on?

"...Alright, let's consider it water under the bridge..."

"I have no doubt that your decision today will contribute greatly to the friendship between Delcross and Brittany."

Seongjin patted the knight's shoulder with a full-faced smile.

As they left the guard post, the sun had almost set, and the surroundings were getting dark.

The streets, once bustling with crowds, had also become somewhat deserted, with carriages and carts moving aimlessly.

'So much for training today.'

He had tried to save some time for training but what a waste it turned out to be.

As he waited for Maria, who had gone to find a carriage, Seongjin grumbled internally. Charles quietly approached him.

"Are you sure it's okay for us not to accompany you to the palace, Your Highness?"

"....."

Seongjin silently looked down at the boy.

Charles was looking up at him with an innocent, childlike face.

It was annoying enough to have unnecessary expenditures due to involvement with the notorious prince, but one couldn't find any emotion other than extreme goodwill on that face.

For that reason, Seongjin thought to himself,

'Somehow, he's a suspicious little guy....'

However, he couldn't spit in the face of someone approaching him with a smile.

"Today, you've done me a favor, Lord Charles."

Thanks to the boy's rather mature handling of the situation, a potential big conflict was quietly resolved. Aside from his inscrutable inner thoughts, Seongjin had to admit that he got along quite well with him.

Upon hearing Seongjin's words, the young marquis Charles jumped up, clapping his hands.

"How outrageous! We should be the ones grateful for Your Highness's generous treatment."

"As for being generous..."

"No, I have a fair idea of what kind of rudeness my knights may have shown to Your Highness. When I return, I plan to punish them severely. Please let go of your anger, Your Highness."

"..."

"Even if they are severely punished for their irreverence, it won't be satisfying. To show such magnanimity for the sake of diplomatic relations between our nations! I can only feel apologetic to Your Highness."

Just look at this guy.

He's subtly polite but obviously afraid of the detailed story leaking from Sungjin's mouth. He's even gently placating by promising to punish the involved knights.

It means he already knows what kind of talk his knights usually engage in.

In that case,

Seongjin looked down at Charles and gave him a mocking smile.

"I don't need an escort to the palace, but if it's alright with you, your excellency, would you care to converse with me until the carriage arrives?"

"Wow. To speak Britannian so fluently...!"

Charles's eyes began to shine even more brightly as he looked up at Seongjin.

Afterward, Seongjin and Charles exchanged light banter in Britannian.

Their conversation had no major theme. It was just a variety of minor stories about recent trends in Brittany or the wellbeing of the imperial family.

Only the knights, who were huddled behind Charles, tensed up each time Seongjin opened his mouth.

In the midst of it all, it went without saying that their young marquis repeatedly exclaimed in admiration at Seongjin's proficiency in Britannian.

"You are truly remarkable, Your Highness! I've never seen a foreigner pronounce 'Arrhc' so smoothly!"

So what exactly is this 'Arrhc' anyway?

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By the time Seongjin and his entourage arrived at the Pearl Palace, the sun had already set completely.

Masain, who had been restlessly waiting as they returned late, hurriedly came out to greet them before the carriage had even stopped.

"What in the world happened, Your Highness! What did you do to get detained by the Capital Guards?"

So even if you try to keep things quiet, if you are a former Knight Commander, news still leaks out.

Seongjin waved his hand in a tired expression.

"There was a minor misunderstanding with some foreigners. It's been resolved, so ask Dame Maria for details."

"...Eh? Your Highness, I know nothing about..."

Dame Maria, who had been detained by Masain, looked at Seongjin with a gloomy expression.

Sorry, Dame Maria.

Since you don't know well, you have to shoulder it. Just gloss the incident adequately.

Perhaps due to the training, his usually sagging shoulders felt heavier as he walked, when he heard a cautious voice from behind.

"Why did you do that, Your Highness?"

"...Huh?"

"Why didn't you just tell the truth?"

Turning back, he found Dame Claudia looking at him with a face full of complex emotions.

She had been quiet all the way, lost in thought. So she was wrestling with such concerns.

"Come to think of it, you said you studied Britannian? Were you preparing for overseas studies?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Claudia had been silent because she couldn't interject into the prince's conversation, but she had found his actions utterly incomprehensible and was extremely frustrated.

In her opinion, Prince Morres actions; standing up to protect the honor of the imperial family was unquestionably commendable.

Why not just lay bare what those Brittany fools blabbered to the Capital Guards? Then there would be no scathing looks, as if saying, 'That troublemaker made another mess.'

Moreover, one could severely punish those arrogant Brittanians for contempt of the imperial family.

"Is that so? Then you more or less understood."

Seongjin scratched his head for a moment.

"Well, how should I explain? Even if I had said that, the chances of them facing appropriate punishment would not have been high."

"What? Why?"

"It would have ended up like that. Sure, both Delcross and Brittany would have been noisy for a while, but those guys would have been safely extradited back to their homeland under Brittany's protection. The punishment, if any, would have been swept under the rug."

If that had happened, the innocent victim Amelia would be the one

suffering from wounds.

"Rather, I thought it's better to quietly bury this matter and reap some other benefits."

"...Benefits?"

Yes. He hadn't wasted his time engaging in futile conversation with young marquis Charles for nothing.

Seongjin flashed a bitter smile and spoke to Claudia.

"More than anything,"

Claudia shuddered for a moment. The prince's subdued eyes, as he looked straight at her, emitted an unusual pressure that shouldn't be coming from a boy of his age.

"What those guys said about Amelia-noonim should never again reach anyone's lips. I want not a word, not a letter of it to even remain in documents."

He didn't want the scribe to record it or the officials to report it.

He didn't want this to become the talk of the whole Guard.

He didn't want it documented and sent all the way to Brittany.

This matter must be as if it never happened.

"Understand? So forget about today's events, Dame."

Ah. Everything is all for Her Highness the Princess.

Claudia suddenly realized.

'His Highness wants to avoid having Princess Amelia become the talk of the town, even if it means he himself has to face criticism!'

Though Claudia may not have been entirely convinced by the prince's explanation concerning the reaction from Brittany, she at least clearly understood his determination to prevent any further criticism of the princess.

Come to think of it, Prince Morres didn't react at all when those people were calling him a piglet. He only demanded a formal apology for the derogatory comments made against the Holy Emperor and the slander against Princess Amelia.

What selfless familial love this is!

"Your Highness..."

Claudia clasped her two hands together and looked at Seongjin with tearful eyes.

'How could he be so thoughtful! The sense of gravity he occasionally shows, which seems beyond his age, was not a misunderstanding after all!'

The more I know him, the more rewarding it is to serve him!

I should devote myself to serving him for a long time to come and lay my bones in Pearl Palace.

Claudia internally made this resolve.

Of course, Seongjin, having no way to know what she was thinking, simply thought this:

'...Why is she looking at me with such burdensome eyes? Is she hungry all of sudden?'

[Seongjin, be honest with me. You have no intention of letting them go safely, do you? What;s your ulterior motive?]

Back in his room preparing for meditation, the Demon King, who had been silent until now, suspiciously started speaking.

'Ulterior motive? What do you take me for? There's nothing like that.'

Seongjin felt awkward but feigned ignorance toward the Demon King.

[...Really? You definitely won't just let it go, will you? Ah! Are you going to have them assassinated? Making them let their guard down only to strike them silently from behind?]

'Are you nuts? If something happens to those guys in Delcross, who do you think will be the first suspect? Huh?'

If he's going to backstab them, it'll be after the festival, it would be when the delegation leaves Delcross!

[So you will do it eventually?]

'Hmm, well... I didn't have plans initially.'

Seongjin shrugged.

But there are likely candidates who would want to do the deed.

I wonder if there'll be any backstabbing left to do later on.

* * *

A mansion in the royal capital townhouse.

The luxurious mansion, where the young marquis Charles is temporarily staying during the festival period, felt unusually icy.

Before Charles, who had a stern face, the knights with their heads bowed all knelt down in unison.

"We have committed a crime worthy of death, your grace, Lord Charles."

"Please forgive us..."

"Ha!"

Coldly smirking, Charles's expression was nowhere near the childlike one that had been visible when he was with the capital's guard force.

"Do you think today's events will be forgotten if you lot die?"

At his icy retort, which was like a biting wind, the helmeted leader hesitantly responded.

"Uh, the compensation you paid at the restaurant today, we will... definitely repay it..."

"Fine. Let's see how much of that loss can be covered by your insignificant salaries. But what's truly important isn't that."

Charles's voice was now quivering with anger.

"How dare you, make Ravioli owe a debt to the Imperial Family?"

"A debt, you say? That, that is..."

"If it's not a debt, then what is it!"

Charles, who had suddenly risen from his seat, yelled loudly in a sharp voice.

"How dare you humiliate the Imperial Family in the middle of the empire! Humiliate the princess? When every prominent figure on this continent is trying to bring the princess to their nation through marriage! What will happen if you insult the princess! What will happen to the position of our Brittany!"

Unable to control his anger, Charles even began kicking the knights who were on their knees.

"If the emperor uses this as an excuse to refuse a marriage proposal from our country, then who will be responsible? If the princess really becomes the queen of Brittany, what will become of Ravioli's standing! Unless you lot truly intend to throw Ravioli's honor into the mud!"

The faces of the kicked knights turned pale as death.

"It was me who covered up the incident for you! If that's not a debt, then what is it!"

With one last kick to a knight's shoulder, Charles took a moment to catch his breath. In the meantime, the helmet-styled leader quickly attempted to justify himself.

"Your Grace! This is all a misunderstanding! Didn't the prince say so earlier?"

"A misunderstanding? What misunderstanding?"

"Thus, the prince misunderstood our jokes among ourselves..."

"Do you really think Prince Morres' understanding of the Britannian language would allow him to misunderstand? What could he possibly have misunderstood?"

"..."

"Did you think I was unaware of your careless and disrespectful conduct all this while?"

Charles's eyes turned even colder as he looked down at the knights, whose words had failed them.

He ordered his butler who was respectfully standing behind him.

"Jean Jacques, send these men back to Brittany immediately."

"...Your Grace!"

"And report every one of their sins to my father. Confiscate their assets and either lock them in an underground prison or sell them off to work in the mines of Carthago. Make sure they pay for their sins accordingly."

The faces of the bowing knights lost all color.

Having served the ducal House of Ravioli for a long time, they knew well that Charle's words were not mere threats.

"Your Grace, please..."

"Just once, give us a chance to redeem ourselves!"

Though the knights pleaded and clung to him, they were soon seized by the hands of other knights, upon the butler's signal, and were dragged out of the room.

"Your Grace!"

Charles didn't even spare them a glance and issued his next order to the butler.

"Prepare gifts to be sent to the imperial palace, Jean Jacques. For the emperor, Princess Amelia, and Prince Mores! Prepare the most sincere and valuable things possible!"

"Yes, Your Grace."

"And immediately inform all members of our party to exercise caution. While we are staying in Delcross, it's imperative to keep tight-lipped about the Empire or the Imperial Family. Make sure everyone understands what kind of punishment awaits those who talk carelessly."

"Yes, I'll see to it," responded the butler, Jean Jacques, as he respectfully bowed his head before exiting the room.

Eventually, only Charles and a single knight were left in the spacious room.

Finally sitting on the sofa, Charles took a deep breath. The rage that had stretched to the tips of his hair began to gradually subside.

"I can only hope that he's satisfied with this..."

He sighed deeply, rubbing his temples, which had been throbbing painfully.

One of the spies he had sent to observe the situation in the Imperial Court happened to witness the altercation between the knights and Prince Mores from the beginning and reported the details to Charles.

Thanks to that, he was able to quickly settle matters at the dining hall and locate the security team.

From the perspective of the knights who were punished, it was unfortunate.

They had merely been gossiping as they usually did, unaware that a person proficient in Brittanian happened to be nearby!

However, it was fortunate for Charles that the incident had not been made public. The Ravioli family's reputation could have been severely compromised, as negotiations for a secret peacemaking

alliance with the Imperial Princess were underway.

Prince Morres' quick wits were both a blessing and a curse for Charles in that regard.

He had understood the situation and tactfully retreated, but not without effectively pressuring Charles.

When asked about the imperial family's well-being in a diplomatic way, such a blatant reply was returned:

—"Is there a reason you're worrying about us in Brittany? I find it interesting that I'm hearing news about the royal family from an outsider."

His review of a currently popular play in Brittany was also noteworthy:

—"A tragedy results when a family can't control themselves properly. It's a story you commonly see, isn't it? It seems the writer has tapped into the public sentiment well."

When Ravioli praised a musician for his excellent fugue compositions, this was the reply:

—"Repeating the same theme can get tiresome. I don't particularly enjoy listening to the same thing over and over. I'd rather just get rid of the musician. How about you?"

Given the hints, Charles couldn't miss the messages behind these comments.

'I know all the nonsense being said about the Imperial Family. Deal with your internal matters before I intervene. Or else, I'll personally get rid of you all.'

Third Prince Morres Klein.

Setting aside his quick judgment and fluency in Brittany language, he already stood out solely for his uncommon, age-inappropriate aura. Why then, was such a prince receiving negative reviews from the imperial family?

"...He must have been hiding his true self all this time."

If that was true, then he was a truly frightening individual.

Charles' eyes became dark with silence.

From now on, he would ignore all baseless rumors about Prince Morres and focus on establishing a close relationship until the line of succession in the empire was secured.

Charles had made up his mind.

Thus, a new friendship was forming, albeit unintentionally and possibly based on misunderstandings, between the two.



Late night. The Heretic Tribunal.

A young priest, who was just about to clock out, discovered a brightly lit prayer room.

Curious, he opened the door and found a familiar face, praying in a dignified posture.

"...Brother Hayes?"

The young priest approached him and asked, "Are you praying at this hour?"

The middle-aged man named Hayes got up and looked at the young priest with tired eyes.

He was a man of few words, despite having served in the Heretic Tribunal for a long time, hardly interacting with anyone.

The young priest had only been dispatched a few days ago and hadn't really had a chance to converse with Hayes before.

"What brings you here at this late hour?"

"I happened to be running late on my way home."

"Is that so?"

Hayes' gaze briefly touched the elongated stick the young priest was carrying and then shifted away.

"Ah, you're the new Brother of the [Seed] I've heard about."

"..."

The young priest's face stiffened.

Because he hadn't received any specific information about Hayes from the other brothers, he scrutinized Hayes with a suspicious look for a moment before bowing his head and reciting an old religious chant from a now-forgotten sect.

He tightly grasped the hilt of the dagger hidden within his robe.

"Bethella."

"Bethella."

As the calm reply came from Brother Hayes, the young priest relaxed his face and smiled.

"So you're a Brother of the forgotten sect. I am Clemence, recently summoned to the Heretic Tribunal. I haven't heard about you, are you a member of [Seed]?"

"Although we're from the same old sect, consider me as good as dead. I'm not a member of [Seed]. You probably haven't heard of me because I can't influence the tasks you're involved in."

"Ah..."

The young priest, Clemence, bowed his head with a somewhat awkward expression.

"So you already know about the mission. Would you like to join us? The Bishop said the season of great harvest is coming."

However, Hayes slowly shook his head.

"Didn't I tell you? I'm as good as dead. All I can do is pray."

"You can still share in the joy of the harvest with us."

"Thank you for the kind offer. However, my prayers have already been answered."

Clemence couldn't hide his sadness. It was as if he were watching a tree slowly wither and die before his eyes.

Yet Hayes himself looked almost relieved as he smiled.

"Now, I am simply waiting quietly for Him to come and command me."

63

After experiencing a series of disturbances in the downtown area, Seongjin's mindset had somewhat changed.

While he still spent most of his time dedicated to training as usual, he now felt a slight inclination to actively keep tabs on the current situation of himself, or in other words, of current Morres.

He still had a sense of discomfort about living as someone else; as Morres.

However, when he listened to the gossip of the Holy Emperor and Amelia, and impulsively acted without thinking about the consequences, it seemed that he had inadvertently developed some affection for this world.

The issue was, given his identity as Morres, it was not easy for him to move about freely.

"If only I had someone capable to act as my hands and feet..." he pondered.

If he were to choose someone close to him, there was Sir Masain.

However, Masain was a former paladin and a member of the imperial family. He was far too prestigious to run errands for him.

On top of that, the man was somewhat inflexible and lacked adaptability.

Even the palace guards in Pearl Palace were tightly scheduled with their duties for palace security and escort missions.

"Maybe I should make more active use of Edith..." he thought.

Recently, as the number of maids and support staff had increased,

Edith had become increasingly idle.

She also had the advantage of being a high-level aura user, so he had no concerns about her wandering around alone.

"... But she's a bit slow and lacks social skills."

So far, there was no improvement in the taste of the tea she made, and her occasional nervous glances made her service less than satisfactory.

Even if he discreetly asked her to investigate something, he would consider himself lucky if she didn't blatantly advertise what she was doing.

"Let's start by sending her on various errands. Her skills will naturally improve with experience," he concluded.

So, Seongjin assigned a simple messenger task to Edith.

"Contact Herna and Gades and tell them we should meet soon."

At that, Edith responded with a somewhat puzzled expression.

"Yes, Your Highness. When would be the meeting? Or would you prefer I go to them directly myself?"

"..."

"Shall I ask them to come to Pearl Palace, or would you prefer to visit them yourself?"

"... Send a letter. Tell them to drop by in the next few days."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Watching Edith obediently leave the room, Seongjin thought,

"Hmm. This feels somewhat inefficient. She seems really cumbersome to utilize..."

[If it's the twins, it's them? The ones you were talking about before?]

The Demon King, who had been listening, perked up at their conversation.

Ah, come to think of it, this guy had never actually seen the twins, had he?

The Demon King had become very curious about them ever since Seongjin told him the twins seemed to know something about him.

-Even Holy Dad, probably wouldn't know either.

- If His Majesty doesn't know, we wouldn't either.

The twins had said so. Therefore, it could be assumed that what the Holy Emperor knew, the twins likely knew as well.

At this point, if he were to investigate someone, targeting these two would be the most efficient. There were also questions to ask about Madame Justine.

Well, whether those cunning kids would readily spill information was another matter.

[Leave all the investigations to me!]

The Demon King boasted unknowingly.

[I can unravel whether they're lying or not, or if they have any secrets, in no time at all!]

"You can't even detect souls anymore, can you? How are you going to discern the truth from those snakes?"

The words were meant to discourage wasting effort, but the demon king flared up.

[I can still detect changes in blood pressure or pulse to some extent and discern lies! I am incredibly useful! I even identified those weird humans from another dimension, didn't I?]

'.....'

The former demon king argued for his usefulness as a lie detector.

It's a bit sad.

There was more to figure out.

Before, the situation was such that they glossed over it, but how on earth could Lee Seongjin speak Brittanian as if it was his mother tongue?

Even after sampling a few Brittanian language books from the Pearl Palace library, he couldn't understand a single word.

When he asked both Masain and Edith, they claimed they had never heard of Morres studying Brittanian before.

At this rate, the basic premise that Lee Seongjin can speak the language because he's using Morres's brain starts to wobble.

[This is truly an unusual case.]

Even the demon king expressed his wonder.

[I, as a high-level soul, can understand any language. But speaking it fluently is another matter.]

The demon king can understand all languages because he reads the thoughts forming in the mind before they're spoken. So, it's more accurate to say he reads thoughts rather than understanding the language.

[It's not difficult for me to have a direct conversation with someone. I read and transmit thoughts. But making vocal cords work like a real human to produce sound or sing is a different story.]

In the previous world, the demon king candidly admitted that he couldn't understand the radio communications between hunter squads.

So understanding and speaking a language he hasn't learned, with just the sound devoid of thoughts, is impossible.

'So what now...?'

How should they investigate this?

Even if they tried to figure out whether Morres had some degree of foreign language skills, not even Edith, his personal maid, knew for sure.

[First, it seems necessary to expose ourselves to other languages of this world.]

The demon king who had been pondering, gave his opinion.

[Even if we assume that Morres secretly studied foreign languages, there would be limits. Let's try listening to all the languages of the continent. If you can understand all of them, then the issue lies with your soul, not Morres's body.]

That sounds reasonable.

'So now we just have to find someone who can rattle off foreign languages in front of us for testing?'

He thought so, but it was surprisingly hard to find people skilled in foreign languages.

A millennium after the empire dominated the continent as a victor.

At present, when almost every nation uses the imperial language as their first language, the imperial citizens didn't pay much attention to learning foreign languages.

Even people working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs barely knew a few phrases of Brittanian, a high-level language, just to show off their education. That's it.

Is this okay, Delcross Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

Feeling frustrated, Seongjin set aside the issue of the Brittanian language for the time being.

However, clues for resolution are sometimes found in unexpected

places.

* * *

It was lunchtime like any other.

"Lady Chloe really sends flowers regularly these days. I'd like to meet her and see what she's like."

Amelia looked and admired the brilliant vase of red and pink flowers.

The flower bouquets that were delivered daily were usually set up by Edith for table decoration. Thanks to that, Amelia, who almost daily visited the Pearl Palace for lunch, was always caught by their sight.

"Wow, she really makes thoughtful choices every time. She must really like you."

Seongjin chuckled.

Like who, exactly?

"Well, it's certainly something to send different flowers every day."

It seemed that Chloe had decided to further solidify her position as a fiancée. Ever since the last tea time, she had been sending a bouquet of flowers with a small card daily.

There were no special words on the cards.

The flowers in the garden are in full bloom, so I wonder how the beautiful palace garden's flowers look.

The weather is quite good today, so it would be a good day to row a boat on the palace pond.

Well, such inconsequential matters.

Today's letter was the same.

"Have you heard about the new play that's the talk of the town on Bertrand Street? They say it has been translated from a script that was very popular in Brittany. I'm a little intrigued due to all the talk."

Seongjin was content with checking his growing vocabulary by reading those cards daily.

But then, having heard the explanation, Amelia cocked her head.

"Isn't that her asking you to invite her to the imperial palace? She also wants to watch a play together and is asking for your opinion."

"Haha, no way. She is going to dump me as soon as she makes her debut."

"How could she..."

Amelia, who looked at Seongjin in disbelief, soon asked with a serious expression.

"This flower is a *Ranunculus* (Buttercup flower), Morres. It's not a casually chosen flower. Do you know its flower language?"

"Is that important?"

"..."

While Amelia was lost for words, Edith, who was clearing the table, shook her head in disbelief.

"That's why I've been telling you, Your Highness, to at least send a one-line reply. Ignoring the feelings of this poor young lady is tactless, to say the least."

Seongjin unconsciously opened his mouth in surprise.

I never thought I'd hear from Edith that I was tactless!

"People often hide their true feelings in the language of flowers or formalities. But most of the time, they're actually hoping that the other person would naturally understand," Amelia said, gently touching the *ranunculus* petals.

"She's showing so much care. So, you should also invite her to the palace and treat her respectfully. That's basic courtesy."

"Exactly, Your Highness. Chloe is virtually flawless. From a good family, cute, and intelligent."

Edith chimed in with agreement.

Seongjin felt incredulous.

Do you even remember that I fed Chloe gallbladder juice not long ago?

Even if you forget, that clever kid will never forget until she dies.

Amelia's clear gray eyes sparkled at Edith's words.

"Oh really? Cute and smart as well, you say, Edith?"

"Yes, Your Highness. I heard she's quite distinguished among the children of the Valois family. She's the youngest, yet the most proficient in foreign languages."

For a moment, Seongjin doubted his own ears.

Wait, Edith. What did you say?

"...Chloe is good at foreign languages?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Edith answered with an unperturbed face, showing no realization of her mistake.

"The Valois family is renowned, you know? They are fluent in the empire's official language and Brittany language. Direct descendants basically know at least three languages."

"...Then why didn't you tell me earlier?"

While I was searching high and low for someone proficient in foreign languages, what were you doing?

"That's because you asked if there was anyone in the palace who is proficient in foreign languages, Your Highness. But the Valois family aren't one of the palace's people, are they?"

What do you mean by that?

Edith, still oblivious, merely tilted her head and repeated the question.

Seongjin subconsciously grabbed the back of his neck.

Ah, my blood pressure's going up.

"...Send a letter to Chloe right away. Tell her to come over if she has time."

"Yes, Your Highness!"

Her enthusiasm in running off to carry out the task was nothing short of remarkable.

I can't tell if I'm ordering a person around or a puppy at this point.

So the next afternoon.

Lady Chloe, adorned with flowers, sat brightly in the reception room of Pearl Palace.

Her curly hair was decorated chaotically with yellow flowers, complementing her light yellow dress.

She must have loaded her personality with all sorts of flower meanings, but to Seongjin, she just looked like a small, yellow chick.

"How could you not send a single reply until now, even if you say you don't feel responsible? That's too much, Your Highness."

Facing the resentful eyes of the petite lady, Seongjin suddenly felt guilty.

"Uh... I apologize for my indifference. Fearing that you'd be talked about, I ended up ignoring your sincerity."

Chloe's eyes narrowed.

"Hmm, is that so? And?"

"I heard from my sister. A lot of meaning and care went into the bouquets you've sent. As you know, my memory isn't perfect, so I didn't understand your intelligent intentions. It's embarrassing."

"And?"

"...The yellow dress really suits you."

"Hehehe. Fine, Your Highness. No need to say things you don't mean."

Chloe spoke as if she was sulking, but the face she made while chewing on snacks seemed to soften.

Of course, she didn't forget to sneak a taste of the tea before sipping.

Upon realizing the tea tasted normal, her face visibly relaxed.

"So, why have you invited me? Surely not just to see my face?"

"Thank you for coming. Actually, I need to ask for your skills."

Being asked a favor after a grand invitation might have made her unhappy, but that was Seongjin's mistake.

Her face lit up the moment he mentioned the need for her language skills.

Seongjin didn't know, but Chloe had a strong desire to be recognized by others.

"Hehehe. You've come to the right person, Your Highness. When it comes to foreign language consultation, none can match the Valois family!"

Rooted in Brittany, the pride the Valois family had in their lineage was immense. They even employed a considerable number of Brittany people as servants, having spent a significant amount on them.

It's even said that everyone in the household formally has to speak

Brittanian.

So Seongjin felt at ease and opened up to her about his problem.

"I think I secretly studied foreign languages before I lost my memory. I need to find out how much I know."

"You studied languages in secret? Including Brittany language?"

Chloe looked at Seongjin with a skeptical face.

"It's not an easy language to study secretly. Plus, generally, you start learning a foreign language by reading textbooks. How can you not recognize the characters at all?"

So, Seongjin gave her a demonstration.

"I don't understand it either, but it's true. I can speak it fluently, but I can't read. Maybe I developed some kind of dyslexia after having a fever. I can't gauge how much I know just by having books, so I would like someone who actually speaks the languages to test me."

And by the time he finished speaking, Chloe was looking at him as if completely enchanted.

"Oh, my! How can you be so..."

".....?"

"Your speech flows so smoothly, yet it's compelling, almost like the eloquence of Arrhc!"

...Why does everyone keep going on about Arrhc? What even is that?

Anyway, thanks to Chloe's sudden increase in affinity, Seongjin was able to directly listen to the languages of various countries across the continent.

In reality, the languages she could speak fluently were limited to the Imperial Common language, Britannian, Orthonese, and Cypriot—just four languages.

However, if simple greetings were included, she could speak as many as nine languages, including those of pagan tribes.

This was surely a talent that was nine times greater than any salary thief in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

And the result of the test.

Astonishingly, Seongjin was able to understand all nine languages that she spoke!

"Wow... this is really unexpected."

After randomly testing phrases in nine different languages, Chloe now looked at Seongjin as if she was looking at a mysterious dragon hiding its true form.

"I'm okay since I just learned foreign phrases to cool my head. But when did you learn so many languages? If you weren't sick with fever..."

She was under a huge misconception.

She thought that Morres, originally proficient in nine languages, had lost most of his abilities due to illness.

Seongjin shook his head.

"Don't tell me... you probably just learned some basic greetings like Chloe (me), right? You can't really speak the languages, can you?"

Exactly as she said. While he could understand the languages, Seongjin was unable to speak them fluently.

He could only speak freely in three languages: the Empire's common language, Brittanian, and the language of Volanta, one of the major tribes among the pagans.

'Furthermore, it seems like I'm not actually "understanding" the [languages], per se...'

He understood what was said, but he couldn't understand the sounds' meanings themselves.

Seongjin was gradually realizing the difference the Demon King had explained.

'I guess the only languages I can really say I understand are those three.'

Though he couldn't test it here, he was certain that unless a person spoke directly in front of him, he wouldn't be able to understand any language other than those three through phone or radio.

In other words, the mechanism by which Seongjin understood languages other than those three was the same as the Demon King understanding thoughts.

'This makes it even more confusing, doesn't it?'

[Hmm....]

Even the Demon King seemed to ponder, holding back words.

Yes, if he could speak and listen in all languages, he would have thought something was happening at the soul level.

However, being able to speak only three languages makes it ambiguous.

Whether it was a phenomenon triggered by Seongjin's soul using some kind of thoughts, or whether it was actually languages Morres had acquired.

Even though learning three languages secretly is plausible, why did Morres study the language of a southern pagan? This leaves a lingering question.

And if it's a phenomenon happening at the soul level, picking and choosing only three languages to understand and speak is very strange.

"If you understand the languages, then it won't be too hard to practice speaking them, Your Highness," Chloe said, misinterpreting Seongjin's stiff expression as disappointment.

According to her, the languages on the continent had many similarities, with similar etymologies and spelling. With appropriate guidance, he could regain his original skills quickly.

Chloe, who is famous as a linguistic prodigy in Valois, might be a little biased, but she felt that 'willpower' and 'effort' could make one proficient in several languages in a short period.

"Um, so, Your Highness..."

"Hm?"

After a moment's hesitation, Chloe's face turned slightly red and she spoke in a soft voice.

"If it's okay with you, may I... help you with your Brittanian studies, just a little?"

"Brittanian?"

"Yes. You speak so fluently that with a little refinement in reading and writing, you'll be perfect!"

"Huh? Well, sure?"

Seongjin wasn't particularly interested in studying the language of such a distant country.

"And after Brittanian, Orthonese would be the next priority. There are many precious literary works in Orthona, you see. I can also help you with that..."

Well, it won't hurt to know, but most of the continent speaks the Empire's common language, so why bother?

Noticing Seongjin's lukewarm response, Chloe's voice rose a notch.

"I can even help you with Cypriot!"

"Um..."

"I know I still have a lot to improve. I will strive to help you with other languages as soon as possible!"

Chloe was completely mistaken.

She thought Seongjin would want to regain his proficiency in nine

languages as soon as possible.

But honestly, he didn't need all that.

No, rather than that, are you planning to study more foreign languages now?

"Meeting Your Highness today has been a huge inspiration."

Little Chloe spoke shyly, stroking her flushed cheeks.

"I've been too complacent. When there are people who speak nine languages, I've been showing off with just four. It's really embarrassing."

"....."

She seemed ready to master nine languages immediately.

Seongjin was slightly impressed.

For a mere 12-year-old to have such a desire for self-improvement.

Compared to the bishops who are satisfied with uttering a few phrases in poorly-pronounced Britannian, children like her should be leading the country's diplomatic efforts in the future.

"The more I see Lady Chloe, the more exceptional you seem."

"Hehehe, are those Your Highness's words? But even if it's flattery, it feels good to hear."

Thanks to Chloe's enthusiastic spirit that day, Seongjin reluctantly promised to have a weekly foreign language study session with her.

"What a strange matter. Truly a strange matter....."

Louis, the chief chamberlain, received the report and sank into thought, stroking his chin.

"How could Prince Morres speak languages of foreign countries he's

never encountered?"

When he heard about the recent trouble with the Marquis Ravioli's family, he had been skeptical.

The third prince can speak Brittanian like a native? How could that be possible?

"A few years ago, Albert de Valois was briefly in charge of teaching the prince Brittanian," added the young steward.

Indeed, Queen Lizabeth nagged so much that for a while, a Brittanian teacher was assigned to Prince Morres.

However, Louis soon shook his head.

"The second to be expelled after the theology teacher was Albert de Valois."

Every lesson, the prince was so disruptive that the earnest and straight-laced young teacher couldn't bear it for more than a few weeks and ran away.

Considering that the prince skipped so many classes, the actual number of days lessons occurred were few.

"And how did he know the language of the southern heretics? The Volanta tribe?"

Since the young emperor took power, Louis had been involved in all matters, big and small, in the imperial palace.

As far as he knew, not once had anyone who spoke Varsha made contact with the Third Prince Morres.

'What is happening to the prince right now.....'

Although he showed a different demeanor after recovering from a fever, Louis had thought the prince was just maturing.

Recently, between the knights who praise his rapidly improving swordsmanship, and now foreign languages he shouldn't even be

familiar with.

'What on Earth is Prince Morres.....'

Suddenly, he remembered the voice of someone he had heard a long time ago.

The voice of Archbishop Benitus, who had been vehemently speaking at the Hall of Reality.

—Your Majesty, how can you stand by and watch this! Listen, chief chamberlain! What possesses Prince Morres is certainly.....

'...Huh!'

Startled, Louis forcefully shook his head.

'No, no! Everything is within His Majesty's will, what blasphemous thoughts am I having!'

He wiped the cold sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief and tried to calm his uneasy heart.

'...Yes, nothing in the world escapes His Majesty's sight.'

So, let's hurry and report to His Majesty. Surely, He will provide some answer.

With that thought, Louis straightened his attire and rushed to Holy Emperor's office.

And a moment later,

The Holy Emperor who actually heard the report simply responded like this:

"Okay."

"....."

The chamberlain found himself at a loss for words.

Despite the seriousness of the report, the Emperor didn't even look up from the documents he was reading. Louis, finding the Emperor's indifference stifling, silently shifted his gaze around.

In the meantime, a few unique documents caught his eye.

They were yellowed papers mixed in with the reviewed documents. Intricate drawings and seemingly disorganized characters indicated that they were documents translated from the script used in the remote South, which primarily uses ideograms.

It appeared that the exorcists had once again brought back something suspicious from deep within the continent.

'...Come to think of it!'

A sudden realization pierced the chamberlain's thoughts, and he opened his mouth in astonishment.

'Isn't it not just Prince Morres?'

Has His Majesty ever personally requested translations of documents before?

He had often seen clerks produce translations for convenience, but he couldn't recall a time those translations had been presented to the Emperor himself.

How about when receiving an envoy from a distant region that doesn't use the empire's common language?

Interpreters might translate His Majesty's words for the envoys, but translating the envoys' words for the Emperor?

Never.

From the Pomeranian language in the far north of the continent to the Varsha language in the far south.

From the ideograms of the deep wilderness to the long-lost ancient scripts.

Someone who understands all that he has not learned was right here!

That means,

"So, Prince Morres is also an Oracle of....."

The chamberlain found himself muttering unconsciously.

Pause.

Only then did the Holy Emperor look up from his papers, quietly staring at Louis.

While his expression was unreadable as always, Louis felt a tinge of reprimand in that gaze and quickly bowed his head.

"I have misspoken. I apologize, Your Majesty."

"....."

The Holy Emperor sighed softly and put down the documents.

"Louis."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"The child only knows what he needs to know. Just leave him be."

Feeling awkward, Louis bowed his head even more deeply.

'I was worried for no reason. Prince Morres is simply His Majesty's son. That's all there is to it.'

The old chamberlain felt an unparalleled sense of relief as he came to that conclusion.

* * *

That evening.

"So, you've decided to study together? That's really wonderful, Morres."

Amelia, who came out of curiosity about Chloe's visit, chuckled as if finding the unexpected outcome amusing.

"Is this really a good thing? I'm not sure if I'm just wasting time on something pointless."

Seongjin grumbled with a round face, to which Amelia spoke seriously,

"It's not like that, Morres. It's quite important to study the languages of the allied nations properly."

While it's recommended to use a common language on formal occasions for convenience, the Holy Emperor's stance is that understanding and preserving the cultures of each nation should be based on their respective languages.

That's why even Prince Logan, the second imperial prince, is said to be highly proficient in Orthonese.

Amelia herself can speak a bit of Brittanian and Rohanian.

"In the case of Owen, your older brother, you might not know well since he left for the southern front shortly after arriving at the palace..."

He probably has a decent command of Varsha, the language used by the heretics, if nothing else.

But what's going on? If even the imperial family studies like this, why are the people of the foreign ministry so lacking?

"Initially, His Majesty, our father, made considerable efforts for the foreign language education of priests and bureaucrats. At that time, the plans were fairly radical and there were frequent conflicts with the Orthodox Church."

The Orthodox Church, which has deeply ingrained ideas about realizing God's kingdom on Earth, probably saw the Emperor's policy as a violation of God's will.

Unfortunately, most of those radical plans were not implemented.

Amelia explained that they probably faced several realistic barriers.

"Actually, if the Imperials don't make an effort to learn deliberately, it's difficult to pick up local languages. Everyone uses the imperial common language in official settings, so there's hardly any opportunity to even encounter local languages."

Amelia was like that as well.

She went to Rohan as a bride, but only learned to speak Rohanian after going through a long, difficult time.

"And that's why Delcross's bishops often suffer disadvantages in diplomatic negotiations."

Seongjin tilted his head.

"Uh? Why is that?"

At his question, Amelia gave a somewhat bitter smile.

Everyone uses the imperial common language in formal diplomatic negotiations.

However, in a sensitive setting where unofficial negotiations are continuously held under the surface, everyone whispers in local languages. The only people left out in such a situation are the bishops of Delcross.

"If people intend to hide something, they usually assume that the other party will notice. Naturally, they should detect it, and if not, they will pay a heavy price."

Amelia's eyes were lost in the far past, seemingly reminiscing.

She thought about how foolish she was back then when noblewomen, grinning sweetly, said incomprehensible things, and she stood there grinning like a fool.

"But you are different," Amelia spoke, looking into the eyes of her younger sibling who resembled her, as if making a wish.

Yes, Morres is different from her.

For some reason, she felt like she was catching a glimpse of the countless possibilities sleeping inside him.

Unlike her, this child would surely easily see through all the deceptions around him, and would eventually overcome any hurdles with his own power.

"You'll certainly become a trustworthy crown prince, Morres."

"Uh...."

Taken aback by her sudden words, Seongjin blinked.

What? A crown prince?

Seongjin had never even thought that he would become something like that.

However, instead of arguing or asking anything, he closed his mouth after a brief moment of hesitation. Because Amelia's smiling face looked somewhat desolate.

That day, the two of them chatted late into the evening in the reception room of Pearl Palace Palace.

And Amelia taught Seongjin a simple sentence in Britannian that she had made up to practice.

"A deep, deep forest, a humble hut built with sincerity, when a small angel descends, that place will be my church."

"What is this? Is it from scriptures or a poem?"

It's a sentence that doesn't make much sense.

As Seongjin repeated the sentence and tilted his head, Amelia burst into a clear laughter.

"Isn't it fun? The word 'Arrhc' appears four times in one sentence!"

65

The Holy Empire of Delcross is a nation governed by the principle of theocracy.

This has resulted in a unique and bizarre structure of governance, distinct from any other nation on the continent. Unlike other nations with separate legislative and judicial branches, Delcross operates quite differently.

[The Holy Council] interprets sacred texts and establishes divine laws.

[The Assembly] discusses national affairs and administers imperial laws.

[The Heresy Tribunal] identifies heretics and condemns devil worshipers.

[The Judiciary] adjudicates and enforces crimes according to imperial law.

Generally, these branches function independently without conflict.

However, occasional clashes occur, such as when something permissible under imperial law is prohibited by the Holy Council. Absurd incidents have happened, like a single crime being prosecuted by both the Heretical Tribunal and Judiciary, leading to double jeopardy.

This system was established when the millennium-old Holy Empire of Delcross was founded. Due to the first Holy Emperor's rule lasting for over 300 years, this system had solidified institutionally.

Despite its shortcomings, Delcross remains a powerful empire thanks to its strong corps of clerics centered around the Holy Emperor,

considered the proxy of the divine. Their lifespan may have shortened over generations, but still, no country could challenge Delcross. Thus, Delcross managed to remain the most powerful empire despite having the most inefficient governmental structure.

The reason for this lengthy explanation is because Seongjin is currently summoned to the Theological Academy, strangely enough, as a witness for the case involving [The Black Prophets]. He is accompanied by Katrina, the head of the Paladin Order of St. Aurelion, serving as his legal and religious representative.

Students like Kenneth Digory, initially meant to face the Heretical Tribunal, are now under investigation by the Holy Council due to the absence of appropriate divine laws. The Council's decisions can take anywhere from one to several months due to scriptural interpretation and debate.

Moreover, the upcoming birth celebration, the empire's largest event, is likely to push any formal legal proceedings by at least six months.

For now, lacking sufficient grounds for prosecution, the students are absurdly held in the Judiciary's prison for breaking and entering and property damage.

The investigation itself is happening haphazardly, carried out by an inspector moving between the Judiciary and the Academy.

Seongjin couldn't help but marvel at the absurdity of how the empire had been functioning all this while as he faced the investigator.

"So, Your Highness, you went to the mansion because you received an invitation?"

"Yes, the letter has already been submitted as evidence."

"Did you have any previous acquaintance with these students?"

"Well, as I've already testified, I have no memories from before my illness."

The inspector glanced at Katrina standing behind Seongjin before cautiously asking, "Do you... happen to know anything about the

strange entity?"

"The strange entity?"

"Yes, according to Kenneth Digory and other students, it seemed as if you knew something about its nature."

Seongjin feigned innocence.

"I saw it as an obvious demonic being. Why are you calling it a 'strange entity'?"

The investigator made a troubled face, sensing that this audacious prince was feigning ignorance despite possibly knowing something.

Yet, behind the prince stood the knight commander, staring at them, which was intimidating.

After a moment's thought, the investigator sighed and tidied up the papers.

"Well, the investigation ends here. There's not much discrepancy between your statements and those of the students. Thank you for your cooperation, Prince Morres."

Had this been the Heretical Tribunal, things wouldn't have ended so easily. Seongjin stood up, slightly uneasy.

Is this really all right? The judicial system of the Holy Empire?

"Good work, Prince Morres."

Exiting the academy, Katrina, the commander of the Paladin Order of St. Aurelion, spoke to Seongjin with a gentle expression.

Katrina Belphein, the right hand of the Holy Emperor and the person he trusts the most, has been serving him since his youth according to Masain.

The seemingly gentle middle-aged woman with fiery red hair twisted up and wearing silver light armor was somewhat familiar to Seongjin.

When the Emperor collapsed after sealing the passage and destroying the support structure, I remember seeing her next to him, infusing him with divine power.

"As for the matter of Bantra Moss's larva..."

"Yes, don't worry about that. I have already reported to His Imperial Majesty, and the Knights of Saint Terbacchia are conducting an internal investigation."

Seongjin had explained to her about Bantra Moss before coming to the academy. He was worried that if another like him appeared and opened a gate in the capital, it would be problematic.

Of course, if she asked where he got that information, it would be a bit awkward. But Katrina simply listened to Seongjin's explanation and even ordered the investigators to act ignorant.

Could it be because she's the Emperor's right-hand?

Seongjin noticed that she didn't ask him any questions, much like the Holy Emperor.

Whether it was her way of quietly listening or pressuring investigators, she reminded him of the Emperor in many ways.

When they had this conversation, Katrina laughed out loud.

"It seems we think alike. When speaking with His Highness, I always feel that you greatly resemble His Imperial Majesty."

Really? In what way?

When Seongjin looked at her with widened eyes, the corners of her eyes curved beautifully.

"His Majesty was also calm and intelligent in his youth."

"..."

Quietly following her, Francis suddenly coughed.

Yes, I get it, Sir Francis.

Stop with that asthmatic cough!

On their way back to Pearl Palace by carriage, Seongjin told Katrina that he wanted to visit the tribunal. He wanted to meet Jonathan McAlpin, who was imprisoned.

He had more questions about Morres' past actions and the funds said to be provided by [The Black Prophets].

"Hmm..."

After a brief moment of contemplation, Katrina nodded.

"Well, if it's the tribunal, it should be fine. They are entirely separate from the Heretical Tribunal. They are simply holding the students for convenience and have no interest in this case."

Just then, the carriage arrived at the palace.

She opened the door and turned to her aide.

"I have to report to His Imperial Majesty, so I'll take my leave here. Captain Francis, could you look after His Highness?"

"Yes, Commander. Don't worry! I will take responsibility for His Highness until the end!"

The tall knight responded with an unspoken smile.

Seongjin was puzzled.

Francis. You're like a guard dog ready to bite anyone but when it comes to the commander, you're entirely different. Why?

"As always, you're dependable, Captain Francis."

Turning towards Seongjin, Katrina continued, "An inquisitor from Saint Terbacchia will visit Pearl Palace soon. Don't worry, they just want some advice. If you provide them with information about the 'mamul' (monsters), it will greatly assist their work."

Here, "monsters" is the term that Seongjin used as opposed to the official terms like 'foreign entities' or 'abomination'.

The unconditional trust she was showing in his words puzzled him.

Unable to guess the reason for this unequivocal trust, Seongjin wore a tentative expression. She gracefully bowed, still wearing a friendly smile.

"Then, I shall take my leave now, Your Highness."

The door of the carriage closed, and her figure disappeared beyond the window.

Francis's face, which had been softly smiling, suddenly changed. His already sharp eyes turned stern, and his lips tightened as if he had become a completely different person in an instant.

What is this guy? Is he bipolar?

"No, shouldn't you go back to Pearl Palace right now to undergo life-or-death training? Why are you suddenly going to the courthouse, huh?"

Hmm, such audacity in his words, even in the presence of the prince.

Francis as usual, I see.

"I need to meet Jonathan McAlpin."

"Then why do you need to meet that man? We've already subtly defused the issue about the sponsorship funds. Is there really a need to visit the courthouse and acknowledge your prior relationship?"

I can't say I'm not worried about that part, but the important thing is that I've already secured Jonathan McAlpin's testimony.

Even previously, Sir Masain searched everywhere from Pearl Palace to the main palace's ledger, but couldn't find any sponsorship records. There's absolutely no evidence to implicate Mores.

So, before the trial starts, wouldn't it be better to gather as much

information as possible from Jonathan McAlpin? It'd be good to make him talk if possible.

But Francis's complaints did not cease.

"Ah, seriously! Do you know how long I counted the days to see the respected Commander again during my last leave?"

"....."

"And now that she, Commander, has finally appeared, what is this? I'm flooded with piled-up work, and she, the Commander, are still sticking by His Majesty with unnecessary worries!"

Is this guy really whining about the Emperor stealing the Commander from him?

Seongjin put on a calm smile.

I tried to be patient, but he's really too noisy.

"Francis, I didn't want to go this far but."

Francis's eyes narrowed sharply over his glasses.

However, Seongjin had an ace up his sleeve.

"I'll tattle."

".....?"

"I'll tell Dame Katrina that Sir Francis has been nagging me on the way."

".....!"

Francis unknowingly opened his mouth wide and dumbfoundedly stared at Seongjin.

Why? You don't think I can do it?

Even if you don't know, wouldn't Commander Katrina take my side?

[Wow, you're so childish. I've never seen anyone like you in all my years.]

The Demon King, who usually keeps his mouth shut when a clergyman is around, finally said something.

What? Why? What? As long as it works, it's fine, isn't it?

Indeed, the 'I'll tattle' strategy worked wonders.

Francis looked dumbfounded for a moment before clamping his mouth shut like a clam.

How's that? I've found this barking dog's weak point!

Seongjin was exuberant, but the Demon King just sighed.

"Who's stranger here? The guy who threatens to tattle, or the guy who's influenced by it?"

The carriage moved on, rattling towards the courthouse in silence.

Upon arriving at the court, everything went smoothly. After stating the purpose of their visit and confirming their identities, they were immediately guided to the prison.

They said they didn't care much about students or minor offenders; indeed, the visitation process was lax.

But once Seongjin visited the prison, he swallowed a gasp at the unexpected sight. The imprisoned students were sitting on the cold stone floor, wrapping their heads and flipping through books—a bizarre scene.

It would take at least six months after the Council's meeting for the trial to commence.

Many of the Council members were also professors at the Academy, and they couldn't stand the sight of students enjoying a leisurely incarceration without studying for several months.

To make matters worse, the Council was convened during the

Academy's midterm exam period.

The professors thought this:

—"You all have to submit assignments and take exams, right?"

So, an absurd situation unfolded where all the [Black Prophets] were writing reports in prison.

"Um..."

Kenneth Diggory, who had a fractured occipital bone, was fortunately awake after receiving treatment from the priests. Being in his graduation year, he had to write a thesis and was engrossed in thick textbooks, looking rather pale.

Aside from him, the others showed minor bruises on their faces. It seemed they had undergone fairly severe interrogation while initially incarcerated in the heretical tribunal.

It was just one day until they were transferred to the tribunal, and the young students, whose charges were not even confirmed yet, had been beaten up. It seemed the heretical tribunal was a terrifying place indeed.

Among them, Ashley Betcher, who seemed moody, and Jonathan McAlpin, who lacked the backing of a high-ranking clergy, appeared to be in worse shape. They were moaning in agony in a corner of the cell without even opening a book.

Did they get beaten up a lot?

"Why are those two like that? Is it okay to leave them like this?"

When he asked the guard, he shrugged.

"Well, there wasn't anything particularly strange when they came in yesterday?"

What do you mean by that? They are dying.

"Sir Francis."

At his call, Francis led the guard and opened the prison door.

They were students personally protected by the Holy Emperor himself. If they were to fall critically ill during their time in the heretical tribunal, it would create a significant issue.

The Prophets, who were busy writing their reports, only then moved aside to make room.

Francis knelt and cautiously examined the two individuals. For a moment, he touched their foreheads with his divinely enveloped hands and even lifted their clothes here and there.

After some time, Francis, who looked a little serious, said to Seongjin,

"Your Highness, we need to isolate the students and call the doctors."

Is their condition that bad?

However, the following words from him not only made the students but also the guards turn pale.

"It seems to be a plague."

66

An outbreak of a mysterious plague has occurred among the prisoners transferred from the Heretic Tribunal!

– If they were held with other prisoners in the Heretic Tribunal's jail...

– Most of those prisoners are demon worshipers! It might be a disease brought by the demons!

The Tribunal was thrown into chaos in no time.

"Summon the Kumah priests, sprinkle the holy water!" The guards, who were in a frenzy, were only pacified after Francis, the Paladin, repeatedly explained that he didn't sense any [Magi], the sign of a demon.

Somehow, Ashley Betcher and Jonathan McAlpin ended up quarantined in an isolated, empty cell.

The fact that the other students with them weren't indiscriminately isolated was thanks to their connections with high-ranking priests.

Seongjin was promptly expelled from the Tribunal premises.

Francis, who had unceremoniously shoved him out of the building before he even knew what was going on, drove the final nail in the coffin.

"I have contacted the Pearl Palace. Masain will be coming to pick you up soon. For now, stay put!"

Adding that he would remain inside the building as a precaution against the possible spread of the plague until the arrival of medical experts, Francis slammed the door shut.

'Ah, suddenly things have gotten complicated...'

Seongjin broke into a cold sweat.

Did he make a mistake coming to the Tribunal and getting Francis involved? After all, he was the first to closely examine the patients. What if the disease spreads?

[Should I go in and take a closer look?]

Before Seongjin could answer, the presence of the Demon King disappeared with a 'poof'. It was as if he was thrilled about something.

"Umm..."

Seongjin looked at the Tribunal's closed gates for a moment, then staggered over to the nearby garden and slumped down dejectedly.

The Emperor had warned him not to cause trouble.

Well, it's not his fault, of course.

But still, will Sir Masain not be furious?

...It's a bit depressing.

Seongjin buried his head between his knees and closed his eyes.

After a while, the guards at the entrance of the Tribunal glanced over at the crouching prince. They felt a strange sensation as if the grass around the prince was shaking even though there was no wind.

Is it an illusion?

As they tilted their heads, the distant sound of horse hooves approached rapidly.

The sound quickly closed the distance, and they saw a burly knight charging toward the Tribunal at a storm-like pace.

"Sir Masain!"

The guards stood at attention, tensing their bodies.

But before his horse even came to a stop, Masain leapt down and almost ignored their salutes. He immediately walked over to the slumped Prince Morres.

His face looked as if he was about to explode with fury.

However, as he took each step closer to the prince, his expression changed bizarrely, eventually settling into one of incredulity.

Finally, Masain stood in front of him and spoke.

"...Are you meditating in a situation like this?"

"Ah, Sir Masain."

Seongjin, who had been lost in thought, finally looked up at Masain.

"I just created a fifth floor in my mental state."

"..."

"Turns out, when you have the will, even negative emotions can serve as a catalyst for growth."

Masain furrowed his brows.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

What do you mean? It means that when you're feeling down, training is the best cure.

Masain shook his head in disbelief.

"Anyway, Your Highness has a real knack for getting caught up in incidents. Has it been that long since you left Pearl Palace, and now it's a plague, a plague! One can't take their eyes off you for a moment."

What does this guy see me as?

I'm not the one who spread the plague.

"Isn't it better that we found out quickly thanks to me? If it weren't for me, you would've only realized it after the plague had spread throughout the court."

"Yes, yes. How could you not know better? Are you feeling okay? You didn't go near any patients, did you?"

His initial ominous demeanor had faded significantly.

So Sir Masain loses his temper quickly but cools down just as fast. Good to know.

Seongjin dusted off his clothes and stood up, just as a group of people in strange attire were seen approaching the court.

They wore thick ecclesiastical garments dyed in a deep bronze, long leather gloves extending to the elbows, and thick leather masks completely covering their noses and mouths.

It seemed a bit makeshift, but they did look properly equipped.

With synchronized footsteps, they approached, each holding some kind of spray device.

"These are the plague doctors of Lyora," said Masain, following Seongjin's gaze.

"The only sect formally recognized as non-heretical by the Delcross Church."

Most sects following the teachings of various schools were not free from the controversies of heresy, largely because they openly challenged the Church's stance that plagues were either divine punishment or demonic curses.

However, the Lyora sect was more religiously friendly, arguing that plagues are impurities that need to be purified and cured.

Their treatment methods included the use of incense and perfumes to dispel the foul smell from patients and bloodletting to purify them. This approach was highly in line with the Church's preference.

As a result, the Lyora sect had the most freedom to operate within Delcross, even having a small department set up for them within the administration.

If a plague broke out in the capital, this department would immediately dispatch the plague doctors.

As the bronze-colored plague doctors got closer, Seongjin instinctively covered his nose due to the strong smell of medicinal herbs and perfumes.

One of the doctors, a petite figure likely female, approached Seongjin's party. Her face mostly concealed by a large hat and leather mask, her round eyes peeked out as she spoke through her muffling mask.

"We will spray some scent for plague prevention."

Before they could comprehend her words, she aimed a large spray device at Seongjin and Masain, releasing an overpowering rose fragrance.

Even a good smell can be too much. Seongjin barely held back a retch.

"Plagues spread through smells. Removing foul odors can prevent the disease."

"...Thank you."

Frowning, Masain replied. The plague doctor nodded briefly and returned to the court.

"I really want to wash this off. I want to go back to Pearl Palace."

Knowing Earth's medical knowledge, Seongjin was aware that fragrances wouldn't drive away diseases. Masain seemed to share the sentiment, nodding in agreement.

"Medical staff and priests are on standby at Pearl Palace. A carriage will arrive soon, so please get examined there first."

Francis, who had also been doused in perfume, walked out from the court a little later, his expression just as disgruntled.

"I never knew lavender could smell so repulsive."

It seems that if it can drive away foul odors, the type of scent doesn't matter. Each plague doctor appears to carry their preferred perfume.

"How are Ashley and Jonathan?"

Francis shrugged his shoulders.

"The situation doesn't look good. The body temperature keeps dropping, and there's no consciousness. Moreover, the plague doctors have arrived. It seems like there's little hope left."

What? Isn't it usually the opposite? Shouldn't the prognosis be more positive with doctors present?

"They plan to drain all the 'bad blood' from those patients. Their condition is already critical, and this will result in massive blood loss."

"Um..."

Wait. Shouldn't we stop this?

"Francis, don't scare us unnecessarily. These people have extensive experience in treating patients; they will know the limits."

Noticing Seongjin's expression changing, Masain cautioned him. It seemed like he was worried Seongjin might barge in right away.

However, Francis scoffed.

"Even in the manpower-starved southern front, the only people unwelcome are those Lyora Plague Doctors. They are known as the doctors of death."

"Doctors of death? That's a bit harsh, isn't it?"

"Is it? You must've heard the rumors from the frontlines, right? How

many patients under their care have actually survived..."

"In front of His Highness! Don't disparage the Plague Guild recognized by the Orthodox Church based on unverified rumors."

While the two were at an impasse, Seongjin abruptly asked a question.

"What's the reputation of the Adelheid Plague Guild?"

It was a sudden curiosity.

One of the organizations that Morres is supporting is the Adelheid Plague Guild. If they are as dubious as the Lyora Plague Guild, he thought of immediately cutting off their funds.

Masain's face stiffened at this.

"They are suspected heretics, Your Highness."

However, Francis had a slightly different opinion.

"They are quite skilled pharmacists. Mostly young people, they focus on efficiency and are cautious enough to only proceed with verified treatments. Recently, they are probably the most preferred in the front lines. At least they don't actively kill their patients."

Hmm, is that so?

As Seongjin looked convinced, Masain warned, "As a paladin blessed by His Divine Grace, be cautious with your remarks."

"Why? I'm just stating the facts. I don't understand why the Orthodox Church would back a sect like Lyora over Adelheid."

"Francis!"

Just as the atmosphere was turning tense, a carriage sent from the Pearl Palace arrived. As they approached, the coachman nervously tightened his grip on the reins.

Lyora Plague Guild, these quacks. What a nuisance.

The three of them sat at a distance from each other in the carriage and returned to Pearl Palace.

After arriving at Pearl Palace, Seongjin took a bath and was rolling around in bed early.

He had built up the 5th floor in haste, so he was looking forward to afternoon training. However, physician Ninnias who had treated him recommended that he rest for today just in case.

But he couldn't stay disappointed for long. The news from the demon king who had inspected the Judiciary was somewhat unsettling.

'Parasites?'

[Parasites! They are small, but they are still demons. In the Sigurd 34th District, they would be similar to parasitic wasps.]

According to the demon king, he faintly sensed the aura of demons from the two collapsed people. Upon closer inspection, they had a small egg of a demon the size of a fingernail inside their bodies.

Called [Lophellum], it was a parasite from Gehenna, a worthless demon that parasitizes the eggs of certain insect-like demons.

'But I haven't seen such a thing in decades.'

[It doesn't lay its eggs in humans, so it doesn't come near humans. It only parasitizes the eggs of a few specific insect-like demons.]

That's why even the demon king was initially skeptical.

'Are you sure you didn't mistake it?'

[Hey! I am the demon king who once ruled over everything in Gehenna! There's nothing about the demons of Gehenna that I don't know!]

If that's the case, it's strange.

Why would the eggs of a demon that doesn't lay its eggs in humans be inside Ashley and Jonathan?

Moreover, considering the Bantra Moss incident, why do demons from Gehenna keep appearing?

However, the demon king didn't seem to find it particularly strange.

[Just as humans don't only exist in the Sigurd 34th District, there's no rule saying Gehenna's monsters only exist in Gehenna.]

"Exactly."

[Furthermore, it might be related to the previous incident. Lophellum are fond of Bantra Moss eggs.]

"So, you're saying the two people who were already near the infected Bantra larvae could have been accidentally infected as well?"

But I thought Lophellum doesn't lay eggs in humans?

Can an egg just enter a human body if it's nearby?

Is there a possibility that someone deliberately inserted the egg into the body?

[If someone really wanted to do that, it's not impossible. But why? After all, Lophellum eggs can't hatch and will die unless they're in another monster's egg.]

"Originally, the human body temperature was too high for parasitic monsters to survive. The eggs inside Ashley and Jonathan were almost dead."

"So, there won't be an immediate death due to parasitic infection?"

"As long as they aren't excessively drained by Lyora's doctors."

Feeling somewhat relieved, the Demon King suddenly whispered to Seongjin.

[Seongjin.]

"Huh?"

[Someone has sneaked into Pearl Palace.]

"What?"

I didn't sense any presence?

[Just one person. They're coming straight to this room.]

At those words, Seongjin sharply heightened his senses.

Indeed, although faint, he could definitely feel an unfamiliar presence within Pearl Palace.

'...They got this close and I didn't notice?'

Seongjin quickly got up from the bed and picked up the Nutcracker he had set aside. If someone sneaked in, their intentions couldn't be good.

'Even though I was distracted, why didn't the guarding knights or mages notice?'

[They're very good at hiding their presence. I see their soul coming, that's how I know.]

Indeed, had it not been for the Demon King's warning, Seongjin himself would have had a hard time detecting them. This intruder was skillful enough to evade the notice of Seongjin, who was one of humanity's last hunters.

[They're coming to the balcony!]

Swoosh. Seongjin drew his Nutcracker and aimed at the balcony.

Sure enough, a person in dark clothing suddenly dropped down from the upper floor. They bypassed the second floor and entered from the relatively lax third floor directly into Seongjin's room.

The uninvited guest in black clothing and a mask cautiously opened the window, and upon locking eyes with Seongjin holding his weapon, seemed surprised.

"Huh? I took extra caution because the knight commander is here, but I didn't expect the prince himself to notice me."

The voice was slightly husky, a woman's voice. There was no particular hostility in her voice.

"Don't worry, I'm not an enemy."

She raised her hands to show she was unarmed and slowly approached, stopping just a step outside Seongjin's sword reach.

"Your argument isn't very convincing with that mask on."

"Haha, fair point."

She laughed cheerfully and started to take off her mask.

Her long, wavy black hair and dark skin soon revealed her face. Her white teeth shone exceptionally bright in the darkness.

"Hello, Prince. I brought Bremen's reply from the Monkey Watchtower."

Monkey Watchtower.

A pub that sells cheap dark beer, located prominently in front of a square with an elegant fountain.

When Seongjin had visited the place to give his regards for the closure ceremony a while ago, he had been led by the twins Herna and Gades to greet the owner Bremen.

"I've received your greetings. I'll return the favor soon."

Little did he know that the return greeting would come across the walls of the imperial palace.

A woman clad in black stealth attire introduced herself as [Dasha].

She looked entirely different from the people of Delcross that Seongjin usually encountered. She was a beauty with deep brown skin and long, wavy black hair.

Her emerald eyes, which sometimes appear teal depending on the light, twinkled playfully.

"Hmm? Is this your first time seeing a Varsha person? I'm not a heretic."

Sitting on the sofa with her long legs crossed, Dasha revealed her white teeth as she laughed. She had a smile that somehow looked refreshing.

'Varsha people' refers to a term collectively describing the ethnic groups living in the southern part of the continent.

They were divided into several smaller tribes, each with its own language and unique appearance. However, people from the central

continent often could not differentiate these subtle distinctions and would simply call anyone with darker skin a Varsha person.

Of course, among the heretics, there were also people with white skin like those from the central continent, and there were people like Dasha who had dark skin but were born and raised in the central continent. Strictly speaking, Dasha, who was born in Delcross, was not a Varsha person.

Nevertheless, due to her unique and rarely seen appearance, she would always be categorized as a 'Varsha person' by others.

"So, you came from Monkey Watchtower wearing that stealth attire? Are you out collecting debts or something?"

"Hahaha. I wish. Monkey Watchtower is no ordinary pub, Your Highness."

According to Dasha, that small pub was actually a direct intelligence agency under the holy emperor.

It is a department that acquires and processes fairly high-level information within the Central Intelligence Agency and performs functions of a personal secretary's office depending on the user's request.

A secret agency exclusive to the imperial family that even the assembly and administration were not aware of.

Coming to pay respects to Monkey Watchtower means requesting to actively use the organization, and asking to place an informant.

Those darn twins. Shouldn't they have explained this beforehand?

"I should have given you the answer earlier, but it took some time to assign a dedicated informant. As you know, the Pearl Palace is a bit of a special place..."

Even though the visitor restrictions had recently been lifted, Pearl Palace was still a place where the emperor strictly controlled the entry of people. Having someone with stealth abilities enter was a security-related issue, thus making approval even more stringent.

Moreover, a dedicated intelligence agent needs to be able to connect with the target without arousing suspicion, and Pearl Palace is much more difficult in that regard compared to the main palace.

There are resident knights with verified capabilities from various orders and even the dedicated maids possess considerable aura usage. So, finding someone capable of infiltrating the palace seamlessly isn't easy.

In other words, Dasha was among the top agents in Monkey Watchtower's network of informants.

"What an honor it is to have such a talented person as my personal informant."

"Don't you have any suspicions? If it were me, I would start with suspicion if someone suddenly showed up late at night to say something like this."

"Well, it's not that I haven't considered the possibility.

However, for now, Seongjin's intuition did not perceive any danger signals from her.

If you think about it, her infiltration skills are remarkable. It was only due to the Demon King that Seongjin was able to notice her presence at all. Given Seongjin's abilities, it's notable that he couldn't easily detect her.

If she wanted, she could easily wipe out someone like Morres. What's the point of a well-crafted lie? It's a waste of energy considering Morres' position. Behind Morres is the Holy Emperor. An incredibly fearsome person whose limits are unknown. Based on his previous encounters, the Emperor seems to hold Morres in high regard. Could the person in front of him really handle the fallout if she deceived Morres?

Moreover, on our side, we have an excellent lie detector.

[No change in pulse. Blood pressure normal. Breathing normal. Very likely to be telling the truth.]

Although the Demon King can't use abilities that directly interfere with the soul since the Holy Emperor's barrier has overridden it, this is still pretty useful.

[Heh heh heh.]

Feeling the demon king laugh proudly inside his mind, Seongjin clicked his tongue inwardly.

Even though he was a king of a dimension, now he feels fulfilled just being this useful.

Anyway, since he decided to trust and use her, Seongjin decided to get along with Dasha without any needless probes.

He had been troubled by not having any reliable subordinates lately; anyone would be better than Edith.

"Why would I have reservations about someone coming to help me? Besides, Dasha gives off a trustworthy vibe. I also think you're quite capable and have a good impression."

Seongjin smiled and gave a bit of lip service.

"Oh my?"

Dasha's eyes twinkled.

"It seems you have no prejudice against people from Varsha."

"Why would I be prejudiced against someone who came to help me? You're competent and also have a good personality."

Her smiling face was pleasant, and she was also beautiful.

Dasha's eyes widened as if hearing something unexpected, and then she burst into laughter.

"Ha ha. To be honest, I was also a bit surprised when I first saw you. Contrary to the rumors, you're astute and charismatic, and I think it'll be rewarding to serve you. Moreover..."

"Moreover?"

"You have a very pleasant scent. It smells faintly like roses."

Damn those Lyora Plague doctors!

Regardless, his first encounter with Dasha was satisfactory. She seemed to think that their trust relationship had been successfully formed and shared various unasked-for pieces of information.

For example, she knew quite a bit about the recent activities of the Brittanians with whom Seongjin had previously clashed.

"Those guys were all dragged back to Brittany?"

"Yes, Your Highness. Young master Ravioli made a firm decision. The knights who were taken are likely to face severe punishments in their homeland. They say he didn't forget to command their party to strictly keep their mouths shut as a lesson."

"That's more than I expected."

Seongjin thought of young marquis Ravioli, with a bobbed hairstyle and round cheeks.

Same goes for Chloe, but it seems like all these kids from Brittany have something that's slightly off.

Dasha also informed him about the survival of Ashley and Jonathan, who had fallen into the hands of Lyora's swindlers.

"So far, their blood pressure hasn't dropped to dangerous levels due to bloodletting treatments. I will closely monitor their condition, and if it looks like they're losing too much blood, I will notify you immediately."

Seongjin upgraded his assessment of Dasha inwardly by a notch.

'...She's really competent, isn't she?'

Was it her intelligence or knack for understanding what he needed? She always seemed to scratch exactly where he itched.

If this continues and trust builds up, Seongjin thought it might be worth asking her to investigate the organizations that Morres had previously sponsored. It's a sensitive area, but there's certainly a limit to what Seongjin can do on his own.

"Ah, and Dasha, I have a question. Is it possible to share information I have with others who use the Monkey Watchtower in reverse?"

While it was good to receive various information and have minor tasks handled on his behalf, what Seongjin was curious about was the opposite. Could he also relay his information to the Holy Emperor?

Fortunately, Dasha confirmed that it was possible.

"If you wish, I can even send your New Year's greetings to each other. After all, the only people we serve are His Majesty Holy Emperor, the princes and princesses."

Good. Seongjin nodded.

"Then Dasha, this is a message I'm sending to my father."

The moment the Holy Emperor was mentioned, Dasha's face stiffened with seriousness.

"The epidemic arising from the judiciary is not a simple illness, but due to parasitic eggs from a monster. These creatures don't naturally implant their eggs into humans, so I suspect someone deliberately planted them. Further multidirectional investigation is needed to guess their purpose, given that the parasite won't wake up just by being implanted. That's all."

Well, this sort of information can't be casually passed on through servants.

Dasha's face showed a momentary confusion due to the unexpected flood of serious information.

"...May I know the source of this information?"

"I can't say."

I'm sure His Majesty wouldn't be curious. If Katrina, who is the Emperor's right hand, or the Emperor himself, wanted to ask something, they would have done so already.

Dasha looked slightly confused but quickly regained her composure and gave a slight nod.

Her role was not to judge the truth of the message, but to relay it.

"Then, I will visit you again tomorrow evening, Your Highness."

She walked toward the balcony window and, just like when she arrived, vanished into thin air. Even though he was watching closely, Seongjin could hardly feel her leaving. Truly an impressive individual.

Seongjin turned his gaze to the dark window for a moment after Dasha's disappearance, then turned back to his bed.

Well, he had done all he could.

I wonder how my father, His Majesty the Holy Emperor, will respond.

"Your Highness, I'm really struggling because of Sir Masain!"

It was another regular morning.

Just as he finished his meditation and was about to eat a walnut, Dame Maria, who was beside him, began to complain.

While Seongjin spent each day satisfied with diligent training, the resident knights were increasingly dissatisfied due to changes in work conditions caused by Sir Masain.

The number of knights had increased more than anticipated, and the work shifts had become incredibly tight. Procedures, which were somewhat lax before, had also been readjusted to conform with the standards of the Imperial Guard at the main palace.

As a result, from shift changes to basic training, nothing was easy

anymore.

Because of this, the resident knights these days had stormy expressions on their faces.

If working at the Pear Palace used to be a cushy job that also paid well, now it had become a demanding post to the point that people were saying the money was well-earned.

So, whenever Knight Commander Masain was momentarily away, the resident knights would constantly grumble and complain to Seongjin.

Just like right now.

"But being on a dispatch mission, it's honestly a bit more comfortable than being with the main force, isn't it?"

"Sob! If only I didn't have the bar tabs piled up this month...!"

"I really need to quit drinking right away; it's so exhausting these days!"

Maria and Kurt, who were quietly doing personal training nearby, sighed with a gloomy expression.

Although they belonged to different Knight Divisions — the 1st and 2nd, respectively — they had been longtime drinking buddies since their squire days.

They had volunteered for the well-paying dispatch duty at the Pearl Palace, thinking they'd earn some extra money for drinks.

"Well, I know a great bar where the drinks are pretty cheap. They only serve dark beer, though..."

"It's not just about money; I'm too tired to even go out drinking after work these days!"

"Could you please persuade Knight Commander Masain? Huh?"

Seongjin felt a bit awkward.

If Masain was being unreasonable with the knights, that would be one thing, but he was operating according to the main palace guard manual, so there wasn't much to say. In fact, these guys had been having it too easy until now.

On top of that, they were whining to the person who did the most work and training among the resident knights. How could he persuade anyone?

"Alright, hang in there. I'll find time to treat you to a good drink."

To the earnest appeals of the resident knights, Seongjin was comforting them in such a manner.

Thud.

Just then, a noise like a falling scabbard echoed from the side.

"...?"

When Seongjin and the resident knights turned around in unison, they saw a knight sprawled out in the corner of the training ground. It was Haven, who had looked somewhat off since the morning.

"What's wrong with him?"

"Did he drink too much last night?"

Haven had just returned from vacation. He had apparently spent the last day of his vacation drinking late into the night.

Knights who were standing nearby carelessly approached to shake him.

"Why did you come back from vacation like this?"

"Hey, get up. If you're feeling unwell, take sick leave."

As they were checking on him, one of the knights suddenly exclaimed in alarm.

"Something's wrong with him! His body is really cold!"

"I see some kind of rash..."

"Could it... be the plague?"

"It's the plague!"

Panic broke out instantly. They had heard rumors about the outbreak of a disease in the judiciary just the day before.

The knights hastily retreated from Haven, whose symptoms included low body temperature, rash, and impaired consciousness.

'Could it be?'

[Yes, it's the Lophellum egg.]

The Demon King answered.

[The egg is already dead, but I don't know why he's in that condition.]

Noting the tense atmosphere, Seongjin paused as he was about to approach Haven. The knights were in an excessive state of turmoil due to the sudden fear of the plague.

'First, I need to calm the situation...'

It seemed best to leave Haven's medical care to the physicians and first calm down the panicking knights to avoid an unfortunate situation.

So, he quickly gave orders to the two most experienced individuals there.

"Sir Kurt, contact Sir Masain immediately, and have the Dr. Ninnias, the physicians and priests on standby at the knight's quarters."

Kurt looked at Seongjin with a strange expression, but nodded respectfully and left. He also managed to drag along a few trembling knights with him.

"Dame Maria, control the other knights. This is not the plague, so

stop panicking and hold your positions."

Maria looked at the collapsed Haven and then back at Seongjin. However, as soon as Seongjin calmly met her gaze, she visibly regained her composure.

She clenched her fist tightly to control her shaking hand and turned around to shout at the knights running all over the place with a booming voice.

"Everyone, calm down! This is not a plague, so stop your baseless speculations! Are you really the proud Royal Guards of Delcross if you lose your cool over something like this!"

As Maria gathered and calmed down the knights, Seongjin approached Haven. Then he gave instructions to the remaining knights who were still frozen nearby.

"For now, let's move Sir Haven to his quarters."

"For now, let's move Sir Haven to his quarters."

At Seongjin's words, one of the knights asked with an anxious face.

"Shouldn't we wait as is until the plague doctor comes? What if we accidentally spread the disease...?"

Once the plague doctor starts drawing blood, Haven might actually die.

Seongjin shook his head, "It's not the plague. It's a disease I know."

"How can we believe you?"

Another knight standing beside them, a young one with a long scar on his forehead, asked skeptically. Although Seongjin had gotten close to most of the resident knights recently, this young knight had always cast him sidelong glances.

"If Your Highness says so but it turns out to be the plague, we're the ones who will die, right?"

"..."

As insolent as the young knight's attitude was, he wasn't entirely wrong.

It would be strange to easily believe a young prince, notorious for being a good-for-nothing, when he claims, without any medical knowledge, that it's not the plague.

Seongjin didn't answer and gently grasped Haven's fallen arm.

Instantly, the surrounding knights gasped.

Regardless, Seongjin hoisted Haven's arm over his shoulder and helped him sit up. Haven was rather small, and Seongjin had pumped Aura into his muscles, so lifting him wasn't much of a challenge even with his young body.

Seongjin then looked at the surrounding knights, "Well, I'll take half the responsibility, you guys gamble on the other half. He's a comrade, right?"

"..."

The knights glanced at each other in silence.

Surprisingly, the first person to step forward was the young knight who had questioned him. The young knight silently grabbed Haven's other arm and helped Seongjin lift him up.

The two of them started to move towards the knights' quarters, supporting Haven between them.

'I thought he was a hard-headed guy, but it seems he still knows the meaning of loyalty,' Seongjin thought. He glanced over, and the young knight looked unhappy, his brow furrowed as he stared straight ahead.

"What unit are you from? How long have you been stationed at the Pearl Palace?"

"...Why? Will you remember if I tell you?"

"..."

'What's this guy's problem? Doesn't he know how to socialize?'

The atmosphere grew tense, but fortunately, they didn't have far to go. Knight Kurt had come prepared with a carriage.

The young knight disappeared without even saying goodbye as soon as he handed Haven over to the doctor. Truly an unfriendly character.

Soon, Haven was quickly moved to the accommodation on the

carriage.

"Since when has he been in this condition?" Ninnias, the doctor, asked. As always, his nose was red, as if he'd just had a drink.

"He was fine until yesterday afternoon," answered Kurt.

Ninnias promptly examined Haven. He checked his pulse, looked inside his mouth, and even flipped his eyelids.

Of course, Ninnias's severe hypochondria made one doubt if he was checking the pulse accurately...

'Didn't this guy accuse the Lyora School of being traitors before?'

Seongjin suddenly remembered that Ninnias didn't seem to like the Lyora School. His trust in the doctor rose dramatically!

Unaware of Seongjin's thoughts, Ninnias, after a thorough examination, finally spoke to the group.

"Indeed, as the Prince said, this does not look like a commonly known plague."

"A plague...it's not?"

Sir Kurt asked, seemingly relieved.

"Probably not. Most plagues initially come with a fever, but this one, on the other hand..."

His body temperature is dropping.

"Of course, as time passes and the illness worsens, one's pulse weakens and body temperature drops like this, but it hasn't been long since the symptoms appeared in him."

"So Doctor Ninnias, if it's not a plague, what could be affecting him?"

At Sir Kurt's question, Doctor Ninnias wiped the sweat off his forehead with a somewhat troubled expression.

"It's too early to say. We'll have to keep an eye on his condition for

now..."

And then he subtly glanced at Seongjin, who stood quietly with his arms crossed, listening to the conversation.

It seemed like he was curious to know how much medical knowledge Seongjin had as an apothecary, being the first to say it didn't look like a plague.

"Sometimes, people show similar symptoms when stung by a bee. I remember a young man in my old neighborhood died after a bee sting; he broke out in hives, his face swelled, he struggled to breathe, and most notably, his body temperature dropped rapidly. Apparently, his father and grandfather also died from bee stings."

Ninnias added, "Of course, his condition isn't deteriorating that rapidly, but..."

"Moreover, it's difficult to guess why he lost consciousness before his pulse weakened. It's not typical symptoms of poisoning, but we should also consider the possibility of some new kind of toxin."

Seongjin examined Haven, who was lying unconscious on the bed.

The man's complexion was pale, almost to the point of appearing grey. His lips were drained of color, and sporadic red, swollen rashes appeared on his exposed skin, including his face and neck.

And below his chest, a portion of the skin had turned gray.

Could it be there?

[Yes, there is an egg of Lophellum in his chest. It's already dead.]

The Demon King whispered.

'What effects would a Lopfern egg have on a human? Is it toxic?'

[Who knows, I've never laid an egg in a human.]

Seongjin lost himself in thought for a moment.

Even though he had lived a modern Earth life, Seongjin didn't have much medical knowledge. Before the Gate incident, he was just an ordinary office worker, and after the Gate incident, he was a superhuman hunter who had no worries about diseases.

However, even he knew that people could die suddenly from bee stings due to an anaphylactic shock caused by bee sting allergies.

The Lophellum egg can't parasitize in a human body; it just dies as time passes.

But what if that dead egg triggers an allergic reaction similar to anaphylactic shock? Or what if it keeps emitting something toxic?

If so, the condition won't improve unless the egg is removed.

The next step was clear. Remove the egg.

"Doctor Ninnias, doesn't the skin tone over there look a bit off? It appears different to my eyes..."

At Seongjin's words, the doctor examined the area on Haven's chest that he was pointing to more closely. It probably hadn't caught his eye before due to the uneven rashes and pale complexion.

As Doctor Ninnias carefully unbuttoned Haven's shirt, a palm-sized area of discolored skin became clearly visible. And in the center of that grey skin, there was a small wound covered in scab.

That wound must be where the Lophellum egg had burrowed in.

The physician touched the discolored chest area and slightly tilted his head.

"Come to think of it, you're right. The color is different, and there is a wound. And the skin feels somewhat hard, doesn't it? ...Hmm?"

He tapped the discolored skin with his fingers and gently brushed it. Then, he raised his head with a somewhat serious expression.

"It feels like there's something strange inside?"

Was it shallow enough to be felt from the outside? If so, this will simplify matters.

Seongjin suggested to the physician with a half-smile.

"Shouldn't we remove that?"

"Huh?"

"I mean, a small incision might be enough to extract it."

"...What?"

Both Ninnias the physician and Kurt the captain looked at Seongjin in utter astonishment.

"Well, it's not certain that it's something strange. It's not that rare to sometimes feel a lump inside the body, you know..."

The physician seemed perplexed and rubbed his nose, which was already red, turning it an even deeper shade of red.

"Won't cutting into an already sick person make the situation worse?"

Sir Kurt discouraged Seongjin with a flustered expression. His face openly displayed his concern that the reckless prince might exacerbate Haven's condition.

I guess trying to persuade them like this is pointless. Seongjin frowned.

However, help came from an unexpected place.

Arriving late at the knight's quarters with Masain, Francis heard Seongjin's words and supported him.

"The energy doesn't feel like that of demonkind, but it's still unsettling. I think it should be removed."

"...!"

It was the opinion of someone who was no less than a deputy commander of the Saint Aurelion Paladin Order.

The physician hesitated for a moment, but soon gave in to Francis's determined look and began preparing for the incision.

"The symptoms in the Academy students and this knight are the same."

Francis briefly explained the symptoms he had seen at the tribunal to Seongjin.

Pale complexion, cold body temperature, and rashes all over. More importantly, he had felt something strange near the students' chest areas.

"A weird energy that repels holy power."

"It definitely wasn't a demonkind. If I were to find a similar feeling, maybe it's like the strange lifeform in the Diggory Mansion?"

He said that at the time, the aura was so weak that they passed it off simply as a plague.

But having heard Seongjin's explanation, now he also suspected that maybe the Academy students' symptoms were also caused by this strange energy.

"If it repels holy power, is it like a curse from the demonkind?"

Masain asked with a slightly pale face. Francis clicked his tongue lightly.

"I get why you're worried, but that's impossible. As long as His Majesty the Holy Emperor is here, no curse from the demonkind can prosper within the Delcross Empire."

And then they all fell silent and watched as Ninnias made an incision in Haven's chest.

First, he disinfected the skin with a high-proof alcohol, then with a sweat-drenched face, he made the incision.

There wasn't much bleeding. The Lophellum's egg had indeed been just below the skin.

Soon, Ninnias nervously extracted a dark grey egg about the size of a pinky fingernail.

Although the egg was partly cracked and soaked in blood during the incision, it was clearly not something that could naturally occur in a human body.

After carefully inspecting the incision area and disinfecting it again with alcohol, he brought a needle and thread to start stitching the wound.

For someone who seemed reluctant, his skills were surprisingly neat.

What school of pharmacists did Ninnias belong to? He seemed to want to keep it a secret, but Seongjin thought he'd discreetly ask him later.

Seongjin and Francis then carefully handled the egg that the physician had brought out.

The dark gray semi-transparent egg looked elongated like a grain of rice.

Knowing this was a monster's egg, Seongjin could see tiny segments glowing faintly inside the egg. If it had survived and awakened, it would have become a larva.

"This looks... definitely like some kind of egg, doesn't it?"

Francis was subtly sharp.

Nodding inwardly, Seongjin saw Francis turn towards the entrance of their quarters.

"I will go to the tribunal, Your Highness. First, I have to tell the plague doctors to stop the students' 'bloodletting' treatment and to search for the egg."

They shouldn't have died from excessive bleeding yet.

Leaving behind these ominous words, Francis quickly left the room.

Soon after, Ninnias, having finished suturing the wound, began hastily pulling out various herbs. He finely grinded them into a powder and dropped it into Haven's mouth.

Was it just his imagination? Although Haven was still unconscious, his complexion seemed to have slightly improved.

Seongjin watched this for a moment, then ordered that if anything happens with the egg, to inform him immediately and left with Masain.

"That wound in the chest, it looked like someone artificially injected the egg into it..."

His mind was in turmoil.

Who exactly is doing this and what is their purpose?

Does the Emperor know about this situation? How far has the investigation gone, and what measures have been taken?

"Your Highness."

Suddenly called from behind, he turned to see Masain looking at him with a rather stiff face.

"I heard briefly about what happened at the training grounds from Maria. You helped the sick knight yourself?"

"Yes."

With a sigh, Masain continued his words.

"You acted too hastily. You should've avoided that situation and heard about it later. It's fortunate this is likely not a plague, but if something like this happens again..."

"Sir Masain."

Seongjin cut him off.

"I'm not a child in need of a nanny."

Masain's eyes quivered at the unprecedented firm words.

"But, Your Highness, I think you should make this clear."

If Masain decides to stay as the knight commander and not his brother, he will need to clarify his attitude.

"I understand that you're concerned for my safety, but I also had my own convictions and assurance."

"..."

"A sincere advice is always welcome. But don't mistake that for having the right to limit my thoughts and actions."

Seongjin stared straight into Masain's confused face. Masain looked back for a moment, then bowed his head.

"I... overstepped my boundaries. My apologies, Your Highness."

"Yes."

Seongjin nodded and began to walk again.

The two of them had lunch in silence and also safely finished their afternoon swordsmanship lessons.

Back in his room late in the evening after parting with a somewhat deflated Masain, Seongjin entered into early meditation.

He didn't feel great having been harsh on the man who was like a loyal dog.

Training is the way to go at times like this.

However, his meditation was cut short.

[Seongjin, it's her.]

With the Demon King's warning, Seongjin also sensed the faint but discernible presence sneaking in.

It was much easier to sense than yesterday.

Soon, a dark figure dropped from the 3rd-floor balcony into Seongjin's window. It was Dasha, an elite agent of the Monkey Watchtower.

Opening the window and sneaking into the room, she found Seongjin sitting on the bed, staring straight at her.

"How, Your Highness, how do you know I am coming?"

She looked as if her pride had been wounded.

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Dasha. She was a standout expert even within a secret agency composed of the most elite intelligence agents.

So, until now, she was somewhat complacent, feeling that there was nothing to fear unless facing a Decalon Knight-level threat.

However, the young prince, who seemed barely to have reached the level of a squire in terms of aura activation, was intently watching her whenever she arrived. It was indeed perplexing.

"Welcome, Dasha. Any new information?"

What was more irritating was that he looked blankly at her as if he had no idea what he had accomplished!

Suppressing her momentary irritation, Dasha soon bowed briefly and began her report promptly.

"The Academy students have been rescued from plague doctors thanks to Sir Francis' intervention. They have ceased the bloodletting treatment and have undergone a procedure to remove the eggs from the royal medical staff. They are still unconscious though."

It's good to hear they're still alive.

"If they were a bit later, they would've been in a life-threatening condition due to blood loss."

What a bunch of Lyora quacks!

However, the following report was unexpected.

"In fact, while conveying the information Your Highness told me to the Holy Emperor, I learned a shocking fact from the Intelligence Department. The discovered plague wasn't something that just broke

out yesterday."

It wasn't the first occurrence?

"For several months now, cases of this plague have been appearing sporadically throughout the Empire. It mainly spread among people living alone, so the initial symptoms were not readily detected."

"Several months ago?"

"Yes."

Dasha nodded, her gaze deepening.

"Within the Intelligence Department, they've been calling it the 'Gray Plague.'"

Gray Plague.

The name came from the victims whose skin turned an odd shade of grey.

It was mainly manifesting among elderly people living alone, vagrants, or those already ill. For this reason, there were still no early discoveries. Most were only found after they had been isolated for a few days and had transformed completely.

The first incident was reported months ago by an Inquisitor, who was alerted by villagers claiming an elderly man in their village had been cursed and had gone mad. The old man had lost his son and daughter-in-law and lived alone. A once healthy individual had suddenly displayed strange behavior within days.

By the time the Inquisitor arrived, the old man was drooling uncontrollably, and his eyes were unfocused. He couldn't speak or understand anything, and his skin had turned into dry, rigid grey, as if he had become a wooden puppet.

He eventually died within a week without eating or drinking.

Since then, sporadic reports about grey-skinned mad people had come from various places in the capital. Initially, they were suspected

to be cursed by demons, so they were immediately imprisoned and investigated by the Heretical Tribunal. However, eventually, they concluded that it seemed to be a mysterious plague, with no evidence of demonic involvement found.

Hearing this, Seongjin frowned.

"How could they not know the initial symptoms? How do they know these cases are of the same disease?"

"One of the Inquisitors who investigated the case happened to witness the treatment of the students."

In response to the prince's valid query, Dasha nodded absentmindedly and flicked her hair back as she continued.

The Inquisitor pointed out that the discolored skin on the students' chests was similar to the skin changes observed in Gray Plague patients.

And he recalled that similar rock-like formations were found in the same location on the chests of patients who had died from the plague. In other words, those formations were believed to be calcified monster eggs.

Ah. Seongjin suddenly realized.

'So, they've dissected everyone who died from the plague.'

"Moreover, the clergy felt the same energy from these so-called monster eggs as they did from that stone fragment. As Your Highness knows, they are highly sensitive to malicious energies."

Francis had also said something similar.

They could detect whether someone was a demonkind by just the energy. And that these monster eggs and the larvae of Bantra Moss felt similar.

"So what's the plan?"

"Besides what's being discussed at the Holy Council, a special task

force will be formed as per His Majesty's orders. Inquisitors, exorcists, and experts will be mobilized en masse. They say the formal term for these abominable creatures will probably be 'demons,' following Your Highness's proclamation."

"..."

Hmm, it's a bit odd.

It's called a 'plan,' but I don't feel a strong will to actively resolve the issue. It's more like they're reluctantly responding because things have escalated to this point.

Hold on, could this guy...?

Seongjin raises an eyebrow slightly, to which Dasha, unaware of his thoughts, excitedly added,

"Thanks to Your Highness and Sir Francis discovering the cause of the plague early, we've achieved quite a lot on just the first day of becoming dedicated informants."

"You seem quite pleased."

"Why wouldn't I be? It's fulfilling to produce substantial results on the very first day of the job."

Dasha revealed a bright smile, full of satisfaction.

"Ah, and a message from the Holy Emperor."

My father?

"Do as you wish,' he said."

What the hell?

As Seongjin looks puzzled, Dasha wore an ambiguous smile.

* * *

At that moment, there were those plunged into great confusion due to unexpected circumstances.

"It's serious. The palace doctors have extracted seeds from those academy students."

"I heard. How did they find it all of a sudden?"

The elderly and young men, both dressed in white, intricate priest robes, converse quietly. Even in the dim light, the divine symbols engraved on their garments are clearly visible.

The elder priest groaned, clutching his head with both hands.

"It's my mistake. Perhaps we sowed too recklessly in the excitement of the impending harvest."

"No, it's not! There aren't that many suitable prisoners coming in with aura or divine power for planting. Who could have predicted that prisoners in custody at the heresy tribunal would be transferred to the tribunal in just a day? Don't blame yourself too much."

"Even so...."

Both of them sighed deeply in unison.

"So what happens to the harvest now?"

"As for that, Brother Clemence has gone to see the Bishop regarding the issue."

"Then let's pray together until Brother returns. May we complete our mission safely. Bethella."

"Bethella."

Both priests began praying devoutly right where they stood.

After some time had passed, a young priest with a weary expression approached them. It was Clemence, who had gone outside the Imperial Palace to meet the Bishop.

And the news he brought was even more troubling.

"Someone seems to have mistakenly attempted to plant a seed in an

imperial knight. That's how the academy students' seeds were also discovered. The bishop was extremely angry."

"What!?"

The elder priest's face turned pale.

"Which idiot tried to sow seeds on an Imperial Knight? Unless they were planning on getting caught by His Majesty! Didn't the bishop clearly say that seeds will never blossom in aura users?"

"That's why I'm confirming with our external supporters. They claim to have only sown seeds in drifters and drunks. They say they didn't touch anyone with high aura activity."

"What good are excuses now!"

For a moment, the elder priest's face flushed with anger, then he muttered a small prayer to calm himself. "Bethella."

"Anyway, what's done is done. What does the bishop say?"

Clemence frowned at the elder priest's question.

"The Bishop said to proceed with the plan as long as the Holy Emperor shows no special movements. Even if we start investigating now, it would take quite a bit of time to find something out."

"What about the inquisitors?"

"That area will also be difficult for a full-scale investigation. They were already understaffed and now they've taken on some of the duties of the Inquisitors who were sent to the southern front."

At this, the young priest spoke in a worried voice.

"It's unpredictable. Who is the leader of the exorcists? That elusive Leandros, right? He'll surely sense something is off and try to interfere."

"The plan takes into account that we might be discovered once it progresses to a certain point. If things don't go smoothly, we'll have

to push up our timeline."

"Expedite? Is that even possible?"

At the elder priest's question, Clemence' eyes shone with seriousness.

"I happened to meet another brother from our forgotten sect here recently. If we can get his cooperation, accomplishing our mission might become a bit easier."

* * *

—Do as you wish.

The cryptic message from the emperor could be confirmed the very next day.

After breakfast, Seongjin, who was about to rush to the training grounds with his slingshot, stopped in his tracks when he spotted a strange man in the Pearl Palace grounds.

'...Who?'

Just in front of him stood Masain, who seemed to be welcoming a guest. Feeling Seong-jin's presence, he looked back with a slightly awkward expression.

"Your Highness...."

Under this unusual atmosphere, Seongjin carefully observed the man before him.

He was a middle-aged man dressed in an almost black, ash-colored uniform.

Apart from the color, his outfit looked similar to that of the Aurelion Knights. The only difference was the silver sword and crossed silver hooks engraved on his deep-colored uniform.

The man had a rigid face, almost like dried-up, gnarled wood. His cold expression was as impassive as could be, matching even the emperor's.

After a quick glance towards Seong-jin, he put his hand on his chest and bowed rigidly.

"I am here to see the Third Prince."

His voice sounded as if it were scraped out of a parched throat.

Just sharing space with him somehow made one feel uncomfortable, such was his aura.

"I present to you, Sir Leandros, the commander of the Knights of Saint Terbacchia," Masain softly informed him.

One of the five orders of knights, the Knights of Saint Terbacchia.

The commander of that order and the leader of all inquisitors, Sir Leandros.

Why had he suddenly come to visit Morres and Pearl Palace?

—In a while, an inquisitor from Saint Terbacchia will visit Pearl Palace. Don't worry, it is only for consultation. If you can provide information on the 'monsters' you know of, it will greatly help their work.

Katrina had mentioned this before, but he didn't expect the commander himself to come.

'Furthermore, this man... there's something strange about him...'

Seongjin stared intently at Sir Leandros, trying to gauge the man's energy. However, all he felt was a vague and stale emotion that he couldn't quite describe.

What is this? I'm not sure, but why does it feel so unsettling?

It wasn't just Seongjin who felt an odd vibe from him.

[What's with this guy? He's a bit off.]

'Where, specifically?'

[Hard to point out, but something's not right.]

What do you even know?

One thing was certain: this man was one of the few knights granted permission to enter the Pearl Palace by the Holy Emperor.

"Are you the guest who sought me? Then let's go to the reception room, Sir Masain. We can talk there."

Giving a fleeting glance to the now visibly restless Masain, Seongjin led the way to the reception room.

And moments later,

Seongjin found out the reason why the commander of the knight brigade had come to find him himself. There had been a rapid change in the situation with the [Monsters] in just a few days.

"I have been appointed to lead a specialized task force against [Monsters], with Terbacchia's knights as the main force," the man explained in a monotone voice.

Seongjin already knew this information through Dasha.

Here, we have invited experts from all fields we believe would be helpful in dealing with [Demon]-related events, from inquisitors to professors from the Theological Academy to members of the Plague Council...," he paused, his dry gaze briefly meeting Seongjin's eyes. "I've heard that thanks to Your Highness's knowledge and wisdom, we were able to confirm the nature of the [Gray Plague]. You also slew the demon during the incident at the Diggory residence and provided detailed information about it."

Seongjin had a gut feeling he was being roped into something troublesome.

Masain also seemed to share that sentiment, as he nervously glanced at Seongjin to gauge his reaction.

Either way, this unemotive man continued to speak impassively.

"So, the prevailing opinion within the Terbacchia Knight Brigade is that we should not merely seek your advice but should actually

include you in the specialized task force against [Monsters]. Therefore, I, Leandros, formally request Your Highness's participation as part of the [Noblesse Oblige]."

"Ah..."

Masain let out a small sigh.

Noblesse Oblige

Just like 1st Prince Owen who leads soldiers on the southern frontlines, rushing through the battlefield.

And 2nd Prince Logan who leads young knights in purging the seas of pirates across the continent.

Now, they are asking the third prince, Morres, to contribute to protecting the capital by joining the task force against [Monsters].

So this was what the Holy Emperor had been talking about.

"Your Highness, the [Noblesse Oblige] is just a nice phrase. It doesn't actually carry any compulsion," Masain interjected nervously from the side. "You have only just recovered from fever and have barely mastered the swordsmanship at the squire level. There is still time. Please consider this carefully."

Ordinarily, he would have yelled first and asked questions later.

Was it because he had been reprimanded by Seongjin yesterday? Masain's tone was almost pleading.

'Right, there's no compulsion.'

That must be why the Holy Emperor said he could do as he pleases.

'But still...'

Seongjin felt a strange sense of foreboding as he looked into the eyes of the stoic Sir Leandros.

If he refused, the outcome might not be favorable—that was his

intuition.

A vague sense of missing out on something crucial loomed over him.

The same intuition that left him as the last standing among the less prominent hunters, still held him tightly now.

Unknowingly, Seongjin nodded towards Leandros, and at the same time, a deep sense of defeat surfaced on Masain's face.

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When he first received a visit from Commander Leandros, Seonngjin had thought that he would need to start working in the [Monster Special Task Force] from the very next day.

However, pulling together the budget to establish a new department, securing office space, filling up the team members, and even determining the operational policy—all of these required a long road ahead.

On top of that, the celebration of Emperor Seonghwang's birth was just around the corner. Inquisitor Valerie explained that it would likely be after the celebration before the department could be fully operational.

"So, Sir Valerie, where are we headed now?"

"We're going to the temporary office of the Monster Special Task Force, Your Highness. Fortunately, some suitable vacant space has just opened up in the administration building annex."

Sir Valerie was a rookie Inquisitor in the St. Marcius Knight Order, a handsome man with flaming red hair. He was the person designated to be assigned to the Monster Special Task Force when it was established.

Seongjin didn't initially have a favorable impression of him since there had been some friction with the St. Marcius Paladin Order before. However, after talking a bit, he found Valerie to be quite likable.

"Why do I have to visit an office that's not even properly set up yet?" Masain, who was following behind Seongjin, growled.

Ever since Seongjin decided to join the Monster Special Task Force,

Masain had been like this, as if irked because he couldn't find any faults.

"Sir Masain, I was the one who told Commander Sharon that I would go to the office."

"But Your Highness, you could have summoned them to the Pearl Palace..."

"Do you not know how difficult it is for knights to gain entry into the Pearl Palace?"

"..."

Commander Sharon was also set to join the Monster Special Task Force as an Exorcist.

Seongjin had once visited the Pearl Palace for work reasons, and having witnessed the complicated authorization process, decided to make the move himself next time.

"Haha. The office is shaping up quite well, Sir Masain. For now, Commander Sharon and I have been coming to work here every day," Valerie said, managing to dismiss Masain's veiled threat with a smile.

"In fact, we're sticking it out here on purpose. If we continue to forcibly occupy this place, there's a high chance it will become our official office as long as there aren't any major incidents."

Then the suave red-haired Inquisitor winked at Seongjin.

"Going to the main building has its share of hassles. Yet, being too far from it also makes paperwork difficult. The location of this temporary office is just perfect."

"The office might be a bit small, but it has quite a cozy atmosphere," Valerie added, laughing heartily.

The administration buildings were all huddled together on the west side of the imperial palace.

In stark contrast to the blindingly white main palace, the buildings

here were mostly made of red brick, exuding an antique charm.

The walls covered with dense ivy and well-maintained garden trees created an illusion as if one had visited the campus of a university with a rich history.

As Seongjin looked around curiously, Valerie asked, puzzled.

"Is this your first time visiting the administrative side, Your Highness?"

"Hmm, probably. It's my first time since recovering from the fever."

Ah, I see.

Valerie seemed to have understood something, nodding his head.

On the other hand, Seongjin felt a fresh sense of revelation.

Come to think of it, this isn't the issue of not being able to go out of the palace right now.

Have I ever been to other parts of the imperial palace besides Pearl Palace and the main palace?

Not even to Amelia's Moon Rose Palace, let alone Queen Elizabeth's Ruby Palace!

'I've been too cooped up in the Pearl Palace...!'

[...You're just realizing that now?]

Seongjin heard the snide laugh of the Demon King in his head.

The Monster Special Task Force was located on the second floor of the Administrative Branch annex.

As they opened the door and entered, Knight Sharon, dressed in dark ash uniforms, stood up to greet them.

"I've been waiting for you, Your Highness."

Sharon was a veteran inquisitor of the St. Terbacchia Knights.

She was a tall woman, making most men look inferior. She had jet-black hair like a crow and seemingly permanent dark circles under her eyes.

The dry, ominous impression she gave off slightly resembled that of her commander, Leandros.

It seems people's expressions change when they deal with demons for a long time.

"What an honor it is for someone of your stature to visit this humble specialized squad's office. I'm at a loss for how to express my gratitude, especially since you've taken even my convenience into account," she said.

Her voice was thin and shaky, a stark contrast to her robust physique. Throughout the conversation, she couldn't make eye contact.

As I thought before, she seemed to have low self-esteem.

"No, it's fine, Dame Sharon. We will be working together from now on; it's only natural that I get used to the department. So what should I do next? Do I share what I know about the monsters?"

"Yes, we've invited you to the specialized squad to consult about [Monsters]. I'm deeply grateful that you've readily accepted our request."

"It's not a big deal, really."

"If you don't mind waiting a moment? I'll need you to detail the Diggory estate incident first. I intend to make it an official record of the specialized squad, so paperwork will take some time. Hehe."

Despite Masain giving her a stern look, she leisurely began to gather her writing tools.

Perhaps she is more daring than she appears.

Seongjin then sat down and began explaining in detail about Bantra Moss for quite some time.

The approximate periods from egg to adult, the characteristics of the larvae and pupae, the adult's characteristics, their respective weaknesses.

And most importantly, about Bartos, their channeling organs.

Of course, Seongjin already knew all the knowledge needed for defeating monsters, but organizing this knowledge was easier thanks to the intrusive Demon King who always wanted to meddle.

[Also, also... tell her this too. The factor that influences the larva transforming into a pupa isn't the amount of nutrients consumed but the number of the entities. The varying sizes of Bantra Moss are because they consumed entities of various sizes...]

'Yeah yeah, this is enough. It's not like I'm writing a dissertation.'

Throughout this, Dame Sharon kept nodding and diligently taking down Seongjin's words.

Not a shred of doubt about the authenticity of the information showed in her demeanor, making Seongjin wonder.

'Why isn't she asking me anything?'

Seongjin now suspected that there might be some directive from higher-ups.

But even if that was the case, blindly trusting like this is another story.

"Aren't you curious about the source of the information I'm providing?" he asked.

At this, Sharon gave a strange laugh, curling her lips. "Hee-hee-hee."

"How could I dare to?"

"I mean, shouldn't you naturally be curious?"

"I trust all that Your Highness says."

Isn't that a matter of forced belief?

Suddenly, her eyes glazed over and she started mumbling.

"Heh. Maybe it's not just me. Some of the emperor's close aides might have noticed by now."

"Noticed what?"

"The constraints due to your latent potential."

"...?"

"And that constraint implies another possibility."

For the first time, she lowered her gaze from the sky and looked directly into Seongjin's face.

"At least I, for one, am not ignorant of the potential and constraints of the Oracle, Your Highness."

...Oracle?

Before Seongjin could ask further, Sharon turned her eyes away and began to chuckle aimlessly.

"Yes, that's right. I know. Although I'm nothing but a useless half-breed, I heard quite a bit while spending my childhood with the tribe. In my own way, I co..."

Realizing Seongjin's confused expression, she shut her mouth saying, "Ah."

"Please forget what I just said. I sometimes talk to myself when I'm distracted. Commander Leandros often scolds me for it. Yes."

"Huh? No, Dame Sharon, it seemed like something important, so about the ora..."

"Uh uh! No need to worry about my delusional blabber. How could I dare to doubt a member of the esteemed imperial family? It's just that."

Seongjin narrowed his eyes and glared at Sharon, but she skillfully dodged his gaze, her eyes darting around.

"You're not planning on talking, are you?"

"Uh... What do I have to say? Moving forward, I'll be alert and keep my mouth shut. I'm already overwhelmed just trying to document each and every precious word of yours."

As Seongjin slightly knitted his eyebrows with disdain, Dame Sharon raised her voice a bit.

"It's not nonsense, Your Highness. From now on, your every move will become a significant milestone in determining the course of our monster-specialized team. Naturally."

"Quit the digression. I've just come as an advisor."

"Heh. But it will eventually come to that."

"How do you know that?"

Upon hearing this, Dame Sharon smirked in a twisted manner.

"Hehehe. I just...know, Your Highness."

She then leaned in closer to Seongjin and spoke in an even softer voice.

"Isn't that why I strongly recommended you join the 'Monster Task Force' to Commander Leandros? Hehe."

For a moment, Seongjin stared at her with a glare that could devour her whole.

So you were the one who manipulated Commander Leandros into summoning Morres!

Sharon merely focused back on her documents, feigning ignorance.

Some people really are unexpectedly audacious.

* * *

After a somewhat exhausting morning, Seongjin returned to Pearl Palace and casually asked Edith while having lunch.

"Edith, do you know what an Oracle is?"

However, Edith simply tilted her head and asked back, "Oracle? What's that?"

"...Ah, never mind."

Seongjin hastily fiddled with his utensils.

[Are you bothered? By what that insane knight said earlier?]

'Insane... Haven't you picked up on anything during your time here?'

[No, this is the first time I've heard of Oracle.]

Even the Demon King, who had soul-scanned for a relatively short period but still collected ample information, didn't know. It probably wasn't something commonly known.

'It seems important, though...'

I'll have to ask Dasha later.

As he thought this, the Demon King chuckled.

[Just ignore what that woman said earlier. She looked like someone who's going to have a hard time keeping his sanity intact for a lifetime.]

'...What does that mean?'

[She's not mentally stable, right? Even if she doesn't realize it, she might sometimes hear hallucinations, right?]

Seongjin was appalled as the Demon King explained what he had observed earlier.

The Demon King went, explaining that he saw something like a tiny shining pebble inside Sharon's head.

At the core, Sharon is a Paladin with divine energy, which is why her soul is enveloped in a faint light, making it hard to notice initially.

However while the woman was talking to Seongjin, the Demon King saw an unstable, flickering little light on one side of her head.

[That was undoubtedly a mind crystal.]

'A mind crystal?'

[It's like a receptor organ that living beings have.]

Surprisingly, the Bartholomew organ that the swarm monsters possess is also a type of mind crystals.

[It's rare, but it seems that it can naturally occur in humans as well. When it functions unstably in a vague location like that, you go insane. But if it stabilizes in the right place, you become something like a psychic or a prophet.]

[You humans also occasionally leave records of it, right? Those depictions where light shines from the forehead, like in paintings or sculptures.]

Upon hearing the Demon King's words, Seongjin inadvertently recalled halos or Buddha statues he'd seen long ago when the Earth was still intact.

...Could it be?

[It's the same with that paladin. She's got an uncontrollable and incomplete channeling organ in the wrong place. I don't know how such a person can act as an exorcist against demons or evil spirits. She seems to have a constitution that's good for anything 'holy'.]

It's the perfect setup to go insane when random voices suddenly appear in your head.

[She even said it herself earlier, right? That it's hard to focus on even a single person's words.]

She did say that.

"Moving forward, I'll be alert and keep my mouth shut. I'm already overwhelmed just trying to document each and every precious word of yours."

That didn't sound sarcastic to you?

[Be nice to her, life must be exhausting for that poor soul.]

...Does Sharon deserve sympathy even from a lowly being like me?

Seongjin felt slightly uncomfortable as he finished his meal and headed for the training ground. Then, unexpectedly, good news awaited him.

"His Highness, Haven has awakened!" Kurt announced, rushing over with a bright face.

Seongjin hurried to the knight's quarters. Finally, he could get clues about the Lophellum's egg!

"Your Highness!"

Under Ninnias's care, Haven, who was lying in bed, jumped up as soon as he saw Seongjin.

Fortunately, he seemed mentally stable at first glance.

Haven stared at Seongjin with a fervent look and said something bizarre.

"Thank you, Prince Morres! Not only did you save my life, but you're also responsible for half of my life!"

What?

Seongjin looked at Ninnias, puzzled.

Is this guy really fully recovered? Is he in his right mind?

Masain, who was standing beside him, started to look menacing. Nonetheless, Haven began to ramble, tears welling up in his eyes.

"I've heard it all from Calmen! I, Haven, have never received such

affection even from my parents! How can I ever express this overwhelming emotion..."

What the hell is Calmen doing?

Seongjin's eyes narrowed, and Kurt quietly hinted.

"...The knight who helped you support Haven."

That insubordinate gaze is one thing, but sabotaging someone like this?

Confused, Seongjin was about to say something when Haven stood up, his face full of resolve, and exclaimed while kneeling.

"I've made my decision! I'll dedicate the rest of my life to Prince Morres. I wish to be buried in the Imperial Palace, so please accept me!"

Seongjin gave a commanding response.

"I don't need it!"

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In summary, it seemed that there was no significant fault on the part of the knight named Calmen who had relayed the information to Haven.

It was Ninnias, the physician, who was extremely irritated while dragging Haven back to his bed.

"When did His Highness say that he would take responsibility for your life? He said he would take responsibility for the statement that it wasn't a contagious disease, didn't he? I clearly heard what the knight was saying right next to him!"

"No, but..."

"Stop confusing things! Like I've been saying, you're too careless about everything. If I say to calm down, then calm down!"

Upon hearing this, Haven immediately grabbed Ninnias' hand, jumping around while calling him a life-saver, until he received a hit from the exasperated physician.

Well, Haven had always seemed a bit frivolous, but it seemed that impressions of people don't really change.

Sir Kurt subtly opened his mouth towards Masain, who was still emanating a furious aura.

"That guy has always been one to not listen well and exaggerate things. He's a guy who bets his life here and there; please understand."

That's right, just calm down. Sir Masain.

It seems like Haven just did what he usually does, but you're acting

like you want to kill someone.

"Not too long ago, I distinctly heard him going around saying he would dedicate his life to Princess Amelia when she visited the training ground."

...Should I really kill him?

After a bit of commotion, Seongjin was barely able to relay the overall to Haven.

"Parasites in my chest?"

He jumped in surprise and touched his own chest. The incision and stitches had almost healed completely thanks to the priest. The discolored gray area had significantly reduced, with only a small portion remaining.

"Based on the shape of the wound, it looks like someone directly inserted an egg into you."

At the physician's words, Haven tilted his head in confusion.

"I simply went out, drank, and then went back to sleep at the inn. If someone stabbed me, wouldn't I have noticed?"

"Was there anything unusual?"

"Unusual? Ah!"

Haven grinned at the people around him, who were all ears.

"Now that I think about it, I met an incredibly beautiful woman on my way! That's what I remember."

"....."

Seongjin asked, while raising his hands to block Sir Masain, who seemed resisting his urge to slap him right there.

"And what did she do?"

"Hmm? I don't know; maybe I was too drunk? Now that I think about

it, I can't remember her face well. Just that she had long, beautiful hair."

Haven's eyes became dreamy.

"More than anything, her voice was really beautiful. I don't remember well, but it felt like a heavenly voice. I wish I could see her again..."

Sir Kurt then asked incredulously.

"Do you even realize you just barely escaped death? What if she's the culprit?"

"Hehe. If she's that beautiful, then she's worth risking my life for."

"....."

He really does gamble his life on various things.

"Hehehe."

"This guy, he's seriously out of his mind, isn't he?"

Thump!

In the end, Haven was slapped on the head by an infuriated Sir Kurt.

"Hmm....."

Seongjin crossed his arms and sunk into thought.

Even though Haven seems like that, he has some basic skills as a palace knight. If someone forcibly implanted an egg, it must have happened while he was drunk and not fully conscious.

However, he really can't remember anything at all?

'Maybe I should wait for Jonathan or Ashley to wake up?'

But there's no guarantee that they would wake up as fine as Haven did.

Maybe I should question Kenneth Diggory or other academy students

as soon as I have a chance.

As he was thinking, he lifted his head and saw that Sir Masain was staring at him intensely. It looked like he had a lot to say but couldn't quite get the words out.

Seongjin sighed and thought, 'first of all, I have to do something about that overprotective gentleman.'

* * *

So when Dasha visited that evening, Seongjin bluntly said:

"Teach me the art of stealth."

"Excuse me?"

"I need a way to move through the palace as stealthily as you."

"...Yes?"

Even Dasha, who rarely lost her composure, seemed taken aback.

The truth was, besides finding swordsmanship enjoyable, another big reason for Seongjin voluntarily training his martial arts was because of his identity as the prince of the noble Holy Imperial Family.

Guards would always wait outside his room, and dedicated maids constantly checking on his condition. Whenever he ventured into the city, a resplendent carriage and a procession of escort knights would follow him, drawing undue attention to himself.

Moreover, to leave the imperial palace even once, one must pass through several layers of the palace guard. With all these constraints, who would find the energy to step outside?

When he focused solely on sword training, he could tolerate it, but the moment he tried to take any proactive steps, numerous inconveniences arose.

At Seongjin's words, Dasha seemed a bit troubled and asked.

"Your Highness, did I ever tell you that I am among the elite of the Monkey Watchtower's intelligence agents?"

"Yes, I've heard. Your skills are remarkable every time I see them."

"Do you know how much rigorous training it took for someone like me to infiltrate the Pearl Palace covertly?"

"It's fine. I don't expect that much. If you can just divert the palace guards, that would be sufficient. I learn quite quickly, you see."

"That's what makes it difficult... No, even if it were possible, that alone presents a problem."

"What's the problem?"

"How could I dare to smuggle Your Highness out of the palace? Oh my goodness!"

Dasha clutched her head and groaned.

"Don't you think that the paladin commander, who watches over Your Highness like a mother, will leave me be?"

"Don't worry. If he throws a fit, I'll talk to my father."

At that, Dasha responded with a chilly expression, "Your Highness, are you planning to kill me?"

"No, I mean..."

"Hehehe. Yes, I'll teach you. I will spill all my secrets, but please don't tell His Majesty..."

Her words implied that she would do her best to protect him using her influence, but it sounded more like he was threatening her.

"Stealth techniques are essentially assassination techniques. Therefore, all the skills intelligence agents learn are those of assassins."

And thus, Dasha started from the fundamentals in her explanation.

Perhaps she planned to take her time teaching him, anticipating that it would take a while for him to master the techniques.

"The core of stealth techniques is to completely mask any traces you may give off."

While many think of stealth as becoming invisible, Dasha explained that the visual aspect is actually the last thing to consider.

"It's virtually impossible to make oneself completely invisible. However, if you can eliminate your presence, most people won't recognize something even if it's right in front of their eyes."

The key is not to hide but to erase one's presence completely. If you can manage to do that, you can hide even in the most open spaces.

"So they can see but not know? Really?"

"Yes. If you get detected, it means you didn't eliminate your presence well enough. Have faith. If you have no traces, even someone right in front of you can't see you. You have to believe that."

"I have to believe it?"

Dasha was resolute.

"Yes, belief is crucial. Even the slightest self-doubt can accelerate your heartbeat and raise your body temperature, thereby revealing your presence. In any situation, you need unshakable calmness, backed by unwavering belief. That belief is the foundation of stealth."

"..."

"It sounds plausible when you put it that way. But still..."

"Why does it sound like you're selling snake oil[1]?"

Seongjin was tilting his head in confusion when Dasha continued speaking.

"Suppressing your presence isn't just about stifling any natural phenomena that occur when you're alive. It's about silencing your

sound, suppressing your breath."

It meant utilizing a strong belief to kill even the variations in one's consciousness.

And lastly, killing the activation of one's aura.

"In some ways, killing the activation of one's aura could be the crux of stealth. Because it's impossible to move silently and suppress your breath without utilizing your aura."

The activation of the aura naturally becomes more active the more layers of aura one accumulates. Hence, the dilemma arises that as you become more skilled in killing sound and breath through the manipulation of aura, the activation of the aura drastically increases.

"So, how do we resolve that?"

"That's why you learn a technique to completely block the external flow of aura. This technique is called [Aura Concealment]."

It involves suppressing your breath to the maximum to minimize the aura you absorb, and completely binding the aura in your body so it doesn't escape.

Huh? That sounds like...

"Seems similar to [Aura Binding]?"

"Well, fundamentally they might be similar. [Aura Binding] temporarily reduces aura activation. However, binding your aura completely and simply concealing its activation are clearly different techniques."

To assist in insufficient breath and to move muscles soundlessly, the aura needs to freely flow within the body. That means aura is blocked only at the skin level, and the body constantly consumes the bound aura without any replenishment.

In short, [Aura Concealment] is similar to a person with a large lung capacity holding their breath for a long time.

"You'll need to sever your body from the outside world and hold out on the stored aura in your body. Plus, there's the additional difficulty of completely isolating every surface of your body from the outside world."

"... Sounds pretty complicated."

"Yes, it's not something you can compare with [Aura Binding] in terms of difficulty. It requires a lot of training."

To maintain concealment for a long time, first, you'll need to accumulate a lot of aura layers.

The more the aura activates, the more challenging it becomes to conceal, which is natural.

"Ultimately, when you reach the [Aura Balance], all of it becomes irrelevant."

When one reaches the level of a Decalon Knight, adjusting the aura activation becomes possible. This is because it's the stage where one achieves the most ideal balance of aura.

"So, the ultimate assassin would be at the level of a Decalon Knight?"

"Yes, but the problem is..."

Dasha added with a somber face,

"Who would become an assassin at the level of a Decalon Knight?"

Indeed. Even in Delcross, the strongest empire on the continent, Decalon Knights are extremely rare.

Any country would shower a Decalon Knight with titles, territories, and wealth. Who would give that up to become an assassin?

"The reason I mentioned the state of [Aura Balance] is that while it may be the ultimate stage an assassin could achieve, it is also the nemesis of an assassin."

"Nemesis?"

"Yes. [Aura Concealment] is completely useless in front of a Decalon Knight."

A Decalon Knight, who maintains the most ideal balance of aura, can not only freely adjust their aura activation but can also easily differentiate between the natural flow of aura and the forcibly concealed aura.

Someone who can better conceal their presence than an assassin and see through the assassin's concealment.

A nemesis, in the true sense of the word.

"Now, enough with the boring explanations. I'll teach you the method of [Aura Concealment]."

Dasha proceeded to give a detailed explanation on how to manipulate the aura, even demonstrating it herself.

Amazingly, when she executed [Aura Concealment], Seongjin felt as if Dasha, who was standing right in front of him, suddenly became faint and blurry.

Staring intently made it manageable, but had they crossed paths unexpectedly, he might have brushed past without noticing.

"How strange, I can still see you, though?"

"Damn it! Stop shaking my faith! Stop!"

Being highly sensitive, Seongjin could still sense Dasha's aura despite her skillful concealment.

And because of that, he could even more keenly sense how she was manipulating her aura.

After receiving a detailed explanation, he started to grasp an image of what he needed to do.

"Even though I agreed to assist your Highness with a heart full of goodwill, I never thought you'd strip away my secrets so quickly."

Dasha continuously grumbled as she demonstrated.

"Do you know, Your Highness? This goes against my teachings. These are techniques I learned through getting beaten up by instructors for years."

"Right. Thank you, Dasha. I'll make sure you're rewarded appropriately, even if I have to ask my father."

"...Well, as long as you understand, that's enough."

And so, based on Dasha's guidance, Seongjin practiced concealing his aura.

However, contrary to his imagination, controlling aura with different intervals across various body parts was quite difficult.

Watching Seongjin who kept tying and untying his aura incorrectly, Dasha chuckled.

"Don't rush. It's natural for it not to work out at the beginning. Even I, who was evaluated as having the best talent by my instructors recently, took over two years just to poorly mimic concealment."

"True. It's definitely hard."

"But you, Your Highness, will likely find it a bit easier. Your aura activity isn't that high yet, after all. Hehe."

"Uh-huh..."

Seongjin focused his entire mind on controlling his aura, sweat pouring down his face.

And after some time had passed,

" ... "

The relaxed smile gradually disappeared from Dasha's face, replaced by an astonished expression.

"...What?"

And a moment later,

"How is it?"

Seongjin, wiping the sweat from his forehead, proudly asked. Dasha, her eyes wide as saucers, said in a trembling voice.

"...A, A genius?"

Seongjin smirked.

Heh. See that? This is the class of Hunter Lee Seongjin.

T/N:

1. Idiom to describe deceptive marketing, or fraud

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Seongjin demonstrated the [Aura Concealment] for Dasha, who found it hard to believe even after seeing it with her own eyes.

"How can this even be possible..."

She couldn't recover from the shock for a while.

"Selective trainees usually take an average of 3 to 4 years for this process. How did you manage it in just one day..."

Seongjin casually shrugged his shoulders, keeping his aura inactive.

Is that so?

Well, that's decent. I've managed to build up to the 5th layer of aura in just a few weeks, a feat that takes others an average of 7 years.

But even then, my father still treats me as a commodity to be sold.

"Your Highness, can you move in that state?"

Upon Dasha's question, Seongjin cautiously took a step forward. However, his efforts were in vain as his previously faded presence snapped back into its original form.

"Hmm..."

This is not going to be easy.

Seongjin focused his mind, constantly recalling the image he had been meditating on.

In fact, he was thinking of a memory from his Hunter days to make manipulating aura easier.

A day from long ago when he had been isolated in the nest of a venomous creature called the Fire Caterpillar. Amid the floating poisonous particles in the air, he had focused his vital energy to protect his respiratory system and skin.

Unable to breathe properly and at risk of his skin melting at any lapse in concentration, Seongjin had survived two whole days in that poisonous environment before finally returning to his unit.

"Right. [Aura Concealment] isn't simply tying up your aura to your body."

What needs to be visualized is a seamless barrier of aura, continually circulating within the body while maintaining a dense concentration to prevent any external aura from infiltrating.

And then he just had to move his body as he did back then.

"Is that really possible? This is insane!"

Dasha's voice, filled with awe, echoed beside him.

After several trial-and-error attempts, Seongjin finally succeeded in taking his first step without any fluctuation in his presence. After that, everything became smooth sailing.

In no time, Seongjin managed to move around the room with his presence perfectly concealed. He even demonstrated hopping in place while manipulating some aura in his legs.

"How did you do that? Why does [Aura Concealment] look so easy when you do it?"

Dasha, appearing almost desperate, asked him.

Seongjin kindly explained his method, albeit with some creative liberties.

"So, Dasha, imagine you are a poison dart frog. Imagine that you've fallen, unfortunately, right into the nest of venomous ants. You lack an immunity to their venom, so you have to constantly exude a mucus to protect yourself. However, if you exude all your venom,

you won't have any more protection, so you'll need to absorb the exuded venom back through your skin. Just like how the poison dart frog..."

Listening to his long-winded explanation, Dasha muttered.

"Is this for real..."

She looked at Seongjin with a devastated face and soon dropped her head, whispering softly.

"Is that how it works, even with such a messy method? In this damned world where geniuses get everything?"

"..."

Seongjin, whose senses were heightened due to the intricate aura manipulation, couldn't help but hear her. However, he decided to let it pass for now.

He did feel a certain sense of guilt for having achieved in a short time what took others years of bloody effort.

"...I'll find a stealth suit that suits Your Highness by tomorrow."

Dasha, who had been panicking for a moment, finally composed herself and spoke.

"We absolutely cannot get caught, under any circumstances."

Her face, clenched in a tight fist, looked exceptionally grave.

"Can't I just sneak out now?"

"What are you talking about! You've certainly grasped the most important techniques, but assassination skills aren't just about [Aura Concealment]. You haven't even started practicing controlling sound, breathing, or consciousness."

According to Dasha, there's still a long road ahead.

Depending on the situation, you'll have to learn several evasion

techniques, weapon skills for assassins, how to handle sleeping drugs, and various ways to handle unexpected situations.

"To make full use of all these techniques, you'll need a lot of practice. You also have to make various preparations. Above all else..."

"Above all else?"

"I can sense it. You still lack trust in me."

Ah, that elusive trust.

"You see? Your Aura Concealment might work on ordinary people, but it's not yet sufficient to completely ward off other Aura users. So, don't carelessly go outside and risk strengthening the palace's security."

Seongjin slowly lifted his arm. His existence seemed a bit blurred, but it was clearly not enough to fully deceive the palace guards like Dasha could.

"Your Highness, please keep this in mind. Your safety should be the top priority. If you intend to go outside covertly, you must, absolutely must, go with me. Understand?"

"Yep, got it."

Avoiding Dasha's intense gaze, Seongjin replied casually, prompting her to let out a deep sigh.

"Sigh, am I digging my own grave? I thought you'd give up within at least 3 years if I taught you moderately..."

So, you were just trying to kill time, huh?

"Absolutely do not attempt to go outside the palace alone. You hear me? You hear?"

Ignoring her, Seongjin obediently lay on his bed. Dasha continued her earnest cautions before leaving.

Of course.

The moment her presence fully disappeared from the Pearl Palace, it was only natural for Seongjin to spring up and slightly open the terrace door.

Shall I take a brief walk around the vicinity of the Pearl Palace?

What's the problem if I'm caught while walking around my own palace?

"Asein introduced it as a new mineral."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

In the pitch-dark imperial palace on a moonless night.

The Emperor was receiving a report from No. 21, Enrique, in a dimly lit room.

"Asein has named it 'Red Gold,' due to its reddish-gold color."

"Red Gold, huh..."

"Yes. Asein is confident that its value will soon surpass that of gold due to its rarity. It's slightly heavier than gold and has a beautiful red luster. It's quite hard, like platinum, which makes it difficult to work with, but this makes it even more popular among the wealthy."

The Emperor tilted his head and said, "But breaking into Asein's gold craftsmanship market won't be easy."

"Asein is actively taking the lead in opening that market. He plans to make some of the relics for the church from Red Gold, and is preparing all gifts for the birth celebration from Red Gold as well. He's mobilized all the craftsmen in the workshop, and they've never seen Asein spend so generously."

"I see. He probably aims to gain credibility for its value through this birth celebration..."

Suddenly, the Emperor stopped speaking and looked out the window.

"..."

No. 21, puzzled, also looked out. The pitch-black imperial garden showed no signs of patrolling guards, remaining silent.

"What is he up to this time..."

"Your Majesty?"

"...No, it's nothing."

The Holy Emperor soon faced No. 21 again with an expression as if nothing had happened.

"So, what about this [Red Gold]? Is it an alloy?"

"Yes, our guild's technicians tried to melt it down but failed to separate anything from it. Surprisingly, it seems to be a single metal."

"How peculiar. I had assumed it was an alloy, given that Asein is known for deceiving people with copper, claiming it to be gold."

21 looked carefully at the Emperor's face and cautiously asked, "Your Majesty, do you believe it's not a new mineral?"

"New mineral at this point? Isn't the timing just too perfect? Especially considering Asein has scoured every available resource in our territory over the past decades. However..."

The Emperor paused and stroked his chin, lost in thought for a moment.

"...What if the [Red Gold] vein extends from the western mountain range triangle to the direction of Carthago?"

21 flinched.

"How did you know...?"

"Indeed."

Although it was pitch-dark, 21, who had night vision, clearly saw a slight smirk on the Emperor's lips.

"Then, even if it really is a new metal, it wouldn't matter much. The amount available won't sustain long-term mining."

"Yes?"

"By now, the grandson of Young Master Carthago must have grown up. Asein must be getting anxious."

"...Yes?"

"Same as ever, an old fool."

"..."

How did you know? How far can you see?

If this had been the 21 of the past, he would have asked the Holy Emperor directly. But now, he just looked at the Holy Emperor with a slightly uncomfortable expression and soon bowed his head quietly.

"Enrique."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Investigate the current situation of Carthago's supply of rock salt. Compare it to the trade trends mediated by Asein."

"Yes, understood."

"Ah, also prepare the newly-mined Red Gold ore. I'll make a brief visit to the Asein branch soon."

21 slightly nodded and disappeared as if melting into thin air.

After he left, the Holy Emperor alone turned his head to look out of the window. There was a silvery light in his eyes, seemingly shining in the dark room on their own.

"I told him to do whatever he wants, but I really can't predict where this fellow will jump next..."

The Holy Emperor couldn't take his eyes off the window until dawn broke.

Swoosh...

Even though there was no wind, the flowers in the garden were suddenly shaken.

Swish...

A branch that was suddenly shaken rubbed its leaves, making a small friction sound.

"...?"

This sudden disturbance caught the attention of a patrolling knight. However, after scanning the garden for a while, the knight found nothing unusual and disappeared toward the armory.

If he had known what was happening in the Pearl Palace garden, he would have been shocked.

The prince, dressed in his pajamas, was testing the limits of his agility, literally running around the garden freely.

'Ahahahaha!'

[You're totally excited. So exciting.]

Even under the Demon King's reprimands, Seongjin merely laughed joyfully inside.

When he first cautiously ventured into the garden, the resident knight who was guarding the door outside didn't notice Seongjin slipping onto the terrace at all. This knight was, based on aura activity, a mid-level knight at the medium stage!

'Is it working? Should I try other places?'

So, Seongjin also wandered around the servants' quarters.

Edith, who would usually swoop in like an arrow even if she sensed a slight anomaly, was now deep in sleep, completely unaware. Having

confirmed her even breaths and light snoring, Seongjin gained confidence.

'Will this work on the guards or resident knights too?'

Although Dasha had mentioned he needs to learn more skills.

Seongjin also had some know-how related to stealth from his past Hunter days, infiltrating monster nests and wreaking havoc.

Above all, a solid resolve.

'If I get caught wandering in my palace, so what? What are you going to do?'

This unshakeable resolve, stemming from his robust self-confidence, wasn't something the ambiguous belief effect Dasha pointed out could match.

And shortly after.

After verifying against a few resident knights on patrol, Seongjin was now freely running around the garden as he pleased.

'Hahaha! I feel alive!'

He must've been somewhat stressed, maintaining his prince-like demeanor all this while. Reminiscing his Hunter days after a good run felt nostalgic.

Seongjin pushed his aura to its limits, moving his body as high and as far as possible. It was a fruitful time to properly adapt to his rapidly increasing aura.

However, he soon reached the limits of his aura, now on its 5th layer.

Thud. Thump. Thud.

Filling his legs with aura for one last leap, Seongjin landed on the roof of the Pearl Palace and sat down to catch his breath and released his aura concealment. Immediately, depleted aura and scarce oxygen started to replenish swiftly in his body.

'This is better than expected? Maybe it's not too much to go outside the palace alone...'

If only he wasn't wearing these clumsy pajamas, he might've stepped out of the palace right away.

The Demon King seemed especially anxious.

[Isn't it enough that you've made this much of a fuss? Let's go back, Seongjin. It's already dawn. Kids grow well only when they sleep well.]

'...Shall I?'

Come to think of it, he had skipped meditation today because he was learning aura concealment.

If he wants to proceed with tomorrow's morning training without a hitch, it's best to go to bed now.

'Who knows when I'll get another chance.'

Fortunately, today was the day Sir Masainhad returned home.

Although he almost lived in Pearl Palace these days, he also had a decent home in the capital, with servants of his own.

If Mason had stayed in Pearl Palace, he wouldn't have been so reckless. He wasn't confident enough not to get caught by a Decalon Knight or a high-ranking knight.

'Alright, let's go all out today. It's just for today.'

[Really?!]

Seongjin, after finalizing his decision, quietly returned to his room with his aura concealment activated. He gently opened the door; the escort knight, still unaware, yawned and started to doze off.

Perfect.

'I should find some decent clothes to cover up...'

Opening the dress room, he found only flashy clothes that obviously suited a prince.

'...I should ask Dasha to find some comfortable clothes later.'

Reluctantly, Seongjin wore his sword belt with Nutcracker over his pajamas and put on boots.

[Are you going out like that?]

'Let's stop by the knights' quarters on the way. Perhaps I could borrow a coat there?'

Doing his best to move silently to avoid waking any sleeping knights, Seongjin started walking towards the knights' quarters. But he soon realized that there was no need to be so cautious.

A boisterous drinking game was taking place in the brightly lit knights' quarters.

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Bright lights and noisy chatter filled the air.

Seongjin hesitated for a moment, considering whether it was a good time to sneak in and borrow something. His hesitation didn't last long, though.

'I can't go on like this, anyway.'

Seongjin approached the barracks and spoke to the Demon King.

"Hey, can you check if either Maria or Kurt are around?"

If a high-ranking knight was present, his crude aura concealment could easily be exposed.

Fortunately, the Demon King, who had momentarily disappeared from his thoughts, promptly returned with news.

[Neither of them are in the barracks.]

"Great!"

Seongjin activated his aura concealment and swiftly snuck into the barracks.

The first floor of the knights' quarters had a large space used as a lounge, where four knights sat, drinking. Empty liquor bottles littered the floor, along with a large barrel. Seongjin quietly clicked his tongue at the sight.

Well, considering most resident knights volunteered to pay for alcohol, such a scene was to be expected on an off-duty day.

While he was wondering where to look, luckily, he spotted some old cloaks piled up near the entrance of the lounge.

Seongjin cautiously reached into the lounge, grabbed a cloak that looked relatively clean, and quickly hid again.

He was just about to make his exit when someone suddenly burst into the lounge.

Bang!

"Is Sir Calmen not here yet? Where is he?"

Trapped, Seongjin quickly hid in the opposite corridor.

Keep calm. Keep calm.

"Oh, Dame Claudia. Want to have a drink?"

"No, thanks. Where is Sir Calmen? I'm on duty with him tomorrow."

"He had a day off today. He probably hasn't been informed of the duty change yet. Want me to fill in for him?"

"Maybe you should sober up first, senior."

Claudia seemed to grumble for a moment but then joined the drinking session.

"Fine, give me a shot. I guess I'll have to fill in for him tomorrow."

"Go ahead, drink up. Worry about tomorrow when it comes."

Seongjin, confirming that the conversation had shifted back to casual chatter, put on the cloak and prepared to move cautiously.

Just then, another knight exited the lounge, walking towards the only exit of the barracks. He leaned against the outer wall and began to urinate.

Damn it. If you're going to pee, go far away!

"Please take care of our junior knights, especially since you and Sir Calmen are from the same 4th Knight Division, senior."

"Do you think I don't want to? As you know, he's been acting distant

lately."

"Distant?"

"Yes. He had issues with the 2nd Knight Division before, but now he's also standoffish with others."

"Why is that?"

"It's all because of the 3rd Prince."

"What did our prince do?"

"Wow, you too? Why is everyone so infatuated with 'our prince' these days?"

At this point, the urinating knight returned to the lounge.

However, Seongjin stayed put, leaning against the wall, carefully listening to their conversation.

"Look, isn't the atmosphere strange lately? People were trashing that 'pig' just a few days ago. And now he's suddenly a genius prince, 'our prince?'"

"That's true."

"Because of what happened back then, Calmen still can't raise his head around the 2nd Knight Division. But even those guys from the 2nd are praising the prince as a genius now. It's absurd."

"It's all Sir Kurt's fault. Despite being a 2nd Division knight himself, he quietly supports the prince."

"What's gotten into everyone's heads? We don't know when that scoundrel will start acting up again."

Then, Claudia exclaimed angrily.

"Don't talk so recklessly when you don't even know who His Highness truly is!"

"And what do you know so well? Do you know what happened

between the old Second Knight Division and the Third Prince?"

"That's..."

"If you don't know, keep your mouth shut. Although the atmosphere has changed since Sir Masain became the Commander, there was a time when people from the old Second Knight Division wouldn't even dare to pee towards the Imperial Palace."

"True. I've heard there were quite a few interesting stories."

"..."

Claudia made a disgruntled sound and began to gulp down her drink.

From the 'oohs' and 'aahs' coming from the people next to her, it seemed she was drowning her anger in alcohol.

Bang!

She slammed her glass down, her voice rising with her heightened emotions.

"Yes, I'm a newcomer, and I don't know about past events. But one thing I do know for sure: we should judge people by what we see ourselves!"

"Well, you're not wrong there."

"You seniors aren't directly involved either, just gossiping, right? The people from the Second Knight Division aren't saying anything now."

"Hey, you know as well as I do how much of a jerk that pig used to be."

"That's not the case now! He's not a pig! He's not a loser!"

"Ah, are you getting drunk already?"

"Please take a closer look at His Highness. Our Prince is subtle, deep, and mature!"

"Alright, alright, got it. Stop drinking."

For a while, the knights seemed to placate Claudia, and the topic changed.

There was some banter and mild insults, and the tense atmosphere heated up again.

It was some time after that when Seongjin left the scene.

Feeling that his limited aura was about to be depleted, Seongjin hurriedly exited the knights' lodging and released his aura concealment.

"Huu..."

As he caught his breath, Seongjin sorted out the information he had just heard.

There was a significant incident between Morres and the Second Knight Division in the past, and a knight named Calmen was involved. His relationship with the Second Knight Division remained strained.

Most of it was probably Morres's fault.

Calmen's recent bad attitude towards Seongjin is probably due to that.

[Does it bother you?]

'... A little.'

Not being bothered would be a lie.

While he was in Morres's body, he couldn't completely separate himself from Morres's past actions.

Even if it is glossed over with the excuse of him having no memory, there must be people who still have unresolved grudges.

If anything, the people surrounding Seongjin have been too kind so far.

'...Amelia really was an angel.'

[Hey, you inconsistent guy.]

Suddenly, he remembered Calmen's sarcastic retort.

—Why? Will you remember if I tell you?

I don't know what happened in the past, but the fact that he is currently working at Pearl Palace probably means he has sorted out his emotions to some extent.

Anyone who poses even a slight problem for Moress is prevented from entering the Pearl Palace by the Holy Emperor anyway.

Maybe Calmen just found it difficult to see the prince forget all his mistakes and walk around carefree.

[So, what will you do now?]

'What can I do?'

He had no intention of sorting out Morres's past wrongdoings.

Most of the issues were already being covered up anyway, and Seongjin had no obligation to bring them up.

Well, considering the circumstances, I'm willing to tolerate Calmen's slightly obnoxious behavior in the future.

Feeling the depleted aura quickly filling up, Seongjin slowly began to move.

That's when the voice of Dame Claudia, who was drunk and shouting loudly, came from afar.

"Your Highness! Regardless of what others say, I will follow you for a lifetime!"

A smile unknowingly formed at the corner of Seongjin's mouth.

Dame Claudia, did you have such special thoughts?

Great. If there's a performance review, I'll definitely take that into account.

[I thought you didn't like that Haven guy].

Ah, no, not him.

Seongjin's harvests from the knight quarters weren't only limited to the the cloak he was currently wearing on his body.

During the trivial chatter he'd heard, he learned of a little-known entrance frequently used by the knights.

Well, it's not really a hidden passageway that allows for secret entry into the imperial palace or anything like that.

It was described as a route where there are fewer inspections and the procedures are not as complicated. Even drunken knights can pass through without receiving too much scrutiny.

[You're going to sneak out using aura concealment anyway, right?]

'Well, a route with fewer guards is still worth considering.'

Thus, Seongjin moved toward the "Second East Gate" next to the greenhouse garden, as mentioned by the knights.

The walls surrounding the inner castle of Delcross Imperial Palace were high and made of luminous stone.

It looked to be a height that would be a bit burdensome for someone to climb over, but that was it.

'If a giant monster ever tried to break in, these walls would probably just collapse...'

Seongjin thought that the palace's aesthetic appearance seemed not to consider external invasions or siege situations at all. Perhaps it was built with the confidence that no one would dare to invade.

The Second East Gate was no different.

It had a thin, flamboyant single-layer iron gate, and as for the guards, there were only two imperial knights standing on either side of the door.

'So this is the "hole" they talked about. The security really is lax.'

Although he occasionally passed by guards carrying lanterns and knights from the royal guard, the frequency was not high.

Just as he confirmed that two teams of guards crossed paths and moved far away in opposite directions, Seongjin stepped back a few paces, maintaining his hidden aura. Instead of approaching the door where the two imperial knights were standing, he thought he'd just climb over the wall at a reasonable distance.

Tat.

With a few stomps on the ground for momentum, Seongjin effortlessly leapt up onto the smooth wall. He didn't even have to use much aura.

As he crouched low on the wall, taking a look at the other side,

The Demon King suddenly made a surprised noise.

["Something just passed by us, didn't it?"]

'...?'

Seongjin held his breath and extended his senses, but he didn't feel anything at all.

'Nothing's there?'

[That's strange? I'm sure something just whisked by...]

Seongjin suddenly felt a chill run down his spine.

Could it be something like a ghost? Is that it?

[Are you scared of such things even after dying once?]

No, I'm not scared. Really.

It's just that you can't punch ghosts, which is a bit inconvenient.

[Nothing's there now. What the hell was that?]

Just then, a patrol passed right below the wall Seongjin was on. He held his breath and waited until they were far enough away, then swung his body back, hung onto the wall for a moment, and then jumped down.

This is going more smoothly than expected.

He hadn't walked much further outside when he easily bypassed the outer walls of the imperial palace, which started to worry him a bit.

'Is it really okay for the palace's security to be this lax? Anyone could easily get in.'

Of course, there were two things he didn't know.

First, even as he worried, Seongjin's [Aura Concealment] skills were rapidly improving.

The difference between when he first demonstrated aura concealment in front of Dasha and now was astronomical. If she had seen him now, she would not have been able to complain about a lack of faith.

The second thing was—

The imperial palace's security wasn't simply comprised of physical manpower.

[Seongjin, there's something. It feels like it's been following us since earlier.]

Upon the Demon King's repeated warning, Seongjin, who had been carelessly moving away from the palace, stopped in his tracks.

But, no matter how carefully he scanned his surroundings, his senses picked up nothing.

[It's spiritual, so you probably won't be able to feel it. But what is it? It feels like a soul but not a complete one.]

Is it really a ghost?!

[It's circling around us. Ah, another one has appeared. They don't seem to have a hostile atmosphere, but what on earth do they want?]

'.....'

[Ah, there's another one.]

Because he could always directly feel the Demon King's emotional state, Seongjin knew that his words were all true, even if he couldn't see it with his eyes.

So things he'd never seen before since landing in this world suddenly appeared as soon as he stepped outside the royal palace?

'...Can they understand language?'

At this, the Demon King grunted for a moment and made a considerable effort before sighing.

[I don't think it's possible? I can't really read their thoughts.]

'Then try speaking to them from your end.'

At this, the Demon King cleared his throat and shouted imperiously,

[Hey, you lot! Stop circling around arrogantly and kneel before me! Receive me, the great Demon King of Gehenna, the eternal lord of terror, with a devout heart!]

'.....'

[They don't seem to understand, do they? Maybe because they're not complete souls but fragmented ones.]

Do those things even have knees to kneel with?

Anyway, according to the Demon King, there are currently a total of three small soul fragments circling around them as if on guard.

They were the size of a child's fist, like small orbs, too insignificant to be considered conscious beings.

[But they move as if they have a proper will. They don't even seem to hear my words. What's with these things?]

'Hmm.....'

While the Demon King was confused, Seongjin took a moment to organize his thoughts.

The opponents were small soul fragments, not proper ghosts.

If they can't be seen or touched, conversely, the influence they could exert would also be extremely limited, he assessed.

Isn't that existence just as insignificant as the Demon King living in my head when you think about it?

'Not a big deal.'

Furthermore, this place is near the imperial palace, where the representative of the god resides. They're probably not too dangerous.

Coming to that conclusion, Seongjin started to walk again, a bit more leisurely this time.

The road starting from the second eastern gate led to a long row of residences extending to the east of the capital. As he strolled slowly, densely packed houses filled his vision.

It was late, so there were no people around, and occasionally the distant barking of a dog echoed in the silent void.

And not long after entering the residential area,

[Oh, they're gone.]

The souls that had been doggedly following them had suddenly all disappeared.

'Good, it seems they've given up.'

Even if they were insignificant, their unknown nature had been somewhat unsettling.

But before Seongjin could take a few more steps, the Demon King suddenly exclaimed in surprise.

[Eh? Another one has appeared this time. More powerful... Huh? This one seems to understand language.]

Then he seemed to focus on something and abruptly became angry.

[What? Why are you daring to call me 'Red'? I am the great Demon King of Gehenna...!]

[What? Who's a brat? Hey, you bastard, do you really want to do this?!]

'Quiet down. Don't fight over trivial things; talk.'

Chastised by Seongjin, the Demon King grumbled to himself and then groaned.

[Ugh, for now, that guy is asking you to follow him. What will you do? Shall we go?]

'.....'

[I'm not sure how trustworthy he is, but according to him, you might have to see for yourself.]

Whether to trust him or not was another issue, but Seongjin was a bit curious.

So, following the Demon King's guidance for a while longer, Seongjin ended up meeting someone unexpected.

And there was Calmen, who had been beaten to a pulp, lying on the ground.

"Why is the man that DameClaudia was so desperately looking for here at such a late hour?"

That morning, Calmen, who was usually secretive, prepared to go out early.

Instead of his knight's uniform, he was in casual attire, armed only with a single sword.

"Man, aren't you tired? These days, everyone just lies down in their quarters on their days off. How come you're always out and about?"

"Bet he's got a girlfriend lately. Who is she? Is she pretty?"

"....."

Ignoring the light chatter of his fellow knights, Calmen briefly glanced at them before turning away without a word. They were not people he was keen on socializing with.

"Wow, that guy! What's gotten into him these days?"

"Ah, leave it. You know how the prince is these days..."

"Ah, he was from the 2nd Knight Squad, wasn't he?"

Muttering could be heard behind him, but Calmen clenched his teeth and walked on.

He headed into the city to buy various groceries and a rather good bottle of liquor.

Though the price was a bit steep for a knight's salary, it was worth it. He'd often be chastised for frivolous expenditures, but every time he visited, the bottle was always empty.

Quickening his pace, he arrived at a slum on the outskirts of the capital by mid-morning.

The atmosphere in the neighborhood, which he had not visited in nearly ten days, felt ominously tense.

Armed guards roamed the streets, and here and there, Inquisitors from the Order of Saint Marcias could be seen.

People gathered outside their homes, buzzing with chatter.

"...What's going on?"

Calmen approached the crowd to ask.

Just then, *CRASH!*

Loud sounds of breaking pottery echoed from across the street.

Inside the only small clinic in the neighborhood, guards and an Inquisitor were causing havoc.

"Are there any more patients hiding here?"

"Sir Knight! These are just patients with skin diseases, not cursed by demons!"

"Don't be absurd. The rash is an early symptom of the curse! If you keep interfering, you'll be deemed a heretic and arrested too!"

"Ah, Sir! At least spare this child! The child just has a fever, you see?"

"Ugh, quiet! Take this one away too!"

People were led away, one by one, by the guards.

Calmen was gaping at the spectacle when an old man beside him muttered,

"As you can see, the Inquisitors have come. They said they're taking all the patients with rashes to the heretic court today."

"Patients with rashes? Why all of a sudden?"

Then the old man shrugged.

"You know the curse that's been turning people gray and mad recently?"

"Ah, the Gray Plague you mean?"

"What? That's a disease, not a curse?"

The fact was already known to those who should know it, but it seemed the news hadn't yet spread in detail to this impoverished area.

But why would the heresy tribunal, which surely knows the truth, be in such a hurry to take them away?

The old man tilted his head in puzzlement before speaking.

"Anyway, weren't all those afflicted by the curse taken to the heresy tribunal? According to Inquisitor Nari today, the curse initially manifests as a rash. So now it seems they're even taking away those who merely have rashes."

"Ah, yes..."

"Anyway, they've been scouring every slum for days now. This village might just be the last on the list."

"I see."

Calmen looked at the people being led away with awkward eyes before turning away. The actions of the higher-ups were often hard to understand.

Perhaps some still believed this disease to be a curse. It seems they're capturing as many people as possible before guidelines for managing the gray plague patients are established.

Calmen quickly walked a bit more and arrived at an old shack located at the end of the slum.

"Commander, I've arrived."

He knocked twice on the door and, as usual, entered without waiting

for an answer. However, the room had an odd, indescribable smell.

"...Commander?"

Confused, Calmen scanned the dim shack and found a man wrapped in a blanket lying in a corner.

"Commander!"

He rushed over and shook the man.

"Commander, what's happened? Are you not well?"

Despite Calmen's calls, the man did not respond at all. His body was unnaturally thin and his temperature was alarmingly low.

Only the man's faintly trembling, scruffy beard indicated that he was still alive.

"I will take you to the doctor right away!"

In haste, Calmen tried to carry the man on his shoulder and run. But then, a dreadful realization hit him.

Inquisitors. They were currently arresting all gray plague patients.

"No way..."

The sunlight coming through the open door revealed the man's appearance. Rashes covered his body and his skin was turning gray in places.

A chill ran down Calmen's spine.

'...He'll die! If we go out now, he'll be taken to the heresy tribunal and executed!"

Grasping his trembling chin with one hand, Calmen racked his brain.

Think. Think about it.

For now, it was impossible to take the leader out without the Inquisitors noticing.

They had to stay hidden until the search was over, until the villagers were asleep. Then they would go to the medical center affiliated with the royal palace, where there would surely be proper guidelines for treating gray plague patients.

What happened after, he couldn't clearly remember.

He changed the man into fresh clothes, burnt the old ones, ventilated the filthy shack that clearly had no one living in for days, and haphazardly put together an unidentifiable stew with the food he brought.

So when the Inquisitors arrived with their guards, Calmen was able to greet them with a smile, pretending to eat.

"Do you live here alone?"

"No, this is the home of an old man. I came to stay for a few days during my vacation. He went downtown and will probably return tomorrow."

He avoided telling an outright lie about the house being his, considering that the villagers might be questioned for verification.

"...Hmm, is that so?"

The Inquisitor scanned the shack with his piercing eyes.

His gaze moved from the empty bed to the wardrobe, and then he gestured to the guard standing behind him.

Soon, the guard strode in, and without asking for permission, started thrusting his sword into the bed.

Finding nothing but straw, he then jabbed his sword into the wardrobe. *Shiik. Swiik*.

"If the furniture is this ruined, what am I going to tell the owner when he returns?"

Calmen lamented about the furniture, to which the Inquisitor snorted dismissively.

"Seems there's no one hiding here. Move on to the next house."

After the crowd of Inquisitors hurriedly left, Calmen, who had been standing there observing the outside for a while, quickly pushed the table aside once he deemed it safe enough. *Creaaak*.

Lifting a wooden plank from the floor revealed a small space used as a liquor cabinet.

From there, he pulled out a man who was forcibly crammed in, laid him on the messy bed, and wiped his face with a wet towel.

The man's pulse and breath were alarmingly weak, just enough to not catch the Inquisitor's attention.

"Commander, please hang in there. Just endure a little longer; I will take you to a physician."

Calmen murmured to himself as he massaged the man's stiff limbs.

Hours passed as if they were decades.

When the moonless night came,

Carefully lifting the man, Calmen finally began to escape the slum.

Initially, things seemed relatively smooth.

Calmen, a Royal Imperial Knight, was a fairly skilled Aura user, and carrying an adult man was not much of a hindrance for him.

Quickly sensing the sparse patrols of guards and Inquisitors, Calmen successfully exited the slums at a swift pace.

However, upon reaching the main road where houses were, things changed.

The patrols were more frequent, and the wide-open road offered no place to hide.

"Hey, wait there!"

Finally, a member of the Capital Guard patrol spotted Calmen and

hailed him.

Doing his best to conceal his tension, he stopped in a seemingly casual manner.

"Yes. What is it?"

"Where are you rushing off to this late, and who is that person you're carrying?"

"Ah, that's my master. He drank so much last night; I'm taking him home as he's still not sober."

Praying that the fine liquor he had doused his clothes in would do the trick, Calmen replied.

"Is that so? But why is his face so covered? Does he have a rash or something?"

The guard lifted his torch toward the man's face.

It was at that moment that Calmen realized.

"These guys, the influence of the heresy court has reached them.. I can't just play this off!"

His decision was quick.

In the blink of an eye, Calmen wrapped Aura around his lower body and darted forward.

"What! You, stop right there!"

Shrieeek.

A sharp whistle sounded, and all the Capital Guards began to chase him.

"Heuk, heuk, heuk."

His breath was running short.

Dashing through various alleys, Calmen tried his best to shake off the

guards. However, they were closing in from all sides, making it impossible to evade them all.

His flight didn't last long. Eventually, Calmen was cornered in a dead-end alley by several members of the Capital Guard, including two armed knights.

"Heuk, heuk. You! Making people go through all this trouble!"

Calmen glared at the guards as he shouted.

"I'm a knight of the Imperial Guard! If His Majesty hears of this, what do you think will happen? You think it's alright to just capture a law-abiding citizen like this?"

"Imperial Guard?"

The advancing Capital Guards hesitated upon hearing Calmen's surprising revelation.

While they couldn't fully trust him, the young man's formidable aura made them reluctant to label him an impostor.

"...Then why is someone who should know everything making this complicated for no reason?"

"It's not some random civilians we're dealing with. Those cursed by the demon need to be rounded up or dealt with today. This is an official order from above."

"Running away on your own is despicable, but if you hand over the ones cursed, you'll be let go."

Calmen clenched his teeth.

He realized that the command came from higher up and that the Capital Guards prioritized capturing the cursed above all else.

'Either apprehend or handle them.'

Should he have handed over the commander to the Inquisition and then tried to rescue him through the Imperial Palace?

No, no one who has entered there has ever come out unscathed. Moreover, in this dire situation...

He gently laid down the man on his back and gripped the sword at his waist cautiously.

Two armed knights and five guards.

It seemed improbable with his strength alone, but if he didn't break through by force, there was no other way.

The only reason Calmen hadn't drawn his sword yet was because he instinctively knew that doing so against the Capital Guards would extinguish even the smallest glimmer of hope he had left.

And at that moment.

Calmen saw a guard in the back aiming a crossbow at the man.

Without any more time to think, he lunged towards the man.

Zwiack! Thud!

The misfired bolt hit the ground and ricocheted.

"Damn, this punk finally!"

"Hey! Don't kill the Imperial knight! Get him off first!"

Hands of the approaching guards maliciously grabbed him, but Calmen bit and tore at them, stubbornly clinging to the man.

How long was he resisting? Soon, a hail of kicks and stomps descended on him.

"Get out of the way! Move it!"

"What's gonna change if you resist!"

"You gonna die with this cursed one?"

Smack! Thump! Smack!

As his consciousness started to fade amidst the violence, Calmen curled his body around the man as much as possible.

A muffled groan slipped through his tightly clenched teeth.

Please, someone!

Somebody please save the commander somehow!

And into his ears came,

"Hey, stop it right there."

A soft but oddly piercing voice resonated.

"Are you guys Capital Guards? Why are you assaulting someone on the street? If there's no proper reason, you should be ready for disciplinary action."

".....?"

"...Who is this kid?"

The guards ceased their beating and turned towards the voice.

Standing there was a boy wrapped in a large, worn-out cloak.

Above the clearly standard-issue cloak, well-maintained light blonde hair emitted a yellowish glow under the torchlight.

The boy with a somewhat fierce expression was a face Calmen knew well.

'...Prince... Morres?'

Why is he here?

The prince also seemed to recognize Calmen, widening his eyes before asking.

"Why is the man that Dame Claudia was so desperately looking for here at such a late hour?"

"....."

"Ah, so that's why you brought me here."

"What's this brat babbling about? Get lost!"

One of the guards spoke with bravado, but the prince wasn't phased.

"The ones who should get lost are you guys. Or would you rather be beaten up here for your unjust violence?"

"...What?"

The guards' faces turned grim.

"Kid, disappear while we're talking nicely! Unless you want to taste the consequence of obstructing public duties."

Two guards approached the prince, their hands on their sword hilts.

Then Crown Prince Morres subtly raised one corner of his mouth.

It was a smirk that annoyingly angered anyone who saw it.

"Was that your public duty? Seriously? From where I stand, you guys look like gangsters bullying people."

"Grr, you!"

Shrring.

Finally, one guard, who was closest to the prince, lost his temper and reached for his sword.

Calmen almost screamed out.

These idiots, that's His Highness! Don't draw it!

Do they know what will happen to them for this mistake?!

Choking back coughs from his injuries and blood pooling in his throat, he would have shouted this if he could.

Prince Morres also saw the partially drawn sword, scratched his cheek, and made a peculiar face.

"Hmm, even if I tell you who I am, you probably won't believe me. But let me warn you. Draw that sword, and you'll surely regret it."

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Not even two months had passed since Prince Morres woke up from his fever.

His appearance had changed so dramatically during that time, and he had been so secluded in Pearl Palace Palace, that not many people actually knew what this notoriously unreliable prince looked like.

Moreover, he was wearing an ill-fitted, worn-out cloak, a far cry from a royal appearance.

Even if he were to reveal his identity honestly here, it was unlikely that the capital's guards would take him seriously.

The problem was, the prince himself didn't seem keen on actively asserting his identity either.

"I've given you fair warning. Anything that happens from now on is entirely your responsibility. Now, what were you all doing here?"

As the prince took a step closer and spoke, an inexplicable force made the guards flinch and take a step back.

"Didn't we tell you? We are on official duty, so get lost while you're still ahead..."

"Shut up, those of you who were beating him. The one who got hit should answer."

After glancing dismissively at a guard who was awkwardly holding his half-drawn sword and shouting, the prince turned his gaze to Calmen.

"Can you speak?"

Calmen spat out a mixture of blood and saliva before replying, "Yes."

"Good. Then you tell me, Sir Calmen. What was going on here?"

"The capital's guards are..."

I never thought I'd be ratting to Prince Morres, but...

Though it was a terrible situation, right now the prince was the only lifeline offered to Calmen.

"The capital's guards are dragging anyone suffering from skin rashes to the heresy tribunal, under the pretext that it's a curse from the demon. I was merely trying to move a patient in critical condition to a medical center when we were obstructed by these people..."

Then, the prince's gaze moved to the man Calmen was shielding from above.

He clearly didn't recognize the man who had changed so much.

"Who is that? Is he the one with the critical condition?"

"...."

After staring at the man for a moment, the prince soon nodded his head, as if he had understood something on his own.

"I see. A patient with the gray plague. Since Lophellum's egg is still alive, we need to extract it quickly."

Then the prince leisurely walked toward Calmen.

The guards, who felt like an insurmountable wall, hesitated a bit and easily gave way as the Prince approached.

It wasn't just the strange sense of pressure emanating from the prince, but also the uneasy undertone in the conversation between the two that they sensed.

It was a surreal scene.

The prince appearing here at this critical moment, overwhelming the atmosphere with just his presence.

And so, before he knew it, Calmen found himself shouting something he would never normally say to the prince.

"Your Highness! This patient is... this man was once the captain of the Imperial Guard! Please make sure he is not taken to the heresy tribunal!"

"...."

"Please help him! Save him!"

This person should not be collapsing here like this!

At the very least, you should not, you cannot, turn your back on him!

The prince, who heard this desperate cry, calmly replied, "Alright, wait a moment."

A wave of relief washed over him.

Calmen let out a small sigh and immediately wondered why he felt so relieved.

Meanwhile, the guards who had been beating Calmen were also plunged into confusion.

Was he really an imperial knight?

But then who is the prince? And what's this about a former captain of the guards?

What is even happening right now?

Prince Morres boldly declared to them, "We're taking this patient with us. Do not interfere and step aside."

"...That's not possible. I don't know who you are, but you can't obstruct official business like this... There are orders from above to detain anyone with the rash..."

A fully-armed knight responded in a trembling voice. He seemed extremely cautious, probably sensing that the boy in front of him was

no ordinary person.

The prince simply nodded his head.

"Is that so? Then you'll need a valid reason for failing to carry out those orders."

In an instant, the prince's fist swung like a bolt of lightning.

Pbaak!

Jjejeok. A disturbing sound echoed as the knight fell to the ground, his head turned awkwardly.

His eyes rolled back, indicating he likely suffered a concussion from the sudden impact. Judging by the eerie sound, his jaw couldn't have remained intact.

Before the other officers could even take a defensive stance, the prince was already darting toward his next target—a guard with his sword half-drawn.

Bang! The prince swung his Nutcracker, which he was holding in his left hand, smashing away the guard's sword. He then drove his fist into the guard's face.

Thud! Another cracking sound, and the guard fell to the ground clutching his face. A substantial amount of blood oozed from between his fingers.

"Gah! That guy! No, that brat...!"

"Stop him! Stop him, whoever he is!"

Shiing. Clank.

The remaining guards all drew their swords simultaneously.

But in that time, the prince was already charging at another target.

Flipping his grip on the nutcracker's handle, the prince wielded his sheathed sword like a shield, blocking the guards' attacks.

Immediately after, his fist swung again.

Thud! Thud!

The sounds of his strikes were uniformly unsettling.

"What is happening..."

Calmen couldn't believe what he was seeing, even with his eyes wide open.

The prince seemed exceptionally skilled in melee combat against multiple opponents.

He blocked descending swords, aimed for the solar plexus of those attacking him from behind, deflected bolts aiming for his shoulders, and knocked down anyone who charged at him from the side.

And they all received his fist, and all of them collapsed unconscious, some part of them broken.

Before long, except for one knight, all the guards lay on the ground.

"How... How is this possible..."

The knight aimed his sword at the prince, his voice tinged with a moan.

A boy, who looked no more than a squire in terms of aura level, had knocked down six capital guards in a matter of seconds—using only his fists.

The knight himself was a seasoned aura user, beyond level 7, but he had no confidence that he could move like the young boy.

Thud thud. As the prince approached, the knight asked in a trembling voice.

"Do you think you can get away with this, whoever you are?"

"I wouldn't worry about me. Wouldn't it be better for you to faint cleanly here and take sick leave? You could avoid getting

reprimanded by your superiors."

"What...?"

"Still, isn't this quite a generous treatment compared to how you've beaten my palace's knights without any restraint?"

My palace's knights.

Before he could even consider the implications of those words, the prince spoke in a chilling tone.

"So, why don't you obediently come here and offer your head."

"....."

With a tone that suggested he would casually smash his head, the prince's eyes were so calm they seemed boring.

An aura devoid of malice.

That made it all the more eerie, and the knight felt this keenly.

"Aaahhhh!"

Letting out a scream or a battle cry, the knight slashed his sword toward the prince.

Screech!

As auras clashed, a deafening sound reverberated, making their heads throb. The knight looked wide-eyed at the scabbard that blocked his own sword.

He had imbued his sword with his finest aura; how could a squire's aura hold up? And with just a scabbard?

Screech!

Once again, the swords and the scabbard collided. Nearly equal force could be felt this time as well.

"How the hell...!"

Looking in disbelief at the scabbard in contact with his sword, the knight then noticed a faint aura coalescing around the middle of the scabbard.

And then he finally understood what the prince was doing to him.

He wasn't using aura by the book. He was simply focusing all his body's aura on the part of the scabbard that touched the sword, compensating for his relative lack of aura.

Screech! Before he had time to be surprised, a third clash occurred. In the gap, the prince thrust his elbow into the knight's side.

Clang. Of course, not much damage is done thanks to the armor.

While other knights were knocked out by a punch to the jaw, a well-armored knight like him left little room for the prince to penetrate.

But this strike introduced a new sense of crisis to the knight. The aura concentrated on the scabbard had disappeared, now swirling around the prince's right arm.

As a result, a clear dent was left on the sturdy steel armor.

'...What is this? This unconventional use of aura? How can he focus aura just anywhere?'

Confused, the knight swung his sword again towards the prince.

Internally prepared for a fourth clash, the prince, who had been stepping forward with his scabbard, suddenly twisted his body diagonally.

The knight's sword barely missed, cutting a long swath in the prince's fluttering cape.

At that moment, the prince, taking another big step closer, swung his left arm upwards.

Thwack! The pommel of the reverse grip extended and struck the tip of the knight's chin. The knight's head was thrown back, and he staggered.

And before he could regain his balance,

The prince, who had spun his body around, slapped the knight's empty neck with the back of his hand.

Thump! Darkness instantly enveloped his vision as consciousness slipped away.

Clank. Thud! Accompanied by the weight of his armor, the last knight fell with a noisy impact.

Calmen watched the entire spectacle without even being able to breathe properly.

Everything happened so quickly that he didn't have time to think.

The prince's martial prowess was so surreal.

There were rumors among the resident knights about his swordsmanship being that of a genius, but was that all there is to it? Didn't he look more skilled with his fists than with his sword!

Misinterpreting Calmen's astonished expression in some way, the prince spoke awkwardly to justify himself.

"Uh, it's okay. I didn't break his neck. I hit him without using aura."

"....."

"...I did it because we're short on time. There's no need to unnecessarily solve a situation that can be resolved through violence with crude conversation, right?"

".....?"

Before Calmen could even express his confusion, the prince swiftly approached him.

"You took quite a beating. Can you move?"

"...Yes."

"It would be difficult for you to carry the patient yourself, though."

Thud.

Before Calmen could even reply, the prince snatched the injured man from his arms and hoisted him onto his back. Despite the dirt and the unpleasant smell, Prince Morres showed no signs of discomfort.

Though still young, Prince Morres seemed to carry the weight effortlessly, perhaps due to his mastery of aura. Turning to Calmen, he spoke.

"Do you have any broken bones? If not, follow me on your own."

And without waiting for a reply, he started walking towards the main road.

Calmen stood there for a moment, staring at his retreating figure.

He couldn't quite come to terms with handing over the man he had most revered to someone he had loathed so much.

Is that really Prince Morres?

And without waiting for a reply, he started walking towards the main road.

The boy walking ahead didn't look regal at all.

His dusty, worn cloak was nothing more than a standard issue for the knight order, and what occasionally peeked out from beneath it was clearly pajamas.

But then, something was odd.

Only now did he truly feel that this man was the prince.

'No, what am I thinking...?'

Shaking his head, Calmen began to follow Prince Morres with heavy steps.

While walking towards the palace at a quick pace, the prince began to bombard Calmen with questions about the current situation.

"So, you were planning to go to the medical facility affiliated with the imperial palace?"

"Yes, I thought everything would be fine as long as we got there..."

Calmen hesitated.

Thinking about the security forces that had been deployed all over the capital under the orders of the Heresy Tribunal, he now had his doubts about whether the medical facility would really be safe.

If someone with the authority to orchestrate something of this scale was issuing commands, the Imperial Palace's medical center might not be immune to their influence either.

"Right. I also think it's best to avoid that place. By the way, what on earth is His Majesty doing amidst all this chaos?"

While speaking irreverently, the prince suddenly stopped walking and turned into an unexpected alley.

"Where are you going now...?"

"Stop asking questions and just follow me. This way is faster."

"...Huh?"

After walking for a bit, the prince once again glanced around as if measuring something, and this time started heading in the opposite direction of the Imperial Palace.

Given that such unpredictable actions had already occurred multiple times, Calmen felt too weary to question it anymore.

Suddenly, a thought crossed his mind.

'Come to think of it...'

There had been an unusually low number of encounters with security forces.

Was the prince purposefully avoiding them? Could it be?

"Yes, for now, I'm trying to avoid running into them as much as possible."

In response to Calmen's query, the prince nodded as if it were obvious.

'...So, what's your point?'

Calmen was unaware that the prince had perception levels sensitive enough to rival those of high-ranking knights.

On top of that, he didn't know that the prince had a detachable short-range navigation system inside his head.

"So if we're avoiding the Imperial medical center, where should we go?"

"Well, we have to go to a place that's out of reach of the Heresy Tribunal, don't we?"

"But if they've seized control over the Imperial medical center, we can't trust any clinics in the capital either."

"True, but I know at least one place they can never touch."

"What? Where is such a place...?"

Then the prince turned to look at Calmen, wearing a playful smile.

"The Pearl Palace."

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Following the guidance of something, whether a ghost or a spirit, Seongjin finally found Knight Calmen, who was being severely beaten while surrounded by the Capital Guard.

'...Why is he taking such a beating? He's not the type to go down so easily.'

Seongjin had always considered Calmen as someone to watch among the resident knights. He found the situation puzzling. However, he soon realized that Calmen was desperately protecting someone.

While the Capital Guard were doing their job, the situation was clearly far from normal.

Deciding to intervene, Seongjin shouted, "Hey, stop it right there."

Strangely enough, the moment Seongjin encountered Commander Calmen, the ghost disappeared from the spot. Perhaps its objective was to lead him there.

Regardless, the current situation didn't allow him to worry about the ghost anymore.

"The Capital Guard is taking all the patients with the gray plague to the Heretic Tribunal under the pretext of a 'demonic curse!'" Calmen exclaimed.

Seongjin frowned at the news.

The gray plague had already been revealed to be caused by monster eggs.

Moreover, the Tribunal had long concluded that the issue was a plague, not a curse.

A specialized 'Monster Special Task Force' was soon to be formed, and all they had to do was extract the eggs from the patients.

Who was orchestrating this, and for what purpose?

Did the Holy Emperor know about this?

What concerned him more was the condition of the patient that Calmen was protecting.

It seemed that a considerable amount of time had passed since the Lophellum's egg had parasitized the patient; the rashes had receded, and the patient's body was turning gray.

[The egg is still alive.]

The Demon King inside Seongjin hinted.

[But something's odd? I see an immense number of psychic crystals in his head. What is this? I've never seen this before.]

Seongjin's intuition whispered to him.

He must investigate this person.

This might be connected to the cause of the gray plague outbreak.

"We're going to take this patient. Don't interfere and move aside."

Seongjin firmly advised the Capital Guard to step back, and eventually they obediently laid on the floor, clearing the way.

Well, I won't deny that a bit of force was mobilized in the pursuit of efficiency.

And Calmen looked at Seongjin as if he was some kind of criminal from another era.

He had just saved him, and yet he was so ungrateful!

Taking the patient upon his back in place of the battered Calmen, Seongjin walked quickly towards the Imperial Palace.

The initial destination Calmen had intended, the medical institution affiliated with the Imperial Palace, was also deemed unsafe for some reason.

After securing the patient in Pearl (Pearl Palace), he thought he'd have to find the whereabouts of the other patients who had been taken away.

Considering what the academy students who were imprisoned by the Heresy Tribunal had gone through, it would be a relief if the patients weren't immediately killed.

'I need to inform my father about this too...'

First, he'd have to confess that he had sneaked out of the Imperial Palace.

The palace's security is likely to be further strengthened.

Dasha would probably give him an earful too.

At the very least, it would surely reach the ears of Masain, the head of security.

'... Sir Masain will be furious.'

Seongjin sighed deeply.

He did his best to avoid the Capital Guard and took a circuitous route. Fortunately, the staggering Calmen managed to follow him.

Meanwhile, the Demon King inside him didn't stop chattering about the psychic crystals filled in the patient's head.

[With this amount, channeling is absolutely impossible.]

For psychic crystals to function like Bartoshi's, they need to be of proper shape and appropriate size.

However, this patient was different.

"It's as if the entire mind has been sprinkled with glass powder."

Each piece is so insignificant that it's embarrassing to even call them crystals.

Recalling Dame Sharon's case and asking, Demon King outrightly denied the possibility.

[That's impossible. The mind crystal in that mad knight we saw during the day may be incomplete, but at least it had some form. This one can't even sense anything. It's practically like grains of sand.]

So, it's nothing more than contaminants filling the mind.

'Then what happens?'

[The brain simply breaks down, especially if there's a lot of it. With the mind this cluttered, it's even questionable if consciousness can be maintained.]

So, the cause is likely to be the Gray Plague?

He was said to have once functioned perfectly fine as a knight-captain, so this couldn't have been his original state.

It might be related to the deteriorating conditions of the minds of those suffering from the Gray Plague.

Sir Haven was discovered early and recovered without any after-effects, but it might be good to check on other patients who are further along in the disease.

Seongjin was about to ask Calmen about the patient's previous condition, but when he looked behind him, he saw the man walking with a very serious expression, as if contemplating deeply.

"Your Highness! This patient is... this man was once the captain of the Imperial Guard! Please make sure he is not taken to the heresy tribunal!"

Despite being beaten, he had still tried to protect him. His desperate pleading to save someone who generally displayed an unruly attitude also stood out.

What is the relationship between this patient and Sir Calmen?

I am also concerned that a former Imperial Knight Captain is in such a ruined state.

Thinking he might touch on an extremely sensitive subject, Seongjin decided to refrain from asking any further questions and kept his mouth shut.

When they finally reached the second east gate of the Imperial Palace, Seongjin was somewhat disheartened.

The once-empty gateway was now brightly illuminated with torches as if it were broad daylight.

Armed Imperial Guards were stationed around the gate, and occasionally one could spot knights in the uniform of the St. Aurelion Order.

And at the front of them stood Sir Masain.

'I ended up making the security manager come out at dawn, huh...'

He didn't expect to sneak back in as he did when he left, but making such a fuss was like admitting he'd really screwed up.

Did they figure out I had escaped?

But when did they find out?

How did they precisely identify the second gate?

All these thoughts were brief. Upon discovering Seongjin's group, the Imperial Guard knights rushed towards them.

One by one, they were shocked to see the young prince carrying someone, who in turn looked absolutely destitute, and that their own knights couldn't even walk due to injuries.

While handing over the patient to the knights, Seongjin saw Lord Kurt and gave him instructions.

"This person is a guest from the Pearl Palace. He's suffering from the Gray Plague, so take him directly to the Ninnias clinic in the Pearl Palace. Ask them to expedite the diagnosis."

Kurt seemed shocked but soon regained his senses and made a makeshift stretcher from knight cloaks.

In the midst of this, Calmen, who was staring at the stretcher carrying the patient, caught his eye.

That guy seems completely out of it.

"...Lay Sir Calmen down next to him as well."

Upon Seongjin's fluttering hand signal, two Imperial Guard knights came to support him.

Kurt, who was overseeing this process, took a moment to scrutinize Seongjin with a strange expression before respectfully bowing and leaving with the patient and Calmen in the direction of the Pearl Palace.

Only then could Seongjin turn towards Masain.

He had thought that upon seeing him, Masain would rush over and scold him, but surprisingly, he simply stood afar, staring silently.

Feeling uneasy due to the strange atmosphere, Seongjin hesitantly approached him and began to speak.

"Uh, umm..."

"..."

"...I'm sorry for going out on my own, Sir Masain."

Masain stared at Seongjin for a moment before taking off his cloak and placing it over Seongjin's shoulders.

He carefully adjusted the clothing to hide the tattered old cloak and pajamas.

"Um, Sir Masain..."

"There's no need for Your Highness to apologize."

At his firm response, Seongjin looked up to find Masain's face weighed down as if he were carrying all the sorrows of the world.

"I am the head of security at Pearl Palace. This incident is entirely my fault."

"Huh? I was the one who went out, so why..."

"I've had a lot of self-reflection because of recent events."

Reflection? What do you have to reflect on?

"I failed to fully trust you, imposing my own standards on Your Highness. It drove you to make the decision to act without me, forcing you into a perilous outing on this ambitious night. Isn't all this my failure?"

Is he serious right now?

Seongjin was shocked.

Wait, no, no! Stop digging yourself into a hole over a simple outing!

"I'm ashamed to have dared to offer unsolicited advice to Your Highness, especially when I couldn't even fulfill my own responsibilities."

"Um, so..."

"I should have followed Your Highness with faith, but instead, I hoped for your trust while neglecting my duties as a subject. Realizing that now, I don't even know how to face you..."

"...Uh, Sir Masain?"

"I haven't even been claiming to protect Pearl Palace for long. What face should I show you now? If only I could atone through death..."

"Stop it! I was the one who did wrong, Knight Masain!"

I won't go out without telling you again, Knight Masain!

So please, stop overthinking it! Don't dig all the way into my core!

The Demon King suddenly asked, sounding rather jittery.

[It looks like you're trying to stop that guy from going overboard, or is it just my imagination?]

* * *

As soon as Seongjin arrived at Pearl Palace, he received a summons from the Holy Emperor.

He had planned to visit anyway. If someone was arbitrarily abducting people, this was a matter that he must report to the Emperor.

After quickly freshening up, Seongjin immediately headed to the main palace.

Perhaps because it was deep into the night, the main palace was still shrouded in darkness. Only the Holy Emperor's office was brightly lit.

"Normally, the entire Imperial Guard should have been put on emergency alert. Fortunately, His Majesty sent a messenger to Pearl Palace before the situation escalated," said Masain, his face still showing traces of gloom.

The prince had disappeared abruptly. It was a situation that could have turned the whole Imperial Court upside-down. Yet the Holy Emperor had assured the people at Pearl Palace and had ordered them to greet him at the Second East Gate.

"Wait, the Second East Gate?"

"That is exactly what His Majesty said."

The one who had specified the Second East Gate was the Holy Emperor.

That gentleman, just how long has he known?

"...How did he know I was missing?"

He was proud that he had left without leaving a trace, so he was extremely curious about how he was discovered.

However, the answer he got from Masain was unexpected.

"Your personal maidservant came to your room saying something was off."

Edith?

"Yes. She said she didn't hear your voice. Apparently, you usually mumble in your sleep around the same time."

".....?"

This was news to him.

I have such a habit?

Hey, Demon King? Do you know anything?

[.....]

The Demon King remained silent.

Usually, when he visited the main palace, he would keep his mouth shut so as not to offend the Emperor. But this time, Seongjin received a strange feeling of discomfort from the Demon King.

Something is suspicious about him.

Before he could ponder further, they arrived at the office.

"His Majesty is waiting for you, Your Highness."

Led by Louis, Seongjin entered the office.

He had been prepared to be scolded for causing a major incident, but the Holy Emperor's face was calmer than expected.

"You've arrived."

"...Yes."

He looked at Seongjin with a serene face and made a silent gesture.

".....?"

Not understanding the gesture, Seongjin approached. The Emperor's hand slowly moved towards his forehead.

Worried he was about to get a knuckle-rap, Seongjin tensed up. But suddenly, a bright streak of light burst from the Emperor's hand touching his forehead, showering down over his head.

It was then that Seongjin realized he had been feeling minor pains all over his body.

"The flow of your aura is disturbed. You must have used it recklessly in a short period."

Come to think of it, I might've used the Aura recklessly while fighting the Capital Guard.

The thought that this would be evident to him isn't exactly new anymore.

Having loosened his shoulders, Seongjin was met with the Emperor's nod.

"Sit."

He doesn't seem interested in reprimanding me for leaving without permission.

Feeling thus assured, Seongjin took the seat across and cut straight to the chase.

"Someone has been dragging all the Gray Plague patients to the heretic court. They've even nabbed people with simple skin conditions, claiming them to be the early stages of the curse. Are you aware of this?"

"....."

The Holy Emperor remained silent, but Seongjin could read the answer.

"So why then..."

He felt as if his questions were piling up, each stuck in his throat.

In fact, there was something he'd wanted to ask the Emperor for a while.

—Did Father know the true nature of the Gray Plague from the very beginning?

This question had lingered ever since Dasha reported about the Monster Special Task Force.

The evidence linking the Gray Plague and the new disease seemed too flimsy. The initial rashes and the later stages when the entire body turns gray. The parasitic eggs extracted from early patients and the stone fragments found on deceased bodies.

Shouldn't observing the transition from the former to the latter come first to establish their correlation?

Yet the Holy Emperor, as if waiting for it, had promptly classified the two as the same disease and ordered the formation of a new division. And he hadn't stopped Seongjin from joining under the pretext of consultation.

It was clear that he had some understanding of how well Seongjin knew about the monsters, and how easily he could detect the parasitic eggs by using the Demon King.

In any case, Seongjin was contemplating that the Holy Emperor did intend to solve the Gray Plague.

"The primary goal of the [Monster Special Task Force] was to resolve the Gray Plague. But someone's unilateral actions contradict that purpose, don't they? Why let them continue?"

"....."

After a moment of silence,

"...The Monster Special Task Force is,"

The Emperor finally spoke, his words cryptic.

"A small cog that will eventually support one pillar of Delcross, Morres."

Seongjin blinked in confusion.

Then he vaguely recalled a conversation he had with the Emperor a long time ago.

—A dynasty is like a finely-tuned clockwork mechanism.

Wait, when did we talk about that?

As he felt bewildered, the Holy Emperor continued.

"And the one now moving the Capital Guard on his own initiative is no different."

"...A part of that finely-tuned clockwork?"

Skeptically asking, Seongjin was met with a nod from the Emperor's impassive face.

"Yes, a delicate mechanism that will break if tampered with recklessly."

"....."

"Do you find the current situation unjust?"

As Seongjin met the Holy Emperor's gaze with his downcast eyes, the corners of the latter's lips seemed to rise ever so slightly.

"Do as you wish. If you want to correct that injustice, then so it shall be."

"Though it may seem now like an institution wielding unchecked power, the Heresy Tribunal originally began as a judiciary organ within the Holy Council. Though it has now become the highest authority overseeing both the Orthodox Church and the Theological Academy, the Holy Council was originally just one of the minor decision-making bodies within the Orthodox Church."

The Holy Council and the Heresy Tribunal, once minor divisions within the Orthodox Church, had grown into major organizations that even overshadowed the Orthodox Church itself. The Holy Emperor began to explain how these bodies had become independent and grown in power.

"There are still some loopholes within the Orthodox Church that allow it to exert direct influence on the Heresy Tribunal, even if they've become largely nominal. These are remnants of the old command structure."

For example, the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church can invoke something called [Temporary Emergency Authority], he explained.

When a grave issue threatens the empire's stability, this grants the authority to directly mobilize the capital's guard and the Heresy Tribunal.

"So, the ones capturing people right now aren't the Heresy Tribunal but someone within the Orthodox Church."

It would either be someone who has influence over the Archbishop or the Archbishop himself.

"The authority has its limits. It can't infringe on the Heresy Tribunal's original tasks, and upon invoking this authority, the approval of the Holy Council must be sought within three days."

Of course, the Heresy Tribunal could also request that this be rejected. However, this could only happen once the Holy Council begins its review. In the meantime, the Orthodox Church can mobilize the capital's guards and inquisitors who are between assignments as they see fit. The Heresy Tribunal can only sit on their hands while waiting for the review to begin.

"Even if the Inquisitors are told to round up the Grey Plague patients, actually accommodating them within the Heresy Tribunal is another issue. This will undoubtedly disrupt their operations."

"So, the Heresy Tribunal won't actually detain them? Then where do all these people go?"

"I suspect they are temporarily under the management of the capital's guard for now."

Seongjin frowned.

What does that mean?

Collecting people who won't even be accepted by the Heresy Tribunal? It would all be pointless if the review ends up rejected.

Seeming to sense what he was thinking, the Holy Emperor spoke casually, "Whoever instigated this surely knows this. They likely consider it a success if they can process about half of the plague patients."

"Half?"

"Yes. The rationale for invoking Temporary Emergency Authority and for requesting its cancellation are both important. If the Orthodox Church provides a solid rationale, the Holy Council will usually try to mediate instead of outright rejecting it. There may be some friction, but the Heresy Tribunal will eventually end up accommodating about half of the people brought in."

Seongjin tapped the armrests of his chair thoughtfully. Then it dawned on him.

"So, the deadline for bringing everyone in is today, which means

today is the last of the three days. Tomorrow, the Orthodox Church will file for review, and the Heresy Tribunal will immediately request a cancellation."

"..."

"If anyone were to intervene, it would be best to do it before the review cancellation is requested and mediation by the Holy Council begins; specifically when there's a period of vague authority and responsibility."

"You catch on quickly, that's good."

At the Holy Emperor's casual reply, Seongjin looked at him intently and asked.

"May I take the fact that you (father) are explaining the structure of this winding mechanism to me to mean that you're also not particularly fond of this situation?"

"..."

"...So it's alright for me to do as I please, but if you interfere directly, something might falter?"

"..."

Though he received no answer, Seongjin felt satisfied. When the old man keeps his mouth shut, it usually means 'yes'.

"Go and receive cooperation documents from the administrative office tomorrow morning. Instruct Dorian to do so."

It was a royal command.

Seongjin got up, bowed slightly to the Holy Emperor, and left the study.

"The young Prince Morress is growing increasingly brilliant."

Louis, who had come late with tea, remarked somewhat regretfully. Serving the Holy Emperor, who enjoyed the aroma of tea but rarely

drank it, made him secretly look forward to serving the prince, who would appreciate the drink.

"He was always an extraordinary child. The problem is that he applies that extraordinary talent only to what he wants to."

The Holy Emperor took a new cup of tea and replied.

Louis was a bit surprised because the young emperor, who rarely shows emotion, had a faint smile on his face.

"You seem pleased."

"Indeed. I can't help but be pleased. Whether it was taking action for Amelia a while back or volunteering to do something for the plague patients today, it must mean that Morres has developed some affection for Delcross."

Louis inwardly found it odd.

Isn't it only natural for the prince of Delcross to have affection for Delcross?

Reading into the Chief Chamberlain's puzzlement, the Holy Emperor gave a bitter smile.

"None of those things are obvious to that child, Louis."

The Capital Guards recently had an uneasy cohabitation with the 7th Knight Division.

The 6th Knight Division, with whom they had been working in the Imperial City, was divided and dispatched to the east and south. They now had to coordinate with the newly formed 7th Knight Division from the start.

Unlike the 6th Knight Division, which had helped occasionally, the 7th Knight Division was established with the sole purpose of defending the Imperial City. They began to interfere in the operations of the Capital Guards.

Naturally, constant discord arose as both sides had overlapping responsibilities and debated whose authority should take precedence.

And so the war between the two departments began to heat up, primarily through official correspondence requesting cooperation.

It was a typical morning.

Julia Meyer, the Lieutenant of the 7th Knight Division, was grinding her teeth while reading several documents that had flown in the wee hours of the morning.

"Damn these cooperation memos..."

As Julia muttered, the young knight accompanying her looked startled. Her strange behavior was unlike the usually disciplined and elegant senior.

The cooperation memos seemed to particularly target Julia Meyer. Not only because she was the Lieutenant responsible for the operations but also because she was the primary target of the Captain of the Capital Guards.

She was Julia Meyer, the only granddaughter of Cardinal Meyer, and a prodigy from her academy days in swordsmanship and academics.

By the end of her first year, she had caught the eye of the continent's top knight, Balthazar, becoming his immediate disciple. Her exceptional capabilities were so highly valued that she was appointed as Lieutenant not long after graduating from the academy.

Despite her excellent work ethic and respectable disposition, even she was getting exhausted by the pointless cooperation memos.

"They're asking us to give up our training ground for prisoner accommodation. Can you believe these cooperation memos?"

The knight reading the memos frowned.

"For prisoner accommodations, for the deployment of knights for prisoner management, for the supply of food for prisoners..."

"Why not use the perfectly good jail in the Capital Guard..."

"That's exactly my point. The creativity of the Captain of the Guard is shining brighter every day."

However, upon arriving at the Capital Guards, they couldn't deny that the cooperation memos were issued out of genuine need.

The prison of the Capital Guard was overflowing, and people with shabby appearances had occupied even the courtyard. An unpleasant smell filled the air.

"What is this..."

As they looked around, an armed knight from the Capital Guard and a junior knight from the 7th Knight Division were arguing.

"Hand these people over now!"

"No, I won't just send them off to the training ground without a proper list of their identities."

"I've already explained that a cooperation memo was sent to the person in charge!"

"Then provide a list of their identities. I'll issue a cooperation memo for the provision of data!"

"Hey, you!"

Just as she was seriously contemplating whether to barge into the Captain of the Capital Guards, someone tapped Julia on the shoulder.

"Are you Julia Meyer, the Lieutenant of the 7th Knight Division? It's an honor to meet someone so famous."

He was a cheerful, red-haired paladin.

"And you are?"

"Yes, I am Inquisitor Valerie. Lieutenant Julia, would you mind taking a look at this first?"

As Valerie handed her a sheet of paper, Julia couldn't help but frown. She was now irritated by documents from other departments.

"What is this?"

"[Monster Special Task Force] sends a cooperative official document to the 7th Knight Division."

"Monster Special Task Force?"

I had briefly heard rumors about the creation of some strange department, but as far as I knew, it wasn't yet an official division.

Thinking this, Julia skimmed through the documents and suddenly widened her eyes in surprise. She found a prominently stamped seal. However, the content of the document was rather plain.

—We seek your department's active cooperation.

".....?"

So, what are they asking us to cooperate with?

While she was puzzled, she saw someone approach the city guards to hand them a document as well. From their dark knight uniforms, it appeared they were an Exorcist.

An Inquisitor and an Exorcist; it was an odd combination.

During this, Inquisitor Valerie began to explain brightly,

"Starting this morning, the jurisdiction for deciding the treatment of these people has been transferred from the church as the Holy Council's approval process has begun. Since the Heresy Tribunal just formally filed for a review rejection, it's not even their jurisdiction yet. So, if any commands come down from either side regarding our department's work from now on, please know it would be a blatant abuse of power."

"But then, what does this phrase 'active cooperation' mean....."

"Yes. It's a request to 'actively do nothing.' We, the Monster Special

Task Force, will handle everything!"

At the Inquisitor's cheerful expression, Julia was at a loss for words.

While this was happening, another group of oddly matched people began to stream into the city guard's courtyard.

"I see they've gathered quite an uncouth bunch. Even if it's an order from above, one should move with some discretion. If they've been brought here, then detain them properly. What's all this pointless fuss?"

First, a boy with an imposing demeanor, dressed in elegant clothes.

"Your Highness! These people are in a dire situation, but is there a need for you to personally intervene in matters involving the Heresy Tribunal? You could just leave it to your subordinates....."

"This is a time-sensitive matter, Sir Masain. Things will move faster if I'm there."

"Really? Why is that so?"

Following behind the boy, almost awkwardly given his large build, was a knight.

"Am I your personal secretary now? They keep summoning me for all sorts of matters."

"Didn't Dame Katrina specifically say to help me out? Keep it up, and I'll bite you."

"Ugh...!"

Next to them, a towering, glasses-wearing Paladin kept muttering.

"Your Highness has directly requested assistance from the Lyora Plague Association; it's an honor. What can I assist you with? Shall we extract blood from these people?"

"No, physician Jibril. I just need the credibility of the Lyora Plague Association. If the Holy Council says anything later, just testify that

we sorted the patients through appropriate medical procedures."

"But I'm a plague doctor! I think we should actively treat the patients now that we are here!"

"Then at least disinfect the area by spraying some fragrance."

"Got it! Leave it to me!"

In a protective suit, a doctor from Lyora's Plague Association wielded a large sprayer.

"...What are these people doing?"

Muttering under his breath, one of the junior knights observed the peculiar group, and Julia scrutinized the boy at the center of this chaos.

His strong gaze reminded her of Queen Elizabeth, and the title 'Your Highness' made it clear.

"Prince Morres....."

"Yes? That chubby idiot?"

Shocked by the junior knight's outcry, Julia sternly corrected him,

"Watch your language. How dare you speak disrespectfully of a member of the imperial family!"

"I-I apologize!"

Meanwhile, a few members of the imperial guard arrived to set up tables and chairs.

"I apologize for burdening you with such menial tasks during your escort mission, Sir Haven."

"No worries, Your Highness! I've already dedicated myself to you! I will faithfully execute any command you give!"

"Don't say you've 'dedicated yourself' so casually."

"What? How could you say that's 'casual'? Isn't that a bit harsh?"

Another imperial guard pulled a large cart into the area.

"I've gathered all the rye bread from nearby, Your Highness!"

"Good job, Dame Claudia. Make sure to record all the expenses. We'll be billing the church later."

"Of course, Your Highness! Hehe, can I have one too?"

"....."

She could not even begin to guess what they were planning to do.

Amidst the city guard and 7th Knight Division who had surrounded the courtyard to watch, Prince Morres, who had been directing the entire situation, finally stepped forward.

He took a sweeping look over the commoners who filled the courtyard.

Some people had severe rashes or their whole bodies had turned gray, and they had collapsed on the ground as if unconscious. But more than half were patients with minor boils, simple skin diseases, or fevers.

All of them were anxiously eyeing the rye bread piled on the cart, swallowing their saliva with desperate looks.

Then Prince Morres spoke to them.

Though not amplified by aura, his voice strangely resounded clearly in their ears.

"From now on, for a short time, our monster-specialized unit will take charge of your ailments! Those suffering from the Gray Plague will receive treatment, and those who have been brought here by mistake will be safely returned, so rest assured!"

At that, the crowd's murmurs grew louder.

They had thought they would be imprisoned by the Inquisition and tortured to death.

"First, let those who can move come quickly to this table."

However, the people hesitated, only gauging the reactions of the guards, not daring to step forward.

Just yesterday, those who had insisted they didn't have the plague were severely beaten. What if they were foolish enough to step forward and get hit by the guards again?

But the situation changed as the prince continued his words.

"It seems like there's not enough rye bread, so it will be first-come, first-served..."

In an instant, the commoners surged forward, rushing towards the front. The ferocious glint in their eyes, aimed at the food, made even the guards who had brought them here flinch.

The young prince, far from being flustered, shouted at the people with an overwhelming presence.

"Form a line!"

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The line was fairly long, but their assessment did not take much time.

From the get-go, those affected by the Gray Plague usually experienced a decrease in consciousness first. There were none who were infected with the larvae of *Lophellum* and could still walk on two legs.

About half of the people who had filled the prison and courtyard of the capital guard were quickly assessed as they passed by the table.

First Phase: Jibril, the plague doctor from Lyora.

Dressed in almost perfect protective gear, she briefly scanned the patients. If she determined they didn't have the Gray Plague, she immediately sprayed rose-scented perfume.

"Before standing before His Highness, thoroughly remove the foul smell to prevent disease! Foul smells are the root of all diseases!"

Damn charlatan Lyora plague doctor!

Second Phase: Trustworthy fighting dog Francis.

While incessantly coughing due to the strong perfume, he double-checked whether he felt the aura of demons from the patients passing by.

"You promised, Your Highness! To the commander, *cough*! Please properly convey my, *cough* efforts... *choke*!"

You good-for-nothing, only brag after you've done your job.

Third Phase: The bastard Demon King—along with Lee Seongjin.

The Demon King scrutinized the chests and heads of the people

passing by and whispered to Seongjin.

[No Lophellum larvae, no inflammation. Confirmation complete. Hehehe.]

Feeling the pride emanating from him was rather uncomfortable.

Fourth Phase: Treasurer Masain.

He handed a few copper coins to the people who had been assessed and emphasized as he uncomfortably looked them in the eye.

"The one who saved your lives today is Prince Morres! Live without ever forgetting to be grateful. Understood?"

...Sir Masain, please stop! You're making me want to die of embarrassment!

And finally, they received a loaf of rye bread and an apple from Sir Haven and Dame Claudia before leaving the capital guard.

With a puzzled expression, she was wondering whether this was a dream or reality.

After a number of people had queued and been processed, Dame Claudia quietly murmured.

"Is giving just a few copper coins really enough? That'll barely cover a meal on their way home."

"It's appropriate," Seongjin replied.

"If you can take these people to their homes and watch over them until they spend all the money, then more can be given. But..."

Unneeded favors can sometimes be poison to those who cannot handle it. It's unfortunate, but that's the limit.

"...Ah!"

Dame Claudia seemed to have an epiphany and looked at Seongjin with twinkling eyes.

She looks at me like that every time she's hungry. Didn't she sneakily eat a loaf of rye bread earlier?

Just when there were only a few people left in line, a burly middle-aged man rushed out from the building of the capital guard.

He was the tardy captain of the capital guard who just heard about the situation.

"What is, what is all this nonsense?! Why are you releasing all the prisoners?!"

Then, Dame Sharon, who had been monitoring the capital guard, stepped forward to intercept him.

"I am under the impression that I delivered an official document stamped with the seal for cooperation. Didn't you receive it?"

"I did, but what do you mean by actively cooperating... furthermore, releasing the prisoners on your own! These people were arrested under orders from higher-ups! No one should arbitrarily...!"

"Hehe. If you don't understand, let me explain again. Once the approval review by the Holy Council begins, the temporary emergency measures are deemed to be over. And the Heresy Tribunal has also withdrawn its hand by requesting a review rejection. So, no side has the right to decide their fate now. Hehe."

"What kind of nonsense is this! Even if so, these people aren't immediately under the jurisdiction of the Monster Special Task Force! At least until the Holy Council decides their policy, they should naturally be managed by the capital guard!"

The captain was right. Technically, the Monster Special Task Force was the third party meddling out of the blue.

"Isn't it also not within the jurisdiction of the capital guard?"

"We must follow the temporary emergency measures..."

"But those measures are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church."

"But ultimately, they should be imprisoned by the Heresy Tribunal..."

"Unfortunately, they're not within their jurisdiction right now either. Then why are you interfering with the [official duties] of the Monster Special Task Force?"

"Krrrgh...!"

The captain's face was losing its patience as he listened to Sharon's thin, leisurely voice.

In the meantime, the last person hastily left the capital guard, leaving only dozens of unconscious patients in the courtyard.

Thud. The captain, drained of strength, slumped down on the spot.

'Is it time to console him?'

Seongjin approached the captain.

"You've always worked hard defending the capital. Because we had our own [official duties] that we were desperate for, we couldn't ask for your cooperation in advance. I apologize."

"...Prince Morres."

The guard captain stood up brusquely, his face visibly frustrated, and began to argue.

"Your Highness! This is a difficult situation for us when you suddenly push us like this! Have you even considered our position of having to bring back all those people we've just released?"

"That's not possible anymore. The temporary emergency measures have already ended. From now on, if innocent citizens are harmed, I will deem it as an arbitrary decision on your part and take appropriate measures."

"Arbitrary decision? The orders clearly stated to arrest even those showing rashes!"

"Exactly, so why do you think you were told to arrest those with

rashes?"

"That's obviously because rashes are the initial symptoms of the curse...!"

"Exactly, the key point is that the rashes are initial symptoms of the Gray Plague."

Seongjin interrupted the guard captain's words and brought forward Jibril Seymour, who was standing behind him.

Jibril Seymour.

She was the same plague doctor who had once sprayed rose perfume on Seongjin and his party in court. She had been hastily invited when a familiar face was spotted during a visit to the Lyora Plague Association's office.

Although she was clearly a charlatan, she was heavily armed in a hazmat suit and looked quite like a specialist.

"So, we sought advice from the Lyora Plague Association. As you know, they are a scholarly faction that has been recognized by the Holy Council for their expertise. To not trust them is akin to not acknowledging the authority of the Holy Council itself."

The guard captain glared at Seongjin with a scowling face.

Hey, don't get mad.

Since we dismissed the people who are under review by the Holy Council, don't you need an excuse to tell the Council later?

"Also, thankfully, the deputy commander of the St. Aurelion Knight Order has personally stepped in."

Seongjin pointed to a grumpy-looking knight who was frowning in the back.

"Isn't a paladin who serves under His Holiness, the Holy Emperor is the most reliable person to detect the curse of the devil. He was the one who first discovered the outbreak in the tribunal not long ago. In

the past, he was able to save the life of a knight who had contracted the Gray Plague. It was all thanks to Sir Francis."

The guard captain then tugged at his mustache and looked uncomfortable.

"Your Highness. The capital guards are merely following orders. Isn't it the responsibility of the Heresy Tribunal to determine whether it is a curse or not? You're ignoring all proper procedures!"

"Is that so? You may not have heard, but the Heresy Tribunal has already concluded that the Gray Plague is not associated with the devil. If you still unjustly detain innocent people and something happens to them, do you think the Heresy Tribunal will take responsibility? In the end, all the blame will fall on the inflexible capital guards."

"..."

"By the way, it's going to take some time for the Holy Council to mediate. What was your plan for managing all those people in the meantime? Would there even be enough food for them?"

People from the slums who can't even get proper treatment anyway. Even if they hadn't been brought here, they would have died in the slums, so the intention was merely to detain them loosely. However, the captain of the guard couldn't bring himself to say that outright.

"...We've also been considering various measures. We've sent several official documents asking for cooperation to the 7th Knights Division..."

"In that case, there's no need to send more official documents now that all problems have been solved. It's a good thing, isn't it? Just manage the remaining prisoners well."

"....."

The boy's face, which sneaked a sly grin while responding to every little thing, was annoyingly irritable.

The captain of the guard's eyes narrowed slightly as he looked at

Seongjin.

"Speaking of which, I had something else I wanted to ask you, Your Highness. Last night, some of the capital guards were seriously injured while on duty. What are your thoughts on this disgraceful event happening within the Empire where His Holiness's law exists?"

"Oh? Did something like that happen? I hope the injured guards get the treatment they need. Ah, speaking of which..."

Seongjin frowned as he continued.

"Last night, the knight who was escorting my [guest] from Pearl Palace was also severely assaulted on the road. An assault on an Imperial [guest] and a group attack on an Imperial Knight, even drawing a sword on a member of the Imperial family who tried to stop them. How do you propose we deal with such rampant incidents within the Empire, where the law still exists?"

"..."

"Plotting to assassinate the prince after undermining the imperial family, they're truly a nefarious group. I'm really curious to know under whose orders they were operating."

"Uh...."

"One thing, I'm too busy with [official duties] to pay attention to this. So, I plan to delegate all investigations entirely to the capital guard. Can you handle it quietly, without any fuss?"

"...We will devote our utmost effort, Your Highness."

The guard captain, with a drained expression, swallowed his saliva and retreated.

[Didn't you say you'd appease them? Why are you threatening?]

"Threatening without even raising a fist? Considering the situation, that was quite a mild way of appeasing them.'

[...]

The real issue starts now.

Everyone lying here is suffering from the grey plague. From now on, I have to decide who to save.

In the past three days, almost 150 people were roughly dragged in by the capital guards.

About half of them, those who could still move, had already left this place.

Seongjin scanned the courtyard and prison cells, quickly surveying those who were lying down. He then selected around ten people who were unconscious due to illnesses other than the grey plague.

After having Jibril and Francis check on each of them, he sent them to the Imperial Medical Center. Now, only those suffering from the grey plague remained within the capital guards.

"...Will you extract the eggs from all of these people? Time is running out.."

Seeing still around 50 people remaining, Masain asked with a worried look.

Seongjin provided a clear criterion.

"Tell the guards to give them water. Exclude those who can't swallow."

Soon after, the guards of the capital, each carrying a bowl of water, began to pour water into the mouths of the prisoners one by one.

While Seongjin was walking around inside and outside the prison giving various orders, the guards were somewhat flustered but were following his instructions.

Since the entire monster-specialized unit was operating smoothly under his command, naturally everyone recognized this young boy as the ultimate authority. Even the captain of the guard simply watched as the prince wandered around issuing orders.

Moreover, although he didn't assert his status or authority, his words carried an inexplicable weight. Nobody felt like opposing him.

Thus, another ten or so people who could barely swallow water were selected. Now, only those truly in the late and middle stages of the Gray Plague remained in the prison.

"Take those we've filtered out to the medical chamber and begin the extraction process."

After giving that command, Seongjin turned away without hesitation.

Those already advanced in the Gray Plague stages appeared to have no hope of recovery.

Their brains were filled with inflammatory crystals, and the Demon King had confirmed that their brains were completely damaged. Even at a glance, their bodies had hardened like wooden logs; they were barely breathing.

Whether that was a reversible change was another issue. Either way, those who couldn't even drink water had no chance of survival, especially since intravenous nutrition wasn't an option with the current medical technology.

In that case, handing them over to both the Heresy Tribunal and the Orthodox Church would be beneficial for everyone.

It might seem callous, but Seongjin thought it was the best course of action.

'From the Heresy Tribunal's point of view, they may not want these people, but if another department takes them away, that could hurt their pride. However, if I simply reduce the numbers a bit, they are more likely to accept.'

The Orthodox Church was no different.

If they smuggled out all the prisoners, the church's credibility would be diminished, and the desperate Orthodox Church might again invoke emergency measures.

However, if a significant number of confirmed Grey Plague patients were left behind, the likelihood of quietly waiting for the evaluation to end would increase.

If the initial aim was about half of the total performance from the beginning, 'then I should be satisfied with just about a quarter of that half.'

While Seongjin was lost in various thoughts, Masain was engrossed in a strange sentiment as he studied Seongjin's face.

He had cautiously expressed his dissenting opinions since Seongjin moved the Monster Special Task Force in the morning.

"If Your Highness is concerned about the fate of the falsely arrested imperial citizens, it would be appropriate to lean toward rejecting the deliberation by exerting pressure on the council now. If it's rejected, everyone will be released. Otherwise, you risk making both the Orthodox Church and the heresy tribunal your enemies."

"But then, those who were wrongly implicated would suffer, and the early-stage Grey Plague patients would miss their treatment window, wouldn't they?"

"Even so, I disagree. If Your Highness intervenes and personally decides the life and death of these innocent citizens, there will inevitably be those who later shift the blame onto you, exploiting their deaths. Moreover, there will be many who question your judgment and pour criticism on your qualifications..."

"Sir Masain."

Having grown up watching his father fight bloody battles of justification with brothers and sisters, the activities of Seongjin appeared to Masain as perilous endeavors that could jeopardize his own standing.

Yet, the young prince was surprisingly resolute.

"Matters that will happen later can be dealt with later. For now, let's focus only on how many people we can save."

"... "

The young prince, who seemed to be brimming with a commitment to help the citizens at great risk, was now ruthlessly dividing those who would live from those who would die. That demeanor was unnervingly cold.

Masain felt that this young prince seemed exceedingly unfamiliar yet, on the other hand, oddly familiar, making him inadvertently shake his head in disbelief.

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Not even two hours had passed since the Monster Special Task Force made an unannounced attack on the Capital Guard. The situation had already been completely resolved.

Those who were wrongfully taken away due to skin diseases and other rashes left the Capital Guard with somewhat satisfied expressions after receiving food and money. No trace of resentment was visible on their faces. They could have been dragged to the Heresy Tribunal and possibly tortured to death, but as things ended well, everything seemed like an unexpected turn of events.

Other patients with serious illnesses were transferred to the palace's medical institution to receive treatment. These were people who, under normal circumstances, would have never stepped foot in a medical institution and would have died at home in the slums. Now, they had the chance to receive proper treatment.

Even some early-stage patients of the "Grey Plague" were sent to the royal physicians for diagnosis and treatment.

The remaining patients were those who seemed beyond recovery. The number had been reduced so precisely that there was no further need for emergency measures from the Orthodox Church, yet they could still be managed by the Capital Guard.

Julia Meyer, who had been monitoring the situation in real-time, couldn't help but click her tongue internally.

Honestly, she couldn't guarantee that things would have been resolved this smoothly even if she had stepped in.

"Your Highness' decisiveness is truly impressive, isn't it?" The red-haired Inquisitor standing next to her grinned slightly.

"I didn't expect His Highness to barge into the Capital Guard since early morning. Initially, he was only summoned for advice, but soon enough, the entire department was operating under His Highness' commands."

"Right. It seems we no longer need the cooperation document that arrived at dawn."

Julia handed over the documents she had been holding to a junior knight.

"For now, our 7th Knight Division will fully cooperate with the Monster Special Task Force. But tell me, Sir Valerie, are you okay with this? Isn't this crossing the line as an Inquisitor and going against the Heresy Tribunal?"

"Well, I'm a member of the Monster Special Task Force. Plus, the Heresy Tribunal has already rejected the case for review. Maybe our seniors are secretly relieved that the burden has been reduced?"

Valerie glanced briefly at the patients being transferred into the guard's prison.

"Your Highness has made a big decision. In some ways, aren't these people the most desperate citizens of the Empire? If he hadn't intervened at all, he would certainly face criticism for neglecting the needy later on."

"Even though it was the Orthodox Church that initially commanded them to be brought in?"

"Yes, they probably planned to leave everything to the Heresy Tribunal after consulting the church. Who would dare to object to the judgment of the Heresy Tribunal?"

"I see," Julia responded briefly and nodded her head.

"God commands us to love his people as we love our own children. Don't you think His Highness is being overly pragmatic as a member of the Imperial Family?"

"I am a soldier of Delcross before I am a member of the Capital Guard

responsible for protecting the citizens. Even the lives of healthy people sometimes need to be strategically sacrificed. I have no intention of blaming His Highness for not clinging desperately to those with no hope."

"I see. It's a wicked choice as a prince."

"But it's the most efficient choice as a soldier, blocking the possibility of reimplementing temporary emergency measures." Julia then turned her head towards Valerie. Her unique purple eyes examined his face with a serious gaze. "I can tell that you also think His Highness didn't make the wrong choice. Stop beating around the bush and tell me directly, Sir Valerie. Do you feel any guilt for contributing to determining the fate of these innocent people?"

At that, Valerie shrugged his shoulders.

"No, it's not like that. I was just curious to see how others would think. When I look at Your Highness, there are times when it feels peculiar."

"Peculiar?"

"Yes. Didn't Dame Julia just mention it? That as a soldier, it's the most efficient choice."

"....."

"What's fascinating is that sometimes he feels less like a prince who has grown up splendidly in the palace, and more like a seasoned soldier from the southern frontlines."

"Sir Valerie!"

Just then, a bright voice called him from the other side.

Prince Morres was cheerfully waving his hand towards them.

"The Orthodox Church has dispatched the Knights of St. Bastian. Let's get out of here before we run into them!"

Hahaha.

Valerie let out a hearty laugh and gave Julia a mischievous glance.

"Well then, we shall execute a strategic retreat, Dame Julia. Thank you for your proactive collaboration so far."

And the red-haired Inquisitor bounded towards the prince with a jovial stride.

"We must hurry, Your Highness! The Bastian folks are a bit dense. Running into them will undoubtedly be tiresome."

"Really? Even if for the Knights of St. Marcias?"

"What, you say that when I'm standing right here? St. Marcias and St. Bastian have been notoriously incompatible. The seniors have always complained that they can't communicate."

"Shouldn't we also consider the stance of the Knights of St. Bastian? Perhaps both sides dislike each other for the same reason?"

"Hahaha! I can't deny the possibility."

They chatted back and forth as they quickly moved away, followed in a line by the commander of the imperial guard, an inquisitor, and the palace knights along with plague doctors.

It was a strange combination, yet oddly fitting.

Julia, who had been watching them for a moment, soon led her junior knights away from the scene. She wholeheartedly agreed with Valerie that encountering the Knights of St. Bastian would be tiresome.

* * *

St. Bastian Church.

Built over 500 years ago, this beautiful church has upheld more than half of the thousand-year history of the Holy Kingdom Delcross. It serves as the cradle for the Knights of St. Bastian and the headquarters of the Orthodox Church.

On one of its high spires, in the archbishop's office, two elderly men in magnificent robes were sitting across from each other.

"It seems we've grown old. I wish we wouldn't set up meetings in a place this high anymore."

Archbishop Albus Meyer, the head of the Council, removes his bishop's hat and wipes the sweat off his forehead.

The elderly woman sitting across from him snorted.

"It's too late to complain now. Don't you remember summoning me here day after day when you were archbishop?"

"You were in your prime back then."

"Stop whining. We are all growing old. I commute to this high place every day."

The saying that people grow old together didn't seem to be empty words; the majority of the woman's hair covered in grey streaks made her look even older than Cardinal[1] Meyer, depending on how you looked at it.

Archbishop Wesker.

The current head of the Orthodox Church, she became a high priest at a relatively young age and had risen through the ranks to archbishop from a bishop faster than anyone else.

Thanks to an eyepatch over her right eye, Archbishop Wesker looked more like a battle-hardened veteran than a clergywoman. The fact that she had sustained a deep wound that could not be healed, despite her strong divine powers, indirectly showed just how fierce a life she had led.

"Originally, the reason I summoned you here was to ask for your advice on the upcoming screening process, but..."

"I heard the news on my way here. The prince has considerably reduced our workload, hasn't he?"

"Yes, that Prince Morres."

Archbishop Wesker frowned deeply, her face wrinkling all over.

"He really pulled quite a stunt today. When I hastily sent the Bastian Knights, there were already fewer than 40 prisoners left."

"Commander of the guard is not an easy person, either."

"He pushed in cooperation documents stamped with imperial seals and released people in the blink of an eye. The commander didn't even have a chance to stop it."

"Haha, indeed."

Cardinal Meyer chuckled and stroked his beard.

"He did leave a reasonable number, though. As you know, there are precedents for the screening process. It would have been difficult to hand over more than that to the Heresy Tribunal. It's more than enough that he sorted out the innocent beforehand."

"That's what makes it more infuriating! Unfortunately, his effectiveness isn't bad, and when you blame the prince, things seem to have cleaned up!"

Archbishop Wesker seemed irritated just thinking about it.

"What on earth is he doing? Has he completely given up his right to the throne? Doesn't he care about his reputation? The high-ranking members of the Orthodox Church and the Heresy Tribunal will now turn their backs on him."

"If he cared about reputation, would he be doing these absurd things to begin with?"

Cardinal Meyer wiped the sweat from his forehead a couple more times and neatly placed the mitre back on his head.

Then he looked straight into Archbishop Wesker's eyes and spoke in a slightly lowered voice.

"I think you know it too. You've really crossed the line this time."

"..."

"Don't even think about making nonsense excuses like being cursed by a demon, as you submitted in the review documents. You're not a simpleton who would blindly charge in like Benitus. Don't you know best that as long as His Majesty the Holy Emperor exists, demonkind can't extend its claws into the Imperial City."

"...Even if it's not a curse, it doesn't matter, Your Eminence. The patients with the gray plague are dangerous."

"Is that why you arrested people who might not even be infected?"

"The symptoms were revealed; I didn't want to miss a single case. Whether they're infected or not will be determined during the review period."

Archbishop Wesker didn't want innocent people to get involved either.

She simply had her own calculations.

Patients in the late stages of the gray plague would die while waiting for the screening, and during that time, patients in the early stages would have progressed to a point where their symptoms could be identified.

Even if a small sacrifice was made during this process, it was nothing compared to the risk that would occur if they were left in the Imperial City.

"If the Heresy Tribunal had done their duty, this wouldn't have happened. When even one more capture is insufficient, now they are standing idly by, making the excuse of an unknown thing called [monster] spreading the disease."

"The duty of the Heresy Tribunal is to fight heresy. Not to arrest random plague patients."

"If it poses a serious threat to the safety of Delcross, shouldn't we

condemn them, even if we have to accuse them of non-existent devil worship!"

"Archbishop Wesker, you really..."

Cardinal Meyer sighed.

Although they are now leading separate entities, the Heresy Tribunal and the Orthodox Church, Benitus and Wesker were originally junior priests who had long worked together under his leadership.

Benitus, who would charge headlong without considering the repercussions if it involved stepping over the strict religious line, and Wesker, who didn't mind skirting the edge of doctrinal taboos for the sake of pragmatism.

If only one could mix the two half and half, how wonderful that would be.

"I'm no stranger to your fiery personality, but you are now the leader of an organization. There are limits to acting first and dealing with the consequences later, just like in your days as a high priest. Do you think His Highness is the only one who's been labeled a troublemaker by high-ranking officials due to this incident? I wonder what you're going to say to him now.."

"..."

"I say this because it seems His Majesty values you quite highly. I, too, don't want to lose a talented individual who has served under me for a long time. Do you understand? The fact that His Majesty has given His Highness a letter of cooperation branded with the Emperor's seal is not to be taken lightly."

Archbishop Wesker remained silent.

She looked at Cardinal Meyer with sunken eyes and rose from her seat. She slowly walked toward a wardrobe in the corner of her office.

"Your Eminence, I still dream of those days from time to time."

Inside the wardrobe was a small wooden box. She picked it up and gently stroked it as she spoke.

"The days when you led the Orthodox Church and I was still a high priest. Fighting against demon cults and purging the underground dark orders, following His Majesty. A time when there were no suspicions and doubts, and it felt good just to forge ahead."

"..."

"I remember the time when I thrust the holy relic with all my strength into the torso of the demon that took my eyes. And finally, when His Holiness[2] crushed its neck with the Nutcracker."

The archbishop pushed the wooden box toward Cardinal Mayer.

When the cardinal slowly opened the lid, inside was a translucent, milky-white stone-like object. It looked as if it was made of crystal, but its form was irregular, twisted together like an aged lump of oil—a sinister mass.

"This stone is dangerous, Your Eminence."

"What is this..."

"These are occasionally found in cremation grounds. Sometimes, these stones emerge from the heads of the Gray Plague victims who have been executed by the Heresy Tribunal."

Cardinal Mayer racked his faint memories. He was certain he had seen such a stone before.

Hadn't Wesker, when she was still a senior priest, shown him something like this in this very place and reported it?

After a long moment of pondering, the cardinal suddenly widened his eyes.

"You don't mean, the Ansa village...!"

"Yes, Your Eminence. I clearly saw it that day. The entire village and its surroundings were being sucked into a human body! That's when I

realized that the seed of unrest must be eradicated, even at some cost."

In the sole remaining eye of Archbishop Wesker, who was facing the cardinal, a flame that looked like a form of madness was fiercely burning.

"Do you find the pain that some of our faithful are currently going through pitiable? If we leave it as it is, eventually there will be no more commoners left to suffer."

T/N:

1. Note that the Cardinals are ranked higher than Archbishops[↔]
2. His Holiness here refers to Holy Emperor[↔]

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The patients with the gray plague that were rescued by the Capital Guard were immediately transferred to the Imperial Palace's medical facility for extraction surgery.

As the patients with shabby appearances began to pour in, the physicians openly scowled. However, with the prince himself standing and glaring, they reluctantly set aside other tasks to treat the patients.

Although he had repeatedly instructed the physicians to take good care of the patients until they woke up, Seongjin was skeptical about their recovery.

Most had already developed psychic crystals in their brains.

Even the academy students, who were relatively fine due to early discovery, had not yet regained consciousness. It was unlikely that those whose brains had been damaged by psychic crystals would easily regain consciousness.

"How is the patient who was brought to Pearl Palace yesterday?"

"Physician Ninnias is currently treating him, but there doesn't seem to be much progress."

The patient brought by Sir Calmen was currently receiving intensive care from Dr. Ninnias at Pearl Palace.

He had undergone extraction surgery as soon as he was brought in last night, but he was still unconscious and even struggling to swallow medication.

Well, he might be beyond saving. According to the Demon King, his brain was thoroughly damaged.

Still, they had to go through the motions of treating him.

After all, Seongjin had publicly declared him a 'guest' of Pearl Palace. Considering the attitudes of Sir Calmen and Sir Kurt, a bad premonition that the patient might not be unrelated to Morres's past actions surfaced.

"I can't promise anything since the disease has progressed quite a bit. Even with the priests pouring in divine power, the gray plague patients show no response. Moreover, his health was already in a severely weakened state," explained Dr. Ninnias to Seongjin, who had returned to Pearl Palace and visited the treatment room.

The patient appeared much cleaner, likely due to the maids' care.

However, his skinny body, full of wrinkles, and thinning hair suggested that he had been malnourished for a long time.

Above all, his aura activity was barely perceptible, indicating weak life signs.

If he had been the commander of the Royal Guard, he would surely have been an aura user. How did such a person end up in this state?

"Commander..."

Calmen, who had been fussing since yesterday, was a complete mess, sticking right beside the patient and staying up all night.

His face was swollen from bruises, and he had a splint on one arm; still, he had no regard for his own condition and was solely focused on tending to the patient.

Continuously wiping the patient's face and limbs with a wet towel, as if trying to make him absorb water through his skin.

"Sir Calmen, you two must have had a special relationship. It's unfortunate."

Seongjin had carelessly remarked, thinking they were not related, but Sir Kurt asked, "Do you happen to not remember anything about him, Your Highness?"

Ah, I see.

This person must've had some relation to Morres.

"Regrettably, I don't have any recollection."

"...I see."

Looking at Sir Kurt's seemingly calmer face, Seongjin recalled the conversations he'd heard the previous night at the knight's dormitory.

"-Because of what happened back then, Calmen still can't raise his head around the 2nd Knight Division..."

"-It's all Sir Kurt's fault. Despite being a 2nd Division knight himself, he quietly supports the prince."

[TL/N: Refer to Chapter 73]

This meant that Sir Kurt, despite knowing all the details of the case, bore no particular grudge against Morres. Perhaps he could offer a fairly objective explanation about what had happened in the past.

Seongjin gave him a light nod.

"Sir Kurt. If it's alright, could we talk about that man?"

Behind him, he felt the aura of Masain taking a sharp breath, as if startled.

Well, he (Masain) had been the commander of the 2nd Knight Division not long ago, so he must know something.

However, this is a man who hasn't even disclosed to Seongjin that he's part of the royal family. If he decides that Morres doesn't need to know, he will keep his mouth shut.

Ignoring the somewhat anxious Masain, Seongjin followed Sir Kurt out of the treatment room.

"That man is Commander Bruno. About 7-8 years ago, he became the commander of the Imperial Guard and led the forces."

Leaning against the window in the hallway, Seongjin listened to Sir Kurt's explanation.

Bruno Green.

He was a refugee from Ortona and, after joining the Imperial Guard, he received the surname Green for his various accomplishments. Remarkably, he had risen to the position of a commander, which is rare for a commoner.

Considering the sons of famous martial artists who have been training since childhood, Bruno was a self-made man who rose through the ranks due to his innate talent.

Especially during the early years of the Imperial rule, he stood by the Emperor's side, wielding his sword valiantly.

"...He was a confidant of my father?"

Seongjin widened his eyes and asked. It seemed unlike the Emperor to neglect someone so close to him.

"But doesn't His Majesty usually take good care of his people?"

"Yes, His Majesty highly valued Commander Bruno. It was the Emperor who recognized him despite his lowly background, opened the path for him, and even personally bestowed upon him his surname. He didn't skimp on support."

Having the Emperor's favor, Bruno Green fully utilized his talent and eventually reached the level of a Decalon Knight. The Emperor then, as if he had been waiting for this moment, appointed him as the commander of the Imperial Guard.

Even the nobles who couldn't accept a commoner as a commander were quickly suppressed. Some even complained about the excessive favoritism.

2nd Imperial Guard Commander.

A commoner knight who had been scraping by at the front lines had suddenly risen to a position only second to the continent's greatest

knight, Sir Baltazhar.

At that time, as Sir Baltazhar was busy at the southern front, it was only natural for Commander Bruno to supervise the swordsmanship training of the imperial princes.

Ah, so that's the connection with Morres.

"Did some friction occur during the lessons?"

Rather than answering Seongjin's conjecture, Sir Kurt seemed uncomfortable and averted his eyes.

"...It wasn't so much friction, but rather bad luck."

Commander Bruno's swordsmanship lessons had been peaceful for a while.

Back then, the students that Commander Bruno taught were Logan and Morres. Prince Logan was such a modest and diligent student that he didn't need much teaching. Moreover, he was a genius in swordsmanship; when taught one thing, he would grasp twenty.

Morres, on the other hand, was usually absent, spending his days unseen, making it difficult for any incidents or accidents to occur.

Starting to enjoy training new disciples, Commander Bruno then shifted his attention to a new student—a commoner boy from his neighborhood who showed promise.

"That student is none other than Sir Calmen."

Ah, so Calmen was involved in all this.

It's said that Commander Bruno took great care of young Calmen. During work hours, he would have him sit in his office with some food. During swordsmanship lessons, Calmen was often seen practicing alongside Prince Logan.

Gradually, the people in the palace grew accustomed to seeing Calmen at the Commander's side. Although he was still young, he was tacitly considered the official apprentice of the Commander.

However, this peace didn't last long.

One day, while Calmen was waiting for the Commander alone in the royal garden, Queen Elizabeth and Morres appeared. And for some unknown reason, a fight broke out between the two boys.

"I'm not sure about the details. The only witnesses were the Queen and her attendants, and they all claimed Calmen was the one who committed the impiety."

At that time, Calmen had no one on his side.

Well, it makes sense. It's unlikely for an ignorant commoner boy to challenge higher-ups outright.

Seongjin speculated that perhaps the two who passed by picked a fight with Calmen for no reason.

The problem was that the fight left visible injuries on both children.

And to make matters worse, it happened right in front of Queen Elizabeth.

"By the time the guards arrived, the Prince already had a bruise on his face, and Calmen's forehead was bloody from being slashed."

So Morres even drew his sword?

"And the Queen ordered the immediate execution of Calmen."

"What? A child?"

"Well, he did harm the Prince, so..."

"Even so, he was defending himself against a sword! So he should just die?"

At Seongjin's incredulous reply, Sir Kurt's expression subtly changed.

In the end, Commander Bruno, responsible for the situation, was summoned. The furious Queen Elizabeth demanded he take responsibility and personally execute the boy on the spot.

"..."

Wow, that's extreme.

Commander Bruno pleaded for mercy, but the Queen's stance was unwavering.

In the end, he had to make a drastic choice.

In order to save Calmen's life, he had to resign as Commander and destroy his own Aura Layer, effectively crippling himself.

From a Decalon Knight to a man unable to gather even a handful of Aura—it was akin to death for a warrior.

Thus, Commander Bruno, whose Aura Layer was shattered, was cast out of the palace half-dead, without proper medical treatment. As for Calmen, who directly caused the downfall of the Commander, he was considered an ungrateful wretch among the SecondDivision Knights and still remains in an awkward position.

Hearing the unexpectedly brutal details, Seongjin was at a loss for words for a while before finally asking in a trembling voice.

"... What about Father? What did Father say at the time?"

"How could we dare to fathom His Majesty's profound intentions?"

Kurt was vague in his explanation, but Seongjin knew.

The Holy Emperor did nothing at the time!

Commander Bruno, whom he had cherished, was not stopped from becoming a cripple and being expelled. Even a man of his power, who could easily work miracles with just a touch, didn't even offer the man a proper treatment.

Why on Earth?

"Anyway, the commander ending up like that is all my fault," said Seongjin, feeling a headache creeping in.

At this point, he was even grateful for the rude glares that Calmen used to give him.

Whenever he looked at his face, he felt like stabbing him with a knife; how had he held back until now?

As Seongjin was massaging his forehead, Masain, standing beside him, exclaimed in a fluster, "That's not true, Your Highness! You're not the one who requested his punishment, are you? You were just a child who knew nothing back then!"

"Being young doesn't absolve me of responsibility, Sir Masain."

Seongjin quickly organized his thoughts.

Initially, he had thought to help as much as possible just for the sake of making eye contact with Sir Calmen, but now he realized that he must do his best to treat the former commander.

The man had ended up in the slums and contracted the Gray Plague; in the end, it was all because of Morres' actions.

But how could the man be cured?

A person whose brain has completely deteriorated can't be revived even with modern medicine.

The only possibility he could think of was to seek help from the Holy Emperor and bring about a miracle, but...

'If he completely ignored it just as before, what would change now?'

Well, it's not like I don't know how that man is.

There must be some reason, Seongjin thought.

"First of all, I will talk to my father. Both of you, help Doctor Ninnias here. Make sure that the commander gets the best treatment possible..."

As Seongjin, having made up his mind, lifted his head to speak, the treatment room door violently swung open.

"Don't bother pretending to care! It's all useless now!"

Turning around, he saw Calmen, his face flushed red, glaring menacingly at Seongjin.

"What kind of impudent language is this before His Highness..."

With a stern face, Masain took a step forward, but Calmen, exploding with anger, cut him off.

"Why? Did I say something wrong? Stop pretending not to know, stop pretending to care! You all think there's no hope for the commander anyway! That it would be easiest to just bury him and be done with it! Don't you?"

Calmen's eyes seemed to flare with intense anger, as if sparks were flying from them.

'Doesn't he look like he's so mad he can't see anything else right now?'

"How dare you show me pity like you're doing some noble deed? It's too late! What use is it now when things have gotten this far!"

"Sir Calmen..."

"You people know nothing! Do you know what the commander always said, even after being driven out of the palace? That it was an immense honor to have been by His Majesty's side even for a moment! That he has no regrets! He always said that like a mantra! But look at this! Is this the tragic end for a lifetime of devotion to Delcross and His Majesty? I can't, I can't..."

Shaking uncontrollably, Calmen couldn't continue speaking. Sir Kurt quickly approached him.

"Sir Calmen, please calm down. His Majesty also did his best for the commander's treatment."

"Don't make me laugh, Sir Kurt! The 2nd Knight Division is the same!"

Calmen shouted as if he was lamenting.

"Back then, was there anyone from the 2nd Knight Division who stood up for the commander? You did nothing for him! You looked down on him because he was a commoner, and now you suddenly talk about pity when he is tragically expelled! You are no different from that worthless prince!"

Is he going to cross the line at this rate?

Seongjin frowned, and the arrows of anger were aimed back at him.

"Nice job, you say! So, it's all your fault, is it? Even if you're young, it doesn't mean you're not responsible. Stop saying things you don't mean! Anyway, you don't remember anything!"

"...Yeah."

"And all you could do is discuss with His Majesty? Why? Because he's..."

Thud!

Before Calmen could finish his sentence, he fell to the ground, knocked out by a punch from Seongjin.

"....."

Facing the bewildered expressions of Masain and Sir Kurt, Seongjin hastily explained.

"Uh, sorry. I didn't mean for this to happen, but it seemed like he was really going to commit a serious act of disrespect, so I acted without thinking."

I mean, isn't disrespecting the prince and His Majesty not much different in weight?

He seems out of it, maybe he should rest.

As Seongjin thought this, he looked at Calmen, who was now lying quietly beside Commander Bruno.

On another note, Calmen really does have a fiery temperament.

Maybe I can't entirely dismiss the possibility that he could have committed an act of disrespect, just as the queen suggested.

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Despite the increase in unconscious patients, Dr. Ninnias seemed rather elated.

"It's truly tiresome when they keep struggling while on the verge of death. It's much better when they lie still like this."

He chuckled and started to apply mashed herbs onto Calmen's now noticeably swollen face.

In contrast, both Commander Masain and Lieutenant Kurt were visibly nervous as they gauged Seongjin's mood.

Seongjin, who had suddenly knocked out a palace knight in one punch, now felt strangely unfamiliar to them.

"... Although he did do something deserving of punishment, Your Highness..."

"One could've been more gentle... that face is, ahem, is quite something!"

Why are they acting like this? I sacrificed my own fist to save a pitiable creature.

Especially Sir Masain, what's up with that look in his eyes?

He's the type who would've been the first to throw Calmen in jail for blasphemy!

Amidst this, Seongjin's group received an unexpected visitor looking for the patients.

The commander of the Paladin Order of Saint Aurelion, Katrina, arrived with her lieutenant Francis in haste.

"...Commander Bruno."

She gazed at the commander lying in the bed, his appearance so altered it seemed unbelievable. Katrina soon approached him with a somber face and carefully laid her hand on his shoulder, channeling a faintly glowing holy power into him.

Known for her indifferent attitude towards anyone other than the Holy Emperor, and nicknamed "The Iron Shield of the Holy Emperor," it was unprecedented to see Katrina pouring her divine power so earnestly.

"Holy power isn't very effective against the Gray Plague."

Despite Dr. Ninnias' warning, Katrina couldn't easily remove her hand from the commander.

Looking at her with a somewhat sullen expression, Francis muttered to Seongjin.

"So that's the unlucky commoner who became a knight commander. I heard he fought side by side with our commander. They had a complex relationship, according to her."

Seongjin's confusion deepened.

Complex relationship?

Well, considering Katrina's current reaction, it does make sense.

But why hadn't she searched for Commander Bruno even when he was in such a state?

Could this be related to the Holy Emperor's indifference towards him?

"Anyways, it's not my place to know. It's all meaningless past relationships now. Yet to worry about our commander like this..."

Sigh

Seongjin, lost in thought, abruptly raised his head at the soft sound.

You crazy fighting dog, do you even want to be jealous of a critically ill person?

Just then, by chance, his eyes met with Katrina's, who happened to be looking in his direction.

Seongjin awkwardly turned his head.

'Is it just my imagination? Why is she looking at me so desperately, as if I'm the only hope? Of course, that can't be the case...'

But that feeling wasn't mistaken.

Katrina, who had turned her body away from the bed, slowly approached Seongjin with an expression of unprecedented urgency.

"Your Highness, I beg you. Please help Commander Bruno."

"...?"

How am I supposed to help?

While Seongjin was puzzled, Katrina laid her hand respectfully on the breastplate of her light armor and bowed her head!

"There is no one who has served Delcross with as much sincerity as him. His loyalty to the imperial family is unparalleled. Please, Your Highness, bestow mercy upon him."

"..."

In his bewilderment, Seongjin's mind raced.

Surely she wasn't asking Morres to directly heal the man, who had no divine energy to speak of. The only possibility seemed to be—

"...Are you asking me to personally request my father to help him?"

Katrina didn't respond, but her head lowered even more, indicating that he was correct.

"Why don't you ask directly?"

Seongjin genuinely wondered as he posed the question.

She had been assisting the Holy Emperor for a long time, serving as his most trusted right hand.

Yet, Katrina shook her head.

"That won't be sufficient."

"Insufficient?"

"Yes, Your Highness. Just because someone has a desperate wish, it doesn't mean His Majesty can help everyone unconditionally."

For a moment, a thought crossed Seongjin's mind.

Having recently dealt with the Gray Plague incident, he began to suspect whether the Holy Emperor knew more than he let on.

The real question was;

To what extent and how should the Holy Emperor intervene?

As far as Seongjin could perceive, the Holy Emperor was an enigmatic individual whose limits were impossible to gauge. If he were to take action with full intent, what problems could he not solve?

To what extent should he intervene?

Take the plague as an example. Even if he could cure every illness, it would be unsustainable for the citizens of Delcross to solely rely on the Holy Emperor for everything.

If the Holy Emperor were to prevent and cure all diseases before they worsen, what would be the need for hospitals? For people to maintain public hygiene?

This would be a poisoned chalice, leading Delcross down a path of infinite regression.

Perhaps the Holy Emperor's somewhat lukewarm recent reactions

were not unrelated to this.

—His Majesty can't help everyone unconditionally.

As Katrina had said, it seemed there needed to be certain [conditions] for him to act.

And she was implying that Seongjin himself had to take the initiative to fulfill these [conditions].

"Would my request serve as a [condition] for my father to help the Commander?"

When Seongjin asked, Katrina evasively averted her gaze and responded ambiguously.

"Sometimes, even words spoken casually can shake and crumble the very foundations, Your Highness."

"..."

You can't talk, huh?

"Well, that's better than completely sealing my lips, Your Highness."

Seongjin nodded and spoke, "I was also planning to ask my father for his help with that matter. I'm just not certain how much that will actually help. You've heard too, haven't you? The Gray Plague shows little response to divine power."

"You need not worry about that, Your Highness. The divine power emitted by the clergy and the power of His Majesty the Holy Emperor may seem similar, but they are fundamentally different."

There was strong conviction in Katrina's voice. It was clear she was saying that the Holy Emperor must have a way.

Seongjin nodded and stood up.

If the course of action is clear, there's no need to delay.

Initially, the plan was to just drop by the office and briefly ask for a favor.

However, as he left the treatment room, Seongjin suddenly thought,

'Why don't I just bring Commander Bruno from the start? Telling His Majesty the Emperor to come and see the patient seems a bit cumbersome.'

The deteriorating condition of the Commander was also a concern. According to the Demon King, the 'psychic crystals' were still growing in his mind.

Despite the considerable time that had elapsed since the extraction, it seemed the disease was not stopping.

Anyway, nothing good would come from delaying treatment, so as soon as the Holy Emperor's permission was granted, they planned to bring the patient before him.

'Of course, there's a chance he may refuse treatment...'

Still, Seongjin had an almost intuitive, ungrounded conviction.

In the end, the Holy Emperor would save Commander Bruno.

So, a somewhat strange procession formed behind Seongjin: not only the priest but also the commander and lieutenant of the Saint Aurelion Paladin Order, and even the resident knights carrying a palanquin.

The issue was how to explain the unusual composition of this visit to the palace guards.

However, Seongjin soon realized this worry was unnecessary. Upon their arrival, chief chamberlain Louis had already come out to greet them at the entrance.

After briefly glancing at the pitiable state of the Commander, he turned and led the group straight to the Holy Emperor's office. It was as if he already knew why Seongjin had come to the palace.

'Well, it's something His Majesty the Emperor is involved in, so I guess it's not surprising.'

Seongjin shrugged his shoulders and followed Louis.

"Have you arrived?"

Entering the office, the Holy Emperor greeted them in his usual indifferent manner.

However, what Seongjin saw was so unexpected that he had no choice but to momentarily stop in his tracks, taken aback.

'What is he doing?'

That is to say—

Currently, the Holy Emperor turned his head in a direction that wasn't towards the entrance, not even glancing at Seongjin and his group.

No, it would be more accurate to say that he couldn't see them. This was because his eyes were wrapped in something that resembled a dark cloth, like blindfolds.

It wasn't only Seongjin who was surprised by this unexpected sight. Masain opened his mouth with a blank expression, and even Francis widened his eyes and pushed up his glasses.

Only Katrina seemed to have a hint of what was going on, as she slowly moved to stand beside the Holy Emperor, as if assisting him.

Feeling momentarily disoriented by the strange atmosphere in the office, Seongjin spoke directly:

"I've come to ask for a favor, Father."

"A favor."

"Yes, I would like for you to heal someone. I brought a Grey Plague patient to the Pearl Palace yesterday. You probably already know who it is—"

"—Morres."

The Holy Emperor cut him off, speaking in a firm tone.

"There's no need for you to tell me that person's name."

"..."

"I have no reason to recognize his face, either."

Seongjin blinked.

Ah, is that the purpose of the blindfold? I don't fully understand the meaning.

"Don't you understand?"

"Actually, I don't."

"When asked, 'Why do you not see?' he replied, 'Thus, I do not pre-judge the direction in which my staff points.'"

"...Yes?"

When Seongjin stared blankly at the Holy Emperor's face, the corners of his lips slightly lifted.

"...It seems you haven't yet considered reading 'The Introduction to Theology.'"

Seongjin turned his head awkwardly.

Ah, was that a reference from a book?

"Um, I've been making an effort to read it."

Meaning, he'd only opened the preface.

He'd been discouraged by the small, densely packed characters that were barely legible even with a magnifying glass and had immediately closed the book.

"I see. Then it's settled."

He had thought he would be scolded more for not studying, but surprisingly, the Holy Emperor didn't seem to mind much as he nodded his head. Then he slowly extended one hand forward and directed,

"Bring him here."

The knights, who had been only moving their eyeballs until then, began to hesitantly move only after receiving a cue from Seongjin.

Soon after, the medium carrying Commander Bruno was placed in front of the Holy Emperor, who gently touched the commander's chest as if measuring something. Seongjin clearly saw the corners of his mouth slightly twist for a moment.

Why? He suddenly thought of the harsh expression that Katrina had initially shown toward the commander.

Caught in a strange mood, Seongjin observed as the Holy Emperor softly sighed and opened his mouth.

"Is he important to you?"

It felt as if some sort of ritual was beginning.

Even though he didn't know what specific steps were needed, Seongjin thought that he had to affirm the question in order to proceed to the next step.

After a moment of contemplation, Seongjin answered, "He is someone who will be important to me."

Immediately, the next question followed.

"Is it right to save him?"

The answer to that question was easy.

"He is a person of worth, but has undergone undue hardship. Therefore, it is only right to save him."

Then the third question was promptly thrown at him.

"Can you bear the consequences of that decision?"

"....."

The weight of this question felt somewhat different from the previous ones, so Seongjin couldn't immediately respond and took a moment to think.

Is it possible for one person to completely bear another person's life and future?

'No, that's not what it means. This is closer to a procedure that must be followed. Don't overthink it.'

Seongjin quickly organized his thoughts and nodded.

After all, if the plan to help Bruno succeeds, he was prepared to take responsibility for Bruno's well-being and even his welfare.

"His past is due to my mistake, so his future will also be my responsibility."

It was at that moment.

Both the Holy emperor and Katrina simultaneously showed faint smiles on their faces, as if they were twins.

Seongjin suddenly realized.

Katrina Belphein. She was known as the Holy Emperor's strongest shield, but in fact, she might be closer to being his mirror.

"Very well, Morres."

The Holy Emperor's calm voice continued.

"From now on, he will wholly belong to your karma."

With that declaration,

A dazzling white light burst forth from the Holy Emperor's fingertips.

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Calmen's nightmares always started with the same scene.

One day, after being severely beaten at home and driven out with a bruised abdomen, a seemingly respectable knight approached him.

"Why are you standing here barefoot on such a cold day, kid?"

It turned out that the knight, who lived not far away, was a neighbor. That day, he provided Calmen with a hearty dinner and a warm place to sleep.

From then on, Calmen often escaped from his stepfather and secretly took refuge in the knight's house.

Though the knight was always busy, he was a good neighbor who never turned away the child who kept coming to him. Even when he wasn't home, there were always simple snacks prepared on the table for the hungry young guest.

Thus, the knight, who later turned out to be far more incredible than initially thought, became close to Calmen.

He was the commander of the royal palace's knights and even the swordsmanship instructor to the imperial princes.

"Why would someone as strong and noble as you take a local kid like me seriously?"

"Wow, what does it feel like to be that strong? How can I become like you, Commander?"

"Do you want to learn swordsmanship, kid? That's a good idea. His Majesty's grace is like the sea; if you have the skills, even commoners like us have the opportunity for advancement."

"I don't really care or know much about advancement. I just want to give my wretched stepfather a good kick."

"Then, would you commit to one year of training with your eyes closed? That should be enough to kick him when he lets his guard down and escapes safely."

Thus, Calmen began learning swordsmanship from him. He was even praised for having quite a talent, which made him feel proud.

Then one day, before he knew it, Calmen found himself serving almost as an apprentice or servant to the knight, commuting to and from the imperial palace with him.

Perhaps those were the happiest days of his rather short life.

Yet, it was a nightmare because he knew too well what end that happiness would meet.

"You brat! What do you think you're doing, wandering around the imperial palace?"

A group of people suddenly appeared before him, surrounding the naive commoner boy and pouring out their sharp malice.

"Lucky you, being able to impersonate a servant. Just the right kind of guy to eat out of anywhere."

A chubby kid sneered at him, twisting his mouth.

"It seems like the lowly gather and console each other. Let's leave them, Morres. It's not as if we had a commoner knight as a master in the first place."

A beautiful woman with sharp eyes scornfully laughed in a haughty manner.

Tittering. Cackling.

Confused and frozen, he was bombarded with maids' mockery and humiliation.

Those sharp words were so obviously malicious that even a young commoner boy like him realized they were aimed at Commander Bruno.

How long had they been at it? When he came to, Calmen was unknowingly gripping the collar of the chubby kid.

Then, suddenly, something sharp cut across his forehead, filling his vision with a burning pain. His sight grew blurry with blood.

The scenes that followed are spotty memories.

"Your Majesty, the Queen. He is just an innocent, unknowing child. Please, retract your order to have this young one executed!"

Through the blood-blurred vision, he could see the kneeling figure of the Commander.

Calmen clenched his teeth.

"I didn't do anything wrong! That damn brat was the one who cursed me and insulted the commander first! So why do I have to atone for a crime I didn't commit, and why does the innocent commander have to suffer for it?"

It was always the same dream, but Calmen struggled frantically every time.

"Everyone stop! Somebody stop this!"

"Commander! Commander, please stop! Don't do it!"

Despite his desperate struggles, Commander Bruno in his dreams would inevitably end up coughing up blood and collapsing.

And watching the commander's miserable state, a brat stood there, pulling up the corners of his lips to let out an evil laugh.

With the backlit, shadowy face, only the brat's eyes shimmer eerily in silvery gray.

"Prince Morres."

- "Thought you'd die sooner. But if it ends like this, it's as good as being dead, isn't it? Perfect!"

"Prince Morres."

- "Why are you staring at me like that? You stupid fool! Luckily for you, I've given you a good opportunity, so be grateful for the rest of your life. Ha. Ha. Ha!"

Damn Prince Morres!

While struggling and letting out a silent scream, his nightmare gradually came to an end. Realization that he was dreaming dawned upon him as he slowly woke up.

And at the boundary between dream and reality, a chaotic mix of incomprehensible scenes swept over Calmen along with intense emotions before receding like a tidal wave.

In one scene, for some reason, Calmen appeared to be considerably older.

After squandering his earnings from mercenary work on alcohol, he was heavily drunk when suddenly a bandit-like man blocked his path.

- "You're the guy? The one who spent last night with our Olivie?"

- "Huh? Olivie? Who's that?"

- "She's my wife. Don't tell me you don't know."

- "What the hell are you talking about? If you can't keep your wife in line, why are you blaming others? Was your night not so great?"

- "What did you say? You son of a-!"

Before he could even confirm the axe the man brandished,

Thud!

He felt a vivid sensation of his forehead splitting and skull cracking,

sending chills down his spine.

Calmen screamed.

I, I can't believe I'm dying like this?

"...Aaaargh!"

"Man, he sure knows how to take a noisy nap."

"Should we wake him up, Your Highness?"

"Maybe? He looked like he was having a good dream just now."

Familiar voices conversing near his ear reached him.

In a state of semi-consciousness, he strained his ears to grasp the meaning, but the voice receded and his body sank downward.

Meanwhile, the dream shifted its scenes once again, this time to a battlefield with arrows flying through the air.

Dressed in armor, Calmen, now transformed into a dashing knight, swung his sword anxiously while staring into the distance. He might not fully grasp the situation, but he was clearly worried about someone's well-being.

And below the ominous sky, tinged red as if with blood—

Someone he knew well was fearlessly darting through the hail of arrows!

Startled, Calmen rushed towards him.

Hey! You lunatic!

Always running off like that?

Haven't I always told you to be more careful? Huh?

"Ah? If you go out there, Crown Prince, just you wait!"

Gritting his teeth and yelling, he heard a sigh in his ear.

"This child is truly a troublemaker, Sir Masain."

"Outrageous. Now he's even committing blasphemy by imagining a nonexistent Crown Prince in his dreams."

"Shall I give him another smack, Sir Masain? To make him rest quietly."

"...Doing that might make Calmen rest for eternity, Your Highness."

"What do you take me for, Sir Kurt?"

Struck by an unusually clear voice, Calmen fully regained consciousness and opened his eyes abruptly.

"Oh, he's awake."

"....."

What was that? I felt like I was in a deeply sentimental mood just a moment ago?

Calmen blinked his eyes.

The lingering images of the dream vanished from his mind at a rapid pace, leaving him with no recollection of why he felt the way he did.

"Hmm..."

However, what caught Calmen's slowly waking eyes was a bizarre sight that he never could have anticipated.

A room filled with people surrounding Prince Morres... or rather, a group of people surrounding him, filling the small treatment room, standing and staring at Calmen in unison.

'What is everyone doing here? And why are they looking at me with

those strange expressions?'

His eyes quickly scanned the faces of the people.

Dr. Ninnias, Prince Morres, Masain, the maidservant to the prince, and many resident knights including Sir Kurt and...

".....?"

In an instant, Calmen jumped to his feet.

Among those people, he saw the face of someone he thought he would never see again.

"...Commander?"

Indeed.

As if out of a lie, there was Commander Bruno.

His unkempt beard and gaunt appearance were the same, but he was no longer the dying patient from before. His previously hunched back was now straight, and his wrinkled face had tightened, making him look younger than his years.

Though he hadn't regained his former vitality, his robust body overflowed with a lively energy.

With a refreshing smile that seemed dreamlike, Commander Bruno answered Calmen.

"Yes, kid. Got your wits about you now?"

What on earth is happening? Am I still dreaming?

"...Commander? Is it really you?"

At this, Commander Bruno's brows furrowed.

"Still half-asleep, huh? What on earth is that appearance of yours? I don't remember teaching you so carelessly. How absentminded are you usually, tsk tsk."

Bruno, the commander, clicked his tongue, and Kurt, standing next to him, cautiously defended Calmen.

"Uh... Commander? Calmen fought against the capital guards to rescue you, so..."

"Huh? Did that happen? I don't remember. So, how many did he fight?"

Then, Prince Morres tilted his head and answered.

"Probably seven, including heavily armed knights? It was no big deal."

The one who had actually defeated the seven couldn't persuade anyone.

Hearing this, a look of disdain briefly crossed Commander Bruno's face.

"So, you're saying you were defeated by just seven? Not even seventeen? Hmph, shame! Don't go around calling yourself my disciple."

"....."

Tears welled up in Calmen's eyes without his realizing it.

Ah, that arrogant attitude. Definitely the Commander Bruno I remember!

"...Commander, aren't you being a bit too cold? You made him cry."

"Yeah. The commander went too far this time. Calmen did his best, there's no reason to make him cry like that."

"Ah, my body is already in pain and you guys are still making fun of a sick man. Why would a grown man cry like a fool?"

I didn't cry! Ugh.

Calmen sniffled.

"...What happened, Commander? The Gray Plague?"

"Huh? Oh, right. I did mention that I had caught the plague. I don't remember, though."

Commander Bruno rotated his shoulders and grinned.

"I don't know what that plague is, but as you can see, I'm perfectly fine. All thanks to His Majesty's grace."

"Ahem! One should not forget the grace of Prince Morres, Commander Bruno."

"Ah, that's right! Sir Masain is correct. If it weren't for His Highness, how could I, Bruno, have the honor of serving His Majesty again."

Ha ha ha. He he he.

It was an atmosphere he couldn't adapt to.

Clearly, Commander Bruno had been disgracefully expelled due to Prince Morres, his achievements as a knight and a warrior all taken away in an instant, and he lived just because he couldn't die.

And now he's casually chatting with the prince who is the root cause of all this!

Calmen felt his mind blur and mumbled, "This must be a dream. How could Commander Bruno and Prince Morres be..."

The air around him suddenly froze.

Calmen had carelessly spoken, but omitting the honorifics in front of an imperial family member is a serious disrespect.

"This fellow, as soon as he woke up..."

In a scene filled with tension, his master with an ugly expression on his face attempted to charge, but Prince Morres quickly grabbed his arm to stop him.

Meanwhile, Commander Bruno respectfully bowed his head towards

the prince, speaking on behalf of the flustered Calmen.

"I apologize, Your Highness. It's due to my unworthy disciple that I have no face to show you."

"Eh? No, I think he's just a bit flustered because he just woke up, don't worry about it."

The scene was reminiscent of the past when the Commander had knelt before the Queen on behalf of Calmen. Feeling his heart sink, Calmen shouted in a suppressed voice.

"Why are you apologizing on my behalf again? You've done nothing wrong, Commander!"

However, the look from Commander Bruno was extremely stern.

"Don't make excuses, Calmen. It's my responsibility, of course."

"But..."

"I've hesitated to say this because you seemed to be blaming yourself too much. But now that I've returned to the palace, let me make it clear."

Facing Calmen squarely, the Commander continued.

"Calmen, the incident that day was your fault, as you were the one who committed the irreverence first, unable to control your own temperament. And it is my responsibility, Bruno, for not properly teaching you manners because you were young."

"..."

"You must face the difficult truths squarely. You're a distinguished knight of the Guard now, aren't you?"

Calmen was at a loss for words.

He wanted to deny it, but deep down he knew the situation had escalated uncontrollably because he had failed to contain himself in a critical moment.

Being naive was no excuse. As Prince Morres had said, being young did not absolve him of responsibility.

The reason he had resented Prince Morres until now was because he couldn't fully bear the fact that he had led the person he admired the most to ruin.

Struggling to his feet from the bed, Calmen knelt before the prince.

His internal resentment towards Prince Morres hadn't completely disappeared. However, unlike before, he now knew what he needed to do.

"I have committed multiple acts of irreverence and disloyalty. I humbly seek your generous forgiveness, Your Highness."

Scratching his cheek, Prince Morres responded, "Well, it's fine. Don't worry about it. It's not like I don't know your temperament."

"And..."

"Yes?"

"...Thank you."

Calmen bowed his head deeply.

"I will never forget the favor of saving the Commander. Thank you again, Your Highness."

For the first time, with complete sincerity, Calmen was able to show his respect to Prince Morres.

That evening, as always, after finishing his meditation and waiting, Dasha soon dropped down onto the balcony.

This time, before the Demon King gave a warning, Seongjin sensed her presence first. Ever since learning [Aura Concealment] from her, his ability to detect the discomfort given by a concealed aura had also improved significantly.

With her twinkling eyes, she sighed towards Seongjin, who was staring at her.

"Yes, yes, whatever. I won't expect to be able to sneak into the palace without you noticing anymore. You've completely shattered my unyielding composure."

Then Dasha began to unload the bags she had tightly wrapped and brought into the room.

Stealth clothing, a few sets of disguise clothes, various types of daggers, and suspicious vials.

It was surprisingly thorough preparation, considering she had been reluctant to pass on assassination techniques.

"You have no idea how much resentment I got from Captain Breman."

As she spread out the items, Dasha continuously grumbled.

"How could you leave the palace as soon as we parted, after I had given you so many warnings? If His Majesty hadn't given special permission, I really would've gotten into big trouble."

"Uh... Sorry."

In that regard, Seongjin had no room for excuses.

"I initially thought I would just take a casual stroll, but the palace knights didn't seem to notice. It's all thanks to my excellent teacher, you know."

"Sigh, if you can't even keep your word..."

However, their conversation couldn't continue. Suddenly, the Demon King urgently shouted at Seongjin.

[Huh? Seongjin, that guy is coming this way?]

'What? What are you talking about? Who?'

And the next moment, there was a loud knock from outside the door.

Knock, knock.

Both Seongjin and Dasha were startled and froze. Normally, no one would disturb the prince's rest at this late hour.

More importantly, neither of them had sensed anyone approaching!

But the voice that followed was one Seongjin knew well.

"Your Highness, is everything alright?"

Seongjin blinked.

"...Commander Bruno?"

He was officially on leave and was staying in the Pearl Palace as Seongjin's [guest].

"I felt a suspicious presence from your room at this hour, so I've come to check. Is everything okay?"

As Dasha's eyes widened in astonishment, Seongjin quickly yelled towards the door.

"Oh, it's fine. A friend I know well has come to visit, so don't worry, Commander."

Then, a moment of silence seemed to weigh something, followed by

the Commander's voice.

"Yes, Your Highness. I apologize for the intrusion. Please rest comfortably."

Thump, thump.

As the sound of footsteps faded away into the distance, only then did Seongjin and Dasha let out the breaths they had been holding.

"Phew, is that person Bruno Green? The former Decalon Knight, right? As far as I know, he's no longer an Aura user, so how did he notice us?"

Dasha spoke, unable to hide her tension.

Come to think of it, wasn't it said that assassins' natural enemies are Decalon Knights?

"Do you know about Commander Bruno?"

"Do I? That's an understatement. One of the few treasures of the continent, a Decalon Knight, who lost everything overnight and was expelled from the Imperial Palace."

It was indeed strange when you thought about it.

No matter the accusations of blasphemy, it was shocking that they would easily make a Decalon Knight, who could significantly boost a nation's military power just by existing, into an exile.

This should have had Queen Lizabeth, who sentenced him to atonement, punished as well.

"Such a big incident got buried without making a sound, and not long after, nobody knew where Bruno Green was. What's strange is, he was hiding perfectly well within the Empire!"

"Wow... really?"

"Is that all? If you look into Bruno Green's personal records, there's no record of disciplinary action. He's simply been 'suspended' from the

Knights for years."

"That's interesting."

"Isn't it? It smells like a massive conspiracy, Your Highness. Although I'm not sure, the rumor in the intelligence department once was that the person who buried Bruno must be an incredibly powerful individual."

As for the conspiracy, I'm not sure.

At least I feel like I know who the power player involved is.

"Anyway, the whole Imperial Palace was buzzing today with news about him. They say the ill-fated commoner commander has returned."

The ill-fated commoner commander.

A once-in-a-generation genius who became a knight commander from humble origins but lost everything due to a momentary misfortune. A man who sincerely served Delcross and the Holy Emperor but was not repaid and was forgotten. That was Bruno Green as known to the world.

Well, the Bruno that Seongjin met in person had a somewhat different image from the rumors.

"And he even suffered from the Gray Plague? How on earth did he manage to survive?"

"My father healed him."

A universal cheat key, so to speak.

"So it was curable. The Gray Plague is known to be completely unresponsive to even pouring in divine power. Truly, the representative of God, His Majesty the Holy Emperor."

"Mm, yeah..."

Seongjin dodged the question with a vague answer.

Katrina had mentioned this. The Holy Emperor's power runs on a different track than ordinary divine power.

But can that be explained just by saying the tracks are different? Having witnessed the Holy Emperor healing the Commander, Seongjin couldn't even be sure it could be described as divine power.

- "From now on, he will wholly belong to your karma."

The moment he made that declaration,

Along with a burst of white light, Seongjin felt some kind of mysterious force pulling towards him and Bruno. This unnatural phenomenon grew stronger with time, so much so that he began to worry something might be going wrong.

And then a true miracle happened.

The Commander's discolored skin regained its original hue, and his weakening breath began to stabilize. He was clearly coming back to life.

Yet even witnessing this phenomenon, Seongjin couldn't be certain that this was really a [healing] process.

Seongjin had previously experienced the miracles caused by the Holy Emperor when he was carried into the palace due to a bursting wooden sword.

However, while the sensation at that time felt like an overwhelming surge of life energy, what was happening to Commander Bruno now felt oddly different.

Something was being broken down and reassembled. Time axes throughout his body were twisting, breaking apart, and then rejoining.

This process was happening on such a microscopic scale and so simultaneously that for a moment, Seongjin felt as if the Holy Emperor was disassembling Commander Bruno down to the cellular level.

The strange thing was, among all those people, the only one who felt such discomfort was Seongjin.

While everyone else was lost in the awe of the divine light, only Seongjin was nervously observing the transformation of Commander Bruno.

Well, there was one more person who felt something was off.

[How... How can this be possible for a human... This is insane! Hiiiiieek!]

The Demon King, who let out a bizarre scream, was subsequently silenced and embedded in a corner of Seongjin's mind for a while.

And a moment later, Commander Bruno stood up in front of everyone, seemingly in perfect condition.

Even his weakened aura started to slowly increase, and it seemed that the aura layer, once thought to be destroyed, began to recover.

Regaining his senses, he immediately confirmed the well-being of the Holy Emperor and shed silent, hot tears as he bowed on the spot.

It was truly the perfect return of a genius commander.

Well, it did turn out well in the end.

[I don't know how to explain this. Simply put, your father forcibly adjusted the divine power even in places where divine power doesn't work. He even changed the definition of divine power several times. That was a dangerous and terrifying act that could shake the very foundation of the Main World, Delcross.]

The Demon King, who had finally composed himself, explained it with trembling.

Well, it's not clear, but at least it wasn't something one should do lightly just to cure a single person. This makes the stringent [condition] understandable.

'And now the result has become solely my responsibility?'

While it was done to save a life, shouldn't he have been a bit more cautious?

Seongjin felt belated regret.

"Alright! Let's put that issue aside for now."

Dasha clapped her hands to refresh Seongjin's focus.

"You have something you need to learn quickly. Originally, I wanted to teach you slowly, but I worry you might sneak out of the palace again."

"I won't do it anymore."

"Focus. I know you don't mean it. People who learn assassination techniques first learn something specific. It's the secret hand signal passed down through our sect."

Dasha belonged to a sect known as [Oberon's Hand], reputedly somewhat famous in the industry. All informants of the Monkey Tower are from there.

She then taught Seongjin several complex signals. If he encounters anyone displaying these signals while undercover, he must respond appropriately, she stressed.

"What happens if I can't show it?"

"You'll be hunted down by the members of [Oberon's Hand] from across the continent until you die. It's the industry rule to deal with thieves who steal techniques through death."

Wow, that's harsh.

"You were lucky yesterday. Imagine if you had run into a lower-ranking informant who didn't know you well. Ugh... I can't even imagine."

She's implying he would have been killed outright.

Of course, Seongjin wouldn't just die obediently to a low-level

assassin, but he nodded without saying anything.

"So, Your Highness. If you're planning any undercover activities, take me with you. No one knows when an unexpected accident could occur. Also, it wouldn't be pleasant to tighten the palace security due to that."

Well, about that.

To be honest, the palace security seemed quite lax.

"Wouldn't it be better to reinforce it a bit?"

"You say that because you don't know. The palace's security system isn't that simple. There's even a dedicated assassination team for security. The place you entered yesterday is just an implicitly accepted loophole. Even that would have been closely monitored by [Arenja]."

"[Arenja]?"

"Yes, it is His Majesty's direct secret organization and its details are not known. It is said to be a spiritual surveillance network monitoring the entire Imperial Domain. The intelligence department speculates that it's probably an elite organization made up of high-ranking clergy."

Suddenly, something came to Seongjin's mind.

The spirit orb that appeared the moment he crossed the imperial wall and had a skirmish with the Demon King!

'Hey, Demon King. Were those guys clergy?'

[Hmm? I don't know? They were unique spirits, but I didn't really feel any divine power.]

Words from the Demon King, who usually has a sensitive reaction to clergy. The intelligence department seems to be quite off in their conjecture.

"Dasha, have you ever actually seen how this [Arenja] guards the

boundary?"

At this, she looked at Seongjin with a strange expression.

"How would I see that when I'm not a clergyman? If it's called a spiritual surveillance network, then probably some angel or ghost-like being is wandering around the palace. That's all that is known."

Makes sense.

At least for an emperor who can see souls, it must be a discreet and easily manipulated organization.

"It feels uncomfortable thinking that such things are wandering around here and there."

"Right? I also feel somewhat creepy when passing through desolate areas."

Seongjin nodded and proceeded to ask her another question.

"Ah, by the way, Dasha. Do you know anything about something called 'Oracle'?"

She pondered for a moment before shaking her head.

"Hmm... Not sure. It feels like I've heard it somewhere, but I honestly don't know. Should I look it up?"

"No, it's fine. It's not that important."

In any case, learning about [Arenja] from Dasha was unexpected but fruitful.

Seongjin, too, had only heard about it from the Demon King, so asking someone else about the spirit orbs that wander the palace was tricky.

'Anyway, I need to find out about this spiritual surveillance network soon.'

Thinking about it, it wasn't strange that it had directly drawn

Seongjin in when Bruno and Calmen were in crisis.

He had the feeling that whoever made up Arenja likely knew quite a lot about him and the Demon King.

'Well, there's no point worrying about it now. I'll ask the emperor when the time comes.'

With that, Seongjin lightly let it go.

However, someone with more detailed information was closer than he thought.

A few days passed.

Bruno, who was slowly warming up at the training ground, said this to Seongjin.

"Yes. Actually, I received a proposal from an organization to work together recently. Do you happen to know about [Arenja], Your Highness?"

...What?

After recovering, Bruno Green comfortably settled in as a guest at the Pearl Palace.

While worried that he might shout, "I don't deserve this treatment!" and return to the slums, such concerns proved unnecessary.

Bruno Green comfortably occupied one of the few guest rooms in Pearl, receiving attentive care from the palace maids and resting. His demeanor appeared so aristocratic that no one could believe that he had lived in the slums for years.

A man who had climbed up the social ladder from humble origins purely based on his talent.

A commoner knight commander who lost everything due to an unfortunate event.

Though this was the image people had, the real Bruno Green was incredibly relaxed in all matters. His cheerful face betrayed no trace of misfortune.

Absurdly, the first thing Bruno Green did in Pearl Palace was carefully trim his mustache.

"...That's an impressive mustache."

During dinner, Seongjin awkwardly uttered these words when he saw Bruno Green's face. The mustache was so unique that it stole the spotlight.

While his unkempt hair remained, the impeccably trimmed mustache maintained a precise angle of 165~170 degrees and extended in a smooth curve.

At Seongjin's compliment, Bruno pulled on his mustache seriously.

"It's an attitude of a warrior, Your Highness."

"Eh?"

"When I go to battle or face a duel, I always sharpen the angle of my mustache as I prepare my inner sword."

"...?"

"I have groomed my mustache with the mindset of going into battle. I cannot afford to show hesitancy for this second life granted by His Majesty and Your Highness. The mustache is the most accurate gauge of a man's mindset."

What, really?

Although reason screamed that it was all nonsense, Seongjin found himself unconsciously touching the smooth area around his still mustache-less mouth.

And someone else was strongly influenced by Bruno's mustache: namely, Knight Calmen.

"Um... I've been cultivating my attitude as a warrior..."

Calmen, who had now begun to show a certain level of respect toward Seongjin, muttered as he stroked his chin.

Unfortunately, his beard was too young and patchy, making it difficult to discern any particular 'mindset.' Still, Seongjin thought it was a sign of respect toward his master.

The problem was that his master did not even acknowledge it.

"Before you cultivate your inner sword, you should properly train your swordsmanship. You got beaten by just seven guys, you useless apprentice. Don't go around bragging that you're a Royal Guard Knight."

"Master!"

When Calmen yelled out, Bruno Green snorted.

"What? Did I say something wrong?"

"But back then I couldn't— Isn't your attitude towards me different now? Just a while ago, you encouraged me saying I had some talent!"

"Huh? I told you that you have talent? Did I really? Don't you remember I was Prince Logan's swordsmanship teacher?"

For Bruno Green, who had been called a genius, anyone with talent less than Prince Logan was all the same to him.

Frustrated, Calmen stomped his foot.

"We shared drinks together! You said one of the best things you did in your life was to leave behind an apprentice like me!"

Bruno Green only rolled his eyes indifferently.

"Well, I remember you occasionally bought good liquor."

"That's why back then...!"

"But I don't remember sharing it with you. Why would I share something good with you?"

"You...!"

Seongjin sighed as he watched the comedy unfold between the two.

Well, Calmen is naturally hot-tempered, jumping around without knowing anything. But in the eyes of Bruno, the commander who is calmly egging him on, who wouldn't see the affection he has for his disciple?

However, Seongjin knew that the commander wasn't just teasing Calmen.

-'There will be occasional gaps in your memory. That was the best course of action for now.'

After finishing the treatment, this was the first thing the Holy

Emperor said as he removed the blindfold.

Reversing a completely damaged brain was by no means a simple task.

As evidence, several small psychic crystals remained in the commander's head like scars.

['I can guess some parts.']

The demon king, after contemplating for a while, explained.

['Psychic crystals are organs that can naturally form in the body. The problem is just that they formed in a bad location, in abnormal numbers.']

The demon king's speculation was this:

The psychic crystals were not so much traces of the plague invading the place, but rather a result of the human body naturally reacting to something emitted by Lophellum's egg.

['Isn't the difficulty with using holy power due to that? Just like getting treatment for sunburn from a priest doesn't make freckles disappear.']

Not long ago, Claudia had suffered minor burns from training under the harsh sun. Even after receiving treatment from a priest, her charming freckles remained.

In other words, while sunburns were targets for holy power healing, the body's natural reactions remained intact.

'So, then...'

In the end, there's only one way to cure the gray plague: to fully reverse the body back to before the psychic crystals formed.

But before discussing whether manipulating time is possible, reversing a single person's time involves unimaginably complex causal relationships, the demon king explained.

[‘So, I’ve tried to keep the healthy parts and only revert the damaged parts due to the psychic crystals. The psychic crystals would have formed gradually, so the time that has been reversed would vary for each area.’]

When the Holy Emperor had felt like he was dissecting the leader on a cellular level, it wasn’t entirely a misunderstanding.

[‘Even then, he had to bend the definition of holy power several times, and still, a tremendous amount of causality was twisted, shaking this world with shock. You probably felt it too.’]

Indeed.

Seongjin recalled the peculiar flow of attraction that had gathered around him and Bruno at that time.

[‘Moreover, the brain is not an organ that can easily be tampered with. Even a slight change in synapses can erase memories or paralyze you. Yet, he almost restored it without damage. Do you now understand what your father has done?’]

‘Wow...’

What did Holy Emperor actually do?

After doing such a tremendous thing, is he saying he’s going to push all the consequences onto me? What is he thinking?

Regardless of the complicated thoughts in Seongjin’s mind, the squabble between the two knights continued.

‘Haven’t I always said since your knighthood? Becoming a knight is just the beginning. True training starts now, so be diligent! Why haven’t you improved since then?’

‘Ah, yes! You also told me that day, I’ve become a distinguished imperial knight, and that even you have nothing more to say...!’

‘Hmm, I don’t remember saying that.’

‘Gah!’

Really, how conveniently selective his memory is.

After a few days of rest, Bruno began to appear in the Pearl Palace training grounds.

"My aura is recovering."

Bruno, who seemed to have grown some muscles from eating well in the last few days, said so.

Even without him saying it, most people would have guessed. His aura activity had noticeably improved in the past few days.

"It seems to be approaching the 3rd level."

"Yes, Sir Masain. I believe I'll reach the 3rd level soon."

"Phew, truly remarkable speed. Even as I feel the aura activity, it's hard to believe."

At Masain's admiration, Bruno smiled.

"It's a path I've already walked once. Building aura for the first time is different, isn't it?"

A Decalon Knight is someone who reaches the 10th level of aura, achieving the epitome of long-term training. You can't reach the 10th level without some form of enlightenment, and after that, the number of levels doesn't matter much.

Balthazar, known as the continent's top knight, was a Decalon Knight with a whopping 12 levels of aura. However, that was just because his sword was more suited for operating at 12 levels; achieving an ideal aura balance wasn't fundamentally different at 10 levels.

The level of Aura could decrease as well, and it was no different in the case of Commander Bruno. The only reason he couldn't achieve the 10th level was due to the limited amount of Aura accumulated in his body; his enlightenment was still firmly embedded in his experience.

As evidence, if he willed it, he could create a perfect balance of Aura

at any time. This was the ideal state of Aura concealment that Dasha had mentioned.

"Could it be due to my mood? My Aura affinity seems to have increased considerably compared to before. I'm not sure why, though."

"Is that so? That's interesting."

Ah, I think I know what it is.

Didn't Seongjin also feel the same after getting swept up in the Aura storm before? It must be related to the Emperor in some way.

'...The more I know, the more incredible he is.'

Seongjin thought so, but he was too focused on the conversation to notice the knights whispering amongst themselves.

"Hey, what about Prince Morres?"

"He's accumulating Aura at a rate surpassing a Decalon Knight, as a beginner?"

"What is he really?"

It was good news, in any case. Given a little time, the Commander could fully return to his former glory.

Another Decalon Knight was guaranteed for Delcross.

"So, what are you planning to do now? Are you going back to the Knights?"

Curious, Seongjin asked the Commander.

For now, he was staying in the royal palace as a guest, but this couldn't go on forever.

The position of the Commander for the Second Knights was vacant. After Sir Masain stepped down, there hadn't been a suitable successor, and deputy commanders and former commanders were

filling the position.

Bruno Green was currently in a [Hiatus] state.

No one seemed interested in his past mistakes anymore, and there was no disciplinary record against him. It wouldn't be too bad if he became a Knight Commander again.

The problem was Bruno Green's will.

Would he want to reclaim his glorious past position, or would he want to leave behind his miserable past and live a new life?

"If you want to work in the imperial guard again, I'll fully support your quick return."

Commander Bruno replied with a bright smile to Seongjin's cautious proposal. "I truly appreciate your kind words. But don't worry, Your Highness. I have some thoughts on what to do next."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Actually, I received an offer from an organization recently. Do you know about [Arenja], Your Highness?"

For a moment, Seongjin doubted his ears.

"...Arenja?"

"Yes. It's an organization directly under His Majesty the Holy Emperor, but it's not well-known."

"Arenja was a small elite organization created in the early days of Holy Emperor's reign. They were so secretive in their operations that no one knew the details except for his closest aides.

Had it not been for the regular annual budget allocations to [Arenja], their very existence, let alone their name, would have remained unknown.

They weren't a group made up of clergy as the intelligence department had speculated. Instead, a certain rare [ability] was

required to join them.

Recently, such an ability manifested in Bruno, and there had been cautious contact from Arenja, it is said.

"Ability?"

"Yes. There are generally two types of agents in Arenja. Agents who use spiritual powers internally to monitor the Emperor, and agents who operate externally in a cellular organization. It so happens that I have developed an ability suitable for external operations, and was advised to join the agency."

Commander Bruno awkwardly tugged at his mustache.

From his explanation, Seongjin could guess several facts.

The identity of the soul orb they had encountered not long ago was neither an angel nor a ghost, but a person with spiritual powers.

And even among those with spiritual powers, there were differences in abilities. There were some like the ones he first met who couldn't communicate at all, whereas others who appeared later were more powerful and capable of communication.

And perhaps they had been keeping an eye on Commander Bruno for a while. Amidst the forced abductions of patients with the gray plague all over the Empire, the timing of handing Seongjin over to Commander Bruno wasn't mere coincidence.

At that moment, the Demon King exclaimed in an excited voice.

[They were human? How could that be? They didn't even have proper souls. Ask more, Lee Seongjin!]

He was planning to do just that.

"So, what ability have you developed? Can you explain?"

"Hmm..."

At Seongjin's question, Commander Bruno looked into space for a

moment before answering.

"For example, yes. I can hear the voice of the person who just spoke to you. That person is the [Red One] that Arenja speaks of."

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Bruno Green's words were nothing short of shocking.

"For example, yes. I can hear the voice of the person who just spoke to you. That person is the [Red One] that Arenja speaks of."

Could he possibly be talking about the Demon King right now?
Really?

Seongjin was so surprised that he froze. The Demon King was the first to snap out of his shock and grew irritable.

[What? Is that what you're saying to me? Who's the Red One?]

"Then could you please tell me your name?"

[How dare a lowly human seek to know the true name of this great Demon King?]

"I apologize. Red One."

[No, I said I'm not the Red One!]

Unbelievable!

Bruno Green was really talking to the Demon King!

In the midst of the confusion, Seongjin checked to make sure there was no one nearby. Fortunately, Sir Masain, who had left when they were talking about rejoining the Knights, had not returned yet.

In a low voice, Seongjin cautiously asked Bruno,

"...Since when?"

"Since I regained consciousness in the palace. I began to hear strange

voices in the air."

"And you never had such an experience before?"

"Correct. There is a slight gap in my memory, but I can say with certainty that I've never had this kind of experience."

Then, there could only be one reason to consider.

'...The Mind Crystal!'

And the Demon King confirmed Seongjin's speculation.

[Yes, that guy has a rather intact Mind Crystal in his head. Seems to be functioning quite well. That means the [ability] he's talking about is clearly channeling.]

That seemed a reasonable conclusion.

"Is what he is saying true?"

Seongjin asked Bruno for confirmation, but this time his reaction was a bit strange.

"Pardon? Did you say something again? I didn't hear it."

"...?"

Could it be that he can't hear all the conversations?

"He says you're channeling..."

Then Bruno nodded.

"Channeling... Ah, Arenja's agents said the same. They said what I'm doing is the most basic form of channeling."

"So the 'ability required by external agents' is channeling?"

"Yes. Precisely, all Arenja's agents are channelers. Internal agents would have spiritual abilities added to that."

To be precise, spiritual abilities are like secondary skills exhibited by

advanced channelers. Ultimately, the essence of the two abilities is the same.

"That's why Arenja can only be an elite group. Channelers themselves are not common to begin with."

[Yet they have enough numbers to form an organization? Why haven't I ever seen any of them before?]

When the Demon King directly asked him, a satisfactory answer returned.

"It's not unreasonable. Originally, Arenja's agents are not allowed to approach the Pearl Palace."

So, not only the clergy but also spiritual ability users are restricted from entering!

As they continued to talk and test each other, Seongjin was able to get a fairly detailed understanding of the range of Bruno's abilities.

Firstly, he clearly understood the thoughts the Demon King directly transmitted to him. He also sensed the waves of thought the Demon King emitted whenever he became agitated.

However, he couldn't hear the thoughts that the jerk was discreetly transmitting to Seongjin's mind. The same was true for the words that Seongjin said to the Demon King.

[It makes sense when you think about it. To sense someone's thoughts through channeling, those thoughts first have to be emitted out of the soul. But our conversation is different. We directly transmit thoughts from one soul to another. It's like a true soul-to-soul conversation!]

The Demon King spoke with a somehow proud demeanor.

'Wow, that feels terrible.'

[...You cold bastard.]

Either way, Seongjin started feeling a headache due to the sudden situation.

Even a few days ago, the Demon King, who was initially trying to communicate with the Soul Orb, got furious, didn't he?

-How dare you call me 'Red'?

Seongjin had just found out that an organization called Arenja existed, but they already had enough information about the Demon King to even give him a friendly nickname like 'Red'.

Just because they are part of the imperial organization, expecting them to be friendly towards Seongjin and the Demon King was perhaps naïve?

"How did you come into contact with Arenja? What did they say about 'Red'... this guy?"

When he asked, sensing that he had received some rumors about the Demon King from Arenja, Bruno briefly explained what had happened.

Initially, when he heard the Demon King's voice, he suspected that the prince might be possessed.

But while he was cautiously observing Seongjin, Arenja contacted him through channeling.

"And I got detailed explanations from them. They said 'Red' is not a demon but actually a loyal servant of Your Highness. A perfectly harmless entity, so you can relax."

[What!?!]

The Demon King wasn't willing to let that go.

[Who said I'm a loyal servant! Who said I'm harmless! These mindless fools! I am the owner of a terrifying presence that can even burn souls! Will they realize the greatness of the true Demon King after they burn to the bone!?!]

Kraaaaack!

His mind was in chaos due to the Demon King's outburst.

Well, the trivial and harmless part is true. They seem to have a detailed understanding of the Demon King.

"So, if you join Arenja, what will you primarily be doing? You said something about becoming an external agent?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

What Bruno Green said next was unexpected.

"They want me to stay by Your Highness' side and act as a liaison."

"...With me?"

"Yes. They said there will be a need for close cooperation between Arenja and the department led by Your Highness in the future."

"..."

Cooperation? With my Monster Special Task Force?

He suddenly remembered what the emperor had said about the Monster Special Task Force not long ago.

—'...The Monster Special Task Force is, a small cog that will eventually support one pillar of Delcross, Morres.' (Chapter 76)

Although it was founded due to the Gray Plague, its real purpose seemed to lie elsewhere.

What exactly did the emperor expect from Seongjin and the Monster Special Task Force?

"The terms are favorable, so I'm considering it positively. Being a Knight Commander is actually filled with more trivial tasks than people think. They're offering me good pay just to stay by your side as a liaison, and I can devote myself to personal training. What could be a better job?"

It looked like Bruno had already made up his mind.

"Is it alright? The position of an imperial knight commander isn't

light."

"It would be a waste to let a rare ability rot, wouldn't it? Channelers are scarce."

You there. Just how scarce must one be to qualify as a Decalon Knight Commander?

The atmosphere in the Imperial City had been quite chaotic lately due to the sudden changes in the Gray Plague situation and the unexpected emergency measures.

But those who were most disturbed were none other than the sower brothers who had been sneakily planting Lophellum seeds, awaiting a large harvest.

Including Clemence, the three underground priests were huddled in one corner of the Heresy Tribunal building with worried faces today.

"Ah, it feels like a farmer who watched all his crops wash away in a flood for a year."

The elderly priest who spoke had a gloomy expression.

"Why did this happen now? The Holy Emperor who wouldn't bat an eye at a few people dying is acting now?"

Clemence, who was next to him, shook his head.

"It's not the Holy Emperor's doing. I heard this was entirely the church's unilateral decision."

"...That Archbishop Wesker!"

The elderly priest ground his teeth.

During the period of the Great Purge, Wesker, who was merely a high-ranking priest at the time, led the crackdown on an underground cult, which he considered brethren serving the same deity. Her accomplishments eventually earned him the rank of

Archbishop.

She was famous for her rapid rise to power, but the path she took was stained with the blood of many brothers.

"Has she noticed something about the [Mission]?"

"It doesn't seem like it, according to the Bishop. He simply thought that Wesker was excessively cautious about the Grey Plague."

Just as the three of them were disguised as ordinary priests of the Inquisition, there were brothers of the [Seed] hidden within the church. The [Bishop] leading them was also one of those undercover brothers within the church.

"But did the Bishop really not know anything about Wesker's moves? How is that possible?"

"Until emergency measures were activated, even her close aides didn't notice. And even after learning the facts, there was no feasible way to evacuate the seeds scattered throughout the empire," the Bishop said.

"...Bethella."

The old priest swallowed his saliva and drew the holy symbol.

The youngest among them, a young priest, also drew the holy symbol and asked with an anxious face.

"Bethella. Are there no saved seeds at all? I heard that the majority of those arrested were released."

"Unfortunately, Prince Morres intervened. He singled out the seeds and handed them over to the capital's guards. Now they're all being transferred to the Inquisition here, so our plan to scatter the seeds widely has failed."

At Clemence's answer, the old priest sighed.

"...And yet his preparations are not over!"

"Yes, it seems his preparations are not over yet."

Confused by the vague conversation, the young priest asked.

"...Prince Morres?"

The so-called disgrace of the imperial family—how did he manage to do it?

Clemence chuckled at the young priest's puzzled expression.

"Don't you know? Well, maybe not to brothers of your age, since it's been over 10 years since then."

Just 10 years ago, no one among the brothers of the underground cult didn't know of Prince Morres.

The day he was born, the leaders of the four underground cults, each an Archbishop of [Passion], [Seed], [Repentance], and [Rest], gathered exceptionally to bless his birth.

Together, they made offerings to the Lord and celebrated his birth, saying,

– "Rejoice! The child is the [Chosen One] for the glory of the Order!"

– "Passion ignites flames in the dead of winter, Sowing plants crops in the desert, and Rest personally breathed life into him!"

– "Repentance shall accompany him, ensuring he walks without regret!"

– "Freed from long-standing oppression, the underground Order shall prosper once again!"

At the time, Morres was a fatherless illegitimate child, but as the only grandson of the mighty Young Master of Asein, he was not easily accessible to the Order, so his brothers watched him from afar, waiting for the time of glory the Archbishops spoke of.

However, years later, the situation took an odd turn.

One day, the child's father emerged and became the 17th Holy Emperor, and the child entered the palace as a prince. Naturally,

Prince Morres was out of the cult's sight.

Not long after taking power, the young Holy Emperor began a massive crackdown on the underground cult. They were defined as heretics and [Cult of Darkness], and a great purge began against the brothers scattered across the continent, not just in Delcross.

The underground cult suffered a severe blow from the Holy Emperor's unexpected actions.

[Seed] and [Repentance], who were based in foreign lands, narrowly survived and maintained their lineage. However, [Passion] and [Rest], the cults that were prospering in Delcross, were utterly eradicated without a trace.

And among the surviving old brothers of the cults, strange rumors began to circulate. They said the reason the Holy Emperor hastily purged the underground cults was that he had learned in advance that his son was the Chosen One prepared by the cults..

"Isn't that strange? Then, isn't Prince Morres not the Chosen One for the Order's prosperity, but rather like..."

Unable to finish his sentence, the young priest hesitated. Clemence lowered his head and said, "How could sinners like us ever fathom the Lord's deep grace? Besides, the faith of the Archbishops remained steadfast to the end, they say."

It was the [Rest] cult that the Holy Emperor slaughtered the most brutally. And even up until the moment his neck fell to the Emperor's blade, it is said that the Archbishop of [Rest] loudly mocked the Holy Emperor, shouting his last prophecy.

-"His preparations are not yet over!"

"His preparations are not yet over..."

"By now, we can't even know what Prince Morres is being prepared for. However, whatever his actions may be, we can't sit idle. Because..."

"Because [Repentance] said that there will be no regret in his steps."

"..."

A heavy silence descended upon the three underground priests.

"...Given the situation, we have no other choice. Starting now, all we can do is sow the seeds diligently. For the time being, it seems that the Holy Emperor has no plans to make a move, and the Church's Archbishop cannot continue to issue temporary emergency measures. If we hurry, we might still be able to reap a great harvest."

A moment later, Clemence spoke with a determined look on his face.

"That's the only way, indeed. By the way, what happened to him? I'm talking about the other brother from the Forgotten order. Didn't he say he would cooperate?"

At the elderly priest's question, Clemence's face darkened.

"It would have been better to just preach to a wall. I've repeatedly emphasized the importance of our task, but Priest Hayes keeps giving the same answer with a somewhat carefree expression."

– "I'm just waiting for His command."

His demeanor felt like that of a condemned prisoner who has accepted his fate, making Clemence sometimes feel a sense of eeriness.

"We're not getting through to him at all."

"What a shame. I had hoped that some part of [Rest]'s legacy would surely be preserved here. If so, it would have certainly been a great help in our mission."

The elder priest sighed and made the sign of the cross.

"In that case, let's forget about him. If we remain faithful to the tasks given to us, the Lord will surely respond someday. Bethel..."

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It was a world where the sun had completely disappeared.

A frigid air devoid of life's warmth.

From the sky, a sticky rain fell incessantly, covering a land of countless, rapidly cooling corpses—a realm of death.

It was only later that Nate realized the viscous fluid wasn't rain but blood. Everything—the sky, the earth—was steeped in a deep red hue.

Standing alone under the crimson sky, Nate remained quiet.

This was the visage of Delcross post the advent of [Catastrophe].

Had equilibrium finally been shattered?

[Ha ha.]

A faint laugh echoed from somewhere.

Slowly, Nate moved his feet.

Every step he took squelched against the sprawled corpses of soldiers that covered the vast plains. Puddles of spilled blood formed splattering sounds beneath his every step.

Soon in his sight lay a crumbling city wall.

Or should it even be called a wall anymore?

With its semi-broken gates and partially remaining stone walls, what once was a fortification now stood soaked in blood.

And in the center of that gate hung a horrendously mangled corpse.

Hundreds, if not thousands of dull blade wounds had torn it to a degree beyond recognition. It took Nate a while to even figure out that this had once been a human.

A deed carried out by someone harboring a hideous grudge.

As Nate frowned, a voice whispered in his mind.

[That man was the king of Rohan.]

Was it that good-for-nothing Amelia was so obsessed with? How did he end up like this?

[It's the retribution he deserves.]

The voice conveyed no emotion, making Nate feel all the more uneasy.

Surveying his surroundings, Nate moved towards a patch of dry ground untouched by puddles of blood.

But he had to stop, lost for words. Lying before him were people he knew all too well—now lifeless.

The young woman lying with her face to the sky wore a tattered dress, a small dagger embedded in her chest. Though her hair had shortened and her face had aged, she remained beautiful in her pale, lifeless visage.

Amelia.

[A pitiful sprout. I nurtured it with care through its neglected youth, only for it to wither in its small pot without ever blooming. She was a child full of dreams and talent...]

Beside her lay a young man in black armor. Arrows pierced his back, and he lay fallen.

Though his face had grown sharper and harder with age, a youthful innocence still lingered on his pale features.

My son.

[A child with great potential. I built fences around him, worrying he might fly away. In the end, he mustered the strength on his own. I should have let him spread his wings earlier...]

Nate's hand began to tremble.

The other kids...

[Stop. You're not ready to handle this.]

Hwaak.

With those words, he was abruptly pushed out of that red world by an intense force.

The sky and the ground inverted, and in an instant, his vision blurred and he found himself in a completely different place.

"...Ha!"

"Your Majesty!"

Nate opened his eyes to the desperate voice calling him. Lifting his head, he saw the face of Chief Chamberlain Louis, who was looking down at him with a worried expression.

He was leaning back on the sofa in his office. In his hand was Amelia's pendant that Louis had brought to him earlier.

The pendant, which the chambermaid of the Silver Rose Palace had sent for repair, had been intercepted and brought to him by Louis.

"Are you alright, Your Majesty? You skipped your meal and stayed in your office. I came to check on you, and you're sweating profusely."

"...No, it's nothing."

Nate took a deep breath and waved his hand at the chief chamberlain. His racing heart slowly started to calm down.

He brushed his face with one hand and looked down at the shattered pendant he was holding. The tiny droplet-shaped gem was still

sparkling brilliantly even though it was broken in half.

It looked completely unrelated to that ominous world filled with red light.

"It's nothing," he said again to the chief chamberlain, who still had a worried look on his face. Nate opened his desk drawer, put the gem inside, and slammed it shut.

Several days had passed since the establishment of the special task force for dealing with monsters.

The Holy Assembly was still in heated debate over whether to recognize these "monsters" as such, or to categorize them as a type of demon race, as there was no specific mention of otherworldly beings or monsters in their scriptures.

The point of contention was a single line in their scriptures:

"The Lord's representative shall be present, and the Lord Himself will bestow blessings, ensuring that the likes of demons cannot set foot on this land."

Depending on the interpretation of this line, the creatures would either remain classified as monsters or be categorized as demons.

"The scripture doesn't mention anything other than demons! To say otherwise is heresy!"

"But this line clearly uses the term 'the likes of,' implying there could be others!"

"Implying? Did you just say implying? It's dangerous to make such expansive interpretations. That's heresy!"

"What? Have you finished speaking?"

They had been arguing for a week over a single line in a book. Theologians were indeed fascinating individuals.

"This is the current situation. I thought we'd be roaming the streets investigating the plague immediately, but here I am, stuck in the office reading books," Seongjin grumbled while crunching on a cookie. The Holy Emperor, sitting across from him, quietly listened to the story as he sipped his tea.

It was the first leisure time they had since Bruno's treatment. Seongjin had a lot to tell the Holy Emperor, given the numerous events that had occurred in just a few days.

Firstly, the aura layer of the short blade was nearly reaching the 6th level. It would be complete within a few days.

Considering it generally takes 3-4 years to progress from the 5th to the 6th level, Seongjin's progress was extraordinarily fast. At this rate, he would soon surpass being a squire and be on par with a newly initiated low-ranking knight.

The admiration from the priests and resident knights wasn't a one or two-day affair. Even Bruno, the knight commander, couldn't hide his astonishment. He looked almost betrayed.

-Why, if someone this capable exists, why didn't I notice him in my own class?

He didn't even seem to consider Morres as his disciple, so why the fuss now?

"Commander Bruno's regaining his Aura thanks to Father. As his Aura becomes more active, his disposition changes day by day. It won't take long for him to reach the level of a Decalon Knight."

"....."

Holy Emperor didn't respond, but Seongjin felt that he was listening more attentively than usual.

Anyway, Commander Bruno also accumulated his Aura quickly and recently reached the 4th level.

He usually seemed to be relaxed, but lately, he seemed to be invigorated, intensifying his meditation. His mustache becoming

longer and sharper was a bonus.

Another topic was the newly formed monster special task force.

For the last two days, Seongjin had been showing his face daily at the task force's office with Masain. Since the department was officially launched, they had started what could technically be termed "going to work."

Of course, there were no specific plans for work yet, and people were just getting to know each other on the team.

At first, according to Commander Leandros, they were recruiting talents from various places. However, the appointed advisors were busy arguing in the assembly. On top of that, Commander Leandros, who had a lot of work of his own, didn't even think about coming to the office.

Exorcists and Inquisitors who had been roaming the country anyway just continued their existing work, now with the added task of "monster" hunting.

In the end, the ones consistently showing up at the task force's office were a half-crazy Exorcist, a cheerful red-headed Inquisitor, and a perfume charlatan from the Lyora Plague Guild.

Seongjin had a lot to say about this Lyora charlatan.

Jibril Seymour.

She had attached herself to the monster task force after breaking into the capital's guard unit with Seongjin not long ago. She was the same plague doctor who had once sprayed rose-scented terror on Seongjin's group in front of the tribunal.

Of course, her first day in the office was no exception. She greeted the new members not with words but with a baptism of perfume.

"So the whole office smells like roses when we go to work! Ah, really! I don't know why Commander Leandros brought in that charlatan."

As Seongjin pouted, Holy Emperor, who had been quietly listening,

tilted his head slightly.

"But the scent is pretty good. Those who take care of plague patients often have to deal with foul smells, so it's not incomprehensible for them to be obsessed with perfumes."

Huh, has the scent grown on you too?

Seongjin sniffed his sleeve and then looked up suddenly.

"So you don't believe that nonsense about the scent driving away the disease, do you?"

"Hmm....."

Holy Emperor averted his gaze. He seemed unable to directly criticize the plague doctors who were officially endorsed by the assembly as quacks.

"Anyway, this is what we do with these members. We open the scripture and theology textbooks and discuss what we should do next, and half the day just passes by."

When will the assembly finally end? We should just investigate; I don't understand why there's so much fuss.

Listening to Seongjin's grumbling, Holy Emperor faintly curled his lips.

"So does that mean you finally read a bit on the Introduction to Theology, huh?"

"Um....."

I just flipped it open and become lost in thought myself.

This time, Seongjin also averted his gaze.

As he lowered his gaze, Seongjin noticed that there was a sword hanging at the Holy Emperor's waist that he had never seen before. Unlike his previous Nutcracker, it was a short sword with a white blade.

At first glance, its simplicity suited his taste. But wasn't it much shorter than the one he used to use?

"No big deal. When I use the Aura Blade, the length doesn't matter. All I need is a sturdy sword that doesn't require much maintenance," Holy Emperor said.

Ah, for someone whose Aura goes wherever his heart desires, the length of a physical sword doesn't seem to be of much concern.

Seeing Seongjin's keen interest, the Holy Emperor willingly unsheathed the sword to show him.

The new sword had a white hilt and its blade was also made of a rare white metal. It felt surprisingly light yet sturdy. The more he looked at it, the more it seemed like a fine piece. Despite the absence of any special decoration, it looked incredibly luxurious.

The Holy Emperor seemed quite pleased with the sword as well.

"It's as agile as a fish, don't you think? Hence, I've named it 'True Salmon.'"

Wait, what?

"...Is that the original name of the sword?"

"I'm not sure. I just picked something that seemed appropriate from the imperial warehouse."

If it's from the imperial warehouse, shouldn't it be a treasured sword? Wouldn't it have a grand name?

"Father, it might be a sword with a significant legacy. Shouldn't we find out its proper name?"

Seongjin was sweating nervously. He had to prevent another embarrassing naming debacle.

The Holy Emperor slightly tilted his head.

"Do we need to? If it gets a better name, then that should be enough."

Salmon is a very tender and delicious fish, after all."

"..."

This man, does he have a thing for seafood?

Seongjin frowned and pondered for a moment. How should I persuade him?

Even if it's not a significant issue, still, 'The Emperor's Beloved True Salmon'? Doesn't it sound a bit... odd?

"Um, Father..."

Seongjin hesitated.

"Of course, this sword is not a living object, but if it has once been given a name, then forgetting that name seems like a regrettable thing."

"..."

"If you're going to cherish it, shouldn't you also respect its name?"

Right. Names are really important.

Wasn't that the case with the twins as well? A name binds someone to this world, and if you continuously deny that name, you won't be able to set foot in the world.

Moreover, whatever the sword's original name, I'd bet my entire fortune that it would be cooler than 'True Salmon.'

Of course, that would be the fortune that I received from Father.

Then the Holy Emperor, who had been fixated on the name 'True Salmon' was silent for a moment.

He then looked at Seongjin with an indecipherable gaze and finally nodded slowly after some time.

"...Your words are correct. It is never desirable for the original name to be forgotten."

So?

"Then I'll instruct Louis to look into the records in the imperial warehouse."

Done! I've averted a second Nutcracker incident!

Elated, Seongjin clenched his fists and cheered inwardly. As a result, he failed to catch the fleeting expression that crossed the Holy Emperor's face at that instant moment.

There was no need to specifically search the imperial treasury records to know the original name of 'True Salmon' sword. Fortunately, the chief chamberlain Louis, who had just come in holding a pot of warm tea, gave a clear answer.

"The name of that sword is [Eungashi], and its nickname is [Acacia]. It's a truly beautiful sword," he said, as he set down a warm cup of tea at the Emperor's table.

"The virtue bestowed by the sacred text on the sword is called [Repentance]."

It was said that adding the virtue from the sacred text to a treasure sword was a long-standing tradition of the Delcross royal family. Things like [Promise], [Sacrifice], or [Devotion], for example.

It seems that if you become a chief chamberlain, you know all the items in the imperial treasury. Truly impressive, isn't it?

At Seongjin's admiration, Louis chuckled softly, "Hehe."

"How could that be the case? It's just that this sword is special. It was one of the few weapons designated as a sacred relic, but it was stolen several decades ago."

At the time, it was under strict supervision within the Theological Academy along with other holy artifacts. But, it vanished overnight, so to speak.

And the sword that was found again after a long search had become just an ordinary precious sword.

"It was an event that occurred 40 years ago. I was just an apprentice steward at that time, but it was such a famous event that I still

remember it."

It was an event where a sacred relic was stolen and lost its noble status. Both the imperial family and the academy were turned upside down.

High-ranking clerics and scholars from the academy had spent months making a fuss, but the noble status the sword had lost never returned. In the end, Eungashi was left abandoned in the imperial treasury amidst many people's lamentations.

"So, I thought that Your Majesty choosing this sword might also be destiny," said Louis, looking at the Holy Emperor with a soft smile.

The Holy Emperor, who had not known the full history, looked gravely serious. It's understandable if it was a sword that had once been a sacred relic.

"A name that's not so special after all. In that case, True Salmon is..."

Was that his concern?

Seongjin quickly shouted, "No! Eungashi or Acacia is definitely cooler!"

"..."

Looking all sour won't change the fact!

After finishing his royal duties and on his way back to Pearl Palace, Seongjin decided to stop by the Tribunal. It was to meet Kenneth Diggory and the Black Prophets who were imprisoned.

With nothing much to do even if he went to the Monster Special Division, and the whole division strangely just staring at Seongjin's face, he thought it might be okay to do some independent investigation.

Clip-clop. Inside the slow-moving carriage, Seongjin was lost in thought.

The accompanying knight Sir Masain who was traveling with him, discreetly observing his mood and remained silent. To his eyes, the prince's face was quite serious, so there was no point in questioning why they were going to the Tribunal.

In truth, throughout the journey, Seongjin had different questions he really wanted to ask the Holy Emperor:

—"Did you keep an eye on Commander Bruno through Arenja?"

—"What do you mean when you say he wholly belongs to my karma?"

—"How much does Arenja know about me and the Demon King?"

—"What do you expect from me and the special monster task force?"

However, every time he faced the emperor, the words would not easily come out. Whether it was due to some strange premonition of Seongjin's, or because of his sensitive intuition, he could sometimes sense an unexplainable, precarious atmosphere coming from the Holy Emperor.

—"Sometimes, even words spoken casually can shake and crumble the very foundations..." (Chapter 81)

Katrina's words kept coming to his mind.

'Is it just me, or does everyone look oddly tired these days...?'

After pondering for a while, Seongjin abruptly raises his hand and messes up his hair. Startled by this sudden action, Masain, who was on the opposite side, looked at him.

'Ah, I don't know! This is giving me a headache!'

Originally, such worries weren't in Seongjin's nature.

Wouldn't the Holy Emperor handle everything well anyway? There's no need to add burdens by sticking his nose into the issues of a failed construction supervisor.

Right, let's not create any trouble.

Maintaining his health and staying out of trouble would fulfill his duties as a child, wouldn't it?

While Seongjin was having these somewhat reassuring thoughts—thoughts that would have made the Holy Emperor sigh if he knew—the carriage arrived in front of the Tribunal.

It was a timely visit for Seongjin.

Three out of the six members of [Black Prophets] were soon to be released on bail until the Church Assembly was over.

Of course, Kenneth Diggory, the main culprit suspected of being related to the disappearance of a maid and a servant from his residence, was excluded.

So were Ashley and Jonathan, who hadn't regained consciousness after receiving treatment for the Gray Plague.

"We know nothing about that disease, Your Highness."

"Ashley and Jonathan have been under investigation elsewhere from the beginning."

As the three individuals who were preparing for release hesitated to speak, Seongjin furrowed his brows.

Seongjin was now suspecting the Tribunal. Those two who were fine at Diggory's residence were already implanted with a demon egg when transferred to the Tribunal. That means the implantation happened within the Tribunal's prison.

If the two regained consciousness and testified, it would simplify matters. However, due to the random formation of salt crystals from the Gray Plague, all patients were mentally unstable, so it was uncertain if they would wake up at all. The only option left was to interrogate the inmates from the Tribunal.

However, no matter how much they were questioned, the three individuals knew nothing. It seemed that they were originally

imprisoned in a different jail.

In the end, Seongjin had to let the three men go without any significant information.

"As you know, Your Highness, I was receiving treatment elsewhere at that time."

The second person Seongjin met was Kenneth Diggory.

His complexion had considerably worsened; whether it was due to the hardships in prison or because of the dissertation he had recently submitted was unclear.

Kenneth claimed to have suffered a skull fracture after getting hit on the back of the head by Seongjin during the Bantra Moss incident. Thanks to the treatment, he had no particular hardships in the heretical tribunal.

"You should be truly thankful to me."

"...Huh?"

Kenneth looked blankly at Seongjin, who was acting rather haughty despite being the one who had injured him.

At the time, Kenneth had acted like a complete lunatic, but now he seemed to have returned to being a well-mannered young man.

Does this guy remember feeding two of his servants to Bantra Moss? At the very least, he can't deny that he tried to use Ashley Becher as bait right before my eyes.

And yet, he spoke to Seongjin with a pitiful face.

"I'm truly thankful, Your Highness, for stopping me. I don't understand why I acted that way when I think about it now..."

What is up with this guy?

As Seongjin's expression turned grim, Kenneth flinched and lowered his eyes.

"I know it's meaningless to say this now, but we, the 'Black Prophets,' were simply a humble gathering exploring the mysteries of this world."

They had initially formed their group two years ago as an energetic social club to read forbidden books behind their professors' backs and discuss various questions.

However, everything changed a year ago when a person called the "Sage" appeared.

At first, the members did not easily believe the self-proclaimed 'one who had reached the truth of this world,' but the more they knew about him, the more appealing he became.

Above all, the black mass he brought was something that couldn't possibly exist in this world. The members gradually started to believe that it was a mystery of this world.

And sponsorship from Morres started roughly around then.

"Exactly as the Sage said! If it's the Emperor, he could share our mysteries."

Seongjin suddenly recalled Kenneth's shouts in the Diggory family's underground chamber.

So, the one who first brought that Bantra Moss spawn here was that 'Sage.' And for some unknown reason, he mentioned Morres to the Black Prophets.

Who the hell is this Sage?

"In fact, I don't remember much about the Sage," Kenneth said, sweating. He felt Seongjin's increasingly piercing gaze.

"But it's true! Although we were definitely charmed by him, thinking back, I don't have a clear memory of his face or voice! I even don't remember how we first met him!"

Kenneth's face was almost tearful.

And at that moment, Seongjin recalled the words that Haven spoke when he woke up from the gray plague.

– Who was she?

– Hm? Maybe I was too drunk, but I don't clearly remember her face now. Just that she had long, beautiful hair.

Was Haven really just drunk that day?

Kenneth looked further into this 'Sage,' but there was little information to be had.

The last time Kenneth met the sage was the day he sent an invitation to Prince Morres.

Before meeting him, the Black Prophets simply planned to continue ignoring him while taking the prince's sponsorship money. However, the sage directly advised Kenneth to invite Prince Morres to their gathering.

- "Even if you see what's in that prince's eyes, would you still be able to act that way? Heavy restrictions always entail great potential. You are more than qualified to step into the mysteries of this world."

That was the inside story behind the sudden arrival of an invitation to Morres.

'...Hey, Demon King.'

[Hmm, it seems to be true. His heart rate is fast, but it looks like it's just emotional fluctuations.]

The lie detector was working hard today as well.

Seongjin wrapped his head in agony, took a glance at Kenneth, sighed, and left the visiting room.

He definitely had to dig deeper into this sage, but he had no idea where to start.

The investigation into the Gray Plague wasn't even proceeding

properly yet.

Ah, it's frustrating. So frustrating.

He suddenly wanted to swing the Nutcracker around in the training ground.

But as soon as he went to the training ground, even more troubling stories awaited Seongjin.

"I have a feeling it wasn't just a coincidence," said Commander Bruno cautiously, sharing his story.

Apparently, he met someone who resembled his first love from his childhood before contracting the Gray Plague.

"Didn't you say you don't remember anything?"

When asked about the initial progress of the illness, Commander Bruno had stated that he hardly remembered anything. At Seongjin's question, the commander's face reddened.

"That's because... at that time, I thought I was just dreaming..."

"Ah."

Certainly. Saying, 'I had a good dream where my first love appeared,' is indeed awkward.

"But as days go by, I keep thinking that it wasn't a dream. Her face is blurry, but her voice is still vividly in my ears. Of course, my memory at the time isn't intact, so I can't be sure."

"Is it possible that she was your first love?"

"Impossible. She definitely died during the Ortana civil war long ago."

"Hmm..."

Seongjin stroked his chin, lost in thought.

The person resembling Commander Bruno's first love, the gorgeous beauty Haven met.

And the sage who captivated the Black Prophets.

[...Something smells fishy, right? It feels like the 'Charm' that demons use.]

At the Demon King's words, the commander nodded.

"Exactly. As Sir Red said, the more I think about it, the more I can't shake off this 'Charm' feeling. But there can't be any demon race in Delcross."

[Who the hell is calling me 'Red'?]

"My apologies. Sir Red."

[Ack!]

Seongjin raised his hand to stop the two who were anxiously talking.

"So, do you remember what she said?"

"Nothing much. I just remember feeling completely relaxed because she was comforting me. So... "

—"I know your pain better than anyone else. You don't need to blame anyone anymore. Forget everything, and after you sleep well for a few days, everything will get better."

"... something like that... Ah, that doesn't mean I resent the Holy Emperor or anything..."

Although the commander belatedly rambled on with excuses, Seongjin nodded his head with a generous smile.

I get it, you sir. Even if you've been sincerely loyal to the imperial family, who wouldn't harbor some resentment after living as an outcast for years? If it were me, I would still be unsatisfied even after venting all my frustrations.

"Yes, even if you vented your frustrations a few times, I understand."

"That's not what I meant..."

"Don't worry. I know. I know it all."

"....."

Enchantment.

The Demon King explained that it's a basic ability possessed by high-ranking demons, usually manifested through magic.

[So, there's really no way for a non-cleric human to resist it. That's why this guy was acting all confused, without even knowing that someone had implanted an egg inside him, acting all 'dazy'.]

"Who said I was acting all 'dazy'? Sir Red!"

[Who are you calling 'Red,' you brat!]

Leaving the two bickering figures aside, Seongjin started to organize his thoughts.

The assumption that the person going around implanting Lophellum's egg was using some sort of [Enchantment] ability seemed fairly plausible. Otherwise, who in their right mind would stand still while a parasite was being implanted into their chest?

However, wouldn't that require the initial premise that the demon species had entered the Imperial domain? He had heard that Delcross was entirely under the Holy Emperor's influence, preventing any demons from even stirring.

[Generally, the medium is magic, but it's not like there aren't cases where something else serves as the medium. In a sense, it could be even more dangerous if you don't consciously resist it, like with divine power for example...]

What?

As Seongjin blinked his eyes, the Demon King sighed.

[You don't have to look far. Just think about it. How did humans react when they faced your father's overwhelming divine power?]

Seongjin recalled the day his neck almost got sliced off.

How did they react? Weren't they just a bit moved?

So, that's why all the Archbishops ran out of the conference room, lost control of their emotions, and cried their eyes out while sitting on the floor shouting praises to the Lord... huh?

'...Somehow, that feels extremely dangerous?'

Seongjin broke into a cold sweat, and the Demon King chuckled.

[See? In a narrow sense, enchantment is just a technique to seduce someone, but in a broader sense, it's a technique that extremely stimulates human emotions to the point of losing their sanity. So, if you think about it, whether the medium is divine power, aura, or anything else, it's all possible.]

In other words, the Demon King was saying that as long as one can stimulate certain human senses properly, an effect similar to [Enchantment] could be produced.

[Ordinary humans often can't even distinguish what starts as enchantment. Even if they know, they find it hard to resist. For example, I've used [Enchantment] on countless humans, but there was only one who didn't fall for it. That is, you, Lee Seongjin.]

'...Huh?'

Hold on, did I just hear something that can't be ignored?

'...What did you do?'

[Ah, enchantment. I used it on you...]

Seongjin was horrified.

When exactly?

[That's the point, I offered to give you the world and all, didn't I? Didn't I look like an incredibly beautiful woman at that moment?]

'.....?'

Certainly, back then the Demon King did make various proposals.

—"I will save your life, and you'll get to have both Earth and the Demon World. Think about the potential of the two fused worlds! You could even have power rivaling the Demon King!"

Let's think more in detail about the situation at that time.

What did the Demon King look like then? A head that was all that was left, and even that face had been completely smashed by a fist? Was that a beauty?

Hold on, is that a situation where [charm] could work?

[...Khu-khuk!]

The Demon King suddenly let out a sound, whether it was a cry or a scream, and buried himself in a corner of Seongjin's mind.

Hmm, it seemed like I triggered his trauma.

* * *

The next morning, after finishing his early training, Seongjin stamped his attendance with Sir Masain at the Monster Special Task Force office.

For the first two days, even Commander Bruno accompanied them. Faithfully fulfilling Arenja's request to stay by Seongjin's side.

However, at some point, he started to avoid the Monster Special Task Force office.

"That woman keeps talking noisily."

When asked why, he scrunched his face and replied.

"Which woman?"

The commander pointed at his head without saying anything.

Ah, the woman with an abnormal amount of mind crystals in her head.

She is Dame Sharon Kyung, an exorcist from the Holy Terbacchia.

I thought she was usually a quiet person doing her job, but it seems she feels different to a channeler.

Apparently, various voices keep coming from her uncontrolled mind crystals. He said it's too noisy, even if he tries to endure it.

"She said she can't help it and asked for understanding, but well..."

Saying that, the commander furrowed his brows and nervously tugged at his mustache.

"She keeps throwing embarrassing comments at me, then laughs while watching my reaction. She's enjoying it. She's a really unpleasant woman."

"...."

Dame Sharon. Why on earth did you do that?

Meeting another channeler with similar abilities after such a long time seemed to make her giddy with excitement.

And so, the regular members of the Pearl Palace team became Seongjin and Masain once again.

The Special Monster Task Force was still using a temporary office on the second floor of the administrative annex building. The annex was relatively quiet, so the two were able to arrive at the office without running into anyone. As soon as they opened the door, the overpowering scent of roses made them involuntarily scowl.

"Jibril..."

"Your Highness!"

A young woman with dark-brown hair curled into a high bun and large eyes greeted them with an elegant bow, lifting the hem of her skirt slightly.

Jibril Seymour.

A young talent specially invited to the team, serving as a plague doctor at the Lyora Plague Conference.

She always carried a large sprayer full of rose-scented perfume, and because she was unnecessarily diligent, she was always the first to arrive in the office and finish disinfecting the space. Meaning, the scent of roses never really left the office.

Seongjin found it slightly irritating, but as the Prince of the Holy Empire, he couldn't just ignore the teachings of the Lyora doctrine recognized by the Church. He couldn't easily kick out someone who had been recruited by Commander Leandros, who was in charge of the team.

Moreover, Jibril was fundamentally a very pleasant young lady. She always greeted people with a friendly smile and sprayed her perfume, leaving them no choice but to avoid the range of her sprays.

Seongjin sighed.

"What about the others?"

"Dame Sharon is out assisting Commander Leandros for the day. Sir Valerie has gone to the Theological Academy."

"Ah! Your Highness, you're already here!"

Before Jibril could finish her sentence, a red-haired inquisitor burst through the office door. He greeted them with a radiant smile and was holding a large book under his arm.

"I thought I'd get back before you arrived, but I was a little late."

"No, I just got here. What's that?"

Valerie grinned and put the book down on the desk with a thud. Dust

flew up from the ancient tome.

"Prepare to be amazed! It's probably been decades since anyone has opened this book."

It was an old book covered in thick layers of dust. After brushing off the worn-out leather cover, the title of the book, barely legible due to wear and tear, came into view.

[Apocalypse of Another World]

Masain seemed startled and glared at Valerie.

"...Isn't this a forbidden book designated by the Church? What are you doing with this?"

Masain, who was particularly sensitive to heretical discussions, looked as if he wanted to protect Seongjin from the book. The red-haired inquisitor blinked in momentary confusion.

"Ah, don't worry. Of course, I borrowed it from the Theological Academy with proper permission."

"You got permission?"

When Masain looked skeptical, Valerie scratched his head.

"Well, it's understandable. The Church is in an uproar over discussions about creatures from other worlds. As a result, some materials are likely to be removed from the list of forbidden books."

"....."

Jibril leaned in with curiosity, to which Valerie responded with a smile.

"Besides, this is the only book that describes creatures close to 'monsters.' Even if it remains a forbidden book, we have received limited access for our department. We are, after all, the Monster Special Task Force, aren't we?"

A book containing monsters.

Finally, Seongjin felt a twinge of curiosity and glanced at the book over Masain's shoulder.

Who in Delcross would write a book about monsters? How did they know about creatures that don't exist in this world?

[Oh? There's a book that contains Gehenna's monsters?]

The Demon King also sent an interesting emotion for the first time in a while.

[Who wrote this? Wow, it's fascinating.]

Pushing aside the still hesitant Masain, Seongjin approached and closely examined the book's cover.

The thick leather cover was intricately embossed, making it difficult to distinguish the faded letters. After observing it for a long time, Seongjin was finally able to find the author's name at the corner of the book.

—Written by Sigurd Sigurdson

Sigurd? Could it be?

[Seongjin! It's him!]

The excited voice of the Demon King echoed loudly in his mind.

[I told you before, it's undoubtedly him! The storyteller who wanders from dream to dream!]

The day he died and revived at the Diggory Mansion.

Despite being advised to maintain absolute stability, Seongjin laid in bed and had quite an extensive conversation with the Demon King about various matters that had occurred up until now.

The stories of the High Demon Kings and foreign lords the Demon King had seen at the border of the Void.

The story of Seongjin flying to Sigurd's 34th District and returning with the aid of the Holy Emperor. The story of meeting the twins and wandering about.

Among them, the story that they talked about the most was about the puppet show that Seongjin had seen. A puppet show about the Dream Demon King, the Fire Demon King, and a cruel warrior.

[That was the guy who attacked me back then!]

The Demon King grumbled as if annoyed.

[Unforgivable to launch such an ineffective attack!]

Ineffective?

[Hey! Imagine being pushed slightly by a finger while standing on the edge of a cliff. How would you feel? I was dying at the boundary of the dimension!]

Ah, sorry.

After venting his anger for a while, the Demon King finally calmed down.

[The puppeteer you saw must be the storyteller who wanders through dreams.]

'Storyteller?'

[Walking through a thousand dreams, emitting a thousand voices.]

Seongjin recalled the peculiar allure of that person's voice.

So, is he the Dream Demon King? Must he fight the warrior to become the Storytelling Demon King?

[Well, from what I know, he's not really what you'd call a 'Demon King'. The concept of a story isn't higher than that of a dream. He probably just lightly manipulated the concepts needed to create his small thought experiment.]

According to the Demon King's explanation, the concepts that the puppeteer needed were [Dream], [Fire Demon King], and a human [Warrior].

Of course, the Dream Demon King wasn't friends with the Fire Demon King either. All that was sufficient was solidifying the notion that the Fire Demon King entered someone's dream, fought with a human, and died.

'What about that gloomy story filled with betrayals...?'

[The author of the story is dark, so naturally, a dark story is born. However...]

'However?'

[The story about the cruel warrior seems to be quite well-researched.]

What, this guy?

The two engaged in a brief war of words, fraught with nervous tension.

Looking back, I was like, 'What kind of psycho is this guy?' Even now, just thinking about that moment makes my heart race, you know?

What? You're the one who invaded first, and you're being all self-righteous? And you're just a soul, you don't even have a heart to race. What's your problem?

Anyway, what Seongjin was focused on was the Demon King's real name, and that part about the "dream."

The Demon King's name wasn't actually "Al Pahars," as expected. The name was twisted in the first place to launch an attack, so that was a given.

But when Seongjin asked for his real name, the Demon King hesitated.

[Hmm, maybe it's better you don't know. Speaking this name aloud

could be troublesome.]

'Why?'

[Because there are some conditions attached.]

'...?'

So how do I call you if you suddenly fly off somewhere?

[I'll call you to my side. Then, won't your father swiftly come to pick you up?]

'What are you talking about?'

If the Holy Emperor knew, he'd give this guy a good thrashing for speaking so carelessly. If anything like that happens again, that nobleman would happily kick the bucket!

Shaking his head in disbelief, Seongjin shifted the topic.

'So what's this 'Dream' about?'

Seongjin could understand that Gehenna's Demon King was a representative of the Fire Demon King. After all, Gehenna was another name for the hell of eternal suffering.

But what did it mean for the Fire Demon King to have fought a human hero in a dream?

The Demon King calmly responded.

[It's simple. I'm talking about lower-dimensional realms like the Sigurd 34th District as dreams.]

Huh?

To Seongjin's befuddled face, the Demon King elaborated.

[The name Sigurd 34th District simply means it's the 34th Earth dimension discovered by a storyteller named Sigurd.]

The 34th Earth dimension discovered?

Are there that many Earth dimensions?

[It's just a simple lower-dimensional realm. The Earth of the Main World is separate, Seongjin.]

Seongjin, having lost all words due to the shocking revelation, heard the Demon King deliver the final blow.

[Your world is a lower-dimensional realm created based on the concepts of the Main World. In other words, it's nothing more than someone's dream.]

Imaginary Dimension.

A world where immense thought-forms solidify and eventually form a complete dimension of their own.

For some, it's an entire world in and of itself, while for others, it's a mere dream or an illusion— a sub-dimension.

"Are you saying that the Earth I lived on... wasn't real, but just a dream or an illusion?"

If Seongjin had heard such a thing while he was living on Earth, he would have scoffed and told the person to spend their time more productively, like hunting demons. However, now that he himself has traveled to another dimension, he can't simply dismiss these ideas as nonsense.

[Don't think of it so simply, Lee Seongjin. It may have started that way, but an Imaginary Dimension is ultimately a legitimate dimension. There is no change to the fact that it is a complete world.]

The Demon King spoke as if to console Seongjin, who rarely showed signs of emotional disturbance.

[Look. You are, after all, a solid existing soul. You've come all the way to this main dimension and you're still living and breathing just fine. What better evidence is there to prove your existence?]

According to the Demon King, the Earth dimension where Seongjin had lived—Sigurd-34 Earth, as it's called—is nonetheless a unique dimension distinct from the main Earth. It may feel like there are quite a number of Earth dimensions based on their numbering, but compared to the sheer amount of dreams that appear and disappear daily in the main dimension, it is actually an extremely small

fraction.

Becoming an individualized dimension means that the originating dream is that deep and powerful.

However, the imaginary worlds are slightly less sturdy in their boundaries compared to the main world or permanent worlds. Consequently, it's relatively easier for them to be created or destroyed. If one intends to, interference or infiltration from other dimensions is also comparatively straightforward.

The reason why storytellers often move around in imaginary dimensions is precisely because of this.

To strengthen the boundaries of such an imaginary dimension, it needs to either merge with another dimension to evolve into a permanent dimension, or two dimensions have to interlock perfectly to form a complete loop and resonate with each other.

Hearing this explanation, Seongjin suddenly recalled what the Demon King had once told him during their final battle.

"You'll have both Earth and the demon world. Think of the potential harbored by the fusion of the two worlds!"

Come to think of it, hadn't the Demon King mentioned that Gehenna was also an imaginary dimension?

[That's correct. Gehenna had already undergone one dimensional fusion.]

The Demon King calmly admitted.

[That's why I intended to merge Sigurd 34 Earth and Gehenna, to create a new, sturdier permanent dimension.]

* * *

Sigurd Sigurdson.

A tale-spinner of dimensions, wandering through a thousand dreams and uttering a thousand voices.

He named the dimension after his own name upon discovering the Earth where Seongjin lives. He might be a puppeteer who was trying to completely annihilate the Demon King of Gehenna.

Seongjin felt a bit uneasy with the ancient forbidden book laid out before him, tracing the footsteps of that person.

'I'm still not sure if it's that Sigurd.'

[Of course, there's a possibility that it could be someone with the same name.]

The Demon King agreed but seemed to be inwardly confident that this author was indeed that tale-spinner.

[But who else could this Sigurd be, who wrote such a massive book about another dimension, if not that boastful tale-spinner?]

'.....'

It's not that Seongjin didn't have a strange feeling that the two might not be completely unrelated.

"Alright, team. This is a historic moment! For the first time in nearly 50 years, we are opening this forbidden book before even the professors of the Church!"

The red-haired Inquisitor looked completely thrilled. His exaggerated tone and theatrical speech reminded Seongjin of his college juniors, who used to get excited about bad acting experiences.

"Sir Valerie, you seem happy."

Jibril, who was delicately wiping the surface of the worn-out book with a rose-scented handkerchief, smiled.

"Yes, isn't the story of another world just too exciting? I was so excited when I heard that reading permission had been granted, I couldn't sleep all last night!"

He had hurriedly rushed to the Theological Academy as if terrified of going to work.

But is this really okay? Considering he's an Inquisitor of St. Marcia, which is almost the hands and feet of the heretical tribunal?

"Ah, it's a secret, but becoming an Inquisitor actually allows you more freedom to explore these fascinating subjects. Regardless of whether you believe it to be true or not, the story itself is very interesting, isn't it? It used to be a hot topic among the seniors as well."

He slyly glanced at Masain, who seemed displeased, and then smiled awkwardly.

"Of course, there's not a speck of doubt in my faith towards God!"

Of course, how could there be?

And so, they all gathered and turned the first page of that enormous book.

Just as Sir Valerie said, it was a historic moment. Seongjin was able to confirm the truth of the Demon King's words as soon as he read a few lines from the book's introduction.

—I, who freely roam through a thousand dreams, the great king, embark on a journey to become the one tale, the one rule that penetrates the world. I shall record Sigurd's journey in this book.

So, it was extremely grandiose from the very first sentence.

[Ha! Such arrogance, this level of pretentiousness...]

The Demon King clicked his tongue. Regardless of the facts, it appears that the storyteller himself thinks he's some sort of "Dream Demon King."

Of course, there was also an Inquisitor who became even more excited.

"Wow, it's intense right from the first line! It's completely spine-tingling, isn't it?"

—This book is a record of the most impressive dreams I have ever experienced. It serves as a guidepost set forth by a great explorer for

those who may one day encounter these dreams themselves. A suggestion personally given by a benevolent king so that you, so that you, the pitiable ones, can finally find solace within these set of grand rules.

This guy is even more boastful than that wicked dragon he claims to have faced. It's unbearably cheesy to the point where modern sensibilities can't keep up.

"It seems like there's more than one reason this book became forbidden, right?"

Jibril narrowed her lovely eyes as she spoke.

Indeed, if someone who self-proclaims to be a great king and vows to be the single rule of the world isn't heretical, then what is? Even in modern society, they'd likely be banned from publication for excessive rhetoric.

In any case, once they laboriously moved past the pretentious preface, the content that followed was surprisingly written in a more normal tone. Soon, Seongjin and his party were engrossed in the book.

Unicorns, mermaids, and other legendary creatures; bizarre-looking monsters and beasts; strange lifeforms that exist on the border between plants and animals; and various magical creatures that Seongjin is familiar with.

For those who love stories, the book was packed full of fascinating content.

As Valerie turned each page, his eyes began to sparkle with delight.

Brief descriptions of the dimensions where these wondrous otherworldly creatures exist, relatively detailed accounts of their ecology, and even simple but accurately depicted illustrations.

To Seongjin's eyes, it was an incredibly well-crafted book.

Well, except for the preface.

[Hoo?]

As he continued flipping through, he finally started seeing content about magical creatures. The Demon King seemed to be fully engaged.

[This is pretty good?]

Upon seeing the pincer-legged creature that he often used as a weapon, Seongjin also concluded inwardly. The content of this book was fairly reliable.

"It's like an encyclopedia. But why is the title of this book 'Apocalypse'?"

Valerie smiled brightly at Jibril's question and responded.

"That's a valid question. The decisive reason this book is forbidden lies in the last chapter of this book."

He quickly flipped to the last chapter.

And there, just as the title suggested, the apocalypse unfolded before their eyes.

—When the first star awakens, a figure with a black face appears. Wherever he passes, not a blade of grass, not a drop of water remains; a great famine ensues. This is why he is called Greed. All beings of Delcross will suffer from hunger.

"Good heavens, this is a book that directly prophesies the fall of Delcross."

—When the second star awakens, a figure with a pallid face will appear. He is called the Bringer of Rest, and behind him, he commands an army of cold immortality. This is why he is known as Death. All beings of Delcross shall achieve eternity.

Ahem. Masain stepped back, his face drained of color, beads of cold sweat trickling down his face. The ominous prophecy had clearly shaken him.

This book had recorded how Delcross would face calamity as a total of five stars awakened. And roughly, the last part went like this:

—And then, the sky and the earth will connect, and a harbinger of the apocalypse wearing a lofty crown and wielding three swords will appear. When he swings one sword, the sun will lose its light and one-third of the stars will fall to the earth....."

Thump. With a grim look, Masain snatched the book and forcefully shut it.

Whoosh. The sound of the old, uncleaned dust scattering into the air.

The members of the special squad stared wide-eyed at Masain, who spoke with a trembling voice:

"This... this last chapter, it's best not to read any further."

"It's nothing but the ramblings of an arrogant person, Sir Masain."

Although Sir Valerie shrugged his shoulders, Masain's expression was firm.

"Merely laying eyes upon these erroneous verses that hint at the millennium kingdom of Delcross's ruin is sinful!"

"However....."

"We must especially prevent these sinful verses from reaching the young Prince's eyes!"

Seongjin, who was standing in front of Masain, looked up at him with puzzled eyes.

Sir Masain, who didn't seem to be particularly devout on a regular basis, was surprisingly sensitive to heresies and such.

"Hmm, hmm....."

The red-haired Inquisitor coughed awkwardly with a slightly flushed face. Apparently, he found it somewhat embarrassing to be corrected by a mere Knight.

"It seems Sir Masain is correct. This is a forbidden book marked as heretical, so we should be cautious, even if we have permission."

While saying that, Valerie's expression was one of reluctance. His words didn't carry much conviction.

Noticing the awkward atmosphere enveloping the members of the special squad, Seongjin sighed. For now, the mood needed to be refreshed.

"Sir Masain is right. Let's not forget that we've gathered to stop the [Gray Plague]. Shall we go back to the list of monsters in the codex?"

Taking Seongjin's cue, Masain hesitated for a moment before reluctantly putting the book back on the table.

In silence, they reopened the otherworldly apocalypse book and slowly began flipping through its pages.

"Hmm... it's not here?"

How much time had passed? They thought they had roughly skimmed through the section containing magical beasts, but they couldn't find anything about parasitic monsters that lay eggs anywhere.

Of course, it's not impossible that they simply missed it, but it's unlikely that the Demon King following Seongjin would have overlooked such a passage.

[Hmm, the idea that this single book contains all the beings from another world is nonsensical from the get-go.]

The Apocalypse of Another World was not an encyclopedia but rather a record primarily of what interested Sigurd. Even if it only gathered creatures with unique shapes or strange lifestyles, the volume would be extensive. There was no need to allocate pages for a small parasitic monster that might not even exist.

Seongjin glanced at the still restless and anxious Masain and spoke to the red-haired inquisitor.

"Would you take another detailed look, Sir Valerie? It might be better if Masain and I investigate the Heretic Tribunal's prison."

The faces of the two brightened simultaneously.

"Yes, Your Highness, I'll look thoroughly."

"Then I shall guide you to the Heretic Tribunal, Your Highness!"

Sir Valerie cheerfully picked up the Apocalypse of Another World and vanished to his spot. Masain's face also relaxed noticeably once the book was out of sight.

Good, everything is resolved smoothly.

Except for the moment of negligence when Jibril sprayed them with perfume, cautioning them to be careful.

"The sanitary conditions in the Heretic Tribunal's prison aren't exactly ideal."

Holding a sprayer and smiling brightly, Jibril received a forced smile from Seongjin.

Damn this Lyora plague quack!

[Hmmm...]

Waiting for the carriage in front of the administrative building and shaking off the perfume scent, the Demon King groaned. He seemed to have been contemplating something.

'What's the matter?'

[No, I've been feeling like something's about to come to mind, but I can't grasp it.]

The Demon King's uncomfortable feeling transmitted without filter, making Seongjin also feel slightly uneasy.

[Maybe we're too focused on Lophellum's eggs and overlooking something crucial?]

'...?'

We're dealing with parasitic monsters, so we should focus on parasitic monsters, right? What else could we be missing?

However, they soon discovered the answer.

That is, standing in front of the Heretic Tribunal building with one corner completely destroyed and billowing smoke.

"Your Highness, did I ever mention that you seem to bring incidents and accidents wherever you go?"

Seongjin couldn't help but send a look full of injustice towards the mumbling Masain.

What did I even do!

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After deciding to investigate the Heresy Tribunal's prison, they left the task force office when Masain made a peculiar remark.

"Although I'm still a little worried about entering the Heresy Tribunal, His Majesty assured me that it should be fine now."

".....?"

The tone suggested that, up until recently, it was a place one shouldn't set foot in.

"Why? Is there a problem with the Heresy Tribunal?"

At Seongjin's question, Masain made an ambiguous face, as if he was smiling or perhaps not.

"...No, not anymore. It should be a good thing now. I misspoke for no reason."

Avoiding further questioning by hurriedly averting his gaze, he disappeared down the road, saying he would call a carriage.

Hmm, something seems suspicious.

Another unsettling factor remained. While waiting for the carriage in front of the administrative building and shaking off the scent of perfume, the previously quiet Demon King suddenly groaned.

[What if we're so focused on Lophellum's eggs that we're missing something important?]

'Well, Lophellum's eggs are parasitic in humans, so it makes sense to focus on them, right?'

[If it was a successful parasitism, maybe. But why bother with a host

who will eventually die anyway?]

Is it really impossible that the demon beasts themselves hatched the eggs? To Seongjin's question, the Demon King firmly denied.

[Didn't I tell you? Lophellum avoids animals with high body temperatures like humans. Moreover, their ovipositors are surprisingly small, so they can't create large wounds. This has to be a case where the eggshell had hardened to some extent before being implanted.]

I see. The fact that the implanted location is always the same is also odd.

Just above the sternum. I don't know for sure, but perhaps that's the environment where Lophellum's eggs can survive the longest.

The conversation paused momentarily, as the carriage soon arrived.

Seongjin and Masain climbed into the carriage. Of course, Seongjin didn't forget to shake off the perfume and fully open the window.

[...It's strange. Why purposely kill the eggs inside a human's body? Why?]

In the carriage, the Demon King continued to brood and sigh.

Is there even anything to worry about? Isn't it enough for the Heresy Tribunal to just find the spy who planted the egg and get rid of him?

[It's not that simple!]

The Demon King flared up.

[Don't you get it? There might be another life similar to Lophellum that even I, the Demon King of Gehenna, don't know about. Whoever spies planting the egg knows that. This is now a matter of my pride versus his!]

Ah, I see.

Seongjin responded vaguely and closed his eyes, thinking that

everything would be resolved once they reached the Heresy Tribunal.

However, things didn't go as smoothly as expected. Seongjin and his companions were stopped by the knights and guards of Saint Marcias right at the entrance of the Heresy Tribunal.

"Heresy Tribunal does not allow random entry from outsiders."

A stern-looking, sturdy knight narrowed his eyes as he blocked Seongjin's way.

"Your Highness, are you a member of the Heresy Tribunal? Or are you a witness or defendant in a case?"

Knowing well that Seongjin was neither, it felt like the knight was unnecessarily flexing his muscles. An inexplicable sense of hostility emanated from his demeanor. For some reason, Seongjin thought he might be one of the knights who had surrounded the Pearl Palace during the Diggory incident.

Masain stepped forward.

"This is an investigation regarding a serious incident threatening the imperial palace. Therefore, Sir..."

"Inquisitor Paris."

"Yes, Sir Paris. This is part of an investigation led by the Monster Special Task Force, so we request your cooperation."

Ha. A Monster Special Task Force!

At Masain's words, the knight snorted and raised an eyebrow.

"Do you have an official letter of cooperation?"

"That..."

Masain was at a loss for words.

There was no way they would have that.

Initially, there was no official stance on the monsters from the Holy

Assembly. The duties of the special unit had not yet been defined, and the investigation itself was merely Seongjin moving around whenever he had the spare time.

'But this is rather sly.'

Seongjin was quietly staring at that knight called Paris when it happened. Someone passing through the Heresy Tribunal's entrance, discovered Seongjin at the front, and looked visibly flinched.

That person hurriedly approached, soon standing next to Knight Paris and began to intensely stare at Seongjin's face.

He was a gaunt middle-aged man in priestly robes, holding a large holy scripture. Despite his relatively young age, his back was noticeably hunched.

Not only Seongjin's group was startled. Knight Paris asked with a suspicious expression due to the unexpected situation.

"Brother Hayes, what brings you here?"

However, the priest named Hayes did not answer Paris' question. He just stared at Seongjin as if entranced.

Sensing the unusual atmosphere, Masain instinctively blocked the space between him and Seongjin. The man then softly asked Seongjin,

"...I never expected you to come here yourself."

Did he know Morres?

While Seongjin was hesitating on how to respond, the man interrupted his thoughts with another question.

"Has the time finally come?"

"...?"

It was an incomprehensible question.

However, sensing an inexplicable zeal in the man's eyes, Seongjin felt an odd premonition that he shouldn't ignore him.

"...Yes."

Seongjin slowly nodded, meeting the man's gaze.

"I had thought it was a far-off future. Have you truly made up your mind?"

"...?"

Well, since I don't really understand, let's just agree for now.

"Yes."

As if ripples were forming on a quiet lake, a smile gradually spread across the man's face. The change was so serene yet intensely passionate that even Knight Paris stared at his face in astonishment for a moment.

"Ah..."

He closed his eyes and sighed softly.

"It's been a long wait. Finally, the end of all this suffering is in sight."

The man took a step back and spoke to Seongjin in a polite bow. For some reason, his demeanor seemed oddly uplifting.

"Everything will happen as you have foretold."

And then he turned his body, and swiftly walked back into the Heresy Tribunal.

...What was that just now?

"Your Highness, do you know him? What did you talk about?"

Masain asked with a puzzled look on his face, but Seongjin had no specific answer. He just had a feeling that if he simply let him go, he might miss some crucial clue.

Could he be related to the previous Morres in some way?

It wasn't just Seongjin who felt something from the man. The demon king, who had been silent for a while, suddenly whispered to him.

[Hey, I'm not sure if it's just me, but doesn't that guy seem weird?]

'How so?'

[Very faint, but I feel something familiar. Just like a demon or something...]

'...Could it be?'

Is it him? Could he be the one who planted that egg?

Seongjin turned his head to look back, but Priest Hayes had already disappeared into the Heresy Tribunal building.

[Hm, I didn't sense any demonic essence or egg from him.]

The demon king paused, but his voice lacked confidence.

[I just feel a very faint trace of demonic energy from him. Why is that?]

'.....'

He wanted to go after the priest right away, but the guards led by Paris were still eyeing him and his party warily.

Is it too risky right now? Should I wait for that Hayes priest to get off work?

As Seongjin was pondering while staring at the Heresy Tribunal building, Masain asked him again.

"Your Highness, what command did you give him? What is he going to do?"

"I don't know either."

"What?"

Seongjin shrugged his shoulders toward Masain, whose eyes widened in surprise.

"I just felt like I had to say something, so I replied vaguely. What could possibly happen? What can he even do....."

But Seongjin couldn't finish his sentence.

Boom!

A loud explosion occurred, and a corner of the Heresy Tribunal building crumbled.

".....!?"

Not only Seongjin and his party but also the guards at the entrance, including Paris, were staring up, their mouths agape.

What?

Then, a series of smaller explosions followed.

Bang! Rumble! Boom! Creak!

The building of the Heresy Tribunal trembles with a shock. Dark smoke starts to seep out of a collapsed wall, making it evident that something quite abnormal was happening inside.

"Uaaahh! Kyaaaaah!" Screams resounded from everywhere.

Soon after, people in priestly robes rushed out of the Tribunal building in a panic.

"Uaaaaaaah!"

"What on Earth is going on? What's all this commotion?"

Sir Paris rushed to grab one of the priests and questioned him, but the man just quivered in fear, his face twisted in terror.

"Let go of me! Let me go! Hell, hell has opened! Oh, Lord..."

"What the—!"

Sir Paris clenched his teeth and turned to Seongjin and his companions.

"Do not move recklessly here, do you understand?"

Then he quickly disappeared into the Heresy Tribunal building with the guards.

"...Your Highness."

Masain, who was blankly staring at the rising smoke as if lost in thought, mumbles.

"Have I ever said that you seem to bring incidents and accidents wherever you go?"

What, why would I?!

Although he guesses that his earlier answer to Hayes might be the root cause, still...

Seongjin felt deeply wronged.

And soon, the Demon King warned him in a low voice.

[Seongjin, it's a monster. The monsters are coming!]

Seongjin immediately sensed that familiar presence.

Swish.

In an instant, he was gripping his familiar Nutcracker in his right hand.

Boom! Bam!

Immediately afterward, with a disturbingly loud flapping noise, numerous monsters the size of large dogs flew out from the ruined building.

At first glance, they appeared to be giant pumpkin wasps, but their bodies were covered with sharp green spikes instead of fur, and their large compound eyes were emitting a bizarre red glow. The

menacing-looking creatures swung their massive, black, poisonous stingers from their rears.

"What... what are those, Your Highness!"

Masain, pulling out his sword glowing in a faint golden light, asked Seongjin in an urgent voice.

Why do people like Masain, or even at the Diggory estate, think that I would know everything about what's happening?

Unfortunately, this time, Seongjin did know.

"They're called Vespa Pumpkins! They're demons from Gehenna! Not only can they fly, but they also move really quickly, making them pretty tricky to deal with."

Normally, the monsters weren't that aggressive towards humans.

Of course, it's rare for them to attack first, but they would naturally retaliate against hostile humans. The venomous sting of that creature had enough power to kill a moderately strengthened Hunter in an instant.

However, those creatures soared up from the rooftop, making a loud "boong boong" noise as they circled around for a while, then swiftly flew off towards the downtown area.

If it were the old Seongjin, he could've leapt high and knocked them down to the ground just with the shockwave of his fist. But now, all he could do was blankly watch them disappear into the far sky.

What's going on? They seem to be flying away without hesitation, as if they have a destination in mind?

His curiosity lasted only a moment. Seongjin turned his head back towards the Heresy Tribunal building.

Kuahng! Kuahng! Euaahhak!

Inside, the sound of something breaking and screams still didn't stop. Something was still causing havoc inside.

"Your Highness..."

Masain called him with an anxious voice, as if wanting to stop whatever he was planning to do.

However, Seongjin briefly glanced at his face and turned back around, running towards the Heresy Tribunal building.

[Seongjin! There are various types of monsters inside! Spiders, ants, and hornets!]

The Demon King excitedly yelled in his mind.

[I've figured it out now! I know what the commonality is among the gathered monsters!]

Upon entering the building lobby, the battered security guards limped past Seongjin. The paladins, supporting a few priests, also glanced at him before rushing out the entrance.

Bang!

Soon after, the floor crumbled and a massive, spiky-legged arthropod creature emerged. Each of its joints nearly reached 3 meters; it was gigantic.

The creature touched the ground and then swiftly expanded the hole, pulling its body upwards. Eight red, glass-like eyes peeked out.

Soon, its full form was revealed—a colossal monster that filled and even overflowed the spacious lobby of the Heresy Tribunal. Its height reached nearly to the ceiling of the lobby, and its body length looked to be at least 7 meters.

Thud. Thud.

Seongjin could never forget that frictional sound every time the creature moved its legs.

The same spider that had mercilessly killed his comrades on the front lines of the city of Paju.

Ahahahaha.

Seongjin found himself laughing uncontrollably. Whether it was anger or delight, even he couldn't tell. All he knew was that his limbs began to tingle and his blood started to boil.

The moment the following paladin, Masain, saw the spider and disgustingly unsheathed his sword with a grim face.

"Your Highness!"

Crack.

Ignoring Masain's cry, Seongjin stomped on the ground.

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In the early stages of the Gehenna situation, at the front lines of Paju City, when humanity's counterattack was just beginning, it appeared.

Pavo Nephila.

The accursed spider offspring that took away most of Seongjin's initial comrades.

Urrrrrrrrrr! Kuwoong!

The monster that burst through the floor of the Heresy Tribunal building, kicking up a cloud of dirt, was as massive as that spider back then.

Its plump body, densely covered with long, coarse spines like fur, looked like a purple tarantula. Only, it was bigger than an average large freight truck, and its disproportionately long legs made it move as if it were heavy machinery.

At the ends of its tough, elongated segments—almost as if armored—were enormous claws emitting a menacing red gleam.

Kiik. Kiik. The eight eyes, emitting a malevolent light, quickly found their target.

Ddadadadadak.

The spines covering its entire body all quivered at once, generating a low-frequency noise.

"Your Highness!"

Ignoring Masain's scream, Seongjin was already charging at the

spider.

As the monster struggled to fully emerge from the hole in the ground, Seongjin swiftly dodged its spike-laden legs.

And before its venomous fangs could even point forward, he had already reached the middle of its belly and slashed it with all his might. It was where its nucleus was located.

Kagagagak.

The blade, tightly wrapped in a coarse aura, managed to cut through the creature's tough outer shell.

'...Too shallow!'

Before the spider could fully stand up, Seongjin, who was sliding down, struck the same spot once more horizontally. Kagak!

But, driving his sword deeply into that massive body was still too difficult. He needed to penetrate at least 2 meters with a single strike.

Realizing his failure, Seongjin rolled to his feet, immediately running counter-clockwise, using the monster's body as an axis.

Meanwhile, the spider, now fully upright, flickered its ruby-like red eyes as it scanned its surroundings.

It momentarily followed Seongjin with its head, but then turned its body to face forward again. This was because Masain was charging at it from the front, sword raised, with a fearsome momentum.

"Your Highness!"

It seemed that their priority was to be wary of the human on the other side. After all, the golden aura surrounding Masain's sword must have appeared quite threatening to the monster.

Seeing the creature grinding its upper fangs together, Seongjin shouted towards Masain.

"Move, Sir Masain! It's going to spit poison!"

"...Huh?"

In the moment that Masain hesitated, Seongjin swiftly struck down one of the creature's protruding spikes near its rear with his sword. While he didn't completely destroy it, he was still able to make the monster flinch and turn its head.

Psst.

A large amount of mucus is scattered onto the entrance floor from the monster's mouth.

Soon after, the entrance's carpet began to melt with a *shhik* sound. Masain, narrowly dodging the acidic spit, was startled.

"Gah! What is this!"

"Don't stand there gawking, move, Sir Masain!"

With the urgent shout, Masain quickly regained his senses and began running towards Seongjin.

Thump! Bang! Thump!

The creature, turning its body to follow, stomped on the floor with its sturdy claws. But the experienced knight commander skillfully dodged its massive legs chasing after him.

He even managed to cut off one of the joints of its mid-air leg with a momentarily-formed elongated aura blade. Seongjin's swordsmanship teacher indeed had quite the skill.

While chasing after Seongjin, he shouted desperately.

"The imperial guard knights will be deployed soon, Your Highness! It's best to evacuate first...!"

"No, Sir Masain! We need to keep it pinned down here!"

It was a reasonable thing for Masain to say, as he wasn't familiar with the creature's mobility. If the monster broke the building and started rampaging, the damage would be uncontrollable. After all, it had

already massacred hunters while moving so quickly, despite its massive size.

Moreover, the monster might not be able to aim properly in the tight space for now, but once it starts spraying its webs over a large area, it would become extremely difficult to deal with.

Most of the knights with no experience dealing with such a monster would get killed before they even had a chance to act.

'That's why we have to hit it as much as we can while we can make it go round and round in a small space!'

Of course, just like the monster was restricted because it was trapped in the building, Seongjin and Masain were also limited in their movements. It was because the creature had broken a large hole in the floor to crawl out.

Kwa-aang!

A leg as large as a crane's shot out like a cannon, embedding itself into the wall. Swiftly ducking and rolling, they found themselves facing a dead-end.

Kagagak!

Utilizing the recoil as another leg flew towards them, Seongjin and Masain barely managed to change direction. Luckily, a hallway with a completely lowered wall appeared next to them, allowing them to quickly escape from the corner.

Ttadadadak!

Frustrated at its failed pursuit, the spider angrily dropped its spikes and chased after them with a "Shhak Shhak" sound, its talons pounding the ground. Parts of its talons got stuck near the crumbling floor, causing the edge of the hole to crumble down even further.

Kuaaaaaa! Chang! Chang!

Eerie noises echoed from beneath the punctured floor. Sounds from the dungeon located in the underground of the Heresy Tribunal.

Screams, the clashing of weapons.

And a creepy, "Kkadeuk Kkadeuk" sound as if something was being chewed on.

It seemed that a battle was raging inside the dungeon as well. Most of the Heresy Tribunal's forces must have been gathered underground. The root cause of the situation must be inside that dungeon.

'Is it because the gate has opened?'

As Seongjin dodged the incoming spider webs, he thought. There was no other way to explain the sudden appearance of these many monsters.

The circumstances pointed to a suspicious priest named Hayes. But how could a human arbitrarily open a gate?

[Should I go take a look?]

Hearing the eager voice of the Demon King, Seongjin let out a wry smile. Whenever there was something to do, the Demon King seemed oddly happy about it, which felt a bit annoying.

'Please do!'

[Alright. You also take care of yourself!]

The Demon King promptly disappeared from his thoughts.

Seongjin silently swung his nutcracker and thought.

If indeed a gate had opened in the basement, it would be difficult to expect support from the paladins of St. Marcias until the situation inside is resolved. All they could do was hope that other knight orders from the imperial palace would quickly realize the situation and come running.

In the meantime, Seongjin succeeded in completely destroying one of the monster's spiky protrusions, and Masain managed to sever two more of its leg joints.

Of course, they were also gradually being cornered as time passed. The space for maneuvering was narrowing, and while they were moving perilously as if performing acrobatics, it was uncertain how long this dangerous standoff could continue.

"Puhahak." The spider indiscriminately spat out webs, tangling them around the floor.

The entrance ground was already a mess due to the sticky spider webs. If they didn't deal with it quickly, it would become increasingly difficult to even set foot on the floor.

The stairs leading to the second floor had long been corroded by the monster's venom and had crumbled away.

Screech. Seongjin clicked his tongue as he confirmed the melting railings that emitted smoke. He had initially planned to jump off from above using the creature's head, but...

"We need to destroy its core, Sir Masain!"

Thud!

Seongjin shouted as he deflected an incoming leg with his nutcracker grip. Masain yelled from behind him, severing the partially broken joint with his sword.

"Do you know where the core is, Your Highness?"

Masain seemed to immediately understand Seongjin's words, perhaps recalling the larvae at the Diggory mansion.

"I already slashed near its belly! That's where you should aim!"

Unlike the Bantra Moss larvae, which shifted positions, the core of the Pavo Nephila always remained in a fixed location.

Masain nodded and aimed his sword. However, he soon looked discouraged, as the spider creature had moved right above a hole in the ground.

They couldn't dig downwards like this.

Both retreated quickly, dodging the creature's claw attack. It was the first time they had distanced themselves from it since it appeared.

"Why don't we cut it from the top?"

Masain cautiously asked Seongjin while watching the creature's furiously grinding mandibles.

"It's difficult. The core is closer to its belly, and the carapace on its back is extraordinarily tough!"

If Masain's Aura Blade attack, which had the same destructive power as Seongjin's peak fistfight, was used, then perhaps destroying the core from the back would be possible. But so far, Masain seemed to be using the Aura Blade with some limitations.

How could they target the creature's back when it was so frantic? And if they tried to go from the front, the creature's massive body would not be easily cut through to reach the core.

For now, the only option seemed to be to slowly whittle down its stamina from the front until an opportunity arose.

Both had been pushed back to the entrance of the Heresy Tribunal building. The ground was entirely covered with sticky webs, making random movement difficult.

Two intact venomous fangs targeted them and squirmed.

Screech. Unpleasant smoke was also rising from the creature's mother, seemingly ready to spew venom at any moment.

Just then, a group of paladins in white robes rushed into the Heresy Tribunal building.

Golden chains and black swords were embroidered on their clothes—the members of the Order of Saint Marcias.

"What the hell is going on here?"

The old man leading the group shouted in a clear voice. Unfortunately, it drew the spider creature's attention.

Almost simultaneously as the old man finished speaking, the creature fired a massive amount of venomous needles it had prepared.

"Everyone, dodge!"

Seongjin quickly grabbed the old man's coat and pulled him sideways.

"Ah!"

"Arghh!"

The sudden event caught everyone off guard; three paladins were unable to dodge the venomous stinger and melted into puddles right on the spot.

The remaining paladins were not in good shape either. Some were writhing in pain due to burns from the splattered venom, while others were retreating timidly, paralyzed by fear.

Struggling to his feet, Seongjin saw one of the paladins lifting his head with a pallid face.

His eyes aimlessly stared at his fellow comrades, who were standing behind him just moments ago but were now reduced to pools of blood on the ground.

"What on earth...?"

"This is no time to be spacing out! Aren't you the commander?"

Seongjin gripped his Nutcracker, aimed it at the spider, and yelled. The creature was now distracted by Masain's bait.

"If we don't deal with that monster quickly, the damage will increase! Give orders to your subordinates now! If you can't help, at least don't stand there like an idiot!"

"...Prince Morres..."

At last recognizing Seongjin, Sir Durand's eyes suddenly filled with furious blue flames.

"Prince Morres! I knew it! I knew you would reveal your true colors someday!"

"What?"

Caught off guard by the unexpected response, Seongjin was left bewildered. Durand lunged at him, his hands tightly gripping Seongjin's collar.

"What have you done! What have you done to my men?"

"Wait a minute..."

"Do you think you can harm the paladins serving His Holiness in the Holy Kingdom and get away with it?"

"No, old man! Now's not the time for this..."

Seongjin tried to shake off the old man's grip, but his hand strength was not to be underestimated.

There was a strange glint in his eyes. Whether it was due to shock or something else, he didn't seem to be in a state where he could be reasoned with.

"You fiend! What are you plotting in Delcross?"

"What...!"

Before Seongjin could react to his irrational fury,

"Your Highness! Dodge!"

A shrill scream echoed from afar, courtesy of Masain.

In an instant, a thick spider leg shot through the air and impaled both men against the building wall.

Bang!

Lieutenant Paris of the Holy Knights of St. Marcias was quick to assess situations.

Even though buildings suddenly collapsed and unidentified creatures poured out from somewhere, he remained composed and promptly organized the available forces.

Screams echoed from the Heresy Tribunal all around, but he had no time to pay attention to each one. The real problem, he felt, was in the building's basement.

So Paris, along with his fellow knights, rushed towards the epicenter. However, while passing through the corridors of the underground dungeon, they fell through a suddenly collapsing floor, descending into the depths below.

"Guh..."

Regaining consciousness, he found himself in a vast underground cavern.

Among the building's scattered debris, there were prisoners with broken bones or dead from the impact.

The state of the guards who fell with them wasn't much better, given the height they'd plummeted from.

Apart from a few paladins skilled in handling aura and holy power, hardly anyone could get up.

Staggering to his feet, Paris looked around. Despite his long tenure in the Holy Knights of St. Marcias, he had never heard of such a vast cavern existing beneath the Heresy Tribunal building.

And there, at the bottom of the cavern, was an enormous black hole of unfathomable depth.

Out of this eerie, swirling pit of black mire, monsters were continually emerging.

Most of the monsters resembled ants or wasps, and their sizes ranged from that of a large dog to that of a horse.

Ignoring Paris and his group who had fallen into the cavern, these creatures flew straight up to the upper floors, as if they had a clear objective.

Only the wingless ants were left behind, gnawing at the fallen prisoners scattered around the floor.

"...?"

And then, standing in front of that hole, was a middle-aged priest Paris knew well.

A man with a virtuous face, Priest Hayes, who had worked together with him in the Heresy Tribunal for a long time.

Shaking, Paris slowly approached him and asked in a quivering voice,

"...Is this all your doing, Brother Hayes? Why on earth..."

"....."

"What is this place? Since when have you known about this?"

Priest Hayes didn't even look back at him. His indifferent voice merely echoed emptily through the vast corridor.

"Long before the Imperial Palace stood at the center of Delcross, the continent's largest church already existed here. Even before the Heresy Tribunal was established, this place was the sanctuary of the 'Rest' Cult."

"'Rest' Cult?"

"You're still young, it seems. You haven't heard of the four underground cults."

For a moment, he stared at the ceiling of the hollowed corridor.

"We were once persecuted and labeled as the Darkness cults, but we originally were a peaceful sect that had been worshipping the Divine even before the founding of the Holy Kingdom."

Darkness Cults.

An heretical group within the church that was said to have been purged during the early rule of the current Holy Emperor.

"Our Archbishop said that through 'Rest,' all followers of the Divine will be eternally saved. Hence, we are called the 'Rest' Cult."

What he was saying meant only one thing.

"Heretic... Priest Hayes, so you're a heretic!"

As Paris staggered in shock, Hayes chuckled.

"Knight Paris, on what grounds do you judge heresy? Do you know anything about the true teachings the Divine bestowed before the thousand-year-old empire was established?"

"What are you saying...?"

"Do you think the current Unified Church is normal? Their dogmatic approach, which distorts the teachings of the Divine and eliminates all dissent, is the true heresy against the will of the Divine!"

For a moment, Paris was lost for words. The priest, who always seemed so devout, spoke so confidently. Could he himself have misunderstood something?

The spell was broken by a calm voice that suddenly echoed from behind them.

"At least the current Unified Church doesn't commit mass murders like you."

Both Paris and Hayes turned around simultaneously.

Approaching them was a person they never expected to see here.

His appearance was as usual, wearing the long, flowing ecclesiastical robes, which swayed with his steps.

"Your Holiness, the Holy Emperor?"

The Holy Emperor scanned the surroundings with his usual emotionless face. After briefly fixing his eyes on the massive hole behind Hayes, he faintly curled one corner of his lips.

For a moment, both felt a chill run down their spines.

"You've done well to hide from my sight until now, You devil-worshipping remnants of the old cult."

Hell.

The appearance of the Heresy Tribunal's underground dungeon was as if it was directly taken from the scriptures describing Hell.

Monstrous creatures that resembled enormous hornets sprung from the crumbled floors here and there.

The prisoners were either thrown into the holes or had their chests bitten and torn by the monsters that flew into the dungeon. Most of the prisoners, who were already not in good condition due to cruel interrogations, died a dire death because of this.

"What... what on Earth is this..."

As the Elder priest turned his head in a daze, he saw the gruesome corpse of a young man whose torso was completely crushed. It was a brother from the [Sowing] order who had been working with him recently in the underground dungeon.

Suddenly, a giant monster sprang from the depths below, crawled to the surface, and happened to crush him under its body.

"Bethel..."

As he weakly uttered the prayer, he heard a voice calling him from a distance.

"Brother! Brother, are you alright?"

Clemence, struggling to approach through the chaotic environment, supported the swaying Nosajae and asked. He still held a long censer for the [Sowing] in one hand.

"Brother Clemence, what on Earth happened?"

In response, Clemence bit his lips as he glanced at the broken floor.

"It looks like the work of brothers from the Forgotten Order. They must have tampered with the [Rest]'s legacy."

"...The legacy of [Rest]? Why now?"

"How would I know!"

Clemence's voice was full of agitation.

How could he have anticipated this situation?

Priest Hayes. He even recommended that the man, who was living a pitiable existence, join the mission. But who could have guessed it would ruin the plan like this.

"Ah..."

The legacy of [Rest] that they believed would advance their mission.

But now, the monsters sprouting from there were devouring everything they had worked for.

Seeds that they had diligently planted and flower buds that were struggling to sprout.

As he blankly watched the spectacle, tears flowed from Elder priest's eyes.

"Our mission... The Day of the Great Harvest..."

"Don't you get it yet? Everything is ruined now!"

Clemence, raising his voice, forcibly lifted the elder priest.

"Forget the mission for now! Put everything aside and we have to escape this place immediately!"

The Heresy Tribunal is now over. There was nothing more they could do.

In that case, they should urgently meet with the [Bishop] and discuss the next steps.

Clemence began to move towards the surface, dragging along his brother who was still unable to hold his body steady due to the shock.

Before the proclamation of the Delcross Empire, the capital already had four derivative cults coexisting alongside the Orthodox Church.

They were respectively called [Passion], [Sowing], [Repentance], and [Rest].

After the first emperor implicitly allowed some of their activities, these underground sects grew in influence along with the rise of Delcross.

Beneath the main buildings of the imperial palace, vast underground tunnels had been established as the headquarters for each sect, much like the Heresy Tribunal.

Furthermore, these were all connected through underground passages. In some sense, one might see it as another palace beneath the surface.

It seemed as though the emperor had just crossed the underground passage connecting the main palace and the Heresy Tribunal.

Nathaniel Klein.

The 17th Emperor and the one who had single-handedly eradicated the underground sects that had lasted for centuries in the capital.

He looked at the hellish scenes he had unfolded with an expression devoid of any emotion, the same person who had made Hayes endure agonizing lengths of time.

As if none of this mattered.

"You've done well to hide from my sight until now, devil-worshipping remnants of the old cults."

At those words, Hayes, who had so far seemed somewhat nonchalant, looked at the emperor with eyes filled with intense emotion.

"Calling us devil worshippers, such absurd defamation...!"

"Didn't the archbishop personally conduct mass human sacrifices for the worship of the Demon King?"

Tilting his head slightly, the emperor elaborated.

"Those who do such things are generally called devil worshippers."

Paris, who had been listening, was horrified. Hayes did not deny the emperor's statement.

The fury slowly vanished from his face that had been silent until now. It looked as if he had regained his composure for a moment.

"It's a misunderstanding. It was a ritual to bring Rest."

"Did the participants consent to that?"

"In this world full of suffering, who wouldn't desire rest?"

"So you granted [Rest] even to nursing babies and submissive women."

"They were all saved!"

"Is that so."

The emperor nodded indifferently to the fuming Hayes.

"I too granted you salvation directly through [Rest]. What's there to resent?"

"Slashing my brethren unilaterally and now calling that salvation...!"

However, Hayes's protesting voice gradually waned.

He himself knew that the [Rest] indiscriminately granted even to babies was, in the end, not different in result from the death of his brothers.

Paris swallowed nervously as he looked at his face.

"Your decisions are so unilateral and full of contradictions; you're like the epitome of heresy."

The Holy Emperor drew a thin smile, slowly pulling the sword strapped to his waist. The sword had a disproportionally elongated hilt compared to its short, sleek blade—a pristine white sword.

"By now, he should have scattered enough pieces for us to find them all. There seems to be no need to wait any longer."

"You... knew everything?"

Hayes repeated in a voice devoid of strength. His eyes seemed empty, as if he had abandoned his life's goals and will at the same time.

The Holy Emperor momentarily met his gaze and quietly asked,

"You've managed to hide from my eyes for so long; why engage in such behavior now when you knew you'd fail?"

The Holy Emperor seemed genuinely curious.

The only reason Hayes could evade the Holy Emperor's sight was that he had not yet received the [Baptism]. Without the mark engraved upon his soul, Hayes could survive the period of great purification

alone.

However, for someone unbaptized to live according to the doctrine of Rest, it's like a living person walking through death. Certainly not something one can endure with an ordinary mind.

Then how could he have so recklessly squandered these long years of suffering?

"I had no choice. I could not... I couldn't refuse His command..."

Hayes staggered, clutching his face with both hands. He looked as if he might collapse at any moment.

After shivering for a moment, Hayes eventually raised his head toward the Holy Emperor with damp eyes.

"What do you plan to do with Him?"

"....."

The Holy Emperor did not respond. He simply raised his sword slowly towards Hayes.

"...I see."

As if understanding something, Hayes gave a melancholy smile, his eyes welling with tears.

"Everything is already under His plan. His preparations are still not over..."

Swish. Silently, the Holy Emperor's arm swung down.

Before anyone knew it, a dazzlingly bright and long aura blade was exposed on the sword.

Thud. Hayes, the priest cleanly cut in two, collapsed lifelessly on the ground. Compared to the deeds he had committed, it was an utterly hollow end.

Paris couldn't even breathe as he watched the whole spectacle unfold.

"Aren't you Lieutenant Paris?"

The Holy Emperor, briefly casting his gaze on the corpse, asked Paris.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The Holy Emperor looked up at the hollow, gaping ceiling. His pupils seemed to emit a mysterious silver glow in the dark corridor.

"Go up and restore order to the Knights. From now on, you are the Knight Commander of St. Marcias."

"What? What does that mean..."

However, the Holy Emperor did not answer his question. Instead, he moved towards the large hole on the floor of the corridor, from which monsters still continually emerged.

Slowly, the Holy Emperor raised his hand towards that hellish pit. Soon, his body was enveloped in a faint light.

At that moment, Paris thought he saw something resembling a golden halo glowing above the Holy Emperor's head.

On the sixth night of the hellish frontline in Paju City.

For a brief moment of respite, Seongjin and his comrades were huddled inside the trench, catching some winks in shifts. Despite their enhanced stamina due to the magical beasts' energy, six days and nights of continuous battle were enough to dull even the heightened senses of the hunters.

And then it appeared.

Amid the patter of falling rain, the sound of bristling spikes scraping against each other resonated.

Out of the darkness, four different sets of glowing red eyes manifested in mid-air, followed by the sudden lash of a massive, spike-covered leg sweeping across the trench.

An entire line of hunters was squashed in an instant.

Leaping over the makeshift wooden fences and earthworks, it effortlessly and cruelly snuffed out the lives of many hunters who were on the frontlines that day. If it weren't for the near-suicidal attacks of a few hunters, humanity's counteroffensive would have ended right then and there.

The Pavo Nephila.

The accursed spider magical beast that Seongjin had put so much effort into eliminating before.

* * *

Staggering, Seongjin managed to lift himself up from the rubble of a collapsed building.

Something hot streamed down from a tear somewhere on his forehead, obstructing part of his vision.

Thanks to his instincts to shield himself with aura when struck by the spider's leg, it seemed that fortunately, nothing was severely broken. However, the sheer magnitude of the impact was such that even the slightest movement caused agonizing pain.

"....."

The old man who had flown with him was already lifeless. His left flank was severely torn open, and his torso appeared almost severed, a sight most gruesome.

Seongjin turned his head to look ahead.

Beyond his blurry vision, he saw the spider beast spitting venom and rampaging in the distance. Now and then, he saw glimpses of the golden Aura Blade, indicating that Masain was fighting alone. What were the Paladins who came with the old man doing?

With creaking bones and aching flesh, he moved.

With every step forward, the pain that felt like it could shatter his body became increasingly unbearable.

As he limped toward the spider, he soon saw the Paladins of Marcias entangled in sticky webs here and there. Some were partially corroded by the venom, and others appeared flattened as if something heavy had crushed them, their lives already snuffed out.

"Your world is a figment of someone's imagination, based on the concept of the real world. In other words, it's nothing more than someone's dream," the Demon King had said.

But look. Whether it's in Sigurd-34th district or Delcross, death caused by that damned spider is equally empty and meaningless.

"You've come flying into the real world and you're perfectly fine and breathing. What better proof is there that you really exist?"

No, that's not it.

Simply breathing doesn't prove anything. What's important is that there's a spider over there that I must kill.

To Seongjin, that spider is like that. As long as he's breathing, even a little, he must chase after it and, in the end, cut off its life.

It was only when he aimed his sword at the spider that Seongjin could finally feel it.

He was definitely alive here.

A paladin who was struggling, bound in spiderweb, looked up as the Prince passed by him, trembling for a moment. Despite his body being in tatters and red blood flowing down his cheeks, the Prince was smiling, showing his teeth.

He gripped his sword more firmly.

Thud-thud. His steps gradually sped up.

Tap-tap-tap. At some point, he was running towards the spider.

Both Masain and the spider, who had been fiercely confronting each other, noticed Seongjin's presence at the same time.

"Your Highness!"

By the time Masain shouted, Seongjin was already near the spider.

Whoosh.

The spider's leg descended over Seongjin's head. Without slowing down, Seongjin charged under the creature's claw. Unknowingly, he had focused his aura into his legs.

Crash.

For a moment, his body shot up, narrowly avoiding the heavy leg. Feeling the wind pressure of the giant claw brushing his hair, Seongjin slid right under the spider's belly.

The initial cut was already mostly regenerated, except for the sword

marks on its carapace. It was the characteristic of a magical beast that regenerates quickly if its core is not destroyed immediately.

Ka-ching.

Following that mark, he slashed deeply with his sword. The aura-wrapped blade cut cleanly through the thick carapace.

Rustle-rustle.

The spines all over the spider's body seemed to tremble, as if expressing its discomfort.

Seongjin pulled his sword out, twisted his sliding body, and planted his feet hard on the ground once more with a forceful aura. Crash.

Whether it was due to the forceful rotation of the aura, he felt something snap in his legs for a moment.

Cutting once more along the initial sword mark, this time the sword nearly buried itself up to the hilt. There was a momentary resistance against the carapace, but the sword, infused with enough aura, tore easily through the carapace and came out the other side.

From the deeply carved wound, a late surge of dark purple fluid gushed out.

Poo-ha-ak!

A large amount of spiderwebs burst out from the protrusions at the same time. Threads were aimed and widely sprayed at the vital point just below the torso.

There's no avoiding it. The moment he felt that, he gripped the sword with both hands and took a hard swing targeting one of the creature's legs.

Pa-gak!

At the same moment a crack appeared at the tip of the creature's toe joint, Seongjin's body was shot out like a bullet through the gaps between the spider's legs. Some spiderwebs did make contact with his

body, but he managed to avoid getting entangled thanks to the speed at which he was propelled.

He crashed hard against the building wall before he could properly regain his posture.

Kwa-ang!

Even though he had shielded himself with aura, his breathing stops for a moment due to the severe impact.

"Cough! Cough!"

After tapping his short sword on the ground like a cane, Seongjin barely managed to stand up.

"Your Highness! Are you alright?"

From afar, the sound of Masain desperately shouting could be heard.

The spider creature was now recklessly spitting venom, turning its back on Seongjin. This was because Masain was worried about getting close to Seongjin who had fallen and was showering the spider with fierce attacks.

Peo-eong!

A blinding golden light accompanied by a powerful storm burst forth.

It was Masain's aura bombardment that split the spider creature's head and caused an explosion.

Kiee-eek!

The spider creature, having suffered a significant blow, twitched its joints at weird angles.

However, despite receiving an attack that split most of its head and chest, it didn't fall. Its core was still intact.

Taking advantage of the creature's momentary faltering, Masain quickly retreated to create distance. The way he was gasping for air

indicated that he too was almost out of stamina.

Seongjin was about to rush in with his sword again when he suddenly felt intense pain in his right leg. His calf muscle seemed to have been strained due to consecutively releasing aura twice.

Dragging his leg that was not moving well, Seongjin once again moved towards the spider.

'...This isn't working.'

The length of his short sword wasn't sufficient to reach the creature's core.

If he couldn't smash the creature's body with a single punch like before, he had no choice but to gradually deepen the wounds.

It was only after his sword could reach deep enough to touch the creature's core that...

Suddenly, Seongjin stopped in his tracks as if he'd been hit in the back of his head.

'Why am I only considering releasing aura as far as the length of the sword?'

Seongjin looked down at the short sword in his hand.

Until now, he had been practicing how to channel his aura into his body and sword, just as he learned from Masain.

But the sword was also an object outside of his body. So shouldn't the same apply to the living creature?

He had used the creature's pincers as weapons by channeling aura into them, so why couldn't he do the same with a living creature?

Walking limply toward the spider, Seongjin continued his thoughts.

Masain had once told him that channeling unfamiliar aura into someone else's body was like stabbing them with a finely sharpened blade.

As he said, the aura flowing recklessly from the wooden sword caused it to explode, easily damaging Seongjin's legs. Then, wouldn't the aura that is also flowing recklessly beyond the sword be enough to break something?

Unbeknownst to Seongjin, a faint wind was blowing around the blade of the Nutcracker he held in his hand.

"Your Highness, please...!"

With his battered body, Seongjin, who was rushing back towards the spider, was muttered at by Masain, whose face had turned pale.

But there was no time to waste.

Seongjin, who had momentarily hesitated as the spider was regenerating its head, charged underneath it, plunging his sword with all his might into the center of its abdomen while channeling aura into his arms.

Unlike before, a sharp pain surged from his arms due to the violently extending aura.

Whoosh

The Nutcracker had pierced through the spider's guard once more, but it felt a bit different this time.

Sizzle

Inside the spider's abdomen, it felt as though something was being churned.

Kyeeeeek!

Suddenly, the spider started thrashing around like mad. While still skewered by Seongjin, it frantically collided its body against the building walls.

Thud!

Thump!

"...!"

Seongjin tightly gripped the hilt of the Nutcracker, channeling aura into his arms and sending another wave of violent aura through the blade into the spider's innards.

Kyeeeeek!

Thump!

Rumble!

With convulsions that seemed like it was going to flip over, the spider finally knocked down part of the building's outer wall.

Thud Thud!

The spikes all over its body trembled as if in convulsion.

Snap!

Spiderwebs shot out aimlessly, oddly enough entangling its own legs, causing it to start spinning and staggering around in a clockwise direction.

'...This can work!'

Seongjin clenched his teeth.

One more time!

Although it wasn't powerful, it was an attack aimed precisely at the center of the spider's abdomen.

One more time!

Seongjin could feel the aura he had stored up almost depleting.

Still, one more time!

Sizzle

The aura churned violently one last time.

Gradually losing consciousness, Seongjin faintly heard the sound of something breaking.

Creak...

Kyeeeeeeee

The spider's body, which had been shaking and convulsing, stiffened.

The trembling spikes all froze and it stopped moving.

The spider's gigantic body slowly tilted and then.

Thump!

It collapsed on the ground, raising a cloud of dust.

'...Your Highness!'

In a pallid rush, Masain charged forward, only to see Seongjin's body flung away lifelessly through the thick cloud of dust.

If it weren't for the spider that had fallen to its side with its leg tangled, Seongjin would have been completely crushed.

"Your Highness! Are you alright? Your Highness!"

Masain, who had been checking Seongjin's body, finally breathed a sigh of relief. Although the prince was completely unconscious, he was still breathing.

However, he was in a truly battered state.

His skin was torn in places, making him a bloody mess. His right leg and both arms were bent at unnatural angles, a consequence of forcefully kicking the ground and gripping his sword to attack the spider.

Above all, his muscles were unnaturally stiff. Repeated excessive shocks had caused the large blood vessels in his muscles to burst.

It was perhaps fortunate that he was unconscious and couldn't feel the pain. At this rate, his muscles would necrotize within a few hours.

As Masain stood there with a woeful expression, unsure of what to do next, the king arrived leading his knights toward them. They had just closed the gate and driven off the Paladin Order of Saint Marcias from the underground.

""

The Holy Emperor, upon discovering Seongjin's terrible condition, stopped in his tracks and remained silent for a moment.

[...I built fences around him, worrying he might fly away. In the end, he mustered the strength on his own. I should have let him spread his wings earlier...] (Chapter 86)

Someone had said that to him, but.

"...How can I let such a reckless guy out of the fence when I can't even take my eyes off him for a moment."

The Holy Emperor sighed deeply, closing his eyes.

Plunk.

A small stone creates ripples upon the tranquil surface of the water.

Seongjin was squatting at the shallow lakeside, watching the circular ripples spread outward. Every so often, his hand, still that of a small child, would pick up a pebble from around his feet and plop it into the lake.

Strangely, the scenery, faded into a shade of gray, seemed unreal.

It was a situation he had experienced before.

So, this is inside a dream, right? If that's the case, could this be another memory of Morres?

Once he became aware, the sullen feelings of the child sitting with his chin on his knees transmitted directly to him. The child was very angry, but more than that, he was sad, and so he clenched his mouth tightly to keep from crying.

Rustle.

Then, from ahead, the bushes moved and a little boy stepped out.

He must have been around seven years old. The round head covered with fine black hair resembled someone Seongjin knew well.

"Why are you here like this? The time for swordsmanship class has long passed."

As the boy approached with concern, Seongjin—or rather, the child—responded with a sharp and petulant retort.

"Go away, Logan! I'm not going to classes anymore!"

"Why? You like swordsmanship, don't you? Let's go. Commander Bruno is waiting."

"I don't like it! I've had enough, so you go ahead and enjoy!"

The child was showing a particularly irritable reaction.

However, Seongjin couldn't blame Morres, feeling vividly the child's imminent tears being forcibly held back.

"..."

Surprisingly, the boy of a similar age seemed to have noticed this as well. After hesitantly lingering around, he carefully approached Morres.

"Did Lady Lizabeth have something to say to you again?"

The corners of Morres's tightly closed mouth began to tremble slightly.

Eventually, unable to hold back, the child buried his head between his knees and hunched over. Seongjin felt a twinge of sadness as he sensed the child's trouser legs getting damp.

Morres did not make a sound; he just shed tears.

But Seongjin could vividly hear the voice mixed with sobs that the child was repeating internally.

"I've ruined all of Mama's dreams."

"It's because I... can't do it like you, because I don't resemble Papa."

"That's why she gets angry every time she sees me."

"She hates me so much..."

After listening to the sniffing for a while, the boy quietly sat down next to the child, squatting in the direction overlooking the lake.

"Hmm..."

The boy seemed to ponder as he looked at the surface of the water, as if he was choosing his words carefully.

It appeared he had some inkling of the words Morres had swallowed.

"Morres."

As the time seemed to pass and Morres appeared to have calmed down a bit, the boy softly called out his name.

"I'll only tell you this little secret. It's a secret nobody else knows."

When the child lifted his reddened eyes to meet Logan's gaze, Logan gave him a gentle smile. Perhaps it was the slightly droopy corners of his eyes that made his smile seem somewhat sorrowful.

"The truth is, it's not my first time learning to wield aura. It looks like I'm good because I've had lessons before."

"You've learned it before? When?"

"Well... The truth is...."

* * *

"...So, the truth is, what?"

Seongjin blinked with a still dazed consciousness.

A single tear rolled down the corner of his eye unwittingly, as if he had sympathized with Morres's emotions in his dream.

So, it's all well and good to show memories, but why does the dream have to end at the most crucial moment? It's as if I've seen nothing at all.

So, what is the truth?

Feeling somewhat wronged, he glared at the canopy of the ceiling when a flustered voice rang out in his head.

[Ack! You've come to? Hey! Are you alright?]

What's with all this fuss now?

[Oh my! Hey, man! I thought you were really dead! Who charges so recklessly with their entire body like that?]

"Uh...."

It was then that the events before he lost consciousness slowly began to come back to Seongjin.

The attack of the monsters. The gate. The rampage of Pavo Nephila. The old man who died....

It was an unprecedented chaos.

He had thought it was quiet today at Pearl Palace where the birds usually cried, but now he realized it was the middle of the night. Seongjin had been sleeping since the daytime disturbance and had just come to his senses.

"So what happened to the spiderling? And the gate?"

Seongjin asked the Demon King, but he wasn't really worried. He was certain that he had felt the core of the spider creature shatter completely in the end.

The gate? The monsters? Surely, the Holy Emperor would have taken care of them effortlessly.

Wasn't the fact that Seongjin was lying safely in Pearl Palace evidence enough?

[I knew of your tendency to charge headfirst without thinking ahead, but this time, really! Wow... In that brief moment, you really looked...]

Ignoring Seongjin's question, the Demon King mumbled on as if ranting to himself. Seeing Seongjin's expression grow ominous, he hastily became alarmed and began to explain what had happened.

When the Demon King had descended underground, there was a small gate opened in the underground corridor, and through it,

spider, wasp, and ant-like monsters were emerging.

The monsters had attacked the underground prison and were feasting on the Lophellum eggs in the chests of the prisoners, turning the jail into complete chaos.

Wait, Lophellum eggs?

[Yeah. Most of the prisoners confined in the Heresy Tribunal's prison had eggs within them. They were mostly alive, seemingly implanted recently.]

Seongjin's expression turned grave.

Just as he had suspected, it seemed that the Academy students had indeed had eggs planted in them by the Heresy Tribunal. There was someone there indiscriminately implanting monster eggs into prisoners who had no one to look after them.

The Demon King continued to explain.

It was clear that Priest Hayes had opened that gate. However, by the time when the Demon King had descended, Hayes had already been killed by the hand of the Holy Emperor, making it impossible to know now how he had opened it.

And after that, the Holy Emperor himself closed the gate and swept away all the monsters underground in an instant.

[I have never seen anything like it. Your father crumpled the gate with one hand, just like crushing it to nothing. Even I, the Ruler of Gehenna, can't simply squash distorted space in such a way.]

The Demon King's soul shuddered as if recalling that moment. Seongjin also felt a chill.

Could a gate be closed so easily? Just how far do that man's limits reach?

[And from a distance, without even touching them, he burst all the little monsters into pieces. I can't even begin to guess how he did it. You should have seen it...]

"Um..."

Seongjin swallowed a groan.

Was it really necessary for him to have recklessly fought the spider creature?

If he had just temporarily retreated and waited, it felt like that man would have appeared and easily settled everything.

[And when your father came up to the surface, to describe what state you were in...]

The Demon King's description of Seongjin's condition was far more serious than he had anticipated.

He had intracranial hemorrhage and widespread necrosis of the muscles throughout his body. The fractures and scratches were just extras.

Without the Holy Emperor's divine power, those would have been injuries that either slowly led to death or, even if he survived, would have resulted in severe disability.

The Holy Emperor's cool silver-gray eyes unconsciously came to mind, and Seongjin broke out in cold sweat.

Only now does the fear of repercussions begin to dawn on him.

He had received a stern warning not to cause trouble, yet it hadn't been long before he was left half-dead again. How was he going to face that man now?

And then there was Sir Masain... what would be his reaction...

"Ah... maybe I should just never wake up."

Seongjin cradled his head and burrowed into his bed. The uncomfortable dream he had earlier was long forgotten.

Fortunately, his escape from reality did not last long.

[Seongjin, it's that woman.]

Before the Demon King could warn him, Seongjin, already familiar with the aura of concealment, slowly got up and sat down on the bed. Soon, as always, the terrace window opened, and a slender figure dressed in black infiltrative clothing entered the room without a sound.

Dasha, catching sight of Seongjin watching her enter, flinched for a moment, then approached him with a sigh, as if her recently bruised pride was slow to recover.

"Yes, I must be the fool for thinking I could succeed in sneaking in this time."

She sat down on the sofa opposite the bed and smiled.

"I heard you were badly injured, but fortunately, you seem to be fine."

"Dasha, you really know everything."

"It's not just me. Everyone knows. Rumors are already all over the capital that the brave young prince has caught a giant monster alone, undeterred by his injuries, for the sake of the capital's citizens."

Had such rumors spread?

Seongjin had never taken the lead for the sake of the capital's citizens, nor had he caught the monster alone.

"The city was in turmoil due to the monster disturbance during the day."

It seemed like one of the swiftly spread tales to quickly settle the people's hearts. Perhaps this would have a positive impact on Morres' reputation, which was at rock bottom?

Dasha briefly explained to Seongjin the day's events.

The numerous gourd wasp monsters that had flown into the city scattered here and there, attacking the people. It was mostly those

who lived in slums or remote areas.

As a result, it took the knights a while to catch all the monsters, as they had to split into teams and disperse throughout the capital.

Somehow, it made him think that all of them were suffering from the gray plague.

Sure enough, Dasha confirmed his suspicion.

"Strangely, all those attacked by the monsters died with their chests torn open. The capital guard confirmed that parts of the corpses' skin had turned gray."

Seongjin suddenly remembered what the Demon King had said during the day.

—[I've figured it out now! I know what the commonality is among the gathered monsters!] (Chapter 90)

Could it be that these creatures' common trait was feasting on the eggs of Lophellum?

The Demon King answered Seongjin's question.

[It's a bit different. The eggs that spiders, ants, and wasps commonly favor are, in fact, separate.]

He said it was the egg of a butterfly, rare even in the demon world, a delicacy that most monsters who feast on eggs would die for.

But why had Seongjin never seen such a butterfly monster during all those years?

[They're channelers. If they sense danger, they'll flee to a completely different dimension.]

It seems that Gehenna, which was in the midst of a war with the Sigurd 34th District, was seen as a dangerous area to live in by these creatures.

[The problem is that the smell of the Lophellum's eggs before death

becomes very similar to that of the butterfly's eggs. It seems they attract insectoid monsters to be eaten in that manner, but I don't know the reason either. It might have something to do with another lifecycle I'm not aware of.]

So, it seems the Lophellum's eggs were releasing a strong scent to lure insect-type monsters when suddenly, a gate opened. This explains why insectoid monsters were crazily jumping out.

But why did that priest named Hayes suddenly open the gate? Could it be that he was also the one who planted the Lophellum's eggs?

Seongjin pondered for a moment but nothing came to mind.

The purpose of planting the eggs and the reason for opening the gate remained unknown.

Seongjin decided to do what he could for now.

"Dasha, could I ask you to investigate?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Dasha's turquoise eyes began to twinkle.

Seongjin had only met her a few times, but he was gradually getting to understand her.

Whenever Dasha became curious or saw something interesting, she couldn't hide her excited expression. It seemed that work related to the intelligence department suited her quite well.

"Firstly, about the priest named Hayes who was working at the Heresy Tribunal."

Oh! Dasha's face lit up with interest.

"You mean that problematic priest who died today. No problem! There are suspicions that he was a remnant of the Dark Order, and our intelligence department has already started investigating. I will bring you detailed news soon."

However, the words that followed from Seongjin made even her confident face momentarily lose its composure.

"And about my mother, Queen Lizabeth as well."

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Lizabeth Asein. The daughter of Young Master Asein, a man with significant influence on the current continental political climate.

She gave birth to the Third Prince Morres after an encounter before the Emperor ascended to the throne and has ambitiously ascended to the position of the First Queen. It is unclear whether she aspires to the Empress's seat, but it is known to the Demon King that she has tirelessly endeavored to make Morres the Crown Prince.

Seongjin harbored a few suspicions about her.

First, she clearly wants to hide a certain past and considers it fortunate that Morres does not remember it.

She didn't seem to interfere much in whatever her son did, which was odd considering how much she wanted to make Morres the Crown Prince.

Seongjin was speculating that the reason why Masain was especially wary of her might be related to this.

Second, there is a suspicion that it was actually Lizabeth, the 1st Queen, who had sponsored various organizations in the past under Morres' name.

Leaving aside the question of why those particular suspicious organizations, the issue is whether it is possible for someone else to have secretly sponsored them for such a long time under the guise of the prince.

It would become clearer after asking Jonathan, who is reportedly getting better, about the sponsorship of the gathering of the black prophets.

Third, there is a possibility that she has been consistently emotionally abusive to young Morres in the past.

The fact that Seongjin, in his dream, saw an unknown Second Prince Logan suggests that Seongjin is indeed seeing Morres' past. Although it was only a brief moment of sympathy, what Seongjin felt then was that the 1st Queen's verbal abuse had not been just for a day or two but had continued for quite some time.

Could there be some connection between the sudden downfall of Morres, who seemed like a relatively normal child, into a complete reprobate?

"Heh, are you a son requesting an investigation of his own mother?"

Dasha wore a meaningful smile.

Her expression somehow reminded Seongjin of a junior colleague who looked forward to a messy family drama, and he waved his hands dismissively.

"I would ask her myself, but I don't have my past memories, and it feels somewhat wrong to keep asking her."

"Hmm..."

Dasha nodded understandingly at his excuse.

"The Queen is the daughter of Young Master Asein. Around her, there is always a sharp rivalry between the agents of Young Master Asein and the Delcross informants. It's not easy to approach her carelessly, nor is it easy to gather information. The fact that you are investigating her could very well reach the ears of Young Master Asein and His Majesty."

Could it be difficult, after all?

While he was contemplating this, Dasha clenched her fist in the air, her vibrant turquoise eyes sparkling as if stars were about to spill out.

"What a gratifying task this is! Just leave it to me. I will uncover everything about Her Highness, more secretly than anyone else. From

all her past connections and behaviors to how many pieces of meat she ate in a day and how many times she went to the restroom—I'll confess it all in detail!"

Hey, that's a crime. Are you considering that I'm the son of the person you're planning to stalk?

Please respect the privacy of the person you're investigating.

"Then I shall take my leave, Your Highness. Please take good care of yourself!"

With lighter steps than when she arrived, she tiptoed across the terrace and, like a ghost, disappeared beyond the Pearl Palace garden.

Seongjin blankly stared out the window where she had vanished.

I've felt it before, but she really is an exceptionally ambitious person.

[Why don't you ask her to investigate your father as well? I'd like to see the reaction.]

The Demon King seemed genuinely curious.

Eh, I'm not curious. I can clearly see a future where Dasha and I both get smacked by that gentleman.

Seongjin got up from the bed and stretched. It was somewhat awkward timing to go back to sleep, so he considered meditating instead.

Though he had almost died or become disabled, he felt energized all over his body, as if he had become even healthier thanks to the divine healing.

'...Huh?'

He realized something was odd not long after he began meditating.

The energies in his center, which had been depleted, were already fully restored, and as he focused a bit more, the surrounding energies

began to gather and automatically form the 6th layer!

'.....?'

Well, he had been close to reaching the 6th layer recently anyway. With that thought, he immersed himself back in meditation and the energies continued to flow into his danjeon. The activity of the energies was abnormally high.

Before he knew it, the flow that had been rushing in haphazardly almost reached the 7th layer before finally slowing down.

At that point, Seongjin was so flustered that his concentration completely scattered.

'What's this...?'

Sweat cooled on his brow. It scared him how quickly his energy layers had increased in just one day.

It couldn't be that his body would burst like that wooden sword, could it?

Fortunately, a quick check confirmed his body was relatively stable. A considerable amount of energy surpassing the 6.5 layers was circulating throughout his body, constantly infusing him with vitality.

What could be the cause? Was it related to the fact that his energies had been completely depleted once?

Or could it be... that man had done something?

The thought crossed Seongjin's mind and he chuckled to himself. It was funny how he'd come to think of the divine immediately when something strange happened, as if he'd already become one of the people from the Delcross Imperial Palace.

No longer in the mood to meditate, he simply lay down in bed. Contrary to his expectation that he wouldn't be able to sleep easily after having slept profoundly before, Seongjin didn't dream at all and slept soundly until morning.

The next morning, as usual at the time when the birds cried in the Pearl Palace, Seongjin woke up. Rubbing his eyes in a daze, he heard a knock at the door and Edith entered with a fresh jug of water, followed by Masain walking into the room.

"Did you cough, Your Highness?"

Seongjin flinched for a moment, cautiously gauging the other's expression. Despite Sir Masain's dissuasion the previous day, Seongjin was aware that he had recklessly fought against the beast too excessively.

After once dying and being revived at the Diggory estate, it seemed that recently Sir Masain had become overly sensitive to Seongjin's safety. Seongjin wondered how he would be nagged today.

However, contrary to Seongjin's worries, Sir Masain's face appeared more relaxed than he had anticipated.

No, not just relaxed, there was a certain enlightened aura about him.

"At least your heart hasn't stopped, that in itself is something to be thankful for."

Ah, that's right, there was that time before when he had been completely out of it, and they had to perform CPR.

"The more I fret, the more I realize that nothing changes, Your Highness."

Sir Masain said calmly, looking out towards the garden beyond the window.

As if he had let go of everything, his eyes gazed into the verdant garden, seemingly filled with a distant melancholy.

"I dare not presume to stop you, Prince. I no longer have many expectations of you. Just, please do not suddenly die on me again."

"Uh..."

"Then I, Sir Masain, will do whatever it takes to present you before

His Majesty. Yes, if only that happens, everything will be resolved. Hahaha."

"....."

His hollow laughter echoed through the cool morning air, the only sound in the silence.

Seongjin was more frightened now than when Sir Masain was openly angry.

Sir Masain, I've done wrong!

That morning, Seongjin attempted to find out the cause of the sudden increase in his aura during their aura training session. However, Sir Masain spoke with a determined face.

"I do not wish to repeat twice what state you were in yesterday, Your Highness. Do not even think about leaving the bed today, just rest quietly and regain your strength."

He didn't even have a chance to go to the training grounds. There had been a constant stream of visitors to Pearl Palace throughout the morning.

Amelia was the first to visit him. She had run there from her training, and unusually for her, she was not in a dress but in a casual shirt and slender pants.

Surprisingly, she seemed to be quite angry, more than anyone else. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyebrows sharply raised, and even this look was exceedingly charming.

With a non-threatening demeanor, Amelia fumed at Seongjin.

"Morres! Why don't you know how to take care of yourself? You must stop this habit of just recklessly diving into dangerous places! Do you know how that makes the people who watch from the side feel?"

"...Yes?"

When did I ever again dive into danger?

Is this really something you could call a habit?

Seongjin blinked in astonishment, only managing to flutter his eyes when Amelia approached and firmly grasped his hand, staring intently into his eyes. Even her clear gray eyes were moist with tears.

"Never again, never again must you do something so frightening! Do you understand?"

"Uh....."

Though he was flustered, Seongjin acquiesced with a nod because Amelia's hand, which he was holding, was trembling slightly.

"Sure."

"Really?"

"Yes, of course."

"You're promising me!"

"Yes, I promise...."

Seongjin answered reluctantly again.

Only after Amelia received several firm assurances did she finally return to the Rose Labyrinth with peace of mind.

The next visitors to seek Seongjin were the twins, Herna and Gades. It happened to be the day of their audience with the Holy Emperor, and they had entered the palace to play chess.

You guys know well that the Holy Emperor dislikes chess, so why do you insist on pestering him like that?

"Morres!"

"Morres!"

The identical twins, beautiful as dolls, ran towards him. Unlike Amelia, their faces were clearly full of joy.

They grabbed Morres' arms on either side of the bed and stretched while beaming with smiles.

"What on earth did you do, Morres!"

"Nobody could have predicted it, Morres!"

And they nodded at each other as they caught each other's eyes.

"Only Morres could do something like that."

"Morres is none other than Morres indeed."

What, are you agreeing among yourselves again on something only you guys know? Such mischievous little rascals!

I also have something to confront you about today.

"Why didn't you tell me about the Monkey Tower in advance?"

"What does that kind of thing matter now?"

"Yeah, that kind of thing isn't important anymore."

What did you say, you rascals?

Seongjin frowned, and the twins, hugging his arms from both sides, stared intently into his face.

"Well done, Morres. Thanks to you, the situation was resolved with much less damage than expected."

"Well done, Morres. You completely ruined that guy's long-time efforts."

Suddenly, Seongjin realized that his previous suspicion was true.

Despite knowing that someone was planting monster eggs and creating the gray plague, the Holy Emperor had deliberately chosen not to take any action.

"Who is that guy? Why has Father known all along and yet..."

To Seongjin's question, the twins answered with slightly gloomy faces.

"We know, but originally, it's something that we're not supposed to know."

"It's not that we can't do it, but that we shouldn't do it."

What does that mean? Seongjin blinked in confusion.

"There are several important restrictions that have come into place for Holy Father."

"Thanks to that brazen old man who dumped all that on Imperial Father."

Herna and Gades pouted their lips and rubbed their faces against Seongjin's sleeve. It was still a conversation filled with unknowns.

"Still, thanks to Morres, we've been able to breathe a sigh of relief."

"It's really good that Morres came to our aid."

"....."

They were earnestly trying to explain something, but the core of the story was skillfully avoided. Seongjin was gradually becoming accustomed to the twins' way of speaking.

The two of them loitered around the bed for a while, and then, saying they were going to visit Amelia, they left the Pearl Palace.

After that, the morning passed in a flash with constant visits from Commander Bruno and the resident knights.

And then lunchtime. It was curious that there was no news from Queen Lizabeth, who seemed like she would have come rushing immediately, but an unexpected visitor arrived for Seongjin.

That is, the entire staff of the Pearl Palace was suddenly wrapped in tension.

[Eek!]

The devil crumpled to one side of his head, startled out of his wits.

That sudden change was so dramatic that even Seongjin, who had been rolling around in bed, could feel it clearly. As he was wondering what was going on, there was a knock, and Edith's voice came through, tense with anxiety.

"Your Highness. His Majesty the Holy Emperor has arrived."

...What?

Before he could even be surprised, the door opened, and the Emperor, with his usual cold expression, strode in. It seemed he had come directly to the Pearl Palace after finishing his morning administrative duties.

Hiccup.

Seeing his cool eyes, Seongjin hiccupped involuntarily.

With a hiccup, Seongjin's eyes widened in surprise. He was so shocked that he completely forgot to greet the newcomer.

The Holy Emperor walked slowly towards the bedside, standing there for a moment in silence, gazing down at Seongjin. The temperature around them seemed to drop noticeably, causing Seongjin to shiver involuntarily from the cold.

After a long silence, the Holy Emperor spoke in a calm but frighteningly serious tone, "After bursting the wooden sword, were you planning to explode your own body as well?"

Ah, Holy Emperor already knew how recklessly Seongjin had been manipulating his aura.

Thinking about it, the outcome was obvious.

Had he pushed a little further, his muscles might have burst like the wooden sword.

"That..."

My aura didn't reach its core.

There was no other way to kill it.

There were many excuses he wanted to make, but facing those icy, sharp eyes, only a single phrase managed to escape his lips.

"...I'm sorry."

He truly was sorry. Sincerely.

It hadn't been long since he woke up in the royal palace in Morres's body, but during that short period, he had caused the Holy Emperor

so much trouble. He had been seriously injured multiple times, and once, he had even come close to death.

He reflected deeply, bowing his head, and the Holy Emperor's stern demeanor seemed to soften slightly.

"Do you understand? The training method isn't a barrier that limits the aura, but a guideline."

Seongjin inwardly flinched.

The Holy Emperor had noticed that he had abandoned the training method in frustration when his attacks weren't effective. Indeed, Seongjin had thought at the time that adhering to the training method was creating a limit for himself.

However, what Seongjin actually did was force his still insufficient aura outward through his arms, using his body like another wooden sword. He was recklessly swinging his unstable aura, eroding his own flesh.

If he continued to train and layer his aura as the method prescribed, he would eventually be able to safely project his energy outward more clearly and powerfully.

"Handling aura is like wielding a double-edged sword. The training method is a necessary safety measure in managing that sword. You mustn't forget that."

"Yes, I'll keep that in mind."

"Good."

The Holy Emperor nodded. From his past experiences, Seongjin realized that the lecture was over.

Seongjin, perking up, asked Holy Emperor, "Father, I have a question."

"....."

"I meditated last night, and suddenly, my aura layers increased

significantly."

"....."

"Until recently, I was near the 6th layer, but now I'm almost reaching the 7th. I feel like I can properly project my aura outward now. Do you know anything about this?"

Seongjin, engrossed in his questions, failed to notice the Holy Emperor's eyes growing cold again.

"Could this be a result of the healing I received from you? Or is it related to the aura depletion I experienced fighting the spider monster? If I continue to receive such healing or deplete my aura, could it accelerate my training progress....."

Suddenly, the Holy Emperor's eyebrows twitched, and a spark seemed to fly from Seongjin's forehead.

Snap!

"Ouch!"

Seongjin clutched his forehead, rolling on the bed in pain, tears welling up in his eyes.

The Holy Emperor watched him for a moment, then turned away, clicking his tongue.

"What have you learned? You're just like someone I know, never learning."

Isn't that a bit harsh?

I heard everything!

Katrina said it clearly! I am very much like you in your youth!

As the Holy Emperor was about to leave the room, he paused and then spoke.

"...Next time you come, bring the Nutcracker. I'll examine your

sword."

"What?"

Seongjin was about to ask more, but the Holy Emperor left without turning back.

* * *

"What happened here! I merely asked you to plant a seed, and what did you do instead!"

A sharp voice echoed through the hut. This was a secret meeting place in the capital.

In front of a long-haired man wearing a half-mask, two disheveled underground priests bowed their heads.

Their once white priest robes were now dirty and stained. A small insignia on the chest was the only indication of their affiliation with the Heresy Tribunal.

While the older priest wept in despair, Clemence, kneeling beside him, quickly spoke.

"It was truly unexpected. We were merely performing our task. It's true!"

"But why did a gate open in the Heresy Tribunal?"

"We don't know the exact reason, but it might be the work of a member of the Forgotten Order. They must have tampered with the legacy of [Rest]."

"Rest's remnants? Why would they suddenly?"

"We don't know either..."

"This is no time for excuses!"

Prince Leonard, who had been sipping from a small bottle of liquor, shook his head in disbelief. He had never seen Romaine so agitated

and unable to maintain his composure.

Understandably so.

Just a few days after an abrupt emergency measure swept away most of the seeds, adding insult to injury, yesterday morning, a multitude of monsters suddenly descended from the direction of the royal palace, destroying the few seeds that had managed to sprout.

All their hard work had gone to waste.

The seeds, of which only a handful would sprout even after dozens were planted, were all gone. When would they be able to start this laborious task again?

"We had been encouraging the brothers of Rest to participate in our task. Originally, we planned to ask them to open the legacy on the Day of Great Harvest..."

Clemence continued with a troubled look.

"Unexpectedly, Hayes acted on his own without any prior indication. This all happened without any warning. I swear it!"

"So why did he suddenly do that!"

"Before opening the gate, he apparently had a brief conversation with a visitor to the Heresy Tribunal. If there's a cause, it might be related to that guest..."

Romaine's voice grew low.

"And who was this guest?"

"Prince Morres, the third prince."

"Prince Morres..."

He paused, looking into the void, catching his breath.

Come to think of it, wasn't Prince Morres's name also mentioned in connection with the recent monster disturbance on the outskirts of

the capital?

What is it about him that stirs the remnants of Rest, who have been lying low as if dead?

It's said that he's such a troublemaker that even the Azure Labyrinth cast him out, but could it be that he's not as simple as the rumors suggest?

Why has this person, who had been quiet until now, suddenly come to the fore, making his presence felt?

"...A new move by the Holy Emperor."

Romaine murmured to himself, grinding his teeth.

"Guardian of Delcross. I wondered what his motives were, and indeed, he's adept at manipulating without getting his own hands dirty."

Behind the half-mask, light brown eyes flashed fiercely. Clemence flinched at that gaze and bowed his head again.

"...Right. So that's how you maintain the balance. I'll look forward to seeing how long your precarious balancing act lasts."

Despite his words, his face showed no expectation.

Romaine continued to stare fiercely in the direction of the imperial palace, his gaze sharp and unyielding.

* * *

The morning's state affairs were hectic due to the monster disturbance from the previous day.

The Heresy Tribunal was almost annihilated, and there were numerous casualties, including prisoners.

The Order of St. Marcias lost its leader, Sir Durand, with his deputy, Sir Paris, now acting as the interim leader.

The revelation that remnants of the Dark Cult remained within the Heresy Tribunal led to many clergy, including Cardinal Benitus, the cult's leader, being implicated. The state affairs meeting was like a storm.

No sooner had things settled down than the Holy Emperor, who had skipped lunch to visit Jinjugung, faced another challenging time.

In the audience room, his twins were eagerly waiting for him with a chessboard set up, their eyes sparkling.

And the Holy Emperor didn't particularly like chess.

"Rushing the queen like that..."

He sighed. Suddenly, a black queen invaded his territory, targeting his king.

"Check."

Ahem. Herna always moved one step ahead. Her bold moves often left the Holy Emperor no choice but to admire.

With no other option, he moved his king.

Then, a knight moved, cornering him.

"Check."

Hmm. Gades, always one step behind, yet forming a formidable attack with the knight, protecting each other. The Holy Emperor often struggled against their impeccable coordination.

He had no choice but to delve deeper into enemy territory.

He managed to dodge for a while, but eventually, his king, alone in enemy lines, was doomed.

"I've lost."

To his calm declaration, the twins cheerfully said, "But we've only played two games, Imperial Dad."

"You promised to continue in the afternoon, Your Majesty."

The chief steward, refilling the cold teacups, smiled contentedly. To him, it was a tender moment.

The Holy Emperor slightly furrowed his brows.

In a way, this was his own doing. After all, he was the one who taught the twins chess.

Herna and Gades, having awakened to channeling at a very young age, often lost control of their minds to an alarming degree during their childhood. In a way, their imperfect channeling faculties gave them no limits.

The Holy Emperor taught the twins chess as a way to anchor them in reality when they would sometimes forget to eat or drink, staring blankly into space. The game required continuous mental effort and focused them on a physical game board in the real world.

Fortunately, the intelligent twins soon became engrossed in the game, gradually learning to control their channeling based on reality.

That was a success.

However, the Holy Emperor never anticipated that they would become such chess prodigies.

Why not find other opponents or let the twins play against each other? Even Louis, the chief chamberlain, didn't quite understand why they were so fixated on playing chess with the Holy Emperor.

But like their uncontrolled channeling, the twins were unable to regulate their ability to read strong thoughts from those around them. If someone concentrated deeply on chess in their presence, they would unintentionally read their opponent's thoughts, even if they didn't want to.

Moreover, being so close to each other, it was impossible for them not to read each other's thoughts. Playing chess against each other was essentially like playing alone.

Only the Holy Emperor, immune to their thought-reading, could genuinely enjoy a game with them.

Regardless of his personal feelings about chess, the Holy Emperor was quite skilled at the game.

The twins were getting better at controlling their abilities, and the Holy Emperor believed that one day they would enjoy chess without any issues.

However, he overlooked the fact that the twins insisted on playing chess during audience times partly because they enjoyed seeing him in discomfort, a slightly twisted form of affection.

He might never realize this fact.

"Father, you have a habit of moving independently without considering other pieces."

"Don't forget, Your Majesty, that you have many other pieces that can be moved."

The twins had matured enough to advise their father.

"...Is that so?"

"Yes, sometimes inevitable sacrifices are necessary to prevent greater harm."

"Right, feeling guilty about unavoidable circumstances doesn't change anything."

Louis, watching them with an adoring look, probably didn't fully grasp the true weight of their words.

The Holy Emperor sighed.

He did not like chess. It was a metaphor for not enjoying moving and sacrificing others in real life.

His gaze, devoid of warmth, lingered on the black queen, the first piece the twins had sacrificed.

The Demon King had always been very curious about Herna and Gades, the twins.

When he was caught in the aura storm and bounced off the dimensional boundary, those kids approached Seongjin and subtly revealed that they were aware of the Demon King's existence. They even showed him a puppet show about the Dream Demon King and the Fire Demon King.

So, he expected that once he met them, he would ask them various questions noisily.

But when he finally met the twins, the Demon King was silent for a while, as if he was deep in thought.

Then, after a long pause, he finally asked:

"Those kids... are they human? They couldn't possibly be monsters, could they?"

...What?

'What nonsense are you spouting all of a sudden? If they're not human, what are they?'

Where on earth would you find a monster that looks perfectly normal?

Even if there were, it wouldn't be Lee Seongjin, who couldn't sense the aura of a monster.

And that applies to the Demon King of Gehenna himself.

[Oh, right, now that I think about it, they aren't monsters. I know they exist but.....]

Seongjin, bewildered, listened as the Demon King hesitantly explained.

He saw the mind crystals shining inside the twins' Herna and Gades' heads.

With their size and shape being quite normal, it was almost certain that the two were channelers.

'That makes sense.....'

While the story was sudden, Seongjin began to understand something.

Every time he met the twins, he felt a strange sense of déjà vu along with fatigue.

Their way of circumventing the topic, or how they abruptly changed subjects.

Even though they weren't as mentally unstable as Sharon, the twins didn't seem completely sane either.

'But even if it's about mind crystals and channeling abilities, why suddenly bring up monsters?'

They were the prince and princess of the Holy Empire, after all.

It's unlikely they are monsters.

[No... it's just that, the location is a bit strange.]

According to the Demon King, they were innate channelers.

The delicately shaped mind crystals were stably located in a specific position. Such cases usually indicate a high degree of channeling ability.

[It's different from that foolhardy commander. Spontaneously developed mind crystals don't have such a smooth shape. That naturally limits their abilities.]

But the difference didn't end there.

Unlike Bruno, the Commander, whose crystal was near the frontal lobe, or Sharon, whose crystal was near the thalamus, the twins' mind crystals were located deep in the occipital lobe of the brain.

That was the problem. It wasn't a location typically found in humans.

Mind crystals in the occipital lobe are a characteristic of cluster monsters that channel, like those with Bartosi-like neural placements in the same area.

[Such traits are inherited from the parents. What does their mother do, by the way? Surely she isn't a monster.....]

'Yeah, right.'

What nonsense is this?

The twins' mother, though not officially a queen, was living well in the capital's bustling area, as far as he knew.

'What about the possibility that they take after their father?'

Seongjin thought this was more likely.

The Holy Emperor has the ability to see souls and even traverse the boundaries of dimensions by moving souls alone. It would be more surprising if he wasn't a channeler, right?

Then the matter becomes simpler. The next time he meets him, he just needs to search his head for a mind crystal.

However, the Demon King's reaction to this suggestion was odd.

[Look for a mind crystal in your father? Ahahaha!]

He laughed in disbelief.

[Do you think that's possible? Your father is... just light. Light! Like a star, he's a massive source of holy power glowing on its own! Would you be able to distinguish a faintly shining mind crystal in that soul?

Could you?]

It's like looking for a candle in lava. Or searching for a campfire by jumping into the sun! At least then, there wouldn't be the risk of the soul being extinguished, right?

The Demon King rambled on with a heavy heart.

[Really... Whenever I get near your father, I'm scared to death I'll just burn up! How long do I have to live like this? Huh? *sob*]

Ah.

Recently, he had been seeing the Holy Emperor's face quite often.

It seemed that the Demon King, knowingly or unknowingly, had accumulated quite a bit of stress.

* * *

The next morning.

Having received permission from Dr. Ninnias to resume training, Seongjin rushed to the training ground, excited to test his increased aura.

He was currently working on the fifth form of the Imperial Standard Swordsmanship, which mainly consisted of brisk thrusts. He was expecting some visible improvement in his swordplay.

"...Hmm?"

However, contrary to his expectations, his movements were not smooth due to his muscles suddenly surging, reminiscent of when he first unconsciously wove aura and his motions were choppy.

Struggling to move smoothly, he was sweating profusely when Masain cautiously suggested:

"The aura has indeed increased too rapidly to be controlled at once. Perhaps it would be better to start again from the first form and readjust your aura?"

Ah, the tedious first form again.

But, thanks to his past efforts, repeating the most familiar form helped Seongjin quickly regain control over the flow of his aura.

But as he was focused on adjusting, he suddenly realized that the atmosphere in the training ground was more bustling than usual. The resident knights were gathered in one corner, discussing something.

Feeling Seongjin's puzzled gaze, Dame Maria discreetly approached and informed him:

"[Lilium] will soon arrive in the capital."

A grand parade was planned, and some resident knights were being mobilized for it, which also required adjustments in their duty roster.

But what's Lilium?

"It's a special detachment of the St. Bastian Paladins. They're an elite unit organized for the subjugation of sea monsters."

Masain, who was nearby, quickly explained to Seongjin.

The St. Bastian Paladins.

The St. Bastian Paladins, upholding the legacy of Saint Bastian of [Forgiveness], embrace [Generosity] as their virtue. Ironically, despite such a virtue as their motto, they are known to be as strict as the St. Marcias paladins.

Operating from the Saint Bastian Church as their base, they are well known as the arms and feet of the Orthodox Church.

And the person leading the special marine detachment from this knightly order...

"Prince Logan is returning for his birthday celebration," Masain said, with a faint hint of joy on his face.

Prince Logan of Delcross, the second prince.

A young paladin, touted as a swordsmanship prodigy destined to follow in the Holy Emperor's footsteps.

—I'll teach you a little secret, just between us. This is something no one else knows.

A boy whispering secrets in a dream.

—The reason I seem good at it is because I've learned it before.

That statement likely meant more than just early education.

It's a stretch, but if he wasn't just an ordinary child...

For instance, like Seongjin, if someone's soul was inhabiting his body...

'...Wait a minute! Isn't that quite plausible? How can I be sure mine is the only case?'

The realization hit Seongjin like a splash of cold water.

In retrospect, didn't he seem too precocious for his age, even in dreams?

"Prince Logan was always unusually mature for his age since he was young."

Responding to Seongjin's inquiry about the second prince, Masain answered with a smile.

"Looking back, it was like he was an aged knight in a young child's guise."

Seongjin felt a chill run down his spine.

Really?

"Even with swordsmanship, it was as if he was effortlessly relearning what he already knew. Although I was assigned as his teacher, I'm not sure if I really taught him anything."

Bruno, the former commander, joined in the conversation.

"I've met many renowned swordsmen across the continent, but I've never seen a talent like Prince Logan. I often thought he might surpass the Eastern Continent's strongest sword, General Gale."

At Seongjin's question about who General Gale was, he was described as a genius of his time.

"Tragically, he fell in the Ortona civil war, but if we talk about swordsmanship, he was unparalleled on the continent. Truly, a knight among knights."

Masain coughed subtly.

"The continent's greatest knight is Balthazar, Commander Bruno."

"Of course, there's no dispute that Balthazar is the greatest knight. His achievements are already a living legend. However, wasn't it General Gale who holds the record as the youngest Sword Master? I'm not saying this just because I'm from Ortona."

"Well, that record might soon be broken," Bruno continued.

"If things continue this way, Prince Logan might become the youngest Sword Master on the continent. It's not certain when the Holy Emperor became a Sword Master, but they started swordsmanship at different ages. Perhaps the prince will reach that level much faster than His Majesty?"

A Sword Master is someone who has reached the pinnacle in both aura cultivation and swordsmanship.

There can be Decalon Knights who are not Sword Masters, but no Sword Masters who are not Decalon Knights.

Prince Logan is predicted to reach this exalted status faster than anyone.

And he had said so himself. The reason he excels is because he learned it in the past.

"....."

As Seongjin heard more about Logan, the idea that he might be a possessor – someone with another soul inhabiting their body – seemed less and less like a mere assumption.

Seeing Seongjin furrow his brows in thought, Masain, possibly misunderstanding his concern, quickly added:

"Of course, Your Highness is also remarkable. The speed at which you accumulate aura is truly unparalleled. Even Prince Logan couldn't increase his aura layers as quickly in one day."

The dramatic shift from the 6th to the near 7th layer of aura.

Fortunately, according to Masain, Seongjin's physical condition wasn't adversely affected.

Observing the stable activation of aura around him, it was clear that the sudden increase in aura wasn't burdening his body.

Masain was a bit surprised to see Seongjin accumulate aura so rapidly in a day, but he thought it must be the Holy Emperor's doing. The aura vortex had lingered around Seongjin while the Holy Emperor was healing him, so it was likely his work.

"But I've always wondered, why is Balthazar called the strongest on the continent? To me, it seems like my father is stronger than Sir Balthazar."

At Seongjin's question, both Masain and Commander Bruno looked puzzled.

"Well, that's because the Holy Emperor is beyond comparison."

"The Emperor is in a league of his own."

...Ah, Seongjin realized.

To these two, the Holy Emperor was beyond human categorization.

Regardless, Seongjin felt somewhat relieved and delved into meditation.

After all, what use was it to ponder about Logan, who wasn't even present? He would soon return to the capital, and Seongjin could learn more upon meeting him.

As Seongjin focused intently, the wind whirling around him became so distinct that even the surrounding knights could feel it. Most resident knights were now somewhat accustomed to the unusual phenomena displayed by the prince.

"His aura materializes just by meditating. No wonder he builds layers so quickly."

Dame Maria commented in amazement, while Kurt, polishing his sword nearby, nodded.

"The amount he absorbs and circulates in one go is different. The bloodline of the Holy Emperor's family is truly extraordinary."

But it wasn't just Morres.

Recently, Princess Amelia, who had received high praise from the spear master Dimlos as a rare talent.

Prince Logan, projected to become the youngest Sword Master on the continent.

And Prince Owen, initially unremarkable at the palace but recently gaining fame for his monstrous prowess on the southern front.

"Um... Suddenly I feel less motivated."

Haven spoke dejectedly, casting a heavy silence over the training ground.

Joining the Imperial Knights meant that one's swordsmanship skills were not easily surpassed anywhere. However, in the presence of such geniuses, even they felt diminished.

"...Let's just train."

"Ugh..."

With that, they returned to their respective spots, a bit disheartened.

The Special Unit [Lilium] of the Order of Saint Sebastian

When they finally arrived, the imperial capital Delcross was brimming with a festive atmosphere. The windows along the streets were adorned with delicate flowers, and blue lily emblems, representing the special unit, were hung on various buildings.

People lining the streets waved handkerchiefs, welcoming the young paladins who had vanquished the sea demons for the empire.

"Long live the Order of Saint Sebastian!"

"The noble blue lilies of Delcross!"

"Hail the sea demon exterminators!"

White petals fluttered everywhere.

At the front of the long procession, young knights in white knightly uniforms led their horses with dignity. Except for the blue sword and crossed blue lilies emblazoned on them, their uniforms were similar to those of the Order of Saint Aurelion.

It was a wonder how they managed to keep their uniforms impeccably clean despite the sea demon extermination not being a simple outing.

There were only about a dozen paladins at the forefront.

Although it was almost embarrassing to call it a special unit, the procession became a sizable force when counting the regular knights, squires, and other soldiers following them.

"Blessings upon the millennium-old holy kingdom of Delcross!"

"Glory to the noble knights of Lilium!"

Seongjin and Amelia were secretly watching this spectacle from the entrance of the palace walls.

He was half dragged by her, who had skipped classes to see the parade. Yet, for Seongjin, who spent his days in constant training, taking a moment to enjoy such a diversion wasn't a bad idea.

"People really seem to enjoy it."

The sea demon extermination sounded impressive, but it wasn't something the citizens of the capital would have physically experienced.

As Seongjin pondered over the somewhat excessive welcome, Amelia smiled.

"There was a monster attack in the capital recently. There was a need to lift the spirits amidst the ominous atmosphere."

Indeed.

Most of the attack victims were unconnected poor people in the slums, so the perceived human toll wasn't as significant as the scale of the incident.

However, it was a spectacle of never-before-seen creatures flying around, attacking people. It wasn't strange that the citizens were shaken.

Thanks to the [monsters] causing havoc, the endless debates in the Holy Council were gradually concluding. There was a move to classify monsters as beings from another dimension, different from demonkind.

It seemed that soon there would be proper working policies for the monster extermination unit.

"Ah, look over there, Morres! It's Logan!"

At Amelia's shout, Seongjin turned his head in the direction she

pointed.

The procession of Liliium had now approached close enough to recognize faces from the wall. And at the forefront, a familiar-looking boy rode a horse with a composed demeanor.

A slim boy in the throes of puberty, with black hair. A young paladin.

His youthful face shone even brighter, possibly due to the silver light armor and the white uniform of the knightly order.

His slightly droopy blue eyes and delicate facial contours were more reminiscent of his mother, Empress Tatiana, if one were to be precise.

"...He resembles his father, somehow."

Indeed, he did.

The calm and dignified aura surrounding the boy was unmistakably royal.

"Logan truly feels like His Majesty's son."

Amelia's eyes were filled with deep affection as she looked at him.

"And he's really a kind boy. When I first came to the palace and didn't know what to do, he was a great help to me."

Seongjin inadvertently recalled a dream he had a few days ago.

In it, Logan seemed to be taking care of Morres as well.

Setting aside the suspicions of possession, it seemed certain that he was indeed a good-natured person.

[Wow, haha. There's light here too! The soul is completely covered in light!]

Then, the Demon King in his mind scoffed as if sickened.

[If it weren't for your father's barrier, I would have taken damage to my soul just by looking at him.]

Ah, right. Logan is said to have exceptional divine power as well.

In any case, a genius in swordsmanship, strong in divine power, and with a noble character to boot. What didn't this guy have?

While Seongjin gazed at the approaching procession of Lilium with a perplexed expression, Amelia cautiously observed him and spoke.

"Um... Morres. Logan is a good boy, so how about trying to get along with him from now on?"

Huh? What's that all of a sudden?

Seongjin blinked in confusion.

[Hmm, for your information, according to the information I collected before...]

The Demon King, finding an opportune moment to interject, chimed in happily.

[Morres had bad relations with his brothers, but he especially hated Logan. He used to pick fights, insult, and bother him whenever he saw him. There are rumors that Logan started participating in sea demon expeditions and leaving the palace because of Morres. Can you imagine how bad it was for people to think the Second Prince, who endured all that, might not be a saint?]

'Uh.....'

Have I, towards the continent's top golden boy and a strong candidate for the next Holy Emperor, completely fallen out of favor with him?

As Seongjin was grappling with the misdeeds of the reckless Morres he used to be, he suddenly snapped to attention due to a sharp hostility directed at him.

'.....?'

Looking around in confusion, his eyes landed on the Lilium group approaching the city gate.

And then their gazes met.

Logan.

Despite the considerable distance, the young paladin at the forefront was staring directly in Seongjin's direction with fierce eyes. It was a position that should be hard to see from outside, cleverly hidden by the structure of the wall.

Caught off guard by the unmistakable hostility, Seongjin watched as Logan soon averted his gaze. The sharp hostility also vanished.

'...What?'

Amelia seemed to have noticed nothing. She looked at Seongjin, who had suddenly become rigid, with a puzzled expression before turning her gaze back to the welcoming crowd.

At the forefront of the knights and greeters who had come out of the palace to meet them stood an elderly priest, composed in his demeanor. He was Cardinal Caplan, the father of the Empress and Logan's maternal grandfather.

As the Lilium special unit halted in front of the city gate, the Cardinal approached them with a proud face.

"Your Highness! I heard you slew many sea demons with a single stroke on this expedition! Your fame resounds throughout the continent, including Delcross and neighboring countries. You truly bring us honor!"

Prince Logan dismounted and briefly paid his respects to the Cardinal. The small buckler on his raised left arm gleamed in the sunlight with a cold silver light.

He seemed to have no special affection for his maternal grandfather, in stark contrast to the Cardinal, who was overflowing with pride for his grandson.

After the customary welcome speech and the splendid military salute of the lined-up knights, the special unit finally entered the palace.

"Long live Prince Logan!"

"Hail the sea demon extermination squad!"

"May the blue lilies of Saint Sebastian be blessed by the deity!"

Even after the group had completely disappeared into the city gates, the citizens of the capital continued to cheer and wave their handkerchiefs. It was a scene that truly reflected the popularity of the well-regarded Second Prince.

"Let's head back now, Morres," Amelia said as she dusted off her pants and stood up.

"Today, there will likely be a royal banquet for the first time in a while. Except for Owen and Sisle, the whole family will be gathering."

She spoke with a joyous expression, but Seongjin felt troubled, recalling the hostility Logan had directed at him earlier.

Such an overt hostility was a stark contrast to the kind boy he had seen in his dream.

After all, even a boy of good character who liked to look after his brothers would naturally harbor resentment against Morres, who had tormented him for a long time.

Seongjin wondered how he should approach Logan.

Should he start by apologizing for his past misdeeds?

However, Seongjin had yet to realize that the hostility Logan directed at him stemmed from something more fundamental.

* * *

Gatherings of the entire imperial family were exceedingly rare in the palace.

Considering the emperor met with his children in rotation every day, Seongjin thought it odd that he didn't organize more frequent

gatherings for a family meal or the like.

For Seongjin, this was a relief.

It wasn't like a mandatory office dinner, nor was it enjoyable to dine in a crowded setting with people he wasn't comfortable with.

However, the palace was different on this occasion. When a prince returns to the capital after achieving glory and being away for months, the situation changes.

The emperor had summoned the imperial family for the first time in nearly half a year. With many attendees, the palace was in a buzz of activity.

Notably, there was a fierce competition of dressing up among the empress and consorts, each vying for dignity and pride.

Queen Elizabeth, who always paid attention to Seongjin's attire, hadn't even shown her face in Pearl Palace this time, probably preoccupied with her own preparations.

It was the dawn of a rare floral war in the Delcross Palace.

The atmosphere was different for the children, however.

It was a relatively free time to catch up and share news with each other after a long separation. This was why Amelia had been so happy.

Herna and Gades, who lived outside the palace, were also expected to attend, and even a place was prepared for Masain. Dressed neatly in his knightly uniform, Masain boarded the carriage with Seongjin to head to the main palace.

At this point, Masain, unable to hide his imperial identity any longer, smiled awkwardly.

"I apologize for not informing you earlier, Your Highness."

"No, Sir Masain. Should I start calling you 'brother' from now on?"

Seongjin, who had been inwardly frustrated about pretending not to know, asked with a sense of relief.

Considering the emperor's age, he could almost be Seongjin's son (in previous world), yet he called him 'father' without difficulty. Calling someone 'brother' should be no harder.

However, Masain reacted vehemently, waving his hands in denial.

"No! That was a term of endearment from my ignorant childhood. Besides, you don't have any memories of that time, do you?"

"But still..."

"Moreover, I am just a knight in the service of the imperial family. I am comfortable with our current relationship, so please understand."

"..."

Well, if he insists.

Seongjin had always thought him to be a man of integrity, perhaps too much so.

The carriage carrying Seongjin arrived at the main palace earlier than scheduled. Being people who didn't need much preparation helped them start early.

However, as Seongjin and Masain entered the lobby of the main palace, they found someone who had arrived even before them.

Prince Logan, a boy with a calm and settled aura, was leaning against a wall in the corridor, watching Seongjin and his party enter, alone and without any attendants.

Seongjin halted in his tracks as Logan rose to his feet and slowly approached them, still shrouded in what felt like a tangible hostility. Clearly, the sharp hostility Logan had directed at Seongjin during the parade was not a figment of his imagination.

Seongjin hesitated for a moment, uncertain how to approach Logan. If years of bad blood had built up between them, it would be best to

start by mending that relationship. He thought about offering a greeting first.

However, contrary to Seongjin's expectation, Logan's hostility stemmed from a more fundamental cause. It wasn't that he was hostile towards [Morres].

"...Who exactly are you?"

Logan's eyes, glaring intently at Seongjin, burned with a blue flame of anger.

"Why are you in Morres's place, wearing his face, living his life?"

"...!"

"What have you done with Morres? Answer me!"

Faced with an unexpected situation, Seongjin inadvertently swallowed hard.

'I'm not Morres? How did he figure that out?'

Caught off guard by this entirely unexpected situation, Seongjin's mind was in turmoil.

Could Logan also possess a power like the emperor's, to see into souls?

Or is it something else...

"Your Highness?"

Masain, sensing the strange tension, alternated his gaze between the two.

However, the moment of confusion was fleeting, and Seongjin quickly regained his composure, calmly facing the boy who did not conceal his hostility.

'...I was bound to face this sooner or later.'

The question he should have been asked by someone when he first arrived in this world, he was now hearing from this boy.

Since when had he stopped worrying about being discovered? The answer was clear: since his first audience with the Holy Emperor.

Knowing yet pretending ignorance, the emperor had treated him as his son, and Seongjin had unwittingly become entangled in it, deluding himself into believing he was truly the emperor's son, a member of the imperial family.

"This doesn't seem like the right place for this conversation."

"...Don't spout nonsense!"

Logan's pressure intensified in response to Seongjin's reply.

It felt as if icy spears were being thrust from all sides, causing a tingling tension.

"You need to answer properly. If something truly has happened to Morres, I will..."

At that moment, Masain stepped in between them, shielding Seongjin with his body and quickly addressing Logan.

"Your Highness! Prince Morres recently suffered a severe fever. It was so severe that his life was in danger. Since then, he has lost his memory."

"Brother Masain..."

Confronted with Masain, the hostility in the boy seemed to soften a bit.

"Moreover, he has lost a noticeable amount of weight recently due to training. It's not strange for Your Highness to think he's completely changed."

"It's not about his appearance, brother. Morres's presence is completely..."

Logan trailed off, seemingly struggling to explain. He alternated his gaze between Seongjin and Masain, then bit his lip in frustration.

"...Right. This isn't the place for this discussion. I'll have an opportunity to talk to you at length later."

With that, Logan turned away from Seongjin and walked off.

"....."

Watching Logan's retreating figure, Seongjin inwardly clicked his tongue.

Wow, what kind of person is he? Can someone like him really be referred to simply as a swordsmanship prodigy?

Even though it was brief, the intensity of the young prince's aura was so heavy that even Seongjin, who had spent decades on battlefields fighting monsters, felt momentarily overwhelmed.

Now what to do?

In the midst of Seongjin's thoughts about Logan's intimidating suspicions, Herna and Gades suddenly appeared at the lobby entrance and rushed toward him.

"Morres! Brother Masain!"

"Morres! Brother Masain!"

The twins, smiling brightly, grabbed his arms from both sides.

They are heavy, these kids!

Thanks to them, Seongjin quickly discarded his brief contemplation. While there was still an uneasy feeling, what could he do about it now? If it really came down to it, he could always ask the emperor for mediation.

* * *

"As Prince Logan has glorified Delcross across the continent, he is indeed a blessing to the Holy Empire," Queen Elizabeth spoke elegantly, dabbing her lips with a napkin as the imperial banquet began.

Already a striking beauty, she seemed to radiate even more today. Her attendants must have put their souls into her preparation.

Prince Logan, a promising candidate for the next Crown Prince, must be a source of inner turmoil for her, but she couldn't openly criticize his significant achievements.

"Yet, there are still those in the far reaches of the continent, untouched by the deity's grace, suffering from sea demons. It pains my heart to think of them. Surely, we can expect Liliun to continue to fulfill its noble duties across the continent, bringing the deity's merciful touch to all?"

Ah, she still managed to slip in a barb, subtly suggesting that Logan should continue his expeditions rather than return to the capital.

Empress Tatiana, seated at the head table, twitched her eyebrows momentarily but maintained her usual courteous smile, lifting her wine glass gracefully. She too looked more elegant and beautiful than usual.

"Serving selflessly in any capacity for the people, that is the mindset befitting a member of the imperial family. Even the youngest, Princess Sisle, is already shouldering [the noble's duty], willingly caring for the people as a saintess. With such commendable princes and princesses, Delcross will surely be blessed by the deity for generations to come."

A subtle nudge to Queen Elizabeth, implying that if she wanted her son to be treated properly, she should discipline her own son, who lazed around the palace.

Now it was Queen Elizabeth's turn to have sharp eyes.

Seongjin awkwardly guzzled his drink, feeling slightly embarrassed by the situation.

"The citizens of the capital are full of praise. Thanks to Prince Logan, many have been saved from the suffering of sea demons. For them, it was a precious opportunity to experience the deity's mercy and love firsthand. It is truly a commendable deed."

A soft, delicate voice followed.

It was Queen Melody, the second consort.

Originally a commoner, she had ascended to the position of queen when the Holy Emperor took the throne and was the mother of the youngest of his children, Princess Sisle.

The gentle and kind beauty with soft silver hair and caring eyes was Queen Melody. Her sincere praise seemed to soften Empress Tatiana's stern expression momentarily.

"If only Princess Sisle were here to share this joyful occasion..."

Princess Sisle, the youngest of the emperor's children, was known to possess the strongest divine power among them despite her young age. The Church had already proclaimed her a saintess, and she was currently on a long pastoral visit organized by the Church.

"She's still young, so she probably feels like these visits are more like outings. I've told her to return before her birthday celebration."

As Queen Melody spoke with a smile, the atmosphere around her noticeably warmed.

Her presence was like a small sheep caught between a leopard and a wolf, but her unwavering voice in such an environment seemed even more remarkable.

Indeed, a banquet with three of the Holy Emperor's consorts gathered was never going to be a relaxed affair. It was becoming clear why the Holy Emperor usually avoided organizing such events.

Looking around, everyone seemed accustomed to the tense atmosphere, each managing in their own way.

The twins, Herna and Gades, kept exchanging glances and giggling quietly during the meal, seemingly communicating something without words. It appeared they were engaged in a conversation through their psychic channeling.

Logan was relatively focused on his meal, occasionally engaging in quiet conversations with Amelia seated next to him. Their interaction, having been close since she arrived at the palace, looked comfortable and affectionate.

Masain, too, appeared unusually relaxed and happy. He seemed utterly enchanted by his younger siblings, smiling fondly as he ate. He truly seemed to have a caretaker's nature to his core.

And then there was the Holy Emperor.

Seongjin glanced at the head table and saw the Holy Emperor quietly cutting his food, his expression unreadable.

But he wasn't eating, just cutting his food.

What was he doing?

Seongjin watched him more closely. The emperor would cut his steak when others did, and bring a cup to his lips when others ate, though he didn't seem to drink. This process flowed so naturally that unless one paid close attention, it wasn't obvious that he wasn't actually eating.

Come to think of it, Seongjin couldn't recall seeing the Holy Emperor actually eat anything.

During tea time, the emperor would just stare blankly at his untouched tea. Even during a lunch in the garden, he seemed to just toy with his food.

Could the Holy Emperor be a picky eater at his age?

As Seongjin sat there with a puzzled expression, the servants brought in the next course – a crisply fried fish dish.

'...Wow!'

Unwittingly taking a bite of the dish, Seongjin found the tender, savory fish flesh, perfectly complemented by a sweet sauce, incredibly delicious. Even for his refined palate, accustomed to the finest cuisine of the palace, this was a gourmet delight.

"This is delicious! What dish is this?"

Seongjin's spontaneous question prompted a response from a smiling servant.

"It's a cutlet made from true salmon, Your Highness. It's the season when they're at their fattest. This one was freshly flown in from the Kiproos Union this morning."

"True salmon..."

Seongjin suddenly remembered the emperor's comment about a sword's name.

-"True salmon is indeed a tender and tasty fish."

Glancing at the head table, the Holy Emperor still wore a stoic expression, seemingly intent on destroying his plate of food.

Was this his favorite?

But why wasn't he eating it?

Before he knew it, Seongjin found himself calling out to the Holy Emperor.

"Father?"

Instantly, all conversations in the dining room ceased, and everyone turned to look at Seongjin. Unperturbed by the sudden silence, he continued.

"Isn't this the fish you mentioned before? True salmon?"

"....."

The Holy Emperor silently stared at Seongjin, then looked down at his plate. His expression was unreadable, but Seongjin noticed a slight widening of his eyes, as if he hadn't realized what he was doing.

The Holy Emperor finally picked up his utensils and slowly brought a piece of fish to his mouth, swallowing for the first time since the banquet began.

"...Indeed."

After a moment of savoring, the Holy Emperor nodded.

"It is indeed that fish. The imperial chefs have done an excellent job."

Seongjin clicked his tongue.

As entangled as he might be among his three wives, was the Holy Emperor too distracted?

With a snort, Seongjin resumed his meal, but soon he felt the gaze of others and looked up.

Empress Tatiana appeared uncomfortable, Queen Lizabeth was sneakily glancing at him, pretending to be uninterested, and Queen Melody was openly admiring.

'...What's with them?'

The reactions weren't just from the head table.

The twins' eyes were wide open in surprise, and Amelia covered her mouth with her hands, silently staring at Seongjin. What's going on?

Even Masain seemed emotionally stirred, his eyes reddening, an unusual reaction.

'Did I do something wrong? I didn't say much.'

Feeling a cold sweat, Seongjin was perplexed.

Surprisingly, Logan too seemed taken aback. He glanced at the Holy Emperor with a puzzled expression, then turned his gaze to Seongjin.

His look, as if seeing someone anew, lacked the earlier sharp hostility.

In this strange atmosphere, with Seongjin still trying to understand the situation, the Holy Emperor alone, expressionless, placed a second piece of fish into his mouth.

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"There is poison in the food that has just been served.

The tingling at the tip of the tongue from the sauce is not due to the spices. It's likely some kind of neurotoxic poison.

It's uncertain if the same poison is present in the meat as well. However, a similar type of poison seems to have been lightly applied to the plate.

The wine is also a bit strange.

The color reflecting in the light seems to be due to the effect of Carvamilla, a poison usually served with tea.

Oh my goodness. Are you listening?

Please open the channel quickly."

* * *

Logan had been observing the Emperor for a considerable time.

He had spent his childhood with him in the Blue Rose Labyrinth, and even after that, they often had audiences together, doing things that a father and son would do.

Occasionally, they would sit in the office and eat walnuts together.

But that was all. He could assert that he had never once seen the Emperor eat other food in the palace without hesitation.

The others were just as surprised. The chief chamberlain next to him was moved to tears.

The Empress and the consorts, too, stopped their veiled jabs disguised

as greetings and well wishes, and just stared blankly at the Emperor's actions.

Unconcerned with the atmosphere around him, the Emperor quietly moved his cutlery, eventually finishing off the entire plate of salmon cutlet.

Of course, after that, he returned to his indifferent facade, merely cutting the food.

However, having observed him for a long time, Logan understood. The man was simply preoccupied elsewhere.

Seeing him act reflexively like that, it seemed that pretending to eat had become a long-standing habit for the Emperor.

'I thought he was just overly cautious...'

Otherwise, what reason would there be for someone with such immense divine power, capable of recovering instantly from deadly poison, to not eat properly?

"Ah, there he goes again."

Across the room, a dull murmur came from the one pretending to be Morres. It was the impostor.

Logan looked at this strange imposter with newfound curiosity.

What exactly was this person?

At first, during the opening ceremony, he had no doubt believed that an evil spirit had taken over Morres' body. Although faint, he even felt an ominous aura around him.

It had only been a few months since he last saw Morres.

But in that short gap, his brother had become a completely different person.

Whatever method was used, his aura had increased as if he had become an experienced knight. And he had lost a noticeable amount

of weight.

Above all, there was an occasional wild and fierce demeanor emanating from him, though he tried to hide it.

It was as if he was not a prince raised in the imperial palace but a veteran hunter dedicated to maritime conquests for decades.

"...Your Highness, this is the first time I've seen His Majesty eat during a banquet," whispered Sir Masain, his face filled with emotion.

When had the two of them become so close?

"Why leave it be? It's disgraceful for the Emperor if such manners are allowed at the table. Shouldn't someone scold for pickiness or at least offer his favorite dishes?"

"That... talking about His Majesty's table manners is a bit..."

What a blunt and tactless imposter.

"Morres, thanks to you, His Majesty has finished his meal. I've always been concerned about His Majesty's health as he often skips meals."

Amelia, with her hands clasped over her heart, spoke joyfully.

When had these two reconciled?

"Wait, he skips meals daily and no one does anything? Why is everyone okay with this? What a disgrace it would be if the Emperor of Delcross suffered from malnutrition!"

"Well... even if that happened, we thought His Majesty would recover with his divine power..."

Could this really be an evil spirit?

Now, Logan found it difficult to make a hasty judgment.

He shouldn't think this way, but wasn't this imposter getting along with people better than the real Morres ever did?

Moreover, Logan was caught in a strange sense of déjà vu.

The imposter definitely had a different presence than Morres, but why did he increasingly remind Logan of the wayward young Morres?

'...I need to have a talk with this person.'

But what troubled him most was the Emperor of Delcross.

Would a person, suspiciously inhuman, who let an evil spirit freely take over his son's body, just stand by and watch?

Logan thought he needed to be more cautious in dealing with this impostor.

* * *

The banquet lasted a considerable amount of time before finally coming to an end late in the evening.

Feeling a bit tired upon his return to the Pearl Palace, Seongjin, as usual, meditated briefly before opening a fairy tale book borrowed from Amelia.

The book had been quite interesting when the first Emperor was busy brawling with dragons, but as it progressed to the founding of Delcross and laying the foundations of the imperial city, his interest waned significantly. It seemed necessary to finish the book quickly and borrow a new one before his motivation for learning hit rock bottom.

However, Seongjin had to close the book just before reaching the end. The Demon King, in a panic, had alerted him.

[Seongjin, it's light! There's light coming!]

What kind of sermon from a pseudo-preacher is that? If you're going to inform me, do it properly.

Frustrated, the Demon King replied.

[I mean Prince Logan. He's rushing here at an incredibly fast speed!]

What?

Seongjin tensed up and swiftly rose from his seat, grabbing the Nutcracker he had placed beside his bed, just in case.

He wasn't sure of Logan's level, but the approaching presence was so faint that even Seongjin had difficulty detecting it. This level of stealth was almost on par with Commander Bruno.

Regardless, the fact that Logan was sneaking into the Pearl Palace in the middle of the night without any formal notice of visitation did not seem to bode well.

Considering the murderous intent Logan had shown earlier that day, it wouldn't be surprising if a sword fight broke out right here and now.

After waiting for a moment, sure enough, someone leapt onto the terrace from the third floor.

Considering that Dasha always used this route to visit, it seemed the third-floor security was indeed lax. He would have to tip off Sir Masain later.

While Seongjin was observing the balcony, Logan, dressed lightly and with a long sword at his waist, approached the window.

Then, he knocked.

".....?"

What was he up to? Sneaking in, yet knocking on the window to enter the room?

Bewildered and staring, Logan knocked on the window again.

Knock, knock.

"...Yes."

As Seongjin reluctantly responded, Logan finally opened the terrace door and stepped into the room. It was peculiar how fastidious he

was in such a strange situation.

"I said earlier that we need to talk," Logan stated, walking towards Seongjin with a calm expression.

No longer could Seongjin sense the rage or murderous intent from Logan that was evident before. Of course, this could change depending on the outcome of their conversation.

Seongjin nodded, and Logan looked at him intently for a moment.

His slightly droopy eyes, which had shown warmth towards Amelia and Marquis Masin, now seemed cold and stern without a trace of a smile.

"I'll ask again. What exactly are you? What did you do to Morres?"

Seongjin furrowed his brows slightly. He didn't fully understand what had happened to the real Morres, and explaining his own identity was complicated.

He decided to respond with a question, a simple way to handle a difficult inquiry.

"What about you? What's your real identity? Are you just an ordinary person?"

Seongjin had already considered the possibility that Logan might be possessed by someone else.

"....."

"What is your secret?"

The moment Seongjin mentioned the word "secret," the boy's eyes widened in surprise. It seemed like he hadn't expected to hear such words from Seongjin.

"How do you know about that... That's something only Morres should know..."

Logan's gaze hardened again.

His hand subtly moved towards the sword at his waist.

"So, you did do something to Morres! How did you find out about that?"

Oops, just as the tension was subsiding, Logan's demeanor turned threatening again.

Trying to probe further might have been too much.

"Where is the real Morres? Where is he?"

"Wait, hold on!"

Before Logan could become uncontrollably agitated, Seongjin quickly interjected. Preventing a potential clash between the brothers seemed the most prudent course of action.

"I got involved in this unintentionally! I really don't know what happened to Morres!"

"....."

Seongjin, in a mix of urgency and desperation, blurted out, "Let's calm down. I'm just as curious about why this happened! I'll tell you everything I know, but you have to be honest about what you're hiding too. Fair enough? That's all I'm asking!"

Fair? As if!

Even as he spouted nonsense, Seongjin was incredulous at his own words. Yet, driven by a sense of urgency, he continued to talk.

"Understand? From my perspective, you're the strange one. Are you really Logan? Or another evil spirit that has taken over his body? Why would I reveal everything to you?"

"....."

Logan's intense blue eyes gradually calmed. He looked at Seongjin, seemingly contemplating something.

Finally, he slowly began to speak, "...You're right. From your perspective, such doubts are reasonable."

".....?"

Seongjin gaped, surprised. Was Logan really persuaded by what he thought was nonsense?

Regardless, Logan looked around, then walked over to a nearby sofa and sat down with proper posture.

"Let's start this exchange of information you proposed. Sit down."

"....."

"We'll each ask one question at a time. Keep the answers simple, and if the response is satisfactory, we'll move on to the next question. That seems fair."

Was Logan fixated on fairness? He was oddly conventional in such an unusual situation.

Seongjin, speechless, just stared blankly as Logan gestured for him to start.

"Shall I begin? Who exactly are you?"

"...I'm Seongjin, likely from another world."

At this point, Seongjin was just going with the flow.

The two continued their Q&A session for a while. Initially, they strictly took turns asking one question each, but as the conversation progressed, they began to share information more openly, foregoing formalities.

Seongjin revealed to Logan that he had died fighting a Demon King in another world and awoke in Morres' body. He added that Morres' soul was nowhere to be found when he arrived, and he had no idea why this had happened.

He also emphasized that he was actually a very old person.

Then, Seongjin learned a surprising fact about Logan.

Logan was not possessed by another soul.

Logan revealed that he was originally an officer from Ortona who had died in a battlefield in his previous life, and had been reincarnated as Logan.

He had never heard of anyone else being reincarnated and was clueless about why it happened exclusively to him. However, he wanted Seongjin to understand that he, too, was a seasoned knight with years of experience in his past life.

"But I might have been over sixty years old! Doesn't that automatically put me in line?"

"I, too, don't have clear memories of my past life, but I believe I was over seventy."

"Seventy and still active on the battlefield? Are you sure you're not exaggerating?"

What had started as a serious conversation had somehow devolved into an argument about their ages.

After spending some time on this irrelevant debate, Logan hesitantly raised the question that had been troubling him the most.

"Why does the Holy Emperor leave you alone? What's the reason?"

That was a question Seongjin also pondered.

But the same question applied to Logan as well. Seongjin countered, "What about you? Why does Father leave you alone?"

What? Logan looked at Seongjin with wide eyes, as if he had never considered this before.

Seongjin tilted his head in confusion.

You still don't fully understand that man.

"You do realize, don't you? You don't actually think the Emperor is unaware that you're not an ordinary person?"

Seongjin was certain the Holy Emperor already knew Logan was not an ordinary person, and he had reasons for this belief.

As he conversed with Logan, Seongjin was simultaneously receiving various pieces of information from the Demon King. The Demon King's insights, akin to a lie detector, had played a significant role in believing the seemingly absurd information about Logan being a reincarnated soul.

Of course, Logan's claim about being over seventy in his previous life was false.

The guy disliked losing, it seemed.

The Demon King had also shared some peculiar observations about Logan's soul.

[His soul looks a bit strange, you know?]

It was surrounded by such a bright light due to his innate divine power that it was difficult to discern its true form.

However, according to the Demon King, Logan's soul seemed to change size when he mentioned his past life.

In other words, it appeared as a boy and then momentarily as a tall adult.

Additionally, there was one common feature in both forms: several long, stick-like objects were embedded in the soul's torso.

The Holy Emperor once answered Seongjin's question about what a soul looks like: "It looks identical to the person in life. The soul is influenced by the body until the moment of death."

Thus, the soul's appearance the Demon King described might be Logan's form just before his death in his past life.

And the Emperor can see souls.

The conclusion was obvious.

Stunned by Seongjin's words, Logan was speechless for a moment. He must have realized Seongjin was speaking with some conviction.

From their conversation, Seongjin sensed that, just as he used the Demon King, Logan also had some reliable means to gauge the truthfulness of Seongjin's words.

If Seongjin gave vague answers or didn't respond adequately, Logan would pinpoint and probe those areas, almost like a ghost.

After all, no matter how gullible, it's improbable to easily believe someone who claims to be an evil spirit that has taken over a brother's body and hails from another world.

"...He knows about me?"

Logan finally responded after a long silence.

He sat upright, but his clasped hands, trembling slightly, betrayed his inner turmoil.

"Probably. How did you die in the battlefield?"

Seongjin's direct question seemed to cut through the tension, focusing on the heart of Logan's past and potentially his connection with the Emperor.

Logan's blue eyes seemed to sink into memories as he responded to Seongjin's question.

"...I don't clearly remember the moment of my death. It was during a prolonged battle... I was surrounded by numerous enemies, weary from the long fight. I remember receiving fatal sword wounds and being struck by several spears in vital areas."

The sticks in his body were spears, then.

"Then it's certain. At the very least, the Holy Emperor knows you died on the battlefield."

"If that's the case....."

Logan's gaze became unfocused, lost in thought.

"Why has he never asked me anything until now?"

Logan no longer referred to the Emperor as 'Imperial Father' in front of Seongjin. It seemed he didn't genuinely regard him as his father.

And the reason for this became clear to Seongjin when Logan murmured almost to himself.

"Could it be that he already knows who I am?"

"....."

"Does he... remember me?"

Seongjin caught onto a possibility from Logan's words.

"Did you, by any chance, meet the Holy Emperor in your past life?"

Logan didn't respond to his question, but his silence was revealing.

Seongjin realized it: since Logan knew him in a past life, he couldn't consider him his real father.

After a moment of silent contemplation, Logan suddenly spoke up, startled by his own realization.

"...Yes. That's why he gave me [Arjuna] without any question."

Arjuna?

As Seongjin blinked in confusion, Logan drew the long sword he had at his waist.

It was a unique silver blade.

The thin and narrow blade was crafted in a wavy pattern, and it looked somewhat like a long spear due to its thin, elongated hilt and relatively small guard.

It was definitely not a typical sword seen in the knight orders.

"When I first requested this sword, everyone in the imperial knight order advised against it, saying it didn't suit the order's swordsmanship. But he simply handed it to me without a word."

After explaining this, Logan hesitated for a moment before continuing.

"And... Arjuna was the name of my sword in my past life."

Could it be?

"Your sword from your past life?"

That was a confirmation beyond doubt.

Logan slowly brought his trembling hands to his face, letting out a small groan.

"How should I... treat him now?"

* * *

It was a story from over a decade ago.

At that time, Ortona, despite being torn into three major factions, still managed to maintain its identity as a nation.

During a period when the continent's sole republican government was being repeatedly pushed back by the coalition of external forces and royalists, there was one exceptional swordsman who played a significant role in preventing its complete annihilation over the past year.

Gael Bertrand.

The only Sword Master in the eastern regions, including Ortona.

He was a longtime friend and the personal knight of Prince Benicio, a supporter of the republican government. He was also the last bastion and the final sword of the dwindling republican remnants.

However, even this busy man was now merely wasting his time as a casual drinking companion for his longtime friend.

"Ortona is finished. Those blockheaded royalists, unable to let go of the past, invited foreign powers into our lands. Now, our nation lies in ruins!"

Gael watched with a tired expression as Prince Benicio guzzled down his drink.

His once brilliant friend had now degenerated into a simple drunkard, lamenting his fate with a bottle in hand every day.

"My homeland, the first on the continent to blossom into a republic, has come to such a hollow end..."

The prince lamented in a sorrowful tone, refilling his glass.

Perhaps because he had dreamed brighter than anyone for Ortona's future, his frustration seemed deeper than others.

But Gael, instead of consoling him, let out an involuntary sigh. He himself wanted to drink and forget his worries.

He had to find a new patron starting tomorrow, persuade the mercenary groups to cooperate harmoniously, and now he even worried about sourcing more bottles of liquor.

"How about you, Gael? Do you also see me as a failed second prince who betrayed the royal family? Don't you believe in my firm conviction to support the republic for the future of our nation?"

Prince Benicio, with reddened eyes, glared at the silent Gael.

If Gael truly thought that, he wouldn't be enduring this hardship at the frontlines.

However, Gael didn't voice this response. He knew too well that even

if he assured the prince otherwise, Benicio would repeat the same lamentations the next day after more drinking.

As long as the republican government couldn't reclaim Ortona, his friend's deep frustration would not end. And to Gael, the likelihood of the republicans turning the tide seemed as far-fetched as a dream.

"No one in this world believes in my sincere dedication to Ortona. Damn it all..."

As Gael gazed at his friend, now slumped over and asleep with the empty liquor bottle, he sighed and stood up. He gently touched the hilt of Arjuna, his sword, then left Prince Benicio's tent to head towards the camp where the newly arrived mercenary group was stationed.

Despite the late hour, Gael had to finalize the contract details with the new mercenaries.

"I am Justin Astros, the leader of the Astros Mercenary Group."

A tall, muscular man with an extraordinary presence approached Gael with a light, almost playful smile.

"It's an honor to meet the legendary Gael Bertrand, the Eastern Sword Master. It's my first time seeing a Sword Master, and the pressure is indeed immense!"

Justin, the man named, exclaimed with an exaggerated enthusiasm as he circled around Gael.

Gael recognized that Justin's achievements were not common, even for a young leader of a mercenary group.

"Wow! Just being near you makes my body tremble. With such a formidable figure on the front lines, I wonder if there's even a place for us."

Empty flattery, yet he seems eager to prove himself.

Just as Gael began to feel slightly irked, a calm voice came from behind.

"Enough, Justin. That's enough. You're being rude."

"Oh, if I have indeed been rude, I apologize."

Justin quickly corrected his posture and apologized to Gael.

Looking to see who had spoken so bluntly to the leader, Gael saw a surprisingly tall yet obviously young member, looking at Justin with a somewhat disdainful expression.

Gael thought for a moment.

Did I make a mistake in hiring them? They came highly recommended for their skill, but if they rely on a child...

But when Gael's eyes met the boy's, he felt something odd. He sensed that dealing with this boy would be remarkably challenging.

Of course, the boy was nowhere near the level of a Sword Master.

His aura activation was much lower than Justin's, and the slight darkness under his eyes suggested he wasn't in the best of health.

Yet, strangely, Gael felt that the boy posed a far more challenging opponent than the group's leader.

The boy glanced at Gael for a moment and then abruptly left the tent.

Gael watched the direction in which the boy disappeared and found himself asking the leader.

"That boy is....."

"Unfortunately, he's not officially a mercenary. Consider him a guest member who joined us temporarily."

Justin gave Gael a sly smile.

"Isn't he a fascinating fellow, General?"

Even Gael, who had been acclaimed as a prodigy since his youth, recognized that the boy's talent was extraordinary. Under different circumstances, he would have spared no effort to take him as a

disciple.

"...Where did that friend learn swordsmanship?"

"That part is truly fascinating..."

Justin scratched his face thoughtfully before answering.

"He claims he's never been formally trained in swordsmanship. It sounds unbelievable, but it seems true. You can see he doesn't use proper sword forms, yet strangely, he wields a sword effectively."

Gael quietly observed the mercenary leader.

The vibrations he felt indicated that Justin was probably telling the truth.

Gael furrowed his brows.

A sword style that defies form and technique.

The legendary realm that Gael's master jokingly mentioned.

Could it be that this boy was independently reaching that level?

"General, shall we proceed with the contract adjustments?"

Justin rubbed his hands, his movements light despite his large frame. Gael nodded and pulled out the contract.

There was no need for excessive speculation. Soon enough, he'd confirm the boy's skill with his own eyes, as they would be working alongside the Astros Mercenary Group.

They began discussing the details.

Soon, Gael received unexpected advice from Justin.

"General, I apologize for saying this upon our first meeting."

Justin looked incredulous as he spoke.

"If you agree so readily, how can we negotiate? We expect some

resistance and push accordingly."

"....."

"Do you always end up at a disadvantage like this?"

Gael sensed the vibrations from Justin, confirming the sad truth of his words. Regrettably, it was all true.

He swallowed his pride and decided to delegate contract negotiations to Prince Benicio or another republican leader in the future.

Gael's time with the Astros Mercenary Group lasted only four months. After the short-term contract ended, they left the front due to a change of heart by their sponsor.

However, the impact of this brief association on Gael's future was immense, though he had no inkling of it at the time.

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Born as the only son of Duke Bertrand, a central noble of Ortona, Gael was sensitive to the movement of aura from a young age.

Even before he formally learned aura cultivation, he already felt the aura flowing around him like air and used it to breathe. When he actually began training, he quickly created three layers of aura, surprising everyone around him.

For young Gael, it was not a big deal.

He had reached the stage where he could not only absorb and accumulate aura in his body but also sensitively feel the aura vibrations from people and living beings around him.

He noticed strong movements from young and healthy people and weak ones from the old and sick. Gael soon realized that these vibrations subtly changed when people spoke or felt strong emotions.

He was destined to become the youngest Sword Master and was praised as a genius comparable to the legendary swordsman Banahas.

"This thieving cat! Where have you hidden my lady's earrings? Won't you confess properly?"

When he was still a child, a theft occurred at the duke's mansion: the duchess's jewelry was stolen.

The main suspect was one of her personal maids, the youngest among them.

"It's not true, Madame Gomez. I really don't know anything about it!"

"So, you didn't steal the earrings? You were the only one who could have touched them!"

"I swear I'm innocent!"

Young Gael felt anxious vibrations from the crying maid in front of the house steward.

Her denial seemed truthful, yet she simultaneously emitted strong vibrations of sincerity while claiming her innocence.

He was confused.

Why? If she stole the earrings, why did she believe she was innocent?

Soon, it was revealed through investigation that she had conspired with a mansion guard to steal the earrings and sell them secretly.

"Please! Please forgive me just this once! My sick mother at home is taking care of my ailing younger sibling! If I am expelled, my sibling won't be able to receive treatment and might die!"

"Take her away, now!"

"Please! You can't do this to me! After all the hard work I have done for the ducal family! Madame Gomez!"

Gael felt the piercing desperation in the vibrations from the maid as she was dragged away by the city guards. Her belief that the ducal family's treatment of her was unjust and overly harsh was genuine.

Gael felt melancholic, absorbing a part of her sorrowful emotions through her vibrations.

Soon after she was imprisoned, rumors spread that her mother and sibling had died of illness. Gael thought it was a tragic turn of events, but as a child, he soon forgot about her.

Months later, the woman, now released from prison, returned to the ducal mansion. She was emaciated, her hair roughly shorn, looking wretched.

She ran towards the mansion guards, eyes filled with resentment.

"It's all your fault! You imprisoned me and ignored my family, you

filthy Bertrands! I curse you! I swear, in hell, I will demand the lives of my mother and sibling from you! Aaaaaah!"

Even as the city guards took her away again, she did not stop cursing them. Her eyes filled with venom were so fierce that even the guards momentarily flinched.

Watching from a window inside the mansion, Gael vividly felt the waves of hatred emanating from her. She truly believed the entire situation was the Bertrand family's fault and cursed them wholeheartedly.

Gael, sitting in his room, turned to his nanny Juana, who was busy with her embroidery, and asked, "Juana, was what that woman said true? Is all the misfortune that befell her really our family's fault?"

Nanny Juana scoffed without even looking up from her embroidery. "Of course not, young master. You shouldn't take to heart what such wicked people say. Why should she blame the ducal family when she's the thief? It's clear that she was inherently corrupt, and the Divine punished her justly."

The price of stealing earrings being her mother and sibling's lives seemed too harsh. And why did her family suffer the Divine's punishment instead of her?

Although Gael was curious, he sensed genuine vibrations from Juana. She firmly believed that the maid received the punishment she deserved.

That incident made young Gael realize that most people always speak with some degree of sincerity. It's just that their sincerity might not be the truth or it might change to another sincerity later. And these wrong sincerities are not always the fault of the person speaking them.

Perhaps it was from then that he tried to understand and listen to what people said.

Over time, Gael enrolled in the Royal Academy, where noble offspring typically studied, and there he met Prince Benicio, who

would become a lifelong friend.

Compared to his peers, who were barely at a squire's level, Gael already possessed the skills of an intermediate knight when he joined the academy, becoming the envy of all.

Many sought to befriend the young heir of the Duke, the future strongest swordsman of Ortona. Among them was Prince Benicio.

"You, with such talent, should lead our country in the future."

The prince was intelligent and likable, and surprisingly, a supporter of the republic despite being a member of the royal family. He befriended radical republican professors and a minority of noble students, becoming a new focal point of the academy's republican faction.

"Everyone says I turned to the republic because I am the second prince, far from power. But that's not true. I love my homeland. I act purely based on what I think will bring a better future to Ortona."

Gael felt a slight instability in Benicio's vibrations. Part of what Benicio said was not true. Whether it was an outright lie or Benicio himself harbored doubts about his words was unclear.

"Many philosophers have pondered this. Is it right for a country to be controlled solely by an absolute monarch? Look no further than our own country, where the monarch is becoming a puppet of the royalists, and the merchant alliances and noble council are growing into an invincible force beyond the monarch's control."

The young prince, not yet of age, furrowed his brow with an adult-like seriousness.

"What then is a fail-proof nation? Listening to more people, moving the country without mistakes based on the opinions of many, that's a republic. I believe that by realizing the future envisioned by the republicans, Ortona will move in a better direction."

Gael looked at Prince Benicio, who was gazing into the distance with a sparkle in his eyes. The prince's words, filled with dreams of a glorious future for Ortona as the first republic on the continent,

resonated with nothing but love for his country and pure truth.

His truth might someday collide with the harsh wall of reality and cease to be true. But for now, the passion Prince Benicio showed was strong and pure enough to inspire everyone in the academy's republican faction.

So, as always, Gael decided to believe in the sincerity of those who spoke their truth before him.

And later, Gael indeed played a significant role in establishing a republic in Ortona and eventually became the last sword of the diminishing republican remnants, pushed to downfall by the royalists allied with foreign forces.

* * *

"This is the end of everything if we don't act now! We must open the gates to Count Castilla immediately!"

"That's an unreasonable demand. Didn't Count Castilla agree to supply us with resources on the condition that we do not retreat from the Andres Plains? We are different from the royalists. We don't use force to open neutral territories."

"That's idealistic, Prince Benicio! Don't you see? If we don't secure the Castilla Fortress right now, the Andres Plains will become the graveyard of the republic!"

"It's impossible! And this isn't about ideals, it's about reality. Do you really think Count Castilla will just watch us reach his fortress?"

"But if we don't secure the fortress..."

An endless debate.

Gael sighed and left the meeting tent.

The Ortona Civil War.

The last remnants of the retreating republicans aimed to seize the Castilla Fortress, known as a natural stronghold, as a pivot for a

counterattack.

However, Count Castilla, maintaining surface-level neutrality, didn't want his fertile territory trampled in the civil war. He provided a small amount of military supplies and food on the condition that the republican forces did not retreat from the remote Andres Plains, keeping his gates firmly shut.

It had been almost three months since the republicans set up their position on the Andres Plains.

Stuck between a rock and a hard place, the republican command had been divided into two opposing viewpoints ever since: invade Count Castilla's territory and seize the fortress, or break through the front lines on the plains to escape the defensive position.

To Gael, neither option seemed particularly feasible.

As he walked, idly touching the hilt of Arjuna, a child's voice came from a corner of the mercenary camp.

"So, brother, is Duke Dassiano on our side?"

Gael stopped in his tracks.

The voice belonged to Prince Benicio's young son, Kike. Why was he in the mercenary camp?

Soon, a quiet response followed.

Gael was startled for two reasons upon hearing the conversation.

First, it was rare for a foreign mercenary to speak Ortonan. Even strategic meetings were usually conducted in the imperial common language.

Second, the responses to the young child were remarkably blunt.

"Brother, what about the Marquis of Laquila on the border?"

As Gael listened to their conversation for a while longer, he eventually turned and walked away.

It seemed young Kike, still struggling with the imperial language, had managed to make a friend among the mercenaries. It was somewhat pitiful that their main activity was scrutinizing the list of supporters.

That evening, Gael visited Prince Benicio's tent and asked Kike whom he had been with during the day. The boy responded with a bright smile, "Bart from the Astros Mercenary Group. He knows Ortonan."

Proudly, Kike handed over a crumpled piece of paper, explaining, "I asked him about these people, and he explained everything to me."

Gael unfolded the paper, which had a list of supporters written in a child's scrawled handwriting. It seemed Kike had remembered the conversations of adults and organized them in his own way. The boy, like his father Prince Benicio, was quite bright.

Regrettably, most of the names were crossed out.

The list seemed to reflect the dire situation of the republican remnants, leaving Gael feeling bitter.

"Still, not everything he said is correct. At least Castilla is neutral, Kike."

Pointing to one crossed-out name, Kike tilted his head in confusion.

"Huh? No, General Gael. Bart said it clearly."

Then Kike, looking straight at Gael, stated firmly, a vibration of undeniable truth emanating from him, "Bart said that Castilla is definitely an enemy."

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[TL/N: Bart... I've heard that name somewhere... ????]

Following that day, Gael often saw Kike, Prince Benicio's son, spending time with Bart, a new acquaintance from the Astros Mercenary Group. Bart was the boy with the extraordinary qualities that Gael had noticed earlier, a guest member who had recently joined the mercenaries.

Kike trailed after the mercenary like a chick following a mother hen, probably because there were no other children in the republican camp, and his father, Prince Benicio, was either busy with strategy meetings or drowned in liquor.

The problem seemed to be that Kike's new friend, despite being younger than most adult mercenaries, acted much older.

"It's no good to let your frustration lead to self-destructive actions."

"Do you know? Sometimes you talk really difficult stuff. I don't always understand what you mean."

"...It means if you're tangled, throwing away your weapon recklessly might cause harm."

The boy sighed as he comforted Kike, sitting on the ground.

Curious about what had happened, Gael approached and saw a deep gash on the child's shin, bleeding profusely – a result of throwing a dagger in frustration, causing it to bounce back and hit his leg.

"Kike, you should go back to your father's tent and get this treated..."

As he was speaking, Gael witnessed something unbelievable. Bart's hand hovered over the wound, and a holy white light emanated from

it, healing Kike's injury instantly.

'...Divine power?'

Wasn't this boy supposed to be a swordsman?

While Gael was stunned, Kike seemed unfazed, probably used to such occurrences.

"Thanks, hyung."

Kike dusted off his trousers and thanked Bart before running energetically towards the camp.

"....."

Left alone with the boy, Gael examined him with renewed curiosity. The more he looked, the more the boy seemed like a collection of incongruous elements.

A noble-like wandering mercenary. An empire-born Ortonan speaker. A swordsman with divine power.

Gael couldn't help but ask.

"Your skill seems better than the medical priests in the camp. Why didn't you become a priest?"

Bart, who had been looking at Gael with an unreadable expression, replied with a question of his own.

"The staff here could use your talent in diplomacy. Why didn't you become a scholar?"

Bart was referring to the occasional external propaganda documents Gael had written, replacing the demoralized staff. Gael himself thought he had done quite well.

But still, asking a swordsman and the youngest Sword Master in the continent why he chose the sword?

"...You've read those documents?"

"I have. They were eloquent. If the situation of the republicans was even slightly better, they might have inspired many from the royalist side to switch allegiances."

"....."

In other words, the republic's situation was so dire that, despite the eloquence, no one was swayed.

"Quite a pessimistic view. We don't know how things will turn out yet."

"Probably no surprises, General. Everyone knows the facts."

"But many still sympathize with the republic's cause. Isn't your Astros Mercenary Group participating in the war with the support of Count Milo?"

"Count Milo is just playing his part. Do you really think he doesn't know when to withdraw?"

Gael recalled the boy's words to Kike. Count Milo was on the side of the merchant alliance.

A bitter smile crossed Gael's face. He had suspected as much.

"Indeed. Anyway, I appreciate the heads-up. I'll keep it in mind for the future."

The boy then looked at Gael, observing him silently for a moment before casually placing a hand on the shoulder of the Sword Master.

".....!"

Gael was taken aback by his boldness.

The reason Gael let the boy continue was probably due to a certain confidence that he could respond to any sudden event.

The boy's actions felt so natural and effortless.

Then, bright light beams erupted from Bart's hand, enveloping Gael.

Instantly, minor headaches and pains disappeared, and his muscles relaxed refreshingly.

For Gael, who hadn't had much to do with injuries since becoming an aura user, it was a novel experience.

'Is this what divine power feels like?'

After that day, Gael realized his own physical condition had deteriorated significantly. Engulfed in relentless duties, both on the front lines and in managing some of the staff's workload, even his Sword Master's stamina was being pushed to its limits.

Bart withdrew his hand and, turning away, commented, "You're transforming the excessive pressure into passion for the republic, mistaking it as motivation. No matter how much you try to compensate, your aura can't reach its potential under such strain."

"...What do you mean?"

Gael asked, confused.

Kike's words had at least one thing right: it was hard to understand what the boy meant.

Without turning back, Bart replied with a voice that felt coldly distant, "It means you're being foolishly stubborn."

Gael was at a loss for words, taken aback by the unexpected personal attack.

Yet, from the boy's departing back, he sensed undeniable vibrations of sincerity.

* * *

Arrows rained down from all directions, accompanied by despair-filled screams.

The enemy, holding the high ground, relentlessly showered arrows, leaving the republicans' archers scrambling for cover rather than returning fire.

"Weren't they supposed to be retreating for supplies!"

Veteran General Gaspar of the republicans shouted in despair.

The republican forces were falling, one by one, to the senseless attack.

A miscalculation had been made following a scout's report that the enemy's main force was preparing to retreat. Despite the geographical disadvantage, the republicans had eagerly advanced with most of their right-wing forces.

Had they faced the enemy near the Castilla Fortress, they would have avoided such casualties.

But Count Castilla had no intention of offering the fortress to the republic's remnants. He strictly controlled the gates, wary of the republicans.

Eventually, the republicans had to set up their position on the open plains, constantly fending off attacks from the royalist army.

Exhausted by the endless attrition, their attempt at a forced breakthrough was almost inevitable.

"General Gaspar!"

A knight, using a small cart for cover, dashed towards the veteran knight Gaspar during a brief lull in the arrow storm.

"We can't hold on like this! We need to retreat now!"

"Where to? Where can we retreat?"

The veteran knight's question made the other knight pause and look towards the southern plains.

The enemy's main force, which they thought was retreating for supplies, had appeared behind them. Their right wing was now completely cut off from the central camp.

Drum beats echoed, and the royalist cavalry, full of morale, charged

towards them.

General Gaspar's forces had unwittingly walked into a trap, becoming the anvil for the enemy's hammer.

The veteran knight gritted his teeth.

"Our only chance is to break through the less defended high ground ahead! Otherwise, we will be annihilated!"

"But..."

"Hold on a little longer! Advance even a step more towards the high ground! He will soon come to our aid!"

The knight's shaky gaze steadied at the old general's words. He nodded firmly and ran back to reorganize the archers.

Gael Bertrand.

The reason the republicans could hold their ground on the Andres Plains despite the unfavorable odds was due to one factor: the presence of the last sword of the republic.

He always rushed to the weakest point on the front lines, his mere presence deterring the enemy.

As expected, soon there was a disturbance at the rear of the enemy cavalry, just as they were about to collide with Gaspar's right-wing forces.

With a flash, a long, blue aura blade shimmered, creating wave-like ripples.

"...General Gael!"

The enemy cavalry slowed noticeably. They hesitated, unsure whether to continue their charge towards the isolated republican forces or to turn back and counter the Sword Master's assault.

Meanwhile, the icy blue sword blade began to slaughter the enemy cavalry from the rear. The swift strikes were so swift that not even

screams were heard.

Amidst the chaos of the horses, the Sword Master plowed through in a straight line, cutting down enemies on both sides and slashing through the center of the cavalry.

Finally, a knight with a dignified demeanor arrived in front of General Gaspar, his chest split open.

The greatest swordsman of the East.

After slashing through the enemy cavalry without even breaking his breath, it was clear that Gael was a monster in combat.

"General Gaspar."

Relieved to have narrowly escaped annihilation, the old general turned to Gael as he spoke calmly.

"The scout who brought the information about the enemy's retreat was a spy from Castilla. I've just executed him and am on my way back from reorganizing the central camp."

"Count Castilla, that man..."

Gaspar's eyes blazed with fury.

He should have suspected from the moment the count locked down his territory. Count Castilla had sided with the royalists. He appeased them with small supplies while disrupting their intelligence, hoping for their demise in the Andres Plains!

Gael watched the trembling old general and then gave an order.

"Regroup the troops. A detachment from the center will soon engage the cavalry. We'll use this opportunity to advance towards the high ground."

His silver sword, Arjuna, remained unblemished by blood.

Gaspar gazed at the sword, realizing something. Gael had an uncanny ability to identify spies, almost as if he could read people's minds.

"Ha ha ha ha!"

Suddenly, a boisterous laugh echoed from afar.

The royalist cavalry, which had hesitated upon spotting the Sword Master, was now thrown into chaos again by the central detachment that had followed Gael.

The cavalry formation collapsed in an instant.

Amidst the chaos, a large man wielding a bastard sword appeared, gleefully hammering into the cavalry. Most of the members of this new detachment were from a small mercenary group recently hired by one of their supporters.

Justin, the leader of the Astros Mercenary Group, shouted enthusiastically, "Attack, everyone! This is beyond our contract! No matter the cost, our generous General Gael won't be stingy!"

"Generous..."

As Gaspar looked at Gael with a dumbfounded expression, Gael subtly averted his gaze.

[TL/N: Gale is changed to Gale. I forgot that the name Gale was first mentioned in Chapter 97]

In Ortona, there exists a unique aura cultivation technique called [Henesys]. It is a specialized practice developed for the Henesys longsword, which features a blade not so short in length and a hilt that extends about two-thirds the length of the blade.

The Henesys longsword is a beautiful weapon, possessing both the advantages of a two-handed sword and a spear. With its delicately patterned blade, ornate guard, and pommel, some mistook it for merely a decorative sword for the nobility.

However, once one witnesses its broad attack range comparable to a spear, the speed with which it can be wielded, and the ferocious power of its jagged blade tearing through flesh, they would never again dare to dismiss it as a mere ceremonial weapon.

The pinnacle of the Henesys technique was now being starkly displayed on the Andres Plains.

Swoosh!

With the long blade already formidable, a blue aura blade, extending two more feet, swiftly drew circles in the air. Two charging cavalymen were cut in half along with their horses and tumbled to the ground.

General Gale, having judged that he was more effective against the cavalry, charged towards them again.

"Eek!"

The surrounding cavalymen, startled, quickly turned their horses.

They desperately tried to distance themselves from the rampaging Sword Master, knowing well that getting close meant being sliced like a dummy in a practice yard.

Even as the elite cavalry of the royalist faction, they dared not venture within Gale's striking range.

But the sword, maintaining its swift momentum, sliced through the air in a large 'eight' pattern. Several cavalymen, failing to escape, were cleaved diagonally and fell to the ground.

Hahaha! A cloud of dust rose in the air.

"Whew, he really is a monster," muttered Captain Justin of the mercenaries, leading a separate unit and swinging his sword vigorously, as he whistled.

A man who seemed gentle and well-mannered transformed into an unstoppable force once he drew his sword.

Just the mere presence of Gale's aura caused the enemy to tremble and fail to respond adequately. While their unit methodically took down the enemies, the Sword Master alone was dispatching cavalymen at a far greater rate.

Justin pushed up the visor of his sallet, glancing sideways, specifically at the boy swinging his sword emotionlessly beside him.

"Bart, why do you keep making that face? Are you still unhappy about accepting this assignment?"

The boy, who had been reluctant to participate in this civil war from the start and was notably taciturn, appeared increasingly gloomy. Justin, who had practically coerced him into joining, was concerned.

The boy, gazing at the swirling blue aura in the distance, replied without looking at Justin.

"It's a task with an inevitable end. These kinds of things never leave a good aftertaste."

"Well, that's..."

The captain trailed off, then shrugged his shoulders and joked with an exaggerated expression.

"That's for our employers to worry about, not you, right?"

"..."

Without responding, the boy clicked down the visor of his sallet. A strange silver light began to glow through the thin visor.

Noticing the ominous aura, a bewildered Justin asked,

"What are you about to do?"

"End this quickly."

"What?"

"...I'm sorry."

The boy, after gently stroking the neck of his horse enveloped in a white light, suddenly kicked the horse's side before Justin could say anything more. Hahaha!

"Hey, wait!"

The mercenary captain's urgent cry echoed behind him as the boy galloped into the midst of the chaotic battle. His horse skillfully avoided the tangled mass of cavalry.

Swoosh. Every now and then, he swung his sword without hesitation at a cavalryman blocking his path.

Despite not being a proper sword technique, his movements were strangely efficient and even seemed meticulous. After spraying several fountains of blood, the boy had soon reached the right flank of the republican remnants.

General Gale, who was swinging his blue aura blade, seemed to glance at him. The boy, riding at full speed, was now charging toward the enemy's stockade, where a rain of arrows poured down.

"Look... Look at that!"

The republican soldiers, who had managed to regroup with the support of the Sword Master but were still unable to advance, were wide-eyed with astonishment.

General Gaspar, unaware, stood up from behind his cover and shouted.

"...It's dangerous!"

Amid the shower of arrows, the boy, unblinkingly, drew another sword tied to the saddle with his left hand. Holding a sword in each hand, he then...

Whoosh.

Somehow, he burst into the air from atop his horse at an incredible speed.

An unreal leap, soaring well above the height of the enemy's stockade.

People from both the republican and royalist camps gaped at the sight, a height impossible for an ordinary human to reach.

Hahaha!

Meanwhile, amidst the arrow rain, the horse, turned into a pincushion, fell with a pitiful cry.

The boy was just as exposed to the arrows, yet miraculously, he was not hit even once while suspended in the air. Of course, the only one who truly understood what was happening around him was Gale.

Whoosh. A wind from somewhere wrapped and swirled around the boy's body. This fierce wind deflected most of the arrows to the side. The few that came straight were blocked by the white sword barrier created by the swords in his hands.

"Shoot... Shoot him!"

The enemy commander, in a trembling voice, urged his archers. They quickly drew their bows, aiming at the boy floating in the air.

Though he had been lucky to dodge the arrows so far, it seemed impossible to avoid all the arrows in a concentrated volley.

Then, something astonishing happened. The boy, who was expected to be momentarily immobilized in mid-air and become an easy target, suddenly shot forward at an incredible speed, landing right in the middle of the enemy lines. It happened before the archers could even take aim.

"What, what?"

While the enemy commander gaped at this scene, the boy landed softly in the midst of the camp, swirling with the wind.

Woosh! The sword in his right hand, now wrapped in a faint aura, flew swiftly towards the middle of the stockade.

The spinning sword, which didn't seem to be aimed precisely, made a thud as it embedded itself in the center of the stockade. Then, quivering for a moment, it...

Cling! Shards of sharp metal scattered in all directions. Several archers, caught off guard, were swept up in the explosion.

"Aaaah!"

"My eyes!"

An unexpected chaos ensued among the archer unit.

The sword had exploded? Even seeing it with their own eyes, the commanders blinked in disbelief.

Whoosh. The boy, leaping from the ground again, was suddenly right in front of the enemy commander.

"What...!"

And that became his last utterance.

Before the enemy commander could even understand what was happening, his head and torso were severed, tumbling to the ground. All of this happened in the blink of an eye.

"Gasp!"

"Mo, monster...!"

The soldiers, staring dumbfounded at the scene, turned pale and hesitantly stepped back from the boy. Some, who had glimpsed his silver inner light through the visor, even staggered and sat down on the ground.

The fear of the boy, who demonstrated incredible martial prowess as if he was not human, froze the entire camp.

In the enemy's camp, which had diverted most of its forces to attack the republicans from behind, only a few archers and not many infantrymen remained.

And now, having lost their commander in such a hollow manner, their morale completely plummeted.

The boy, after coolly surveying the scene, picked up the severed head of the enemy leader and began walking slowly towards the stockade.

Swoosh.

Something round suddenly flew towards the republican camp and dropped. It happened right after the shower of arrows ceased when the boy invaded the enemy lines, leaving the republicans puzzled as they scrutinized the enemy stockade.

Startled, they realized it was a severed head, helmet and all.

Through the opened visor, General Gaspar recognized the face.

That head was...

"...General Alonso!"

The republican camp began to stir.

The enemy commander's head! How did it suddenly...?

But the experienced General Gaspar realized that this was an unprecedented opportunity. He drew his sword, leapt from his cover, and shouted.

"The enemy commander's head has fallen! Charge into their lines, everyone!"

"Ch... Charge! Charge!"

Following him, other knights encouraged the soldiers and joined in.

Waaaaaaah! The entire unit cried out and began to rush towards the high ground.

Thus, no more arrows rained down until the republicans reached the stockade, and they easily occupied the enemy position, as if all their previous struggles were a lie.

* * *

"This battle truly owes much to your Astros Mercenary Group. Thanks to you, we were able to significantly reduce our casualties. I must express my gratitude."

Gale personally visited the mercenary corps' camp to meet with Captain Justin. The urgent nature of their recruitment meant that proper compensation had not yet been discussed.

He looked a bit tired. He had just come from a strategy meeting, wrestling with republican officials who were furiously insisting on immediately attacking Count Castilla's domain.

Of course, the meeting concluded with the decision that an attack with the current forces would be impractical.

Though the count who had deceived them was detestable, there was no need to unnecessarily extend the frontline. Moreover, even if they were to successfully capture the Castilla fortress, turning the intact Castilla territory into a wasteland would provide a pretext for other neutral nobles to side with the royalist faction.

"General, when you think about it, our mercenary group always takes on the most dangerous battles, doesn't it? Perhaps some additional hazard pay would be justified..."

Despite bluntly calling Gale an exploiter, this cheeky captain made a brazen demand.

Gale felt a surge of irritation, but after some thought, he realized there was some merit to the captain's words. It seemed the mercenary leader genuinely believed they deserved more compensation.

As Gale pondered, a calm voice came from beside him.

"Justin, you should know when to stop."

Mercenary Bart.

Always competing with the captain, his prowess today clearly surpassed that of his leader. His abilities were hard to believe for someone who had not even reached adulthood.

Gale still vividly remembered the boy's mysterious movements as he shot into the enemy lines. It was fair to say he contributed the most in this battle.

"No, but think about how much we contributed in today's fight! We deserve a fair reward for our efforts, don't we?"

The captain grumbled with a frown, but soon shut up at the boy's following remark.

"Then first, shouldn't we have a more in-depth discussion about my rightful share within the mercenary corps?"

"..."

Hmm. Justin, sweating, hesitantly spoke to Gale.

"...General, let's forget about the hazard pay increase."

Was he implying that the amount they were skimming from the boy was greater than the additional hazard pay!

Gale looked at the boy named Bart with newfound surprise.

Despite his young age, he was remarkably mature, yet here was another exploiter like himself. Noticing something in Gale's gaze, the boy twitched his eyebrows, prompting Gale to quickly turn back to Justin.

He discussed compensation with the now subdued captain for a while. Finally agreeing on a satisfactory amount, Gale was about to leave, fatigued, when he heard the boy's sudden question.

"How long do you plan to continue these meaningless fights?"

For the first time, the usually reticent boy initiated a conversation with him. Taken aback by the unexpected question, Gale turned around to find the boy's eyes colder than ever.

"Do you intend to become a martyr for the republican cause?"

A martyr of the republic.

This was a rather intense expression to use in front of the republic's last sword. It blatantly revealed the belief that, no matter the effort, the republican camp was ultimately doomed to defeat.

Startled by the boy's sudden remark, it was Justin who looked at him in shock.

However, instead of getting angry, Gale wore a bitter smile. In the end, the boy's words accurately pierced through the currents of the time.

After the establishment of the republic in central Ortona, there was some initial chaos, but Ortona soon regained stability.

For about two years, the new government successfully governed, and their conciliation efforts towards the local nobles were very smooth. It was unlikely that a civil war would ignite so easily just from the remaining royalists' minor provocations.

There were other unseen hands in Ortona's civil war, hoping for the republic's downfall.

Hands powerful enough to sway the powers and capital of the continent.

Now, even if a distinguished Sword Master were to fight valiantly, it was unlikely to change the outcome. It's no wonder that the astute Prince Benicio, deeply despaired, was squandering his days in alcohol.

"Officially, it is said that the Brittanian army joined the war at the request of the King of Ortona."

Gale silently listened to the boy's calm voice.

As he said, after the establishment of the republic, the exiled King of Ortona promised Brittany a part of the western territory in return for their support. This was the same territory ceded to Ortona by Brittany a hundred years ago.

A sufficient pretext for the Brittanian royal family to get actively involved.

"However, it was the Delcross Holy Empire that mediated the territorial cession a hundred years ago. There's a high likelihood that they are involved in this return of land too."

But that's not all. The Ortona Merchant Coalition was also supporting the royalists with massive capital.

With the royalists' tacit approval, part of the southern region of Ortona, including the capital, was to be declared an independent free trade zone. Naturally, this free trade zone would be adjacent to Delcross.

"While the merchant coalition is ostensibly led by Young Master Asein, he is, in fact, a third party, ultimately having to maneuver with Delcross in the middle. If it were not the empire, there would be no need for him to actively intervene."

Gale's face had hardened. The boy, facing him, calmly revealed the truth Gale never wanted to hear.

"Behind all this is the Delcross Empire, General."

The Delcross Holy Empire, the millennium-old sanctuary.

The land ruled by the continent's most powerful absolute monarch, and a place that despised the Ortona republic more than anyone else.

No matter how hard Gale tried, he could never defy the flow created by this unseen hand of the continent.

That's why the boy called it a meaningless fight. If Delcross decided to eliminate the republic, it was already an unchangeable outcome.

Realizing his vague suspicions confirmed by an unexpected source, Gale felt an odd calm settle in his heart.

"...Such a young friend yet with such remarkable insight."

How long will this fight continue?

Until Prince Benicio, the spiritual leader and head of the republican remnants, makes a decision.

Will he become a martyr for the republic?

Of course, he is the republic's last sword. He must become the complete symbol of the republic.

So that his death signifies the complete downfall of the republic in the eyes of the empire.

"You may see all this as meaningless flailing. But sometimes, even knowing the truth, one must silently endure."

Gale was well aware of how his end would come. Seeing the faint smile on his face, the boy's eyes flickered momentarily.

"Now, now. How about we stop this here? You've worked hard today, General. You should go back and rest."

Unable to bear the increasingly heavy atmosphere, Justin butted in, making a fuss.

"And tomorrow, we'll meet with a fresh mind to discuss the hazard pay again."

Gale blinked.

Hazard pay? Hadn't that been already given up?

Justin's face, usually appearing carefree, suddenly turned serious.

"We're talking about the Holy Empire joining hands with the royalists. The risk has doubled, so it's only logical to renegotiate the hazard pay from scratch."

Really? As Gale looked puzzled, the boy glared at Captain Justin with cold eyes.

"Does it matter who intervenes? How does that change the outcome? What's so obvious about that? Not everything picked up randomly makes sense."

"Huh? Hey... aren't you being too harsh? Even if temporarily, you are part of the Astros Mercenary Group! Why do you always side with the General?"

Justin seemed genuinely aggrieved, prompting Gale to unwittingly support him.

"Right. On reflection, there is some sense in what the captain says. At least he spoke honestly. So let's discuss it calmly tomorrow."

But the boy remained firm.

"Do you believe in his sincerity? He's someone who would distort even his own memories and feelings for a purpose."

"Wow... Bart, are you really doing this?"

Justin trembled with a sense of betrayal.

Gale watched helplessly as the two bickered, only managing to return to his own camp after unexpectedly receiving some divine power from the boy.

"Bart, isn't this unlike you recently?"

After Gale left the mercenary camp, Justin, who had been watching the direction Gale disappeared into, turned to the boy.

"..."

The boy didn't respond, only slightly furrowing his brow.

He too was aware that recently his behavior was quite different from his usual self.

Originally, he would have just lent his strength to the mercenary corps as needed, never expecting to take the lead and behead the enemy commander. Moreover, he even used his rarely utilized divine power in front of others, just because General Gale looked extremely tired.

Above all,

Why did he ask and interfere in so many things concerning General Gale's future? What did it have to do with him?

Yet, for some reason, the boy found himself greatly concerned about General Gale.

This man was the strongest swordsman in the east. Despite being an adult stronger than anyone, the boy oddly felt a vague urge to help him. He couldn't understand why.

Well, there wouldn't be many days left to feel this strange sensation anyway.

"The civil war is dragging on longer than expected. Soon, the Merchant Coalition will start adjusting the capital they're putting in."

Justin's eyes widened in response.

"What does that mean?"

"It means we should start looking for other contracts."

The boy waved his hand dismissively and turned towards the inside of the tent.

The territory of Ortona was already ripe enough.

All that remained was to tear and share the soft flesh of the fruit.

Not long after the boy's prediction, reality caught up. Count Milo, who had been employing and supporting the Astros Mercenary Group, suddenly decided to cease his patronage. With the frontlines unexpectedly holding firm, it was likely that Young Master Asein, Count Milo's backer, had pressured him.

Although they received a response that another mercenary corps would be sent soon, Gale felt that there would be no more support from that quarter.

The day before the Astros Mercenary Group withdrew, Captain Justin visited Gale and handed him a small box.

"It has been an honor to work with you, General. This is a small gift we offer only to our special clients."

Inside the box was a gem no bigger than a fingernail.

It looked like an ordinary, nameless gem, but when it caught the sunlight, it emitted a surprisingly brilliant light.

"...What is this used for?"

"It's an amulet for good luck. They say it relieves fatigue if you carry it."

".....?"

It sounded like something a heretic would say.

Gale passed it off without much thought, but in less than a day, he realized the captain's words were true. After carelessly putting the box in his pocket and walking around, his chronic fatigue began to noticeably decrease.

Sensitive to aura and the energy around him, Gale could feel that the effect was indeed coming from the amulet. It was somewhat similar to the feeling of receiving divine power.

Soon, the gem found its place at the end of the sheath of his sword, Arjuna.

The Astros Mercenary Group left the frontline as swiftly as they had arrived, like the wind.

After that, Gale maintained the front alone, without any additional mercenaries, and managed to hold out for about six more months.

* * *

He blocks the incoming arrows and parries swords.

Dodging thrusting spears, he cuts down one enemy after another in quick succession.

Arjuna, no longer flowing with aura, had become so dull that it was not cutting but tearing through the flesh of the enemies.

His vision blurred momentarily before clearing again.

Focus, focus!

It had been a long time since his aura had been depleted. Gale, hardly having a moment to breathe, forced his barely responsive arm to swing.

He never thought there would come a day when he felt Arjuna heavy in his hand.

He parries. Dodges. Thrusts. Cuts.

Movements that seemed to go on forever, repeating in what felt like an endlessly long duration, suddenly ceased. Gale realized that the barrage of arrows had stopped. He paused and looked around, noticing the silence.

He was the only one left standing in the republican camp.

Several knights in full plate armor surrounded him. They appeared to be a specialized unit with long shields and sharply pointed spears, a formidable sight. Gale, with his dulled sword and no aura, probably couldn't break through their formation or pierce their armor.

Gale sensed the end was near.

"Indeed, you live up to your reputation as the finest swordsman in the east, General Gale," said a figure stepping forward, presumably the leader. He towered a head taller than the other hefty knights.

"With due respect, it's remarkable that even the combined forces of

the royalist coalition took five days to reach you..."

Five days. He had held out longer than expected.

By now, the group he had diverted should have had enough time to cross the border and escape far away.

Finally, Gale relaxed his body and let his sword arm drop.

"...And you are?"

"I am Syllus Agen, commander of the 3rd Knights Division of the Delcross Holy Empire's personal guard. I was dispatched here especially for you. It's a pity to end your life this way."

So he was indeed no ordinary knight, but a division commander.

The style of the armor and spears had seemed slightly unfamiliar; he hadn't expected a direct intervention from Delcross.

Then, spears flew towards Gale from all sides.

He reflexively moved, but it was impossible to dodge every spear coming at him from every direction.

Crack.

The sound of spears piercing flesh echoed loudly, as if right next to his ear.

His body, utterly depleted, quickly drained the remainder of his life.

As Syllus Agen caught the slipping Arjuna from Gale's hand, he whispered to him.

"I will remember your valor. Rest in peace."

Thus, Gale, the last sword of the republic, met his end on the Andres Plains.

As he slowly closed his eyes, it seemed like he heard something cracking inside his head.

He didn't fully remember what happened afterward.

All he retained was a vague feeling that his soul, just after death, was wrapped in a blinding white light, and it felt incredibly comforting.

It also seemed like someone gently stroked his head, as one would do to a child.

[Was it necessary to hold on so stubbornly?]

A question that seemed slightly reproachful.

Gale felt an inexplicable apology to this unknown entity.

But what could he do? Unskilled in taking the easy way out, he knew no other way to live.

With a sigh-like presence, the voice then said to him,

[You've worked hard, my son.]

Son?

Before he could ponder over it, his consciousness flickered out with those words, and everything turned dark.

* * *

He thought everything had ended.

But unexpectedly, he was reborn as a Delcross native.

And not just anyone, but the first prince of the Delcross Imperial Family, the root cause of all the turmoil.

'...How am I supposed to live now?'

A deep contemplation was etched on the face of the young child with the neat features.

[TL/N: I'm not really sure why Logan is mentioned as the 1st prince here when in Chapter 1, he was mentioned as the 2nd Prince right off the bat. My good guess is that he's the first

imperial heir found by Nate?]

Archbishop Caplan's only daughter fell pregnant on her study abroad, without a father for the child!

Caplan was speechless with shock upon hearing this thunderbolt-like news.

His daughter Tatiana had been beautiful and intelligent since childhood, carrying all of his hopes.

Although she lacked divine power to become a high priest, he believed she could at least secure an administrative position of influence. Hence, he had sent her to a university in Brittany at great expense.

She was still so young.

Instead of studying as she was supposed to,

She was involved in a romantic affair.

And now pregnant?

He suppressed his rage, holding his head in his hands, but his daughter returned, visibly pregnant and unapologetically proud.

"I never thought I would meet him again in my lifetime. To bear his child is like a dream come true, Father."

Is this what you say to a father who sent his only daughter abroad and got betrayed!

Considering his social status and dignity, he wanted to disown her immediately, but seeing the happiness in Tatiana's blue eyes, it was clear that no amount of fuss would make a difference.

'...First, I have to find that damned man. Find and kill him!'

Caplan's eyes blazed with rage towards the man who threw his daughter's future into the gutter.

Until he heard the identity of the child's father.

"Nathaniel, the prince...? Are you certain of this?"

The 3rd Prince had been missing for years, and everyone presumed him dead. Wasn't he also thought to be infertile?

But Tatiana was adamant.

"I cannot mistake him. I have admired him since I was a child."

"But wasn't he at least three years younger than you? If it's him, he would be only seventeen now..."

"....."

Perhaps the real problem had been his daughter all along.

Stunned by the unexpected turn of events, Caplan soon had a change of thought.

At the moment, the capital was in a fierce underground struggle between the 1st Prince and Princess and the 2nd Prince. Princess Josephina's influence was questionable, and there were rumors about Prince Brayden meeting with strange people.

Archbishop Caplan had been considering Prince Cameron, the 1st Prince, as the likely next Holy Emperor. But what if the 3rd Prince entered this equation?

If he could form a new power base around himself and elevate him to the Holy Emperor.

And his daughter was carrying the 3rd Prince's child.

Caplan, a cleric with unusual political acumen and ambition, began to put his plans into motion. He discreetly started tracking down the

3rd Prince and quietly expanded his influence.

Then, on the day Tatiana gave birth to a healthy boy named Logan,

Caplan realized, surrounded by a bright aura of blessings, that his grandson was born with an extraordinarily strong divine power.

The boy showed remarkable talent and intelligence as he grew.

His innate dignity and cleverness.

His grandson was destined to be the crown prince!

Caplan watched Logan with fondness, his eyes gleaming with undeniable ambition.

What he didn't realize was what thoughts were running through his grandson's small head.

'...Why was I given another life? What is the meaning of this life?'

An age when other children would still be nursing, the neat and pretty-faced child was pondering these deep questions while spooning baby food on his own.

* * *

Logan was somewhat aware of his past life from the moment he was born.

It was only the physical limitations of a newborn that impeded him; he would eat, attempt to ponder a bit, and then be overcome by sleepiness, leading to a cycle of eating and sleeping.

He began to seriously contemplate his existence once he was able to control his body to some extent.

Realizing he had been reincarnated as a Delcrossan, he was initially in shock. It was disconcerting enough to be given a new life, but why in Delcross of all places?

Moreover, his new body was equally bewildering.

He had been called a rare genius in his time as Gale, but this new body was almost perfectly optimized for cultivating aura, with an exceptionally high affinity for it. So much so that even as a baby, simply eating and sleeping accumulated aura.

Secretly meditating away from his mother and the servants, Logan wondered:

His mother, Tatiana, and his maternal grandfather, Archbishop Caplan, seemed to have average aura affinity. That meant he likely inherited it from his father's side, but who exactly was his biological father?

The question was soon answered.

Before Logan turned four, tumultuous news spread through the capital: a new Holy Emperor had ascended in Delcross.

Then, his mother and grandfather took him by the hand and led him somewhere.

"Where are we going, Mother?"

To Logan's query, his mother, Tatiana, responded with a captivating smile.

"My proud son Logan, we are finally going to meet Him."

Him?

"Nathaniel Klein. The new Holy Emperor of Delcross, and your father, Logan."

The child's face paled.

His father was the Holy Emperor of Delcross?

Logan wanted to deny this reality, but the majestic and ornate building they arrived at was undoubtedly the imperial palace. Standing before the Emperor, Logan was so shocked he felt his soul might leave his body.

In the grand hall of the enormous palace, a young man with a refined face sitting on the throne, gazing down at Logan and his group, was shockingly a familiar figure.

'...Bart!'

Though taller and more mature than the boy in his memories, it was impossible for Logan not to recognize that unforgettable young man.

– The founding principle of Delcross is to realize the Kingdom of God on Earth through His proxy. They cannot accept anything other than the governance by a single Holy Emperor.

The calm boy who had explained the situation in Delcross to Gale in a matter-of-fact tone.

– Sending cardinals to manage the internal affairs of other countries is also based on the principle of 'complete governance by God's proxy.' Therefore, the moment they recognize a republican government, the empire would lose its foundation for intervention and its very purpose.

The one who had unhesitatingly labeled Delcross as the cause of all the tragedies in his homeland Ortona and an impediment to the continent's progress.

– If a true republican government is to flourish in this land, Delcross must inevitably fall first.

Now, that boy sat as the new Holy Emperor of Delcross, confidently presiding over numerous high priests and paladins.

Confusion, betrayal, and sorrow.

A whirlwind of negative emotions swept through Logan's small mind in an instant.

As the child stood there, lost for words, his grandfather and mother seemed to think he was overwhelmed by the grandeur of the imperial palace.

"Come on, Logan. Why aren't you greeting your father, the Holy

Emperor?"

"....."

"Ah, my apologies, Your Majesty. He is not usually like this..."

But there was no response from the Emperor either. Bart's gray eyes were slightly widened, quietly meeting Logan's gaze.

In his inexplicable silence, Archbishop Caplan and Tatiana's faces began to harden. Then, the Holy Emperor slowly rose from his throne and approached them, still maintaining eye contact with Logan.

For a moment, a peculiar silver glow seemed to pass through his eyes.

He came up to Logan, knelt on one knee, and looked down at the child for a moment.

"...You must have had a hard journey getting here."

Finally speaking, the Holy Emperor's voice was low and subdued. He then smiled faintly at the child.

"Logan."

This faint warmth felt incredibly tender, and Logan felt a sudden urge to cry.

* * *

Logan was brought into the Blue Rose Labyrinth.

Along with his half-brother Morres.

And as the shock of meeting the Holy Emperor for the first time subsided, the child fell into a new dilemma.

'...How am I supposed to live now?'

He had become a prince of the enemy nation.

The culprit behind the fall of the republican government, the

instigator of the civil war, and ultimately, the one who tore apart his homeland.

The first prince of that empire.

But again, his bad habit kicked in; he somewhat understood why Delcross manipulated continental politics to maintain its empire.

So, he didn't think about destroying Delcross, or about seeking revenge by annihilating the Holy Emperor's family in the name of 'vengeance for his homeland.'

As time passed, Logan also came to understand Bart's situation.

He had heard that Bart had been facing assassination threats from a young age and ended up wandering the continent alone. Then, in a tumultuous situation with the previous Emperor and his siblings dead and the capital being infiltrated by demonic beings, Bart hurriedly ascended to the throne to rectify the situation.

'...Then, it can't be helped.'

The child frowned deeply in contemplation.

Logan, who quickly understood everyone's perspective, found himself unable to blame anyone.

He couldn't seek revenge against Delcross or the imperial family.

But living as a proud prince in his second life was complicated by the deep entanglement of his previous life's downfall and his own death.

'What am I supposed to do...'

He groaned softly, clutching his head.

Fortunately, Logan's worries didn't last long due to the frequent troubles caused by someone in the Blue Rose Labyrinth.

"Waaaah!"

"Kyaaaah! Prince Morres!"

"Call a doctor! No, bring a priest quickly!"

In the Blue Rose Labyrinth, Morres's cries and the servants' screams were incessant.

What's the problem with this child?

If he's going to cry out in pain anyway, why does he keep jumping from high places?

His accidents were so extravagant that Morres's mother, the 1st Queen, fled to Asein, and the Holy Emperor had to move his office to the Blue Rose Labyrinth. Logan, who had been precocious even in his previous life as Gale, couldn't understand Morres at all.

And then there was his half-brother, big and bumbling in everything he did.

"Uh, where the mind goes... the aura..."

"....."

"Over the vast void... thoughts... I mean..."

Ah, frustrating. Was his name Masain?

Why does everything this brother do seem so clumsy, causing more stress to the observer than to himself? And he also seemed somewhat dispirited, which was concerning.

Before he knew it, Logan found himself following Masain around, taking care of him as part of his daily routine.

This was a level of busyness Gale, who had been an only child in his past life, couldn't have imagined.

In the midst of this chaos, Logan found himself sitting in a makeshift office in the Azure Rose Labyrinth, picking up walnuts with them. In front of them, the Holy Emperor, his father, was cracking walnuts with his beloved sword.

Was this man always like this?

"Dad (Appa-mama), spin me! Spin!"

Morres, tired of eating walnuts, stood in front of the Holy Emperor with his arms spread.

There was a moment of hesitation, perhaps worrying about spoiling the child, but the Emperor sighed and tossed the child up into the air.

Kyahaha!

Suddenly, Morres, enveloped in a gust of wind, floated gently down and fell into the Emperor's arms.

Logan was always surprised to see this, as his sensitive senses could feel that the wind was a manifestation of fluctuating aura.

He had been amazed by his own affinity for aura when he first felt its flow in Logan's body. But it was nothing compared to his father, the Holy Emperor.

Even on the battlefields of Ortona, he had felt an extraordinary mastery of aura, but now, it seemed as if the Holy Emperor's body itself had become one with aura. How had he reached such a formidable level in just a few years?

"Dad! Spin! Spin again!"

Morres clamored, and the Holy Emperor lifted him into the air again. He seemed cold but was surprisingly weak to a child's tantrums.

They repeated this action a few more times.

As Logan watched them blankly, the Holy Emperor suddenly turned to him.

"What about you, Logan?"

"...Yes?"

"Do you want to try it?"

Yes? For a moment, Logan didn't understand and just blinked in

confusion, but soon he found himself flying through the air along with Morres.

What?

Whoosh. A comforting aura of wind wrapped around his body, slowing down his fall, and then the Emperor lifted him up again with a swift movement.

As Logan slowly descended, this time Morres was soaring into the air. Kyrararuk!

Hmm, this is kind of fun...

No, but still!

Feeling guilty for even a moment of enjoyment, Logan suddenly caught sight of Masain's face and gasped in surprise. The large-bodied Masain was looking at them with envious eyes.

"....."

It was nothing short of a relief that the Holy Emperor hadn't noticed that gaze.

[TL/N: The last particular scene in this chapter was first mentioned through Masain's POV in Chapter 55. You might want to read that part again.]

Childhood seemed like grains of sand that slipped through fingers just when one thought they had a firm grasp, leaving no trace behind.

Logan grew into a bright and talented young boy. His calm demeanor and prodigious skill in swordsmanship were enough to affirm him as the son who most resembled the Holy Emperor in blood.

Yet, as much as he grew to resemble his parents, Logan found it difficult to consider the current Holy Emperor and Empress as his true parents. He tried his best to show respect and affection in his actions, but the human heart does not change so easily.

Ironically, he felt a more genuine connection with his siblings. Perhaps because he, Gale, in his previous life, had never experienced such relationships.

He grew fond of the simple-hearted Masain, worried about the troublemaker Morres, cared for the timid Amelia who joined the palace later, and loved Sisle, who he had watched since she was a nursing infant.

Possibly, it was this attachment to them that kept Logan anchored in the palace, despite feeling somewhat adrift due to the memories of his past life.

As his siblings became busier with their lives and Logan's mind matured, he found himself increasingly wandering outside the palace.

While he officially led a separate unit for the grand cause of protecting the people from sea monsters, Logan was well aware of his true intentions.

He simply wanted to keep himself so busy that he had no time to

ponder, tied up with memories of his past life and searching for a purpose in his new one.

Moreover, the recent deterioration in his relationship with Morres troubled Logan. Having met him first after his reincarnation, he seemed to have unwittingly become emotionally dependent on Morres.

What has happened to you, Morres?

Although he always felt his brother's presence, Logan sometimes found Morres to be strangely unfamiliar.

"Logan, all of Delcross praises your valor and virtue. Truly an achievement worthy of a prince of the millennium-old Holy Empire."

After a long absence, returning to the palace, the Empress greeted him with an elegant smile.

Joining the Order of Saint Sebastian under the [Duty of Nobility] at a young age, Logan had distinguished himself in many ways.

Not only was his swordsmanship exceptional, but his thoughtfulness and upright character endeared him to knights of all ages, leading to a group of followers within the Order.

These knights, calling themselves the [Lilium] after the lily emblem of the Order, soon formed a separate unit under Logan's command.

He had just returned from leading the Lilium on a campaign to suppress sea monsters across the eastern regions of the continent.

"You've uplifted the name and honor of the Empire and the royal family even at such a young age. I am always proud of you, my son."

Logan smiled bitterly.

He hadn't intended to elevate the Empire's prestige. He just wanted to protect the wandering refugees of Ortona, his lost homeland, from the sea monsters.

Being reborn as a prince of the enemy nation, that was all he could

do for his country.

"But isn't it enough now? I'm always worried whether you're eating properly or getting hurt somewhere."

Empress Tatiana wanted Logan to stay in the palace, learn statecraft, and participate in governance. She probably hoped he would become the crown prince and eventually succeed the throne.

However, Logan could never think of himself as a Delcrossan.

Even as he led expeditions to combat sea monsters, his repeated visits to the eastern regions, deep down, were probably because he still considered himself an Ortonan.

– Did you think we would be grateful to you? When did you ever care for Ortona's downfall, and now you come to help!

– We of the East will never forget the grudge for killing our General Gael!

He vividly remembered the group of refugees he had saved, looking at the Lilium with resentment-filled eyes.

In his past life, he had sacrificed himself for Ortona, and now he was facing the resentment for that very death.

Was this new life given to him for that purpose?

To sacrifice himself for the republic wasn't enough, and now he had to bear the hatred toward Delcross and martyr himself for a nation that wasn't his homeland?

Logan didn't know.

* * *

"So... you're unsure about the purpose of your new life?"

How much time had passed since they started their conversation? The night had deepened, and it was dark without the moon.

Luckily, accustomed to the darkness, Seongjin could clearly see Logan's expression in the faint starlight.

Realizing that the Emperor probably knew his true identity, Logan's face showed signs of agitation. This was probably why he was more open to discussing worries with Seongjin, which he normally wouldn't do.

Moreover, sharing a [secret] with each other within the palace likely helped bridge the distance between them.

"In your past life, your homeland was destroyed because of Delcross, so you feel guilty just living comfortably as a prince of this nation? But when you try to actively rebuild your homeland, being a prince of the enemy country limits you?"

"That's a simple way to put it, yes."

Seongjin's face turned sour.

What's this? Just like with Amelia, why do I feel like I'm giving a lot of advice lately?

Am I more philosophical than I thought?

Is the profound philosophical aura emanating from my years of experience influencing people like this?

The Demon King was taken aback.

[You talk about being so experienced, but do you even know yourself?]

'What, you little?'

He scowled inadvertently, causing Logan to look at him curiously. Clearing his throat, Seongjin spoke to Logan.

"Hmm... Listen, this is purely my opinion, so just take it as a reference."

"I'll listen carefully. Please share your frank opinion."

Logan nodded seriously.

"Your country fell and you even lost your life purely because of Delcross. But since you became a prince of Delcross, you couldn't take proper revenge, right?"

"That's right."

"And you went on sea monster expeditions to help your countrymen, but somehow that always felt insufficient?"

"Yes, that's true."

"So what are you worrying about? There are plenty of ways to moderately solve both, aren't there?"

"...What?"

When Logan looked at him with wide eyes, Seongjin shook his head and clicked his tongue.

'Wow, why are all the kids in this house so naive?'

Amelia was the same, but this guy, even in his second life, is too innocent.

Father raised these kids too gently, tsk tsk.

"I'll give you an example of one of those solutions."

At Seongjin's words, Logan leaned forward, his face full of tension.

"What's the most difficult yet most crucial thing to obtain for rebuilding a country?"

"...?"

"Capital."

"Capital..."

As Logan pondered and nodded, Seongjin continued.

"So, the solution is simple. You embezzle some of the Delcross imperial family's capital and divert it to your homeland."

"...!"

"That way, it's a moderate revenge on Delcross without being fatal. At the same time, it's a definite help to your homeland."

Logan's mouth fell open in shock.

"But that's... that's not..."

"Not what?"

"Not... right..."

As Logan trailed off, Seongjin smirked with a slightly mean-spirited smile.

Indeed, a little more explanation is needed for someone as honest as you, who sneaks into other people's rooms but boldly knocks before entering.

"If it's not that, then how did you plan to help your homeland?"

"If the people of Ortona wish for it, I'm prepared to give up everything I have. It's regrettable to Empress Mother who has high hopes for me, but I cannot become the crown prince and inherit the throne here."

"Hmm."

"The problem is that the people of Ortona might not trust me as a prince of their enemy nation..."

As Logan ended his words with a gloomy expression, Seongjin tilted his head and asked.

"Okay, let's assume you leave here and successfully settle in Ortona. What will you do? How will you help the people?"

"Well..."

After pondering for a moment, Logan answered.

"First, I need to gather those who want to rebuild Ortona. I'll find the remnants of the republican faction that survived. Then, I'll negotiate with the merchant alliance about exclusive rights and other benefits to be offered after rebuilding the country. I'll need to persuade the nobles of territories that are now under other nations. And there are refugees wandering around that need help."

"Good."

Seongjin crossed his arms and nodded.

"All good ideas. But are those things that only you can do?"

"Uh?"

"And where will you get the funds to carry out those tasks?"

"..."

Logan was at a loss for words.

Indeed, even now, there were many people working underground in Ortona to revive the country. Among them could be leaders as good as or better than Prince Benicio. There was no need for it to be him specifically.

Sword Master. What does that even mean?

Even when the republican forces had a proper army, they couldn't avoid destruction. What substantial help could one skilled swordsman add to them now?

As Logan's eyes deepened with thought, Seongjin drove the point home.

"Think about it. Would it be more helpful for your homeland if you became a poor spiritual leader, guiding people, or if you became a wealthy internal enemy, discreetly diverting capital and supporting from behind?"

Huh?

"The former anyone in your homeland could do, but the latter can only be done by you, the Prince of Delcross and the former knight of Ortona."

"...!"

"That's something only you can do in this world, Logan."

Logan's eyes widened dramatically.

In his blue eyes, there was a wave-like ripple of sudden enlightenment.

The Demon King sighed deeply.

[No, this devil!]

Logan slowly stood up and said,

"So that's it. The reason I was given a new life...!"

The boy, who always maintained a calm and somewhat sad demeanor, now, without realizing it, rediscovered his hidden passion and looked somewhere with sparkling eyes.

Towards the invisible distant land in the east, his now lost homeland.

"The purpose of my reincarnation as a prince is to embezzle Delcross's capital and divert it to Ortona!"

Well, it sounds strange to put it that way.

...But maybe that's right?

However, Seongjin overlooked one fact: this pure prince was even more honest than he had anticipated.

The next afternoon, in a rare audience with the Holy Emperor, Logan spoke with a serious face.

"Father, I have a favor to ask."

The Holy Emperor, glancing at his teacup, looked up and blinked upon seeing the firm resolve in the boy's blue eyes.

"A request?"

"Yes. I would like my allowance to be increased."

"....."

"Significantly increased... actually, very significantly!"

Louis, the chief chamberlain who was serving tea at the Emperor's side, tilted his head in confusion.

"The amount allocated to you as a prince is not insubstantial, but how much exactly do you need?"

"Well, double the current amount? No, maybe triple?"

"Excuse me?"

"How much budget is usually needed to run a country?"

"A country..."

Logan was brazenly asking for a fortune, an amount that would be substantial even if embezzled secretly, as his allowance.

Louis discreetly glanced at the Holy Emperor.

After a moment of silence, the Holy Emperor slowly lifted his hand to cover his face, then spoke.

"You can have the allowance as you wish. However, Logan..."

"Yes, Father."

"Have you been spending time with Morres lately?"

"....."

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The grand birthday celebration of the Holy Emperor was only a fortnight away.

As one of the biggest events in Delcross approached, the imperial palace bustled with noticeable activity. Servants were busy thoroughly cleaning and decorating the entire palace, while a stream of supplies from outside flowed into the palace storerooms.

Dignitaries from foreign lands began to arrive one after another.

Diplomatic envoys bearing congratulatory gifts from distant countries continually requested audiences, leaving the Holy Emperor scarcely a moment's rest. Consequently, regular audiences with his children seemed impossible for the foreseeable future.

Relatively idle, the princes and princesses spent their days in peace, occasionally dealing with tailors who visited the palace to create formal attire.

"Ah, this is the Henesys longsword. I've always thought so, but Arjuna is truly a beautiful sword," Amelia admired, running her fingers along the elegantly wavy silver blade. She had borrowed the sword from Logan for a moment to examine it.

It was a beloved sword of the strongest swordsman in the East. After General Gale's death, it proudly made its way into the royal treasury, befitting its status as a treasured weapon.

The blade was meticulously engraved with intricate patterns, while the narrow guard and pommel were delicately and elegantly adorned.

"I wish I had one like this. With such a sword, it would be easier to apply the Weiloiz martial arts method to swordsmanship," Amelia mused, swinging Arjuna in her hands with envy.

Back when she enjoyed playing with Nutcracker, she had a hidden desire for weapons, it seems.

"Then, why not consider getting one? A Henesys longsword would suit you well," Logan suggested kindly, smiling. Amelia, wielding the slender longsword, looked quite convincing.

"That's a good idea. How long would it take to custom make one?"

"There probably aren't artisans in Delcross specializing in Henesys swords. However, I believe there are a few fine swords stored in the royal treasury. Maybe you could ask for one?"

"Really? But it's a treasured sword. Would His Majesty really give one to me?"

"I received a sword when I was very young. Back then, there was quite a fuss about giving a child a treasured weapon, but our Royal Father didn't even blink an eye."

Encouraged by his optimistic view, Amelia nodded with renewed enthusiasm.

"I see. I should ask about it."

"If you request it, why would a treasured sword be an issue? His Majesty might even gladly offer a sacred relic."

And so, the two of them looked at each other and shared a warm smile.

How heartwarming. Truly heartwarming, but...

Listening quietly to their conversation, Seongjin couldn't help but express his annoyance.

"That's all fine, but why are you doing this here, of all places?"

That is, Logan and Amelia were currently in the Pearl Palace. They were enjoying a conversation while watching Seongjin's etiquette lesson.

Looking at him with their innocent eyes, Seongjin sighed deeply.

Not all princes and princesses were idle. To Seongjin, who had almost no experience as a prince, an etiquette teacher had been unexpectedly assigned.

Even the laissez-faire Holy Emperor thought it necessary to teach him the basics when foreign dignitaries started to arrive.

As a result, Seongjin's time for martial arts practice significantly decreased, making him increasingly irritable.

He needed to transform this stress into training soon!

"Still, thanks to your sword training, your basic posture isn't bad. I don't think you need much correction," Amelia noted.

"Right. Morres has a natural presence just by standing still. With a few key etiquettes, you'll be an impeccable prince," Logan added, comforting Seongjin like soothing a child. The etiquette teacher watching nearby chuckled endearingly.

These people, really!

Seongjin's ordeal didn't end there. As soon as the etiquette lesson was over, dance lessons had to begin.

The birthday celebration spanned three days around the Holy Emperor's birthday, and princes and princesses over thirteen were required to attend the main banquet. He couldn't simply excuse himself from such an important event, despite his incomplete memories.

Additionally, there were social gatherings and formal dinners with foreign dignitaries planned in various palaces starting next week, as well as numerous smaller parties hosted by archbishops and nobles in the townhouses throughout the capital for three weeks.

Such social obligations of the upper class were truly bothersome.

"Despite everything, Morres seems to learn physical activities quickly. You picked up dancing just as fast as swordsmanship," Amelia said,

smiling as she lightly stepped in rhythm, holding Seongjin's hand.

During the dance lesson, she had become his partner, and her skilled assistance made it easier for him to learn

"Is that so? That's fortunate. I used to struggle with dancing, causing my teachers much trouble..."

Logan, who was casually observing them, suddenly stopped speaking and closed his mouth, realizing he had momentarily forgotten that the current Seongjin was not the real Morres.

Amelia looked at Logan quizzically, and Seongjin quickly picked up the conversation.

"I used to be quite poor at swordsmanship as well."

"...Yes, that's true."

"People do evolve, after all."

"...Indeed."

Amelia sensed a brief awkwardness between the two but, failing to discern anything amiss, simply tilted her head in mild confusion.

Looking at Logan, who awkwardly fiddled with a fairytale book beside him, Seongjin recalled a conversation they had not long ago.

—Right. You're not just a simple spirit, Seongjin. I think we can have a friendly relationship moving forward.

After that late-night conversation, as Logan was about to return to the Blue Rose Palace, he spoke to Seongjin.

—However, I must find the real Morres. Even if our relationship isn't what it used to be, he's still my dear brother. So...

Hesitating briefly, Logan then looked directly at Seongjin, struggling to continue.

—So, if Morres returns... can you promise to give his body back?

It was merely a request to return his brother's body, yet Logan looked as if he was asking Seongjin to die, guilt written all over his face. Such a tender-hearted fool.

—Sure, it's no big deal. I'm technically dead, anyway.

Sensing Seongjin's sincere agreement, Logan smiled, relieved.

—...Thank you.

Since that day, Logan treated Seongjin as if he truly were his brother. Needless to say, Amelia and Masain were overjoyed, hoping their relationship would return to how it once was.

Yet, Logan never directly referred to Seongjin as Morres.

"What should we do about attending the banquet? Logan used to escort me, but since Morres doesn't remember, I'm a bit worried about leaving him alone."

As Amelia held Seongjin's hand and spun around, her light dress fluttered like flower petals, captivating even the dance instructor with her ethereal beauty.

After pondering her question, Logan replied.

"This year, Sisle will be attending the banquet for the first time. I think it's best if I assist her."

"Isn't Sisle just 12 years old?"

"She's officially recognized as a saint by the Holy Church. Although it's a bit early, the council decided it's time for her to make an appearance before the dignitaries."

The youngest princess, who had been on a pilgrimage, was soon to return.

Amelia nodded in understanding.

"I see. Herna and Gades will also be attending for the first time, but they should be fine since they'll be together."

Clever as snakes, those little ones. They wouldn't likely be overwhelmed at their first banquet.

"Then it's decided. This time, I'll escort Morres, right?"

"...Isn't it usually the other way around?"

Amelia laughed heartily, turning and stepping in rhythm to Seongjin's bemused expression.

"Don't worry too much. I'll make sure to protect you until the banquet ends."

"....."

"Morres will always be under my protection."

Seongjin was at a loss for words.

Is she really treating Morres, who is only a year younger than her, like a child?

Finally, the tedious lesson time ended in the late afternoon.

Feeling liberated, Seongjin excitedly headed to the training grounds, only to find that both Logan and Amelia had followed, idly lounging around.

Seriously, don't they have anything better to do?

"Dimlos, the lieutenant, suddenly had to go on a long-term assignment. So, there won't be any spear training for a while," Amelia explained, already seated in a meditative pose beside Seongjin.

"I decided to practice here while you train. Watching Morres practice is quite instructive."

Even Logan began his warm-up exercises in front of them.

"There's no training ground in the Blue Rose Palace. Using the Knight Order's ground feels like I'm intruding on the others' training, so I feel guilty."

Can't you see the Pearl Palace knights crammed in that corner?

Hoping for some intervention, Seongjin looked towards Masain, who turned his head away, tears welling in his eyes.

"It's like returning to childhood. To see Your Highness getting along so well with your siblings, I have no more regrets."

Ah, it was my mistake to expect anything from him.

Seongjin grumbled inwardly as he prepared for meditation.

As Seongjin had been eagerly anticipating to build the seventh layer of his aura, he found it hard to concentrate with the company around him. However, once he settled down, he surprisingly found himself immersed in his inner world.

Wrapped in a small whirlwind, as usual, Seongjin completed his meditation satisfactorily, just like any other day. He was slightly startled when he opened his eyes to find both Amelia and Logan staring intently at him.

Amelia looked somewhat proud, while Logan appeared surprised.

"I thought only our Royal Father could materialize aura so effortlessly..."

Aura materialization?

"Isn't it amazing? I was really shocked when I first saw it," Amelia chimed in.

"Indeed. Despite not having exceptional aura affinity, the speed at which you've built layers is remarkable," Logan said seriously, nodding his head.

More sensitive to the flow of aura than others, Logan could clearly discern what was happening with Seongjin.

Commonly, those who build aura layers quickly are said to have good aura affinity, but strictly speaking, this isn't entirely accurate. Even if one naturally absorbs aura easily, without proper control, they can't

build layers quickly. The challenge lies in stabilizing the aura in a fixed state.

On the other hand, even if one's affinity is slightly lower, if they become adept at manipulating aura, they can accelerate the layering and cultivation process.

Morres's body wasn't inherently gifted with high aura affinity.

Even though the Holy Emperor had forced a massive amount of aura into him, improving his affinity significantly, he still couldn't absorb aura as naturally as Logan, or compared to the Holy Emperor, whose body seemed to be made of aura.

Yet, the ease with which he was building and moving aura layers indicated that he was already at a level where the aura moved according to his will.

Amelia piped up, her lips puckering like a chick's.

"You'd be really surprised to know how he manipulates aura on a whim. Recently, he nearly died by ignoring the cultivation method and stirring the aura inside his body recklessly. He got a severe scolding from His Majesty for that."

"...Is that true?"

Logan looked at Seongjin with wide, astonished eyes.

What? Why?

"You really need to be careful when using aura in the future. I don't know why, but the way you manipulate aura seems different from others. It's as if your body lacks basic control."

"Isn't it supposed to be controlled? Why?"

Wasn't it just a matter of releasing the flow differently than the cultivation method?

However, Logan's expression was more serious than expected.

"Of course. Normally, you can't just ignore the flow like that because it's bothersome. The body naturally resists such movements."

"Why? It's just letting flow what's already moving in the body, right?"

"Think about it. Can you rip off and swing around your skin just because you feel hot? Can you vomit out all your internal organs because your stomach feels uneasy?"

"Uh..."

Seongjin blinked, momentarily lost for words.

That analogy hit home...

Wait, actually imagining it is kind of terrifying.

Aura is a force akin to the source of life.

In the Main Dimension of Delcross, any living being naturally generates a small amount of aura simply by existing. The fundamental nature of aura is inherently preservationist concerning the body. Unlike external energies which may be tumultuous, an aura user is instinctively incapable of using aura destructively within their own body.

Therefore, Seongjin's handling of aura—as if it were an alien force similar to the energy of monsters—might fundamentally differ from the residents of the Main Dimension.

"There might be only one solution to this problem," Logan stated calmly. His demeanor as a former Sword Master seemed to instill confidence.

"And what's that?"

"Just become so strong that such force isn't necessary anymore."

"....."

Oh, that's straightforward. But why do I feel cheated?

Unaware or indifferent to the slight sense of betrayal on Seongjin's face, Logan smoothly began to promote the aura cultivation method of his homeland.

"How about learning the Henesys cultivation method? Banahas may have been a genius, but his method is too intuitive and simple. For depth and finesse in operation, there's nothing like the Henesys method."

Until recently, Logan had strictly concealed anything related to Ortona. It seemed that now, with his identity revealed to the Holy Emperor, there was nothing left to hide.

Seongjin snorted.

Trying to sell me something? Masain once said Banahas's cultivation was the strongest on the continent, right?

However, someone was intrigued by his words.

"Is that cultivation method so powerful? More than Weilo?"

"Absolutely, sister Amelia. Unlike the complex Weilo, the Henesys method encompasses both spear and sword techniques magnificently."

"Can it destroy walls if channeled through a spear?"

But why is this sister so keen on destroying walls?

"Walls? With mastery, you could even demolish entire fortresses."

"Wow..."

Amelia's grey eyes sparkled with excitement. Logan, seizing the moment, offered her a convincing smile.

"Why not try learning it, sister? After all, you'll be receiving a Henesys longsword from His Majesty."

Henesys longsword!

Immediately, Amelia nodded eagerly, falling for his persuasion.

Seongjin looked at her with pity.

Struggling with Weilo and now seeking to delve into another discipline – her path ahead seemed fraught with hardships. But what can be done? One must climb out of the grave they dig themselves.

He drew his Nutcracker and focused his mind.

After Logan's warning, Seongjin decided to strictly adhere to the Banahas cultivation method for the time being, putting aside his habit of manipulating monster energy.

Speaking of monster energy...

"...I regret not trying something with the monsters I've killed. There was something I always wanted to do after capturing a monster..."

[What did you want to try?]

Seongjin had long harbored a curiosity about utilizing the energy of monsters.

Could he use monster energy in this world, as he did in others? After capturing monsters at the Diggory mansion and during the heresy trials, he lost consciousness both times, so he never got the chance. Perhaps he could absorb energy from a monster's corpse to strengthen his body, as before?

But upon hearing this, the Demon King was horrified.

[Hey, hey! You're a human of Delcross now, with an aura! Do you know what kind of impact monster energy might have on you?]

'Why? It's just energy. What could possibly go wrong?'

Seongjin may have thought lightly of it, but the Demon King's concerns had valid grounds.

[Think about it. That knight, Haven, was implanted with an egg that died within a day. But the others survived for days, right?]

'...Now that you mention it.'

The difference between those two cases seems to be that Haven was an aura user.

[Why do you think the Gray Plague primarily affects the sick and elderly? Could it be because they have weaker auras? And if the egg's quick death was due to aura, couldn't the opposite also be true?]

Monsters might be vulnerable to exposure to aura.

Then, could the energy absorbed from a monster also act as a poison to Morres's aura-endowed body?

'That's a possibility, but...'

Even if something went wrong, wouldn't his father take care of it? Trying it out once might be worthwhile.

The Demon King grumbled in annoyance.

[Do you want to cause trouble again after already worrying the Holy Emperor? Of course, your father will save you. But first, he has to keep you alive to punish you, right?]

That's a bit frightening.

Seongjin involuntarily shuddered, recalling the Holy Emperor's icy gaze.

Let's just focus on training.

* * *

That evening, Logan left Pearl Palace and visited the administrative building for the first time in a while. Following the conclusion of the sea demon subjugation, he typically visited the office of the Saint Aurelion Knights, as was his custom.

Besides his affiliation with the Saint Bastian Order, Logan had separate assignments from the Saint Aurelion Order mainly to compile and report any demon activity encountered during subjugations.

Though it was late and most people had left for the day, Lieutenant Francis, who was still in the office, seemed in good spirits. He was the type of person who'd happily work overtime if it meant reducing the burden on his commander, though he'd likely apply for a day off the next morning.

"This subjugation took unusually long. I heard you went as far as the

borderlands near Count Ziegsmundt's domain."

At Francis's comment, Logan nodded.

"My request to investigate inside the domain was denied. The Count was quite obstinate. But it wasn't entirely fruitless."

"You mean..."

"As the exorcists reported, we spotted demonkind near the Black Forest, close to Ziegsmundt's domain."

Logan, with one of the strongest divine powers in the Liliu Special Force, was highly sensitive to demonic presences.

He quietly entered the forest while the force was encamped, explaining to Francis how he had single-handedly dealt with a demon he encountered there.

Francis clicked his tongue in response.

"You took such a risk? Why bother having a special force if you're going to act alone? If His Majesty learns you're doing this, he won't just stand by."

"It was a solitary demon known as the Witch of the Forest. There was hardly any danger. Besides, the Liliu knights are noble souls who willingly lend their strength to aid the people, not a personal army of mine."

"Really? I thought they were just a fan club for Your Highness."

"....."

After staring incredulously at his tactless lieutenant for a moment, Logan took something out of his pocket and handed it to Francis. It was a small, rusted medal.

So worn that it was difficult to make out the spider emblem etched on its surface.

"What's this?"

"After defeating the demon, I found traces of a summoning ritual nearby. This was buried within the summoning circle. The demon worshippers had already fled the area."

Francis adjusted his glasses and examined the medal, scraping off some of the rust.

After a while, he put the medal down on the desk and said to Logan.

"It's from the Dark Order. This appears to be the symbol of the 'Order of Repentance.' However, its poor condition and crude design mean we need further investigation to confirm its authenticity."

Logan nodded.

Leading the special force across the continent for years, he realized there were more covert demon-worshipping factions active than he initially thought. A prominent example was the remnants of the Dark Order, who had escaped the purge.

Even in the former territories of Ortona in the east, where he went for sea demon subjugation, traces of such orders were found in every village visited.

Something he never noticed as Sword Master Gale.

The prevalence of the Dark Order's remnants in the eastern region suggested a deeper secret behind Ortona's dissolution, beyond just Delcross's machinations. Recently, Logan had begun to suspect this.

"How about the investigation in the east?"

"Recently, Commander Syllus led a detachment of the 3rd Imperial Knights to the east. Exorcists from Saint Terbacchia also joined, forming a substantial investigation team."

Again, the 3rd Imperial Knights.

Logan's expression grew complex.

Why was the 3rd Knights, composed mainly of excellent lance knights, frequently deployed on such mismatched, minor

investigations?

Especially since Commander Syllus Agen, quite senior in years, shouldn't be traveling long distances ahead of major events like the Emperor's birthday.

"The 3rd Knights seem to be dispatched often."

Francis sighed.

"Of course. His Majesty is really pushing it. But with the 3rd Knights being specifically targeted, what choice does the commander have?"

With Commander Syllus away, training for new lance knights of the 3rd Knights became difficult, so Lieutenant Dimlos of the 1st Knights had to step in.

This also delayed Amelia's lessons.

"Lady Syllus's mother complains that in the last few years, Commander Syllus has never spent the Emperor's birthday leisurely in Delcross."

Commander of the 3rd Imperial Knights, still Syllus Agen, a relative of Francis Agen and a well-known figure to Logan.

The tall knight who had claimed Gael's life in Ortona a decade ago.

"Could it be..."

Logan thought of a new possibility and furrowed his brow.

Had it not been for a recent conversation with Seongjin, he wouldn't have suspected it.

How many times had Logan encountered Commander Syllus in the palace? Especially during the Holy Emperor's birthday celebrations, wasn't he always away on assignment?

It seemed improbable, but could the Holy Emperor be deliberately sending the 3rd Knights away from the capital each time Logan returned?

Could it be... No, it can't be.

"Is that all you have to report?"

Lost in thought, Logan was jolted back to reality by Francis's question.

"Oh, actually, besides the demonkind, I saw something strange in that forest."

"Something strange?"

"It wasn't demonic energy, but something ominously unsettling."

Logan slowly recalled his encounter with the demonkind in the Black Forest.

The demon, wandering the snow-covered forest in flowing robes, and a single blue butterfly it cherished.

"That Witch of the Forest was holding a butterfly dearly. Just before I slew the demon, the butterfly vanished without a trace. I still can't figure out what that sinister aura was, different from the demonkind."

"....."

Francis blinked for a moment, then straightened his glasses and smiled meaningfully.

"I have a feeling I might know where to find that answer."

* * *

The next day, after morning training, Seongjin visited the Monster Special Task Force office for the first time in several days.

"Your Highness! You're here!"

Red-haired Inquisitor Valerie greeted him warmly as usual.

Seongjin skillfully dodged Jibril, who rushed at him with a rose-scented spray, and waved casually to the grim-faced Dame Sharon, who stood in a corner of the office.

He then stopped abruptly, startled by a familiar face sitting upright and reading a book in the back of the office.

Why is he here?

"Hmm? You're late."

Logan, always impeccably groomed, looked up from his reading of the Otherworldly Apocalypse.

"I've decided to help out with the Monster Special Task Force while I'm in the capital. So, how far has the investigation into the Gray Plague progressed? What can I help with?"

"....."

Still reeling from not avoiding Jibril's enthusiastic greeting, Seongjin was enveloped in a strong rose scent.

No help needed, but first, do something about that perfume smell!

"I'll likely stay in the capital and help the Monster Special Task Force even after the Emperor's birthday celebrations. I've already discussed this with Sir Leandros."

Logan explained while carefully turning the pages of the worn book of Otherworldly Apocalypse.

"Besides, His Majesty has promised to reimburse part of the subjugation team's operational funds from my personal finances while I'm in the capital."

Is that like saying, 'I'll increase your allowance, so stay home nicely'?

"I've always focused solely on subjugation and never bothered with operations, but it turns out, organizing a subjugation team costs quite a bit of money. It seems the funds for Ortona's reconstruction will increase significantly."

Logan whispered to Seongjin with a slightly pleased expression.

Seongjin was incredulous.

You, man, were quite mature before dying, and now you're completely playing into the Holy Emperor's hands, aren't you?

"What are you looking at?"

Seongjin's gaze shifted to the pages Logan was turning.

Unlike the flamboyant Sir Valerie, it was curious to see this knight, as precise as a painting, casually browsing the Otherworldly Apocalypse, which until recently was a forbidden book.

After all, isn't Sir Masain the only one who finds the Otherworldly Apocalypse creepy?

Sure enough, as Seongjin showed interest in the Apocalypse, Masain behind him visibly grew uncomfortable.

Logan nodded and explained.

"While subjugating demons in the northern region, I encountered something strange. It wasn't demonic energy but something else, emitting an ominous aura. Sir Francis speculated it might be a monster. I thought it might be mentioned here, so I'm looking for it."

"A monster? From somewhere other than Delcross?"

Seongjin asked, startled.

Could it be that another gate has opened somewhere?

If so, monsters should be pouring out by now, so why is it so quiet?

Just then, Logan pointed to a page.

"Ah, this is it! It really was an otherworldly creature!"

Everyone from the Monster Special Task Force crowded around to look at the book.

"The Blue Flower of the Demon Realm, Dilelaria..."

Jibril read aloud from the page.

Contrary to the description of a flower, the page featured an illustration of a small, blue-dyed butterfly.

It looked more like a moth than a butterfly, with a plump body and wide, feather-like antennae. Nonetheless, the accurate depiction of its core suggested it was indeed a monster.

"A beautiful creature that became my companion many times as I wandered through a thousand dreams. A traveler across dimensions and a monster that enchants other monsters. Monsters, drawn to its dream-like blue wings and mirage-like supreme beauty, follow Dilelaria as if intoxicated. And what awaits them at their destination is only pale rest."

Hmm. Is Seongjin's sense of beauty off, or is it the author Sigurd's mediocre artistic skill?

To Seongjin, it looked like a simple, unattractive pale blue moth. Moreover, the black pattern on its wings uncomfortably resembled eyes.

The Demon King's opinion was that Sigurd was exaggerating.

[As always, so full of flair. Monsters are simply attracted by its scent. They just want to eat its eggs.]

Wait, that sounds familiar.

Seongjin tilted his head in curiosity, and the Demon King grumbled.

[Have you forgotten after all that commotion? I told you before, there's a butterfly that travels dimensions alone while channeling.]

'...The one you said all bug-type monsters commonly like? The egg?'

[Right. The scent Lophellum imitates is that of Dilelaria's eggs. Monsters are indeed drawn to it like drugs. But that's just a storyteller's interpretation who doesn't know the details.]

The Demon King explained.

It might seem like monsters are entranced by Dilelaria's butterfly, but in reality, they are both moving in the same direction.

Monsters are attracted to the scent of the eggs, and Dilelaria's butterflies are there because of...

[Females. Dilelaria's butterflies travel across dimensions in search of females. They're so rare that the butterflies move great distances, even across dimensions, to find them.]

Seongjin had heard of moths traveling long distances to find females.

But traveling across dimensions? How is that even possible?

"Are you sure you saw this? The Apocalypse contains illustrations of

other butterfly-type monsters as well."

To the red-haired inquisitor's question, Logan nodded.

"Yes. The illustration and hue are slightly different, but blue butterflies aren't that common. Plus, the strong black pattern on the wings is vividly etched in my memory."

"I see."

It seemed they didn't have to worry about a gate being opened somewhere else, as this monster apparently moves across dimensions on its own. The concern, however, was that this butterfly was in possession of a demon.

"So, the recent sudden appearances of monsters might be the work of demonkind?"

Masain, sharing Seongjin's thoughts, asked with a trembling voice.

It was a plausible theory.

Seongjin remembered what Commander Bruno had told him earlier – about being charmed just before contracting the Gray Plague. He had suspected the one who implanted the egg might be a demon.

And Logan had witnessed a demon and a monster butterfly together during a sea demon subjugation.

To consider them separate incidents seemed too coincidental in timing.

Moreover, could it be mere coincidence that both Dilelaria and Loperum, two types of monsters, emit similar scents from their eggs?

"It's overwhelming."

As Jibril sighed, a silence fell over the entire Monster Special Task Force.

The investigation of the Gray Plague, the investigation of the butterfly monster, and their potential link to demonkind.

It was indeed hard to figure out where to start.

"...Let's tackle it step by step."

Seongjin, after organizing his thoughts, spoke up.

"We don't have enough evidence to link the Gray Plague and the butterfly monster yet. Before hastily connecting them, let's treat these as separate cases to minimize errors. First, the Gray Plague."

Everyone in the Special Task Force listened intently.

"It's safe to say that the recent monster turmoil has essentially exposed all the Gray Plague patients. Now, our focus shouldn't be on the plague itself, but on who implanted the eggs, and what their purpose was. Tracking down the perpetrator seems like the fastest solution."

Should we try a trap investigation? Like tying up aura in the dantian and wandering around in the slums.

Then Jibril chimed in.

"Your Highness, how about meeting with the academy students you mentioned earlier? They've recovered enough to be interrogated."

Oh, finally!

"That's a good suggestion, Jibril. I'll meet them today. Now, about the Dilelaria butterfly. Where did you say you saw it, Logan?"

"Near Count Ziegsmundt's domain in the north."

"Right. Investigating there directly now seems impractical. It might be better to check old records. Have there been previous instances of this butterfly appearing in Delcross, or cases where demonkind and monsters appeared together?"

Then Dame Sharon spoke up in a quiet voice.

"There are demonkind extermination reports submitted by exorcists from all over the continent. We can sort out previous cases focusing

on Ziegsmundt's domain and Delcross."

"Good idea. Can I entrust that task to you, Dame Sharon?"

As Seongjin nodded, a slight flush appeared on Sharon's pale face.

"Yes, Your Highness. I will get started right away."

Dame Sharon, usually disengaged due to mundane tasks, responded with an unusually brisk voice and left the room.

Seongjin then turned to the red-haired inquisitor, who had been looking at him with sparkling eyes.

"Sir Valerie, can I ask you to continue the work you were doing? Please keep searching the Otherworldly Apocalypse for the monsters that appeared in the capital and categorize them."

"Yes, Your Highness!"

Sir Valerie responded eagerly and smiled broadly. It seemed an appropriate task for the young Paladin who enjoyed mysterious stories.

"Hmm..."

Logan, who had been quietly observing, muttered to himself.

"Just an advisor, but unexpectedly seems to be in control of the entire department?"

What is he talking about?

I merely offered my opinion as an advisor.

"Shall we head to the imperial hospital now?"

As Seongjin got up to leave, Logan followed suit. Seongjin quickly stopped him.

"Before that, you should take a shower to get rid of that scent. Hurry up!"

"Why? It seems like a decent fragrance."

"You're nose-blind right now; it's overpowering. Passersby will stare at you; how embarrassing is that?"

It's already bad enough that our department is nicknamed not the 'Monster Special Task Force' but the 'Rose Perfume Squad' in the administration!

Then Jibril protested with an aggrieved face.

"But this scent is for your benefit, Your Highness! You're going to see patients who had the plague, right? Wearing this fragrance should prevent any possible infection!"

"Jibril. I'm telling you, the plague doesn't spread because of bad smells."

Jibril retorted sharply.

"Are you disregarding the teachings of our esteemed Lyora School, Your Highness?"

"No, that's not what I meant... Ah, really...!"

Frustrated, Seongjin scratched his head, and Logan, smiling gently at Jibril, interjected.

"That's alright, Physician Jibril. We aura users aren't typically susceptible to ordinary plagues."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Morres is just concerned about giving the students a standoffish impression. Otherwise, there's no reason to refuse such a fine floral scent, a badge of honor for Lyora plague doctors who constantly fight against the stench of disease."

"That, that's..."

"Don't worry too much. Oh, and could you check if there have been any recent cases of the Gray Plague at the Plague Institute?"

"Of, of course! I'll look into it right away!"

Blushing, Jibril bowed shyly.

Seongjin unwittingly gaped in astonishment.

Wow, isn't he a real pro?

He's said to resemble the Holy Emperor the most, and indeed, a born charmer is right here.

Following Logan's cue, Seongjin and Masain quickly exited the task force office.

Before boarding the carriage, Logan performed an astonishing feat. A gentle breeze swirled around him, and suddenly the rose scent significantly diminished.

As the smell faded to just a faint after-scent, Seongjin blinked in surprise.

Logan looked back at the two with an amused expression, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why make a fuss? Just come out quietly like this and scatter it. What's the big deal?"

Wow, there's another person here whose aura follows his heart's desires!

On their way to the hospital outside the palace, Seongjin and Logan sat side by side, incessantly bickering.

"How did you do that? Is it different from releasing aura externally?"

"It's just materialization. Just do it well."

"Do it well? How?"

"Why are you asking me? You do it all the time, don't you?"

"I don't know how I do it! It's only possible during meditation; I've never done it consciously. Isn't there an easier way?"

"Well, if you're curious, why not try learning the Henesys cultivation method?"

Is he trying to sell me something again?

No way, I'm going to achieve greatness with the Banahas cultivation method.

Seeing Seongjin's flat expression, Logan clicked his tongue.

"Really, you too. Think about your real age, Lee Seongjin. Do you want to argue with a girl who could be your daughter?"

What, this guy?

"Where do you get off shaving years off your age? Jibril could be my granddaughter! Get it straight!"

"What about me? She's like my great-granddaughter. Daughter or granddaughter, it's all the same."

"What? Does that even make sense? There's a limit to exaggerating your age!"

"Who's exaggerating?"

"Who else but you? The great Logan, gallantly riding into battle at seventy!"

After bickering quietly for a while, Seongjin and Logan suddenly noticed Masain staring at them and immediately fell silent.

Right. Masain is also a skilled aura user. Despite their efforts to keep their voices down, he could not have missed their conversation.

Masain looked at them strangely for a moment before asking.

"What are you two Highnesses doing, exactly?"

"I fondly remember the times when you both used to argue over who was the older brother in your childhood, but this time, I can't understand your argument at all. Is this some kind of game?"

At Masain's words, Seongjin narrowed his eyes and glanced at Logan.

Pretending to be an adult all by yourself, and you had such fights with young Morres?

Logan's face turned a bit red.

"Why are you both arguing about who is Jibril's grandfather? You do realize that you're both actually younger than her, right? Despite her appearance, Jibril is already an adult who has graduated from the academy."

"No, that's, um..."

"I never thought I'd have to tell Prince Logan to act his age."

Logan hung his head in silence. Seongjin, watching with a smug expression, suddenly felt a strange sensation.

Sir Masain, why are you only scolding Logan?

Then Masain replied with an indifferent expression.

"Well, I didn't expect any such thing from Your Highness."

".....?"

"You haven't exactly acted your age either, have you?"

Seongjin's mouth dropped open.

Sir Masain, you've been hanging out with Francis and now you're picking up his habits!

The carriage continued in silence towards the outskirts of the palace.

* * *

Ashley Betcher and Jonathan McAlpin were receiving treatment at a medical facility operated by the imperial family. They were isolated in a remote room in a large building of the medical center.

As they were still technically prisoners, there were guards at the entrance, but the watch wasn't intense since they were just young students.

The guard, standing idly in a bored stance, straightened up and opened the room's door as Seongjin's group approached.

"...Your Highness! I can't express how happy I am to see you again!"

Entering the room, a boy who recognized Seongjin's face shouted with brightened features. He was a slightly plump and smart-looking boy, but Seongjin had never seen him before.

Who are you?

As the boy staggered out of bed to approach, Seongjin, startled, stepped back out and then re-entered the room. This has to be the right place, right?

The boy's face, once filled with joy, quickly fell, and his eyebrows drooped.

"I'm Jonathan. Didn't Your Highness call me an old friend?"

What?

"...Jonathan? Jonathan McAlpin?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Jonathan McAlpin, the link between Morres and the Black Prophets.

And possibly, an accomplice who might have secretly supported Morres's heretical group.

He was a chubby boy when he was groaning in jail just a few days ago, but what happened to him in such a short time?

Even considering the bloodletting treatments by the plague doctors, is it possible for someone to become this emaciated so quickly? He looks like he's lost a significant part of his body mass.

"...Shouldn't you be the last one to say that?"

Logan spoke from behind with a slightly incredulous tone.

No, what. I've been through aura storms and all sorts of things!

Seongjin tried to hide his confusion and smiled awkwardly.

"Wow, Jonathan. I hardly recognize you. I was worried because you were ill for so long, but it seems my worries were needless."

"It's all thanks to Your Highness. You discovered that parasite, right? Thanks to you, I was able to escape the horrific bloodletting treatments."

Remembering his ordeal, Jonathan shivered.

This guy, he seems more relieved to have escaped bloodletting treatments than to have recovered from the Gray Plague. What exactly did the Lyora Plague Association do?

"Yes. It's good to see you're looking better now."

"Haha, actually, I feel much lighter than before the plague. I think I might be even healthier now."

Jonathan scratched his cheek with a slightly embarrassed look.

"The problem is with Ashley..."

Jonathan turned his head towards a corner of the room, and everyone's gaze followed.

Ashley Betcher.

The other victim of the Gray Plague was sitting on a small bed in the corner of the room.

Her condition was markedly different from the lively Jonathan; she sat there with a vacant expression, staring blankly into space. She had lost so much weight in just a few days that she looked almost skeletal.

"Why is she like that?"

"She's been like this ever since she regained consciousness. She doesn't talk at all. She barely eats when food is spoon-fed to her."

"Is it because she hasn't fully recovered yet?"

To Masain's question, Jonathan shook his head with a gloomy face.

"The doctors say it's a lingering aftereffect. It seems that as the Gray Plague progresses, it eventually irreversibly damages the brain."

Irreversible aftereffects.

[It's the mind crystals, Lee Seongjin.]

'Yeah. I thought it might be.'

Even in the case of Commander Bruno, didn't the salt crystals continue to increase for a while after the parasite was removed? Considering it took him a long time to regain consciousness, it's likely these two couldn't entirely avoid the formation of crystals either.

Seongjin then heard a detailed explanation from the Demon King about the condition of the two.

In Jonathan's brain, a few small mind crystals could be seen, but fortunately, they seemed to have avoided any critical areas. However, in Ashley's case, a significant number of crystals had spread mainly in the frontal lobe.

"Actually, Ashley was interrogated before me. She was exposed to the

parasite longer, I suppose."

Listening to Jonathan's explanation, Seongjin slowly approached Ashley.

The girl didn't even notice someone approaching and just sat there with a vacant look, staring blankly into the corner.

"...Ashley."

"....."

There was no response.

Remembering Ashley's keen and passionate criticism of the Empire's injustices during the Black Prophets' meetings, Seongjin felt a pang of regret. A promising young talent was lost.

Considering that all those afflicted with the Gray Plague eventually die, it seemed somewhat fortunate that they were able to remove the parasite and save their lives. But is being barely alive like this truly living?

As Seongjin silently observed her, Logan stepped forward and spoke.

"So, you're Jonathan, right? It's unfortunate what happened to your friend, but since things have come to this, we need to ask you some questions. Can you cooperate with the Special Task Force's investigation?"

"Y-Your Highness Logan? Why are the two of you together...?"

Jonathan, finally recognizing Logan, stared alternately at Seongjin and Logan with wide eyes, his expression revealing his bewilderment. Apparently, the discord between the second and third princes was well-known.

"We're both part of the same Monster Special Task Force."

"Ah, yes..."

As Seongjin shrugged and answered, Jonathan nodded with a look of

confusion.

And so, they were finally able to hear a relatively detailed account from Jonathan about what happened at the Heresy Tribunal.

"I was beaten senselessly. The scariest part was that the interrogators started by hitting us without asking anything."

Jonathan's face turned a bit pale as he recounted the terror of the interrogation.

According to his explanation, both Ashley and Jonathan were the main targets of the Heresy Tribunal from the start. Kenneth Diggory, the mastermind of the incident, was being treated for serious injuries at the time, and the other three had significant backing from high-ranking officials.

Thus, the two of them were thrown into a jail crowded with other prisoners.

In the cell, mainly prisoners accused of devil worship were detained, already brutally tortured to near destruction.

And they all appeared to have lost their minds, drooling while staring blankly into space.

"Looking back, it seems all of them were suffering from the Gray Plague. Despite the dark prison, it was clear their complexions were not normal, and none seemed sane."

Jonathan, who initially thought this was all due to the interrogators' torture, felt he would lose his mind from the fear of what awaited him.

Then, Ashley Betcher was taken away, and soon after, her screams were heard.

Having said this much, Jonathan glanced at Ashley, huddled in a corner, with a look of pity.

"After a while, she returned to the cell, completely out of her mind. I guess the parasite was implanted by then, but soon after, I was

dragged away, so I couldn't pay much attention to her."

Subsequently taken away, Jonathan, upon reaching the interrogator, was immediately beaten with a club.

The interrogators asked nothing, yet Jonathan was soon spilling everything he knew, tears and snot streaming down his face.

"During that, I probably... talked about the support... you gave..."

Jonathan suddenly trailed off, sneaking a glance at Seongjin.

"No, about that help... I think I spoke of it too."

"....."

"Sorry, sorry, Your Highness! I knew I should have kept quiet, but back then, I was just..."

Seeing him shrink back, tears welling up, Seongjin couldn't bring himself to blame the boy.

This crazy Heresy Tribunal, how ruthlessly they must have beaten this bright young student to break him like this.

"I never want to go back there. That's why I was so relieved when I heard about the accident."

Jonathan wiped away a tear and took a deep breath, raising his head.

"That's why I am even more grateful to Prince Morres. Your Highness saved my life, even though I betrayed your trust. And above all, you utterly destroyed the Heresy Tribunal while hunting the monsters. How can I ever repay this kindness..."

"...Huh?"

Seongjin felt the gazes of Logan and Masain on him.

What? Why? What?

Wait, this is a misunderstanding. It wasn't me who destroyed them!

Why is Masain looking at me like that too? He was there that day!

Just then, an eerie voice sounded from behind them.

"Prince Morres..."

A voice that was slightly hoarse, yet strangely compelling.

Turning around, they saw Ashley Betcher, who had been sitting vacantly until now, turning her head towards them.

Her previously unfocused eyes now held a clear hostility as they stared directly at Seongjin.

"Ashley! Are you back to your senses?"

Jonathan tried to approach with delight, but Seongjin quickly raised his hand, stopping him.

Although he hadn't known Ashley long, Seongjin sensed a distinct alien feeling from her.

That gaze was definitely not Ashley Betcher's!

Logan also seemed to sense something, reaching for his sword, Arjuna, while blocking the group from Ashley. Ashley glanced at Logan, then focused back on Seongjin, speaking.

"So, it was you who did that to the Heresy Tribunal..."

A fierce hostility surged from Ashley, the atmosphere in the room suddenly becoming tense and heavy. For a moment, a peculiar yellow glow seemed to flicker in her eyes.

What exactly is happening?

The Demon King urgently warned Seongjin.

[It's a channel, Lee Seongjin! Someone has opened a channel using her as a medium, though it's quite unstable!]

'...A channel?'

Seongjin's face turned grave.

Seongjin couldn't help but feel that the Arenja weren't involved. They had cautiously communicated their intentions through Commander Bruno, but had not yet attempted direct contact with Seongjin.

Yet, knowing about the mind crystals in Gray Plague patients and using it for channeling?

If so,

"The culprit involved in the Gray Plague or perhaps the one who brought the monsters to Delcross!"

Seongjin, with a hardened face, reached for his Nutcracker, watched closely by Ashley. Then, Ashley, with a sinister voice, again addressed him.

"You ruined everything. What are you, exactly?"

"...Me?"

"Yes, the new horse of the guardian. Do you even know on whose stage you are playing, in whose hands you are being played?"

"....."

"Foolish one!"

Ashley sneered with a twisted smile, showing a grotesque expression.

Then, suddenly.

She twitched as if electrocuted and began shaking.

And suddenly, she started shouting at thin air.

"Such a persistent nuisance! These tiny beings!"

".....?"

"And you are no different! Do you even know who you are helping right now!"

While Seongjin's group looked on bewildered, Ashley staggered to her feet from the bed and began gesticulating at thin air!

"Get lost!"

"Don't interfere!"

"Get lost!"

"You creatures too!"

She seemed to be fighting with herself, shouting and responding alone, appearing utterly mad.

"How long will you keep this up!"

"Get the hell out of the palace, you wretch!"

"Disappear far from the palace, you villain!"

".....?"

Seongjin blinked in confusion.

Huh?

This oddly repetitive manner of speaking, it felt familiar somehow?

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In the midst of the Imperial Hospital, an extraordinary scene unfolded.

"How long do you intend to obstruct me! Do you fiends truly wish for death?!"

"Your feeble tricks are futile, you wretched fool!"

"Your petty schemes won't work, you despicable creature!"

Ashley Betcher was in a frenzy, angrily ranting and mocking all by herself, seemingly in a state of delirium on her bed.

Masain, holding his sword anxiously, quietly asked Logan.

"Is it a demon... Your Highness?"

Ashley's face, or rather the entity using Ashley's form, was contorted in a demonic fury.

Her eyes were so bulging with rage that the blood vessels seemed to burst, turning the whites into blood-red. She looked like a vengeful demon just risen from hell.

However, Logan, observing her intently, shook his head.

"It's different from the aura of a demon."

"What do you mean?"

"It seems like another soul, perhaps. It's as if multiple spirits are fighting inside this student's body."

Jonathan, shivering behind the group, whispered in a trembling voice.

"Then we should perform an exorcism..."

"That seems necessary. However, these spirits don't seem entirely malevolent, so I'm not sure if they'll be susceptible to holy power."

In the midst of this grave conversation, Seongjin alone was sweating profusely, his eyes darting around.

Wait... am I the only one thinking this way?

Aren't some of the spirits possessing Ashley Betcher those twins, Herna and Gades?

How they ended up here, I don't know, but should we really just exorcise them like this?

"Aargh!"

"Uugh!"

Ashley Betcher now appeared to be strangling herself, groaning in pain.

Her lips turned blue, and her eyes rolled back in her head, looking dangerously close to suffocating.

Seongjin involuntarily swallowed hard.

'Wow, this is intense...'

This isn't a horror movie, but her self-convulsing behavior is seriously spine-chilling.

Then the Demon King scoffed.

[Heh, you're a demon possessing Morres, and you're scared of this?]

'...Shut up!'

Isn't it natural to be creeped out? I can't even fight it with fists!

Besides, it's unfair to treat me the same. Even if I am a spirit, I am officially recognized by the Emperor!

"Your Highness! Please hurry! If we don't act now, she might truly die!"

At Jonathan's tearful plea, Logan steeled his expression.

He released the hilt of Arjuna and slowly approached Ashley Betcher, extending his hand enveloped in sacred white light.

"I'm not a formal exorcist, but I think I can mimic one poorly enough. Sir Masain, just in case, could you request support from a real exorcist?"

As Masain nodded and quickly left the room, Ashley, still strangling herself, rolled her eyes to glare at Logan.

"In the name of the Holy Emperor, I command you. Release this girl and return to where you belong."

"....."

Ashley, who had been calmly observing Logan's increasing divine energy, suddenly grinned maliciously, her eyes gleaming a strange yellow.

"Hahaha, you fool! There is no name for the great Holy Emperor here!"

Yet Logan remained undeterred, stepping closer with a firm voice.

"The Holy Emperor's power is the evidence of His presence in this world and His name!"

"Don't waste your time! The will of a nameless being is as hollow as the non-existent!"

"The will of the Sovereign exists clearly through His vicars. Lost and pitiful spirit, vanish!"

"Kuhh....."

Ashley gritted her teeth and glared at Logan.

Seongjin watched them with wide eyes.

The Holy Emperor had mentioned that the deity of Delcross wasn't a personal god, and now it seems they don't even have a name?

Seongjin made a belated resolution to actually read the introduction to theology sometime.

"I, I am..."

Ashley Betcher's momentum seemed to falter under Logan's unwavering demeanor.

She let go of her own neck and staggered back a step on the bed.

"I am not a mere spirit! Not a petty human soul! I am a demon!"

But Seongjin had doubts about that claim.

Though the entity claimed to be a demon, it seemed unaffected by Logan's increasingly bright holy power. Unlike the demon in Seongjin, who is terrified of holy power, Ashley's reaction was distinctly different.

Logan pressed on her but kept his distance, observing, likely for this reason.

"By the power of the Sovereign, I command. Disappear from here, spirit."

"I'm not a spirit!"

Suddenly, Ashley screamed violently.

A strong shockwave blasted through the room. The bed curtains fluttered, and the windows burst open rattling. Startled, Jonathan screamed and tumbled backward.

Angry over something, Ashley glared at them with furious eyes and spat out.

"I am the great Demon King that rules all of the demon world! The

Demon King of Dreams who will become a great tale!"

"....."

"You all can struggle to erase me, but I am not one to be trapped in a mere psychic scar like a spirit!"

Suddenly, Seongjin flashed back to a past memory.

The Demon King of Dreams aspiring to become the king in the tales.

And the masked puppeteer who calmly narrated that story.

[What? The Demon King of Dreams?]

Not only Seongjin reacted. The demon roared in his head.

[Seongjin! Could that be the same one from the puppet show you mentioned?]

'Uh? I'm not sure... Hey, hey! Wait!'

Before Seongjin could say anything, the demon's presence vanished from his head.

Then, the next moment.

Ashley Betcher, who just flinched, started moving even more bizarrely.

"Grrrrr..."

Now she was holding her own collar with one hand and shaking her head violently with the other.

"Is it you? You little rat, did you launch that pathetic attack on me?"

"Who's this now! Why would a demon be wrapping itself in a holy barrier?"

"Alright, you! Let's settle this today!"

"Ah, it's you? You've become so insignificant I hardly recognized you!"

What are you doing still alive, suddenly showing up like this!"

"What, who are you? Do you know me? What are you?"

Ah, another voice has joined the chatter from Ashley's mouth.

They are now distinctly split into sides, engaging in a brawl with each other.

"Yeah! Go, our Red!"

"Wow! Hang in there, our Red!"

"Who's calling me Red?!"

It was an unprecedented chaotic mess.

Fortunately, this chaos didn't last long.

Just as Seongjin was tilting his head, wondering if the temperature in the ward had suddenly dropped...

[...Eek!]

The demon king in Seongjin's head returned, utterly terrified. Trembling and barely able to speak, its reaction was oddly familiar. Could it be?

Logan also seemed to sense something unusual. He looked up, puzzled, and said, "...Where is this holy energy coming from all of a sudden?"

Ashley Betcher, too, noticed the anomaly.

She stopped her soliloquy and blankly stared into space. For the first time, a look of fear appeared in her wide-open eyes.

"You... You are!"

Cough.

At that moment, Ashley spat out blood and collapsed to the floor.

* * *

Cough, cough.

In a dark basement, a man hunched over and coughed. Small droplets of blood sprinkled on the floor along with a metallic smell.

"...This is indeed a spectacle of self-destruction."

A girl watching the man crawling on the floor scoffed.

She was a petite girl, probably not yet ten, with long golden hair tied in twin braids, looking quite adorable.

However, her expression was excessively impassive and dark, as if she bore layers of sediment from countless years.

Romaine, the masked man, after struggling on the floor for a while, finally stopped coughing and wiped the blood from his mouth, smiling.

"It's alright. I did take some damage, but that's because I'm still not adept at this trickery."

"Trickery?"

"Yes. A certain clan's secret technique of creating phantoms by detaching a part of the soul."

He had used a technique known to the Cornsheim clan, adept in handling souls.

[TL/N: Refer to Chapter 42 on Cornsheim]

They created phantoms by detaching unnecessary parts of their souls, using these phantoms to channel while preserving the individual's ego.

It was a method that allowed the clan, which otherwise could have been engulfed in a collective consciousness like channeling monsters, to maintain their humanity.

The fragment of the soul that had possessed Ashley Betcher and then died was just a tiny part detached by Romaine, imitating the Cornsheim clan.

Ha. The girl let out a hollow laugh.

"No wonder it was floundering like a fish out of water. It wasn't even a proper soul fragment."

"Well, not exactly. That was still a part of me, albeit a clumsy one. I too had my emotional moments in my youth."

Romaine shrugged nonchalantly.

"Of course, it was insufficient to deceive the Holy Emperor of Delcross. I attempted to divert his attention, but the moment he realized the channel wasn't connected to my main body, he immediately destroyed the phantom without a word."

"Thinking of deceiving him... I wonder whether that's bold or foolhardy..."

The girl shook her head in disbelief.

The Holy Emperor of Delcross.

How could such a being exist among humans? She still couldn't comprehend it.

Just when she thought she had almost successfully eroded the continent, he suddenly appeared in the Imperial City, swept away her forces, and became its sole Holy Emperor.

And since then, for a considerable time, he has successfully held Delcross under his influence. A feat unthinkable for the previous Holy Emperors.

Under his protection, demonkind couldn't even approach Delcross. It was so severe that even though she was in a human girl's body, she dared not enter the Imperial City, merely lurking around.

Currently, Romaine was the only ally capable of freely moving in and

out of the Imperial City.

He was an enigma, making her hesitant to keep him close, but she had no other choice.

"It's truly a man without any openings. For now, all we can hope is that Prince Leonard will play his part during the Birthday Celebration. If he really manages to seduce the princess, it would be ideal."

Romaine, nonchalantly dusting off his robe, seemed remarkably calm, a stark contrast to his earlier anger over their foiled plans.

"Yes. But was it necessary to enter the Imperial Palace using the last semi-bloomed seed?"

The girl's question was legitimate.

Ashley Betcher, had she been left alone with the egg, might have eventually blossomed. Even in its premature state, she could have been a valuable asset for the next plan.

But Romaine shook his head.

"The Grey Plague plan was already exposed to the Holy Emperor. It's impossible to execute a failed plan again. While I could exert influence, I needed to see someone with my own eyes."

The Third Prince, Morres.

For the first time, Romaine had clearly seen the true nature of the prince the Holy Emperor had been hiding in the Imperial Palace. A self-assured smile unknowingly spread beneath his half-mask.

The girl stepped forward, gently wrapping her hands around his chin.

"What did you see? You seem quite certain. It's good to see."

"Indeed, it's an honor."

"Your voice is also very pleasing. Tell me more, Romaine."

Her small, cherry-like lips exhaled a sweet breath.

"At least you can tell me, can't you? Where is the labyrinth? Where is your main body now?"

But Romaine gently pushed away her [Temptation], smiling.

"That's a conversation for when we've made more progress. Oh, Sovereign of [Greed]."

Bertrand Street.

Located in the western part of the Imperial City, this beautiful street, originally started as a logistics warehouse area, is now the cultural hub with a series of splendid theater buildings. Although most of the old warehouses behind these grand buildings are now used for storing theater props or hosting temporary performances by foreign troupes, a significant number still stand empty.

One of these warehouses served as a meeting place for a group from Rohan.

Late evening.

When Romaine entered the building, he paused upon finding Prince Leonard, unusually sober and sitting quietly. The prince, typically dressed casually, was now neatly attired in traditional Rohan garments and had his hair neatly combed with fragrant oil.

"Hey, Romaine. Where have you been wandering at this late hour? I thought you quit playing with drunks at Darron."

Romaine, sensing that the impatient prince must have been up to something during his absence, asked cautiously, "Did you go somewhere, Leo?"

Leonard's attire, though tidy, was hardly fitting for royalty. He shrugged nonchalantly and picked up a bottle of liquor.

"It's nothing. I was frustrated with how long it was taking to get permission to enter the Imperial Palace as a guest."

"Surely you didn't..."

"Yes, I disguised myself as part of a diplomatic delegation and went to the palace."

Leonard took a swig from the bottle and wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

"The palace might stop the royal family of Rohan at the gates, but they allow entry to diplomatic delegations bearing gifts. So I followed the Rohan delegation into the audience chamber."

Romaine was at a loss for words.

Despite the disguise, Leonard's face was too well-known to risk such exposure. What a scandal it would be if someone recognized him.

"Don't worry. I stayed hidden among the crowd and kept my head down. I shouldn't have been noticed."

His voice lacked the usual confidence.

"Just wanted to see the princess's face out of sheer frustration. Unfortunately, I didn't meet her, but I did get a close look at that damned man causing all the trouble."

"The Holy Emperor... You met him?"

"Yes. That man, his temperament is..."

"What happened?"

"Oh, nothing much. Just the way he glared at me..."

Leonard suddenly shivered, as if recalling something frightening.

Even amid a crowd of diplomatic envoys, Leonard's striking appearance seemed to captivate attention. As he fumbled for words and took another swig of his drink, Romaine realized something.

He had been recognized.

And deep down, Leonard seemed to regret this realization a bit.

"He couldn't have known my face," Leonard mused.

"You should not have underestimated him as a mere human," Romaine reminded him, sighing and sitting opposite the prince.

Considering the water had already been spilled, and fortunately, Leonard hadn't embarrassed himself in front of the foreign delegates, it seemed best to just feign ignorance and return to the palace as a dignitary.

"If Your Highness plans to approach his daughter, who knows how he will react. It's better to be cautious from now on."

"Should I really stop then?" Leonard's uncharacteristically timid response contrasted sharply with his usual bold demeanor, but Romaine wasn't overly concerned. He knew well enough that by tomorrow morning, Leonard would likely regain his confidence and nag him to arrange another meeting with the princess.

"Oh! Speaking of which, there was something odd during the audience."

Leonard, now flush from alcohol, rested his chin on his hand and continued.

During the presentation of gifts from Brittany and other regions, just as a page was about to announce the envoy from Asein, the Holy Emperor suddenly raised his hand to stop him.

Amidst a sudden, heavy silence in the audience chamber, the Holy Emperor slowly touched his forehead and closed his eyes. Everyone, puzzled by his actions, watched in confusion. Leonard, standing relatively close to the throne, distinctly heard the Holy Emperor's low murmur.

—So noisy...

In the vast audience chamber, filled with silent, attentive people, it was perplexing what he found so noisy.

After a moment, the Holy Emperor opened his eyes and the audience resumed as if nothing had happened.

But Leonard was already left with an indelible impression of the

Emperor as a remarkably unpleasant and unfathomable man.

Hearing this, Romaine came to a new realization.

His own soul fragment, which had possessed Ashley Betcher, was it destroyed not because it was discovered but simply because it was noisy?

After a while of silently sipping his drink, Leonard suddenly hung his head and spoke in a subdued voice.

"Listen, Romaine. I always took your words lightly, but seeing the Holy Emperor of Delcross up close, he was truly different."

"..."

"Just sitting there, I could feel how terrifying he was."

Leonard then looked up, casting a somewhat desperate gaze.

"Tell me, Romaine. Can we really do anything against someone like him?"

Romaine silently met his gaze, then gently placed a hand on his shoulder.

[He has been alone until now and will continue to be. He is surrounded by enemies, and they are extremely powerful. He has nowhere to retreat and will slowly wither away here in Delcross.]

Hearing Romaine's mystically charged voice, Leonard's expression visibly relaxed. He nodded and took another drink without a word.

Yet, behind the mask, Romaine's eyes were shaded with a hint of darkness.

At the same time, a long procession of carriages was heading towards the northern gate of Delcross. Despite the late hour, these were the priests who had been on far-reaching pastoral missions, now returning for the Birthday Celebration, thanks to the support of the

Orthodox Church.

"We are approaching the gates of the capital, Sister Sisle. My heart flutters, which shows how long we have been away."

Inside the gently rocking carriage, a young girl, engrossed in a book, lifted her head. Her long, silvery hair flowed softly, adding to her angelic appearance, like a celestial being from a sacred painting.

"I didn't realize you missed the capital so much, Sister Ursula," she remarked.

"Me? Didn't I tell you how much I love Delcross?"

Sister Ursula, slightly dramatic, peered out of the carriage window with excitement. "If it weren't for our mission to spread the grace of the Divine across the continent, I wouldn't have left home for so long."

The girl tilted her head, puzzled. "Weren't you the one who always complained about being stuck in the capital, longing to travel on pastoral missions?"

Sister Ursula chuckled, admitting that her recent experiences had reaffirmed her love for Delcross.

Closing her eyes, she deeply inhaled, savoring the air of Delcross. "Indeed, nearing the capital feels different! I thought the sisters were exaggerating, but returning after a long absence, I can sense the immense influence of His Majesty the Emperor."

Sister Ursula wasn't particularly powerful in divine energy, but even she could feel the strong holy aura intensifying as they neared Delcross. It was no wonder that visiting clergy from distant lands often stopped near the gate, overwhelmed with tears of emotion.

She clasped her hands together, overwhelmed. "Such a powerful presence! Truly, Delcross under the care of the Divine's representative is a blessed holy nation, Sister Sisle!"

Sister Sisle's expression darkened slightly. Ursula, puzzled by her subdued response, was soon distracted by the commotion outside.

The inspection at the gate was unusually stringent, causing the procession to slow down.

"Today's inspection seems particularly strict."

Indeed, armed knights and guards swarmed out, checking each carriage and its occupants. Usually, a quick confirmation of the identities of the leading knights and priests sufficed, but the heightened security seemed excessive, even considering the upcoming Birth Celebration.

Soon, it was the turn of the carriage carrying Sister Sisle and Sister Ursula. The inspection officers arrived at their door.

He knocked politely on the carriage door and cautiously opened it. The knight was from the 5th Knight Order, assigned to guard the gate.

Seeing two people in radiant religious attire, he quickly bowed his head. Every citizen of Delcross would recognize the face of the young Saintess with her long silver hair.

"The grace of the Divine descended upon Delcross is before us!"

The knight respectfully greeted them, prompting Sisle to inquire, "Is there a problem in the capital?"

"Yes, Saintess. Recently, a creature called a 'monster beast' appeared in the capital, causing some disturbance. This has made the inspection process at the Birthday Celebration more stringent."

Monster beast? What's that?

Sister Ursula blinked in confusion, while the young Saintess asked with a trembling voice, "A monster beast? How can that be?"

Sisle's clear grey eyes reflected her dismay. She quickly flipped through her small diary, found a page, and stared intently at it.

"It can't be. A major gate opening in the capital was not due for several more months..."

"Huh?"

Sisle's incomprehensible murmur left Ursula and the knight exchanging confused glances.

"What's... what has changed?"

The knight, noticing the young girl's face turning pale, quickly reassured, "But don't worry! The Holy Knights of Delcross quickly exterminated the demon beasts. The capital is now safe."

Sisle remained silent, contemplating.

"Moreover, Prince Morres, the 3rd Prince, personally slew the largest of the demon beasts. He is leading a special task force called the 'Monster Special Task Force', so such vile creatures won't dare tread in Delcross anymore!"

"His Highness... Morres?"

Sister Ursula's expression turned awkward, but the knight vigorously nodded, adding, "Yes, indeed! It's the second time His Highness has slain such a creature. Previously, he saved students from an attack at the Academy. Despite various rumors about the Prince, he is truly a noble member of the imperial family..."

"Morres..."

Sisle repeated the somewhat unfamiliar name, flipping through her diary again.

Certainly, around this time, it was noted that the chubby troublemaker had decided to focus on swordsmanship.

Monster Special Task Force.

She couldn't recall reading about such a unit, and unsurprisingly, her diary had no mention of it either.

"Sisle," Sister Ursula said softly.

Sister Ursula's worried voice reached her from beside her.

"The Monster Special Task Force."

The Saintess's eyes settled with a calmness beyond her years. If something differed from what she knew, it likely wasn't unrelated to this unfamiliar unit.

She closed her diary and held it tightly against her chest.

Let's not panic.

Once back at the palace, she planned to thoroughly investigate this Monster Special Task Force. And then...

"...I need to meet him, Morres."

To her knowledge, Morres, who should have been wandering aimlessly for a long time unable to accumulate aura, was now a skilled warrior capable of slaying monster beasts. Wasn't he leading the Monster Special Task Force too?

Perhaps.

He might just be the crucial wildcard that could help her escape her destined fate.

Staring quietly in the direction of the palace, a resolute light flickered in the young girl's grey eyes.

"There should be no issue with those students."

That evening, while observing Seongjin's complexion, Masain cautiously opened the conversation. It was after he had already briefed the Saint Aurelion Knights about the incident at the Imperial Medical Wing.

Suddenly, Ashley Betcher, who had collapsed vomiting blood, was in a state of severe shock due to the exorcism of the evil spirit that had possessed her.

Fortunately, Logan quickly healed him with his divine power, but afterwards, Ashley reverted back to her initial state, resembling an empty puppet.

Jonathan called for a doctor, and soon after, Masain and the Saint Aurelion paladins rushed into the infirmary.

The plan was to request the help of an exorcist, but Francis was already on his way, leading the paladins urgently.

Considering how the Saint Aurelion paladins usually operate like the limbs of the Holy Emperor, Seongjin speculated that it was probably influenced by the Holy Emperor's intervention.

Taking into account the interference from the twins, who were suspected not to be twins, and the deployment time of the paladins, it seemed reasonable to assume that the Holy Emperor had intervened the moment Ashley's possession began.

"Anyway, in the capital, it seems impossible to avoid the eyes of that gentleman, no matter what happens..."

Upon arrival, Francis briefly examined Ashley's condition and then,

along with the paladins, took her and Jonathan away.

Jonathan, who kept looking back anxiously, seemed to be of some concern.

"The involvement of the Saint Aurelion paladins means that the students are now under the care of Dame Katrina. So, please set your worries aside, Your Highness."

Masain reassured Seongjin again.

"Dame Katrina is a person of excellent character. Any matter she handles will undoubtedly be dealt with fairly and justly."

Yes, if it's Dame Katrina, somehow, I do trust her. After all, she is the Knight Commander who even the fierce Francis deeply respects.

Finally feeling a bit relieved, Seongjin could focus his thoughts on other matters.

It seemed that the Holy Emperor himself had exorcised the evil spirit that had possessed Ashley Betcher.

Even after returning to Pearl Palace, the Demon King, who had been shivering in Seongjin's head for a long time, later admitted it.

[Yeah, your father came and went. Wow, that soul, even seeing it again, really...]

'What happened to the evil spirit?'

[Of course, it died! I just touched it, and that pathetic thing's soul was instantly crushed, leaving no trace.]

But at the same time, the Holy Emperor was said to be meeting foreign diplomats in the audience chamber. So, his body must have been in the main palace while his soul briefly visited the infirmary.

Last time, he followed Seongjin to the boundary of dimensions, so it seems the Holy Emperor has some easy method of astral projection.

Indeed, being a divine proxy, he is an individual who transcends

normal understanding in many ways.

But leaving aside that almost inhuman individual, what about the twins who suddenly intruded during Ashley's possession?

Herna and Gades. Could those extraordinary children also perform astral projection like the Holy Emperor?

However, the Demon King's explanation was slightly different.

[Well, it's hard to say those were proper souls...]

After pondering for a moment, the Demon King then gave an unexpected answer.

[There were certainly two different soul auras at that time. Thinking about it now, it seemed somewhat similar to the souls of those twins we've seen before. But it wasn't a complete soul. Rather, it felt more like a fragment of a soul that had broken off from somewhere.]

'...Soul fragment?'

Seongjin blinked.

Huh? That sounds familiar, doesn't it?

[Yeah, right. It was a similar feeling to them.]

Arenja.

The spiritual surveillance network that watches over the capital from beneath the surface.

And then the Demon King strongly affirmed Seongjin's speculation.

[Moreover, one of them was someone we've already met. Remember? When you climbed over the wall of the Imperial Palace, that one who told us to follow you.]

'.....!'

And then, the words the Demon King had said before flashed through Seongjin's mind.

—Another one has appeared. A more powerful one... Huh? This one seems to understand us?

—That guy is asking you to follow him for a while. What will you do?

Was it one of the twins?

Herna and Gades are part of Arenja?

'Whoa, wait a minute...!'

Seongjin felt his mind suddenly become alert.

'No, think about it, it makes sense, doesn't it? Why didn't I suspect this earlier?'

The twins had known about the existence of the Demon King for a long time, and Arenja was also aware of the Demon King.

The twins are speculated to be high-level channelers, sharing quite a bit of information with the Holy Emperor.

Then, wouldn't it be strange if they had no connection with the secret organization of channelers operated by the Holy Emperor!

As Seongjin grasped his head in self-reproach, the Demon King offered some consolation.

[Well, they are minors, after all.]

'.....'

He couldn't deny that he had let his guard down because they were just kids.

Anyway, now that he knew, verifying the truth of this matter was simple.

Without delay, Seongjin called for Commander Bruno to his room.

"Yes, Princess Herna and Prince Gades are unofficially part of Arenja."

Soon after arriving in Seongjin's room, the commander, gazing into the air and channeling for a while with Arenja, eventually nodded.

"It's an internal secret known only to the insiders, not well-known publicly. Oh, and..."

The commander, focusing as if listening to something, added more.

"Yes, yes. They were also the ones who named that Reddy 'Red.'"

"...Huh?"

[What?]

The Demon King was shocked.

[They did? Those little...! I'll never forgive them! Aaaargh!]

As the Demon King noisily fumed, Commander Bruno provided Seongjin with a more detailed explanation.

"All internal agents of Arenja are high-level channelers capable of creating terminals of souls. They not only receive thoughts but also move parts of actual souls to survey every corner of the capital."

Terminals of souls.

The incomplete soul fragments that the Demon King saw were actually small terminal devices created from parts of these psychics' souls.

They used such devices for safety reasons. If something happened to the terminal, their souls preserved inside the palace would remain safe.

Moreover, Commander Bruno added that completely detaching and moving one's soul involves significant risks.

"Then why does the Holy Emperor, unlike other members of Arenja, roam around using his soul directly instead of creating terminals?"

If it's possible for the twins, wouldn't it be possible for the Emperor as

well?

Lost in thought, Seongjin was interrupted when Edith entered the room and quietly set down a teacup. She had brought tea without being asked, sensing the conversation might be lengthy.

'Edith is improving!'

Seongjin felt a sense of pride.

Edith, who used to be oblivious to such nuances, seemed to have learned a thing or two after the recent increase in the maid staff at Pearl Palace.

"Today's soul terminals you encountered are likely belonging to Princess Herna and Prince Gades. They are stronger channelers than other internal agents and are quick to detect anomalies in the palace," said Commander Bruno, lifting his steaming teacup.

"They mainly live outside the palace, so they are on the boundary between internal and external agents and do not have official duties. After all, they are still quite young."

Seeing the noticeable cheer on his face as he spoke, Seongjin couldn't help but ask, "Do you like tea, Commander?"

"Haha. Embarrassingly so, Your Highness. I often enjoyed it when I worked in the palace. It was a rather simple pleasure."

The hardest part of living outside the palace was not being able to drink good tea, the commander said while idly stroking his sharply angled mustache.

Indeed, the more he was observed, the more he seemed to possess noble characteristics.

"Of course, I didn't like it from the beginning. Just touching the tea would stir up various gossip. Those who mocked me for my humble origins, saying I didn't even know how to drink tea, later scoffed that I was pretending to be a noble."

"How did you come to like it?"

"If I was going to be ridiculed anyway, I thought it was better to enjoy what I wanted. Once I thought that way, suddenly the tea tasted good."

Indeed. He was a person of strong mentality, having endured in the palace all the way to becoming a commander despite his commoner background.

"Anyway, Your Highness. The same goes for the soul that possessed the academy student today. Arenja says it was not a complete soul but closer to an incomplete terminal made from a fragment of a soul."

"What does that mean?"

"Yes, the art of creating soul terminals. Whoever that person is, they must also be a high-level channeler."

Seongjin frowned.

"And their real soul is still alive and well."

"Exactly."

Commander Bruno nodded, took a sip of his tea, and...

"Pffft!"

He dramatically spat it out!

"...Edith?"

As droplets of tea splashed everywhere, Edith silently sweated and avoided eye contact.

Edith, it seemed, had made no progress in the art of making tea.

* * *

The most admired young ladies among the Delcross noblemen recently were two people.

The beautiful rose of the palace, Princess Amelia.

And the elegant flower of the social circles, Isabella Scarcepino.

All the noblemen hoped to be chosen as their partners at the ball, and they would spend sleepless nights just to brush past their gowns once.

However, just for one day.

On the main banquet of the annual birthday celebration, no gentleman dared to ask them to be their partners, as their partners for that day were always predetermined.

But now.

"...You're attending with a different partner this year?"

Isabella's face contorted oddly as she read the reply from Pearl Palace. She had sent a letter to coordinate dress codes, only to receive an unexpected response.

"Oh my, really? Isn't that a good thing? Our beautiful Isabella with that unsightly prince, even if it's Her Majesty the Queen's command, how could that be appropriate?"

"....."

A naive maid chattered without understanding the situation.

Indeed. Since Prince Morres reached the age to attend the ball, Isabella always accompanied him to the birthday banquet as a sign of respect for the engagement talks.

Of course, it wasn't pleasant. The prince was not only unsightly in appearance, but his manners towards ladies were atrociously bad.

The only reason she accompanied Prince Morres was due to the intense pressure from Queen Lizabeth.

Passing this role to another fiancée wasn't feasible either.

Julia Meyer would come to the ball in knight's uniform, more like a farmhand, and Lady Balua was merely a child who had just weaned off her mother's milk.

"Finally free, Miss! Now you can truly enjoy the grandest ball in Delcross!"

'Freedom...'

It was true.

But the mere thought of that disgusting prince ruined her appetite.

Yet, oddly enough, her pride was hurt to attend with someone else.

"So, Miss, who will you go to the ball with now? Perhaps the renowned Young Master Siegmund... Eek! How wonderful!"

Ignoring the jumping maid, Isabella left the room.

As the most famous person in social circles, she didn't like the idea of proposing a partner first, and with the ball approaching, she had no suitable candidate in mind.

So, in a rush, she thought about asking her older brothers for help, but...

"I can't leave Olivier alone. Sorry."

Her eldest brother, Dominico, who was already engaged, refused.

"You know, don't you? I don't attend the birthday celebration every year."

Riccardo, her second brother, also gently refused with a kind smile.

"Why not?"

Isabella asked, puzzled.

The second brother she knew was extremely sociable. He enjoyed drinking, romancing, and engaging in conversations with people from various fields.

He was the most welcomed guest in all the salons of the capital, and the regular meetings he organized were coveted gatherings that the influential heirs of Delcross eagerly sought invitations to.

At his sister's question, Riccardo lifted his head, his eyes briefly unfocused, as he stared off into the distance. Then, with a smile that was somewhat ambiguous, he answered.

"Regrettably, I cannot enter the palace."

"Yes, that Prince Morres, you see..."

After hearing the whole story from Isabella, Riccardo nodded.

"My, my. To turn down the flower among flowers, endowed with both beauty and intelligence, my beautiful Bella, the fairest of them all in the capital! It seems that the fellow hasn't yet recovered from the aftermath of his fever."

Rubbing her arms, which were prickling with goosebumps, Isabella scowled.

"...Brother, sometimes you say the creepiest things so nonchalantly."

"Why not just say I'm rich in sensibility? And it's not like I'm wrong, is it? Even among the foreign dignitaries, there are whispers. In the salons of Delcross, there's an elegant one who captures everyone's attention..."

"Brother Riccardo!"

Unable to bear the cringe, her eyes narrowed at her smirking brother.

"Well, speaking of which, there have been rumors lately that he's changed quite a bit. Perhaps he's had some sort of change of heart. He hasn't been coming around to the townhouse these days."

"Brother, haven't you seen him lately either?"

"Unfortunately, that's the case. I can't go to him, so he has to come to me, but there's no reply at all, even though I send him invitations to our weekly gatherings."

Prince Morres used to visit the Scarcepino mansion often at Riccardo's invitation.

What Isabella found curious was this: Prince Morres and Riccardo were quite consistently friends, despite not only their age difference but also their completely opposing reputations. It was beyond her guess as to what had brought these two seemingly unrelated people together.

"Why do you associate with such a rascal, Brother?"

Her question was met with Riccardo's hearty laughter.

"So you see him that way too. But even if you knew what the Prince sees, would you still say such a thing? The more I get to know him, the more interesting a friend he turns out to be."

Riccardo, having dropped this somewhat mysterious remark, stroked his smooth, handsome chin, lost in thought.

"Anyway, what's important now is finding you an escort partner. It's a bit awkward to say he's my substitute, but how about Young Master Siegmund? The top flower of the social circle, a partner who might be suitable for my beautiful Bella?"

"....."

Isabella was at a loss for words.

For a moment, she suspected that her playfully teasing older brother was making fun of her again.

...Really, that Young Master Siegmund?

"Yes. I recently had the opportunity to build a friendship with him. If it's my suggestion, he won't refuse. What do you say?"

If Riccardo's words were true, Isabella naturally had no reason to refuse.

If the most sought-after individuals by the noblemen of the capital were Princess Amelia and Isabella, then for the ladies, it was Prince Logan and Siegmund.

She didn't like to admit it, but frankly, Siegmund was in a different

league from her.

Though she was the daughter of a nouveau riche who had sought asylum in Ortana and was subtly looked down upon, he was the eldest son of a great noble, the foremost knight of the continent, and a disciple of Balthazar.

A genius swordsman who had conquered swordsmanship tournaments in many countries, he was an idol to the young lords of Delcross and aspiring knights. He was a celebrity, ranked alongside Prince Logan, a likely future Emperor.

If she could be with him, Isabella would surely become the most noticed lady at her birthday celebration!

The fact that Prince Morres had rejected her was no longer even in her mind.

"...Yes. If my lovely sister likes it, then I am happy too."

Riccardo smiled knowingly, looking at Isabella's excited face.

And the next day.

Isabella, having received a letter from Orden Siegmund expressing his wish to match dress codes, headed to Deste Street with a fluttering heart.

The atmosphere in the palace was strangely excited from the morning.

It was because the third Princess Sisle had returned the night before.

Although there was no grand parade like when Logan returned, the return of the empire's proud young saintess was a welcome news to everyone.

And Seongjin, meeting the little girl who had come to him with Amelia that morning, blinked his eyes.

Those clear gray eyes seemed familiar.

The long hair shining in silver.

The girl, looking like a delicately carved piece of crystal with her beautiful face, held a small book dearly in her hands and stared intently at Seongjin's face.

"It's been a while, Morres-orabeoni. You've changed a lot."

Brother.

This extremely unfamiliar term made Seongjin feel strangely. It reminded him that Morres indeed had a sister.

All the twins he had met till now always tried to compete with him.

"Uh, hello."

Seongjin waved his hand awkwardly at the girl.

"So... you were Sisle, right? Sorry. Actually, I've been suffering from a fever recently..."

"I know. You lost your memory, right? Amelia told me. You must have had a hard time."

"....."

Her bland expression as she uttered kind words created a strange sense of dissonance.

"I heard a lot on the way here. Brother, you've been quite active lately, haven't you?"

"Huh?"

"Remarkable. Despite having just recovered from illness, you've been training and managing the Monster Special Task Force. Impressive."

"....."

He just couldn't get used to the discordance between her thoughtful

words and expressionless face!

What's with her? Is she a robot?

Then, tilting her head, Sisle asked curiously.

"But Brother, what is that thing next to you?"

".....!"

Oh no! I forgot, she's a saintess!

He could feel the Demon King inside him quiver.

It seemed that high-ranking clergy, like cardinals, could faintly sense the presence of the Demon King, even with the Emperor's barriers.

Even Logan once mentioned to Seongjin that he felt a sinister aura by his side.

If so, the saintess, boasting the highest divine power among the Emperor's children, would definitely notice the Demon King!

What should he do? What if she immediately tries to exorcise the Demon King?

Seongjin was tense, but contrary to his worries, the girl continued in an indifferent tone.

"Brother, it's strange what you carry around. I don't remember reading about such a thing."

"....."

"Anyway, be careful of the high priests. Especially Archbishop Benitus. The old gentlemen will probably notice it right away."

Leaving the Demon King alone, Sisle didn't seem like the most devout servant of the Lord, despite being a saintess.

Well, maybe that's the same for the Emperor, the representative of God.

While he was silently acknowledging this, Sisle suddenly asked an out-of-the-blue question.

"By the way, Brother Morres, what's your ideal type like?"

...Huh?

"Do you like women who are pure and tender, who can understand your pain?"

...Huh?

"Do you find yourself attracted to women with exotic, black hair?"

"...What?"

He couldn't understand the context at all!

While Seongjin was confused, Sisle continued to speak with her inorganic, statue-like expression, as if she had a lot to say. Her face was as expressive as the Emperor himself.

"Be careful of such women. Understand? Clinging desperately to a popular woman will only be a loss if she doesn't pay attention to you. It's the tragedy of being second-best."

"...Um?"

"Oh, I just stopped by to say hello today. I have to go to the main palace and then to the Orthodox Church for work, so I'll be going first."

"Ah, okay. Take care."

"Goodbye then. See you later, Brother."

With that, Sisle left as quickly as she came, still clutching the small book in her arms.

...What was that all about?

Stunned, Seongjin gazed in the direction where the girl had disappeared, while Amelia, who had been silently watching them,

smiled brightly.

"It seems like the first time you two have talked so affectionately. Family is indeed a wonderful thing."

...Glad it seemed affectionate, Sister.

With the birthday celebration approaching, the busiest place in the capital was undoubtedly Deste Street, where the tailoring shops were clustered.

Designers and seamstresses with dark circles under their eyes worked through the night, feverishly altering and adjusting outfits, making Deste Street as lively as a night market even in the early hours.

Typically, party dresses are ordered well in advance, but the problem arises when many events overlap, requiring last-minute changes to already finished outfits. Whether due to personal reasons or family circumstances, it was not uncommon for party partners to change just before the event.

In such cases, typically, the design and alterations revolve around the one with the higher status. And for Isabella Scarcepino, touted as the flower of high society, this was no exception.

Isabella, along with her own dress designer, entered the Salon de Merci, a men's tailoring shop.

"Oh my, Miss Scarcepino!"

Several young ladies, who were chatting in the salon, were startled and stood up upon noticing Isabella. Like her, they too had their partners changed unexpectedly.

They seemed to guess why Isabella was visiting a men's tailoring shop.

"Are you not attending the birthday celebration with Prince Morres this year?"

"Yes, that's how it turned out."

"Oh my..."

The ladies' eyes sparkled.

Whoever had brought Isabella to a men's salon must be of no low standing.

"I wonder who the lucky gentleman is who will escort the beautiful Miss Scarcepino."

"Ha ha, you'll see soon enough, so let's save the excitement for later."

Isabella smiled and took a seat gracefully.

Reading a certain confidence in her demeanor, the ladies refrained from prying further and resumed their conversations.

"By the way, have you heard the news? About the young lady from the Balua family?"

"Ah, the little girl who's rumored to be in talks for an engagement with the Third Prince?"

"Yes, apparently she sends flowers to the Pearl Palace every day with utmost devotion."

"Really?"

Although pretending to be uninterested and flipping through a design book, Isabella's ears perked up, attentively listening to the ladies' conversation.

One young lady, with a look of pity, asked, "Oh dear, has she ever met Prince Morres in person? I wonder if that poor little girl is under some kind of misunderstanding..."

"That's not entirely the case. Rumor has it that she visits the Jinju Palace weekly, having tea and warmly chatting with the Prince."

"Oh my! That's true love that transcends appearances!"

"The young lady is truly admirable."

And with that, they burst into giggles, finding the situation cute.

Isabella swallowed a bitter smile as she listened to their chatter. She felt like she was being equated with that adorable little girl.

Despite being known as the flower of society and one of Delcross's most beautiful women, Isabella knew she could never be matched with someone like Prince Logan.

A refugee noble from Ortana, who amassed a fortune through civil war.

Lacking notable lineage, her only claim to fame was wealth, often derogatorily nicknamed as a nouveau riche who profited from selling her country.

The only reason she was even considered for a match with the imperial family was because Prince Morres was seen as a disgrace and a worthless troublemaker of the imperial line.

And Prince Morres himself, aware of this, had always looked at Isabella in such a way.

With a gaze devoid of any emotion, as if looking at a lesser being.

Unwittingly, Isabella bit her lip hard.

But her thoughts were abruptly interrupted.

One of the young ladies gasped in surprise and pointed towards the entrance of Salon de Merci, creating a stir.

"Oh my! What's happening? Look, there's Princess Amelia and Prince Morres!"

Initially, Isabella didn't recognize Prince Morres at once. The tall, handsome boy who entered with Princess Amelia seemed very unfamiliar to her.

"...Huh? Eh?"

The young lady, who had shouted out that it was Prince Morres just by seeing the royal carriage and hair color, now stood gaping, having forgotten to cover her mouth with her fan. Even the lady beside her rubbed her eyes so hard that her eye makeup began to smear, oblivious to it.

There, stood a prince like something out of a fairy tale!

Had it not been for the sharp eyes resembling those of Queen Lizabeth or the unique hair color, no one would have easily realized that the boy was Prince Morres.

"Shouldn't I be the one matching my outfit to my sister?"

"Not necessarily, Morres."

"Is that so?"

"The hierarchy in the salon is also important. Salon de Merci is the most famous in Delcross."

The Third Prince was known for his discord with the other princes and princesses, but now it seemed like a baseless rumor. The way they entered, arm in arm, chatting amiably, looked very affectionate.

The moment the beautiful siblings entered, it seemed as if the interior of the salon brightened up instantaneously.

".....!"

Leaving the young ladies, who were petrified with shock, behind, the prince and princess proceeded towards the private room, receiving Madame Justine's excessive hospitality.

And as they disappeared from view, the young ladies finally let out the breath they had been holding, bursting into exclamations.

"Oh my! Goodness, what in the world!"

"How can someone change so much in such a short time? I can't believe my eyes even though I'm seeing it right in front of me!"

"Now that I see, the prince is definitely a true member of the Imperial family! He resembles both His Majesty and Queen Lizabeth!"

"There was a reason why the little lady of Balua was so smitten!"

And then, all eyes turned towards Isabella.

Their gazes had now shifted from seeing her as a plump, ill-mannered girl, rumored to be betrothed as a match of convenience, to the heroine of a romance novel, poised for a rise in status after being chosen by the prince.

"....."

Isabella, too, was almost losing her mind due to the sudden turn of events, but in front of the young ladies, she had no choice but to hide her startled heart and force a calm smile.

"As you can see, His Highness has completely recovered from his illness."

"Oh, yes."

"Hehe, that's good to hear....."

However, even afterwards, Isabella's heart, which had started pounding shockingly, couldn't easily calm down.

The embarrassment of not knowing the recent situation of the one she was rumored to be betrothed to.

The feeling of betrayal when, as soon as his appearance changed, he blatantly rejected her.

The prince's affectionate gaze towards Princess Amelia, so different from the way he looked at her.

Thus, even when Young Master Siegmund arrived, and the young ladies burst into another round of intense exclamations, Isabella couldn't genuinely enjoy their envious gazes.

"How about lightening the tone of both your outfits a bit?"

The designer suggested, laying several pieces of high-quality fabric in front of them.

"This year's trend for party dresses is to avoid bright reds and use lighter fabrics. Otherwise, the red gold buttons and accessories will look like ordinary gold."

"Red gold?"

"Yes, Your Highness. It's a precious metal recently imported from the Duchy of Asein. We've only received a very small quantity in our salon. Considering its noble value, I believe it would be the perfect ornament to enhance both of your high statuses."

"Alright, just handle it appropriately."

While the Young Master was nodding carelessly, Isabella quietly observed him from the corner of her eye.

Orden Siegmund.

Heir to the Duke of Siegmund and a famous disciple of the renowned Sir Balthazar. A young and formidable genius swordsman.

Although they had no personal acquaintance and had only seen each other at major events, up close, he appeared even more stoic than the rumors suggested. He seemed like a man who brought the cold air of the northern territories to Delcross.

His attitude towards Isabella was relatively polite, but that was all.

The occasional glances Orden cast her way were nothing but indifferent.

How could that be?

In the barren north, it would be difficult to find a beauty as captivating as Isabella.

"But, can it be altered in time?"

"As for the Young Master, since he must wear the family's grand attire, we can keep the basic structure of the outfit and just modify the sash and epaulettes slightly. However, for Lady Scarcepino..."

The designer, having said that much, covertly glanced at Isabella.

"To match with the Young Master's attire, it would be better to replace almost all parts of the fabric, except for the flounces. This would mean starting from the cutting again and scheduling a new fitting, which might be a bit..."

"....."

"Oh, of course, our salon will do our utmost to meet the schedule! If Lady allows us some leeway, perhaps at this year's birthday celebration, the two of you will be the best couple in the capital....."

As Isabella remained silent for a moment, Orden turned his head to look down at her.

"Do you have any objections, Lady Scarcepino?"

It probably wasn't really a question about whether she had any objections.

Over the years, ruling the social circles of the capital, Isabella had become adept at dealing with people and could clearly sense it.

The desolate gaze that looked down on anything lesser than herself.

In Orden's eyes, there was neither affection nor respect for her, not even a trace of warmth.

'Yes, just like Prince Morres had been...'

The belle of the ball, the greatest beauty of Delcross.

Despite such praises, in the end, what others thought of her amounted to just this much.

Isabella managed to barely lift the corners of her trembling lips and responded.

"Yes. I think it would be best to follow the designer's opinion. Let's do that."

Perhaps it was because of the unexpected events happening one after another recently.

Despite her long experience in the social world, she felt as if she might burst into tears at any moment.

It was Amelia who first brought up the topic of the dress code.

It seemed like a hassle, but aligning the party dress designs a little was apparently a matter of courtesy to one's partner.

And so, she personally came looking for him, bringing a dress designer to match her design to Seongjin's.

That's how Seongjin ended up visiting Salon de Merci side by side with Amelia.

"Shouldn't I be the one matching my outfit to my sister?"

Wasn't it customary for the one of lower status or younger age to follow the lead of the one who's higher or older?

However, Amelia replied with a gentle smile.

"Not necessarily, Morres."

"Is that so?"

"The hierarchy among the salons is also important. Salon de Merci is the most famous in Delcross. From the perspective of other designers, it's difficult to order Madame Justine around."

At this, Amelia's designer chimed in agreement.

"Yes, Princess, you're absolutely right. It's so considerate of you to take our salon's position into account! Moreover, Madame Justine is primarily a men's clothing designer, but he is also renowned for his discerning eye in dress design. Following his advice will surely not disappoint."

Well, considering what Madame himself wears, I'm not entirely convinced of his so-called discerning eye.

"I've also wanted to meet him. I've always been curious. What kind of person could the most famous designer in the capital be?"

Amelia said this with an angelic smile.

"Especially that butterfly patterned dress you showed me last time was truly a masterpiece."

That dress was quite daring.

But when they actually faced Madame Justine, Amelia seemed greatly disconcerted and quietly clutched Seongjin's sleeve without saying a word.

"Morres..."

And as soon as Madame stepped away for a moment, Amelia whispered cautiously in Seongjin's ear.

"Why is it? I find that person a bit unsettling."

Huh?

"...Do you feel that way too, Sister?"

"Do you also find it strange? I keep getting this uneasy feeling around him, like I'm scared. It's strange because I can't sense any aura

activation from him, but why do I feel this way?"

"Hmm, I see."

According to the Demon King, Madame Justine is speculated to be a human with a soul from the original world in a body from the structured world. But Amelia wouldn't know such details.

Perhaps, like how Seongjin's instincts sharply alerted him when he first saw Madame, Amelia also instinctively sensed some inherent danger through a certain perception.

Seongjin looked at Amelia anew.

Considering the extraordinary beings like the Holy Emperor, Logan and others he had encountered, it was easy to forget that Amelia herself was an immensely talented individual.

Additionally, her training methods were extremely efficient.

"I know my limits well, Morres."

She quickly accepted that no matter how hard she trained all day, she couldn't become like Seongjin. So, despite her love for training, she didn't invest more than a certain amount of time in it.

She practiced meditation in her spare time and asked the Emperor to directly impart aura during audiences, a clever tactic to increase her cultivation efficiency.

She then devoted the time saved to other pursuits.

She invited tutors in politics, diplomacy, economics, and social studies.

She played musical instruments, recited poetry, and attended lectures at the academy.

Even if she deeply focused on swordsmanship, at this pace, she could eventually reach the ranks of the continent's strong.

What exactly did Amelia want? Did she aspire to become a

superhuman?

"It's a long journey towards a goal. A process of building a tower called revenge, brick by brick."

When asked if she found it hard, Amelia responded with a smile, different from her usual demeanor, somewhat eerily chilling.

"Yes, you were right, Morres. I find this journey towards revenge quite enjoyable."

Well, it's good that she's enjoying it, at least.

Feeling somewhat regretful about her untapped potential, Seongjin softly advised her.

"Who knows? Perhaps his real weapon isn't aura. In any case, that person is probably strong, in many ways."

"I thought so."

"But don't worry. He is under our father's control, after all."

Considering that it was the twins who first introduced Madame, Arenja might still be keeping an eye on him.

Amelia visibly relaxed at Seongjin's words.

So, when Madame returned to the private room with new fabrics and design books, Amelia, unlike before, began to express her opinions more freely.

"The trend for this year's party is light colors. Perhaps cream or aqua blue..."

"I am drawn to this black fabric."

"Oh, this is just an accent fabric for flounces or ribbons. Now, Your Highness, please don't and take a look at these fabrics..."

"But Madame, somehow black seems stylish."

"However, Your Highness. If you're pairing it with red gold

accessories, perhaps this light emerald fabric would be better..."

"I think it would be nice if Morres and I matched in black."

"Your Highness! For the celebration of the day the Lord's envoy arrived on this land, wearing black that resembles mourning clothes... Someone might mistake it as devil worship!"

Madame Justine exclaimed seriously, his tone not trailing off as usual, indicating his utmost sincerity.

However, Amelia, with slightly flushed cheeks, bore a wide smile.

"Wow, a demon of Delcross, that sounds cool..."

"....."

Ah, I had forgotten about this.

Sister have always had a taste for the 'teen rebel' style...

After some back and forth, the two finally reached a dramatic resolution.

Seongjin's formal attire was adjusted to a somewhat somber color. Amelia had not given up on that 'Black Demon of Delcross' concept after all.

However, in Amelia's case—due to Madame Justine's vehement opposition, arguing that a completely black dress would be too pitiful—a bold red fabric was chosen.

Regardless, it was certain that what Madame described as this year's trend was about thirty million years removed from their choice.

"I am... I am the top designer of Delcross.... I absolutely must not be branded as outdated! Think! There is no concept I can't match, no design I can't bring to life. I will definitely make it work.....!"

Madame, usually dragging his words in a teasing manner, was now absent of such tone, frantically scribbling in his design book with heavy eyes. Meanwhile, Amelia, with a satisfied expression, was sipping her warm tea beside him.

Amelia-noona, you're strong!

In many ways.

"The initial design was pretty good too, wasn't it, Sister?"

Seongjin pushed a cookie towards her as he spoke.

In fact, to Seongjin, who was a layman in design, Amelia in the initially fitted dress looked as lovely as a white blossom blooming.

Then, Amelia responded with a smile that felt somewhat bitter.

"Yes. He said the same thing. On the day I wore that dress, he told me I looked like a single rose wet with dawn's dew. Back then, I firmly believed it was sincere."

Her eyes darkened, as if recalling a distant past.

"...It's hard to explain, but, Morres. This birthday celebration is very important to me. That's why it has to be different from that time. I don't want to be the same as I was back then, doing something I would regret over and over again."

"....."

Occasionally, Amelia was like this. Worrying about things that hadn't even happened yet, speaking as if regretting a mistake from long ago.

Wondering if it might stir up a deep, unhealed wound, Seongjin found it hard to casually ask her about it.

"...This outfit will turn out well too. It will surely suit you, Sister."

"Yes, I trust Madame Justine's judgment. Anyway, I think it will take me a bit longer, would you go ahead?"

"No, I'll wait. I'll just take a look downstairs for a moment."

Leaving Amelia and the escort knight behind, Seongjin left the special room.

[Why? Is something wrong?]

The Demon King, puzzled, asked Seongjin, who moved decisively as if he had a specific goal in mind.

'Uh, there's someone downstairs who's bothering me.'

His statement about taking a look around wasn't just a casual remark. He had been feeling an irritating presence from downstairs for a while now, making him restless.

It was the presence of a rather strong aura user.

The aura activation was quite useful. It hadn't yet reached the level of a high-ranking knight, but its wild momentum was such that even the high-ranking knights of the imperial palace might have to yield.

But this wasn't a training ground or battlefield. To so openly exude a challenge, what exactly is he doing? Is this a call to fight?

As the saying goes, the heavier the ear of rice, the lower it bows, and the higher the level of cultivation, the more cautiously one tends to conceal their momentum.

Yet, in this imperial city dominated by strong aura users, the audacity of someone flaunting their presence so unabashedly was astounding. What kind of confidence did this person have?

Surely he must have sensed me or the escort knights, yet he behaves like this, is he picking a fight with me? Is that it?

[...Hey, why are you smiling like that? It's making me uneasy.....]

'What am I doing?'

[.....]

Why is this guy trembling?

As he followed the presence for a while, he heard a woman's voice shaking with fear.

"...I don't understand why you're doing this to me all of a sudden. What exactly are you asking me to say?"

A man's voice, cold enough to chill the bones, followed.

"I'm here to get a definite answer about your promise to keep silent."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't play dumb! You must have received some kind of hint from the young prince, right?"

At the end of the deserted corridor, a young man and woman faced

each other.

The woman, pale with fear, was pressed against the wall, while a robust young man, emanating a strong aura, was aggressively pressing her.

"It would be wise not to test my patience, Miss Scarcepino."

Seongjin was momentarily taken aback.

Is that guy harassing a regular person? Someone who's not an aura user would be completely intimidated without even understanding why.

Look at that, she's almost crying.

'Should I just leave it be?'

[Don't get involved. It's a matter between a man and a woman, right? Despite appearances, it could be a simple matter of jealousy.]

'...Huh?'

Sometimes, I feel the Demon King's sense of common knowledge is surprisingly close to that of humans.

'Even if it is a scene of jealousy, it seems like it could turn into a crime scene any moment, doesn't it?'

However, there was no need for Seongjin to ponder whether to intervene.

Suddenly, the young man turned around with a murderous look and growled at Seongjin.

"Stop sneaking around like a rat and get lost!"

Sssh.

A momentary surge of intangible killing intent from the man.

It was so violently aggressive that a lesser aura user might have frozen like a mouse before a snake, or even wet themselves.

Seongjin slightly stepped forward, adjusting his stance while curling the corner of his mouth.

'...Look at this guy?'

Still, seeing the young man in person, Seongjin somewhat understood his confidence.

The guy was quite young for his level of cultivation.

Moreover, the strength emanating from this young man far exceeded mere aura activation.

He belonged to what's commonly called a genius. The kind who does twice the work with the same amount of aura as others.

"Squire... no, maybe a low-ranking knight. Not bad."

The young man, surprisingly, opened his mouth as Seongjin reacted calmly, contrary to his expectations.

Turning away from the woman, he stepped forward, placing his hand on the sword at his waist, and continued.

"I commend your courage for not running away. But you're no match for me. Take the good advice and leave this place before you get in over your head."

No, but that seemed unlikely. The woman's eyes widened like lanterns, as if she recognized Seongjin.

She must be someone familiar with Morres, though he didn't know who she was.

"Why don't you ease up a bit? What are you doing, harassing someone who's not even an aura user?"

"...You'd better understand your place and pick the right battles, kid."

The young man took another step forward, increasing his intimidating presence.

The woman behind him seemed to want to say something, her face pale, barely opening her mouth, but she seemed completely overwhelmed by the man's aura, unable to speak properly.

"Hmm..."

I'm not fond of this kind of warning, but I suppose I should at least say it as a matter of courtesy.

"A warning for you. If you knew who I am, you wouldn't be acting like this."

At that, the young man let out a scoff of ridicule.

"How laughable. That's my line."

Even considering that he didn't recognize Morres' face, his confidence suggested he must be from some significant noble house.

"I never expected there to be someone in the imperial city who wouldn't recognize me. Are you a foreigner?"

"...And here I was wondering what kind of confidence you had. Turns out you're just another delusional celebrity wannabe."

"Delu... what?"

"You're not right in the head."

"...I don't give warnings twice. I don't want to waste my energy on a kid, so take the friendly advice and leave!"

Though he spoke thus, the young man, Orden, was quite flustered internally.

Externally, he seemed to be merely staring down his opponent, but inside, Orden's aura was constantly weaving and unwinding, shifting repeatedly.

From the 5th form, 8th pattern to the 7th form, 2nd pattern, then back to the 5th form, 5th pattern, and to the 8th form, 8th pattern...

Of course, he had no intention of drawing his sword right away; he merely intended to crush the arrogant youth with his presence alone.

'...It's not reaching him!'

No matter how intensely he exerted his aura, and meticulously he observed, he couldn't find an opening.

It was incomprehensible. The aura activation he felt from the boy was clearly at best that of a low-ranking knight.

The absolute difference in aura between a low-ranking knight and a high-ranking knight is more than the gap between a child and an adult.

And yet...

The boy was countering Orden's pressure effortlessly and responding appropriately. Even experienced knights within the Siegmund domain couldn't handle Orden's intensity so flexibly.

Moreover, what was most peculiar was...

'The gap is different...!'

Orden realized that the truly dangerous zone felt different from the boy's sword range.

The boy's most confident range wasn't actually the range of his sword.

'Who is this boy? Where did such a person suddenly come from?'

Orden, sweating coldly, quietly gripped the handle of his sword.

On the other hand, despite appearing relaxed on the outside, Seongjin was also internally searching for a way to resolve this uncomfortable situation.

'I still lack enough aura!'

The fact that he couldn't easily overpower such an obvious opponent

was a blow to the pride of Hunter Lee Seongjin.

He had thought that he had built up his aura quite rapidly until now, but perhaps it was still too soon to confront those who had undergone years of rigorous training.

Already, he began to feel minor pains throughout his body just from responding to the man's intensity. It meant he was overexerting his aura usage.

To face someone near the level of a high-ranking knight, Seongjin simply didn't have enough absolute aura quantity.

-The only solution to this problem might be one. Just become incredibly strong so that such exertions aren't necessary.

At the time, he thought Logan's words lacked sincerity, but in the end, Logan was right.

If the other party were to attack outright, Seongjin could have managed somehow, but this kind of battle of intensity was gradually becoming disadvantageous for him, requiring increasingly strenuous effort.

'...Damn it!'

As he adjusted his aura to match the changing intensity of the opponent, gathering aura in both arms and left leg, now his shoulders and knee joints started to creak. Seongjin became anxious.

'Will I end up getting a severe scolding from His Majesty again today?'

Swish!

Just then, as Seongjin forcefully gathered aura and momentarily experienced aura depletion, he felt a small ripple, as if lightly drenching the area around his chest.

'This is...!'

The aura filling Seongjin's pathway.

Previously, when a storm of aura was caused in the imperial palace's rear garden, His Majesty had drawn in a tremendous amount of aura. Interestingly, this aura maintained a water-like property, filling the pathway completely. It remained distinct, not mixing with the surrounding aura or the aura Seongjin was moving, maintaining its own unique characteristics.

However, this was still aura.

Until now, Seongjin had left it untouched, considering His Majesty's words.

'Maybe, just maybe...'

As Seongjin introspectively focused his will, a gentle wave rippled on the surface of the aura, and small droplets splashed up. And then,

Smoothly.

The droplets quickly dissolved into Seongjin's body, which was in a state of aura depletion.

'It's possible!'

If Seongjin so decided, he could melt these water-like auras into his own! It was as if he had an extra tank of aura to draw upon whenever needed.

-Remember, if you pull water from the canal, things on the opposite side get drawn in as well.

His Majesty had warned him so.

But,

'If it really comes down to it...'

Staring down the young man, who showed no signs of relenting, Seongjin steeled his resolve.

"Young Master Siegmund."

Suddenly, a chilling voice came from the other side.

Seongjin and the young man, who had been completely focused on each other, flinched in surprise and simultaneously turned their heads toward the direction of the sound.

".....!"

"...Sister Amelia?"

There stood someone completely unexpected.

Amelia, without any escort knight, had appeared at the end of the corridor. She surveyed the standoff for a moment before slowly beginning to walk towards them.

Click-clack.

In the quiet hallway, the only sound was that of her heels striking the floor, and the sharp aura emanating from her felt piercingly close.

"Cease your threatening posture towards my brother immediately, Young Master. Otherwise..."

Amelia stared directly at the young man, issuing a warning.

"I'll personally demonstrate how an aura-infused dress pin can become a lethal weapon."

Her voice was not just cold, but seemed to carry an icy chill.

[TL/N: Young Master Siegmund → Eldest Young Master Siegmund]

A gentle tone of voice and a compassionate smile.

Princess Amelia, who usually brought a warm breeze to the palace like a single spring rose, was now approaching them with a very unfamiliar expression on her face.

"...Princess Amelia?"

Click-clack.

Her figure, wrapped in a sharp aura as if to pierce through, resembled an ice flower extending its frosty petals in all directions. Her mineral-cold eyes bore a striking resemblance to those of the Emperor.

And so, Princess Amelia approached.

She stepped into the space between Seongjin and the young man with an indifferent expression.

Click.

".....!"

An intense, invisible clash filled the air, fraught with tension.

Even for Amelia, who had exceptional talent in aura cultivation, it must be incredibly difficult to withstand this pressure, considering she had only just surpassed the level of a beginner.

Having exchanged glances, Seongjin and the young man, as if by agreement, gradually reduced their intensity in accordance with her

movements.

Thus, when Amelia walked up to the two men, they completely withdrew their fighting spirit and ended their confrontation.

"I greet Your Highness."

The young man bowed stiffly to Amelia.

It was impossible for a noble of Delcross not to recognize this beautiful princess, especially known to be dearly cherished by the Holy Emperor.

Amelia, who had been observing him for a moment, replied in a cold voice.

"Have you forgotten whom you should first pay your respects to? If you show further disrespect to a member of the imperial family, I can no longer overlook your circumstances, Young Master."

Caught off guard by the unexpected situation, a complex look briefly crossed the young man's eyes.

The answer should be simple if it's about Amelia's brother and a member of the imperial family. Yet, he couldn't come to a quick conclusion, probably because the impression of the chubby troublemaker had changed too drastically.

After briefly gauging Amelia's mood, the young man stiffly bowed slightly to Seongjin.

"...I greet Your Highness, the Prince."

Such a stiff fellow.

"Oh well."

".....!"

Seongjin, after briefly mocking the twitching of the young man's eyebrows, turned to Amelia and asked.

"Why did you come all the way down here, sister?"

Then, she smiled softly at Seongjin.

"How could I not know when you were spreading such a presence? Sorry for interrupting at such an interesting moment, Morres. But if you had crushed the face of Eldest Young Master Siegmund like that, people would surely have blamed you for being inconsiderate against the promising heir of a border count."

".....?"

At her reply, Orden Siegmund's expression turned strange.

Although he was known among the young Delcross as the most promising genius swordsman, the princess genuinely believed her younger brother could have beaten him.

'Wow...!'

And Seongjin was purely amazed.

'Princess Amelia is so kind, even when she's angry, just like an angel!'

[...What exactly is your standard for kindness?]

Thud!

At that moment, the sound of someone collapsing to the ground was heard. It was the woman who had been threatened by the young man until recently.

Now freed from the terrifying aura, her legs had given way without her realizing.

"Ah... Ahh!"

She was completely drained, unable to even speak properly.

As she trembled and sweat, a pitiful sight, Amelia approached Seongjin and whispered in a low voice.

"Morres. I will take the Siegmund aside, so please take care of her.

Once she calms down, it would be best to take her to a private room for protection."

"...Wouldn't she feel more reassured with you, sister, if she knows you?"

At Seongjin's question, Amelia smiled awkwardly.

"I know you don't remember her. But Morres, this time, it's better for you to help her, both for her sake and in the eyes of others. After all, you are in talks of marriage with her."

...What?

"Isabella Scarcepino. Lady Scarcepino had been your fiancée for years, celebrating birthdays together."

".....!"

Ah, right, that Scarcepino!

No wonder the name sounded familiar!

While Seongjin was in shock, Amelia gracefully walked past the young man, saying,

"Then, Eldest Young Master Siegmund. Would you have a moment with me?"

The young man, who had been frowning with his mouth tightly shut, glanced at the woman on the ground with disdain before reluctantly turning away.

Please take good care of her.

Amelia gave Seongjin one more pleading look before leading the young man away.

"....."

Well, this is awkward.

Left alone with the woman, Seongjin scratched his head awkwardly

before turning to her.

"Um... hey, are you okay?"

The woman, who had been staring blankly ahead, slowly refocused her eyes. She lifted her head and looked straight at Seongjin.

"So... Lady Isabella? Can you stand up?"

As Seongjin bent down to ask, the woman's eyes widened in surprise. Then, hesitantly, she stammered,

"Ah, since when....."

"Huh?"

"Since when have you started treating me as a lady...!"

What's this? I'm trying to help, why the quarrel?

Confused, Seongjin watched as the woman suddenly started to shed tears like raindrops.

"Uh-huh-huh!"

Seongjin was startled.

Crying? Why all of a sudden? What did I do wrong?

But her words, amidst the sobbing, were astonishing.

"Why, why are you pretending to be so kind all of a sudden? Are you mocking me? Why are you doing this to me!"

"Huh?"

"Always ignoring me like that! As if I wasn't even human!"

"....."

"Why only to me? Why are there rumors that you treat that little girl so well, and not me! Uh-huh-huh!"

...I'm not sure, but it seems like another victim entangled in the troublemaker Morres's karma.

Isabella continued to cry for a while.

Seeing her state, Seongjin offered a handkerchief, which she used to blow her nose loudly.

Then she began to ramble incoherently.

"Sniff! Uh-huh! As Your Highness knows... I'm not usually like this! But just now, I was so scared and couldn't calm down... Sniff!"

It's impossible for an ordinary person to maintain composure when exposed to such a menacing aura. However, instead of explaining, Seongjin just quietly listened to her.

"Of all people, to show such a side of me to Your Highness, sob, it's just the worst! Sniff! Anyway, you must never tell anyone about today's incident, okay? Sob."

"....."

"Sob! But don't misunderstand! You know, right? I am the flower of the social circles! The elegant and noble Scarcepino!"

Wow, is that something you say about yourself?

Noticing Seongjin's evident expression, Isabella blushed and muttered.

"Ah geez! It's so embarrassing to say this myself... Thinking about it, Ricardo orabeoni seems to be out of his mind, sob."

After some time, her sobs gradually began to subside.

Just then, Seongjin sensed the approach of several people in the corridor. The chatter of guests in the dressing room was faintly audible.

Judging the distance from them, Seongjin extended his hand towards Isabella and said.

"Lady Isabella. People seem to be coming this way; you don't want to stay here, do you? It would be better to leave this place for now."

Isabella looked at Seongjin with doubtful eyes.

However, the prince's gaze, unlike before, met hers directly, fully capturing her appearance.

"...Then, let's best leave, Your Highness."

After hesitating for a moment, Isabella, fiddling with her hair and clothes, embarrassedly held Seongjin's hand with her reddened face.

Meanwhile, Amelia was leading Orden towards the entrance of Salon de Merci.

Walking in silence, Orden finally couldn't hold back and spoke first.

"Amel... just how far are we going....."

"Even in a private setting, you should maintain proper etiquette, Siegmund."

Without turning to look at Orden, Amelia cut him off with a cold voice.

"Don't be mistaken. I am now a member of the imperial family. I'm no longer that little girl locked in the attic of the count's house."

A fleeting look of dejection crossed Orden's stoic face.

"That was... all grandmother's orders. We had no choice then. I do feel sorry for you."

"....."

"But not everyone in the family agreed with that. We still cared for you....."

"I won't warn you twice. Maintain proper etiquette."

Stopping in front of the entrance, Amelia slowly turned to face Orden.

"It seems unlikely that we will ever have a private meeting again, so let me be clear now. There's no need to explain the Count Siegmund family's position to me at this point. No need to apologize either. I won't make an issue out of anything."

"....."

"Anyway, the time I spent there holds no meaning for me."

Orden's eyes wavered.

"But, I....."

"Since we seem to share the same sentiment, let's end the conversation here. I was of no significance to you either, wasn't I? Until His Majesty my father took me from there, I might as well have been non-existent in the count's family."

"....."

"Then, I'll see you at the birthday celebration. Take care on your way."

It was a cold dismissal.

Orden, with a rigid face, looked at Amelia for a moment before obediently bowing and turning away.

Ting.

After he left and the door of the entrance closed.

Only then did Amelia, her tension released, clasp her trembling hands and bite her lip.

Although she had faced him as if nothing was wrong, the shock of being exposed to the fierce clash of auras, if only for a moment, still lingered within her.

Most of all, the memories of her childhood that surfaced the moment she faced Orden.

She had said those memories meant nothing to her now, but that didn't mean the events of those times simply ceased to exist.

So, Amelia stood there for a long time, staring at the entrance where Orden had disappeared.

Until Seongjin, who had come looking for her, called her.

"Sister, why are you standing here?"

"...Morres."

Amelia turned around, her eyes wide.

"What about Lady Scarcepino? How did you come here?"

"She seemed to have calmed down, so I left. It seemed like you were taking too long."

"Were you worried? Why?"

"Why? What kind of question is that? You went off with such a violent man, how could I not be worried?"

"....."

Amelia looked at Seongjin thoughtfully for a moment.

"...I see. Right."

Soon after, as if a small realization had dawned on her and the ice was melting away, a gentle smile spread across Amelia's face.

"So, to you, I have such a clear meaning. Back then, and even today."

".....?"

"Thank you for worrying about me, Morres."

Amelia's hand, which lightly wrapped around Seongjin's arm, had completely stopped trembling by now.

Together, the two of them, arm in arm, arrived at the special room.

But when they opened the door, an unexpected scene unfolded inside. Lady Isabella was in front of the mirror, thrusting a hairpin forward with a grimace.

"Put down that aura right now! If not, I'll just use this dress pin!"

Then, seemingly dissatisfied with something, she squinted at the mirror and tilted her head.

"Hmm, this isn't right..."

She switched the hairpin to the other hand and, placing one hand on her hip, lifted her chin defiantly.

"I'll show you how this hairpin can become a weapon! So immediately... Gasp!"

She gasped in surprise upon seeing Seongjin and Amelia reflected in the mirror and hurriedly hid the hairpin behind her back. Then.

"Yikes!"

She screamed at the sight of the hairpin stuck in her arm.

"....."

Wasn't she said to be the flower of the social circles?

Could it be that standing comedy is the latest trend in the Delcross social scene?

* * *

That evening, upon returning to the townhouse, Isabella immediately sought out her second older brother, Riccardo.

Sitting in the study flipping through a book, Ricardo greeted her with his usual sly smile.

"So, you're back? How was it, my beautiful Bella, the fairest in the capital?"

"...Ah, really! Stop doing that, will you!"

Isabella, brushing off the goosebumps on her arm, opened her mouth with a serious expression.

"Actually, brother, something strange happened at the dressmaker's today."

"Strange?"

"Yes, it was about Eldest Young Master Siegmund..."

She poured out the whole story to Riccardo.

How, while fitting her dress smoothly, he suddenly demanded a clear answer. When she tried to avoid responding, he changed and began to threaten her.

"...I'm sure he must have heard something about you, brother... Are you listening, brother?"

Noticing Riccardo's unnaturally calm demeanor, Isabella asked with puzzlement.

Then, as always, he smiled gently and whispered quietly to his younger sister.

"Yes, I'm glad you're back safe. Now, let it all go and rest easy. Isabella."

"Here is the list of the missing persons from the Heresy Tribunal you asked for, Your Highness."

Seongjin, flipping through the documents Dasha handed him, remarked,

"The number is smaller than I expected?"

"Yes. Considering the scale of the incident, there were almost no unidentified bodies."

Seongjin nodded his head as he reviewed the materials.

Initially, he had requested her to investigate Priest Hayes, but even after several days, the results were not as fruitful as expected.

It was said that he came to the capital with only a single letter of recommendation from a rural countryside church. And, since he was assigned to the Heresy Tribunal almost at the end of the Dark Sect's purge, it was impossible to find any significant connection between him and the remnants of the Dark Sect.

Moreover, Hayes was known to be extremely taciturn. Not only did he lack personal connections, but he also hardly communicated for work purposes, being thoroughly isolated even within the Heresy Tribunal.

'However, it was definitely not a feat he could have accomplished alone...'

Considering Jonathan's case, at least four people were involved: one heresy interrogator, two guards who beat him, and one priest who was recording the statements.

Furthermore, considering that most of the prisoners in the underground dungeon were Grey Plague patients, it's possible that more than one or two teams were involved.

There were undoubtedly colleagues of Hayes, or perhaps a separate group unrelated to him, existing within the Heresy Tribunal.

'And now that their plan has gone awry, they've likely already fled.'

With Cardinal Benitus fervently rooting out the Dark Sect, remaining in the Heresy Tribunal was tantamount to suicide.

Seongjin focused on the list of missing persons for this reason.

"Wolfgang, a junior priest, Clemens, a junior priest, Inquisitor Fabian... Hmm."

After reviewing the list of nine missing persons, Seongjin picked out five and handed them to Dasha.

"Let's start by looking into these individuals."

Among the missing was one Inquisitor, plus a list of four priests assigned before and after the outbreak of the Grey Plague.

"Yes, Your Highness. I'll get started right away."

"Ah, honestly, I wonder what good all this is..."

"Pardon?"

"...Ah, never mind. Just talking to myself."

In truth, his motivation for the investigation had hit rock bottom lately.

The Holy Emperor and the Twins probably knew the whole story. He even thought that Arenja, despite being a part of their group, might know their identities or at least the extent of their organization.

But when he asked Bruno, the leader of Arenja, for information about this, the response sent by Arenja was as follows:

– It's not yet the time.

According to Bruno, who had a short career as Arenja, it seems there's some kind of backlash involved in revealing information that goes beyond mere manpower. And the resulting consequences could never be good.

'So, they mean to say, do what you can for now, right?'

No, it's like digging in vain while the answer is right in front of him.

Seongjin was grumbling to himself when Dasha, who was gathering the documents and about to stand up, suddenly hesitated and turned back to Seongjin.

"Your Highness, this is purely my personal curiosity, but..."

"Yes?"

"You've been wearing that outfit a lot lately. Is it your preference?"

"Oh, this?"

Seongjin tugged at the hem of his garment.

"Does it look a bit flashy to you too, Dasha?"

Indeed, Seongjin was wearing the latest creation from Madame Justine. It was a splendidly colorful outfit adorned with vibrant butterfly patterns.

"It may look a bit much, but it's surprisingly comfortable."

Excluding the banquet clothes tailored for his birthday celebration, this was probably the most recent outfit he had tailored.

Madame Justine's craftsmanship was quite exceptional, so despite the numerous elaborate decorations, it was the most comfortable and best-fitting among Seongjin's clothes.

'Besides, I've been growing lately.'

Regrettably, though it hadn't been long since it was made, the ankles

and sleeves were already showing signs of becoming too short.

That's why, determined to get his money's worth, he wore it constantly within the Pearl Palace.

"Why? Does it look that bad?"

"No, not at all. I just thought it was a very futuristic design and got curious."

Dasha backed away, dripping cold sweat.

"You can be honest with me, Dasha."

Seongjin gave her a warm smile.

"Like a crazy Brittanian, or a clown from Bertrand Street, or a heretic if I just add flowers to my head..."

"...Ah, no, not at all! I'll report back as soon as there's progress in the investigation! Please rest easy, Your Highness!"

As Dasha hurriedly left the room, Seongjin tilted his head and examined his outfit.

'Do you think it looks that strange too?'

[It is a bit avant-garde, isn't it?]

Certainly, to Seongjin, who was no expert in design, the butterfly pattern did seem overly modern.

He had heard that Salon de Mercier had a separate staff member who specialized in drawing designs, but he wondered who could have created such a design.

* * *

"Wow! Did you guys see? Eldest Young Master Siegmund himself visited our dressmaking room today!"

Inside the sewing room, brightly lit as if it were midday, even at night.

The employees of Salon de Merci were busy gossiping while catching up on their overdue overnight tasks.

"Isn't he as splendid as the rumors say? He has an aura that's just different from ordinary people."

"How can the wolf crest of his family suit him so well?"

"I'm so jealous that he was escorted by that person. I would love to be Isabella Scarcepino, even for just one day!"

Then, a young lady, who had been quietly listening to their chatter, let out a soft laugh.

"Hehe. You guys have nothing to be envious of."

"Yi-seo, aren't you jealous?"

"No, not at all."

Yi-seo, as she was called, put down the design she was working on and lifted her head.

She had an exotic appearance with uncommon black hair and deep brown eyes, a rarity in Delcross.

"Unfortunately, the chance will not come to Miss Scarcepino. She's cast in the role of the jealous villainess."

"Jealous... what?"

The employees looked at her, baffled.

Seo Yi-seo. She was a new recruit at Salon de Mercier, having settled in the Imperial Capital not long ago. Sometimes, she would make strange remarks that were hard to understand in the context of Delcross's common sense. The employees usually brushed them off as her hometown's style of humor.

"Most importantly, she's not the Eldest Young Master's type."

"...And how would you know Eldest Young Master Siegmund's ideal

type?"

"Yeah. The lady from the Scarcepino family is one of the most beautiful women in the capital."

The employees' questions, tinged with disbelief, were met with a relaxed smile from Seo Yi-seo.

"The type that someone like him likes is always specific. Someone pure and kind-hearted, yet occasionally surprising in unexpected ways."

"...Surprising? How so?"

"Hmm, let's see? Maybe by falling in front of him at an unexpected moment, or spilling tea."

"What?"

"Or perhaps by getting drunk and crying, or suddenly slapping his cheek?"

The employees, who had been eagerly listening for any useful information, let out a deflated sigh.

What? Slapping the youngmasters' cheek just like that?

He's one of the most promising swordsmen on the continent and a noble from the North. They'd be lucky not to be beheaded on the spot.

"Kikiki. Yi-seo sometimes says really weird things."

The employees burst into laughter at the seemingly absurd joke, then picked up their sewing materials again.

"Remember? Yi-seo did the same during the last parade. What did she say? That Prince Logan is really handsome but his character is too good, which makes him unattractive?"

"What? Is that true?"

"Hmph. It's a matter of personal taste. Please respect it."

Seo Yi-seo replied demurely and buried her nose back into the design she was working on.

"So, Yi-seo, do you prefer someone like Eldest Young Master Siegmund then? The cold, bad-boy type?"

"Well, maybe? He did look quite handsome today. But it was unexpected that the cold Northern young lord didn't have black hair."

"...?"

What does the Northern young lord's hair color have to do with anything?

The employees were confused, but then, as if struck by a sudden thought, Seo Yi-seo chuckled.

"More than that, I was surprised to see Prince Morres today. Reading about someone and seeing them in person are quite different. Maybe he's more my type? Looks like I've got a case of the second male lead syndrome."

"What?"

The employees stopped their sewing in unison and stared at her.

Is she serious right now?

"Do you even know what kind of person Prince Morres is?"

"Well... there's a difference between someone with bad-boy charm and a total scoundrel, right?"

They realized that Yi-seo, being new to Delcross, might not be aware of all the local nuances.

Pitying glances were thrown Yi-seo's way.

"Hehe, who knows?"

Undeterred, Yi-seo went back to her sketching.

"He might act like a scoundrel on the outside, but deep down, he could be someone who has carried great inner wounds since childhood. Eventually, he might be drawn to a woman who truly understands his pain."

"...Inner wounds?"

The employees exchanged bewildered glances.

Her fabrications are getting more elaborate with every telling.

"Oops! I might be causing character destruction here. I'm just too chatty today."

"...?"

"Well, talking about this now is pointless."

After completing another butterfly wing in her design, she added with a confident smile.

"Anyway, you'll all find out after the birthday celebration ends."

* * *

Emerald Palace.

This splendid detached palace, where the Second Queen Melody resided, was a beautiful place with a lush green garden and a small glass greenhouse.

Having returned to the Imperial Palace after a long time for some rest, Sisle lay sprawled on a couch in the greenhouse, idling away the entire morning.

"Hey, Sisle."

Melody, gently stroking her daughter's silver hair, spoke soothingly.

"It's nice to spend time with you after so long, but shouldn't you start getting ready soon? Your audience with His Majesty is approaching."

However, Sisle, with her face buried in the pillow and eyes closed,

did not move an inch.

"It's not just today, is it? We can postpone it."

"But, dear. You've been away from the palace for so long. It's a rare audience, and His Majesty might feel neglected."

"I already paid my respects upon my return. Besides, His Majesty is busy with audiences with diplomatic delegations and such. Seeing him once should be enough."

Unable to persuade her stubborn daughter, Melody sighed softly.

"Really, when did children grow up so fast? It feels like just yesterday you clung to His Majesty's robes all day."

"....."

"You know, Sisle? When you were little, you hardly wanted to walk on your own. You always insisted on being in your father's arms. His Majesty had such a hard time separating you from him whenever he had to attend state meetings."

Lying still, receiving Melody's caresses, Sisle slowly blinked her eyes.

Her childhood memories were always similar.

Herself, toddling after the sunlit, gleaming hem of the imperial robes.

And occasionally, the Holy Emperor turning back to check on her.

If only she could return to those times.....

"Your Majesty, Your Highness."

At that moment, a servant approached swiftly, bowed, and said,

"A letter from the southern front."

He then respectfully presented a small tray with a white envelope to Sisle.

Melody, visibly excited, asked,

"Oh my, is it from Prince Owen again?"

"Yes, it's a letter personally addressed to the Princess."

Sisle sat up on the couch and, with a slightly eager heart, unfolded the letter.

+ + +

—To Sisle.

I heard you embarked on a long journey. With the birthday celebration approaching, you must have returned to the Imperial Palace by now.

Regrettably, I won't be able to return for the celebration this time. The situation in the southern front is stable, but the atmosphere here is still a bit too tense for me to leave.

We've just started interacting with the Volanta tribe.[1] Chieftain Chikutaruku seems quite dignified and wise, and I believe we can maintain a good relationship with them.

However, the response from other tribal leaders around us is not so friendly, and there's always a risk of conflict reigniting.

It's not much of a consolation, but I'll send a gift to father and you soon.

P.S. Always take care of yourself. If anything happens, don't forget to consult with Imperial Father.

+ + +

Melody, who had been reading the letter alongside, smiled gently.

"How thoughtful of him to care for you so deeply. It's truly heartwarming."

However, Sisle's expression darkened as she finished reading the letter.

Owen-orabeoni, did you know this?

Sometimes I'm terribly afraid of His Majesty.

T/N:

1. First mentioned in Chapter64[↔]

120

Crack! Whoosh!

The last Nurumachi on the plains fell to the ground, scattering thick blood. Boom!

Woohoo! With a long, drawn-out cry, the massive beast struggled briefly before shivering and collapsing into silence.

Owen gasped for breath as he watched the scene. Soon, a notification window blinks into existence before him.

[Daily Quest – Nurumachi Hunt (Completed)]

[Quest Grade: D]

[Summary: Just because the quest is completed with one Nurumachi, you've been sparingly hunting one per day. Don't you think it's a waste of time and energy to travel back and forth to the hunting grounds? How about showing more initiative in improving your surroundings, rather than just focusing on rewards?]

[Completion Grade: D]

[Reward: 320(-40)P Cash]

[*This item can be used in the Pangea Chronicle Shop.]

Owen closed the window, suppressing the surge of anger within him.

This damn status window. If it initially offered 360 cash, it should give 360!

Why reduce the reward for a daily quest?

'I almost spent all my cash on the gift I'm sending...'

He wanted to vent, but this capricious status window could reduce rewards further if it sensed his displeasure.

Once, thinking it wouldn't understand if he swore in Varsha instead of the imperial language, still deducted his reward. Frustrated but unable to express it, Owen kicked the lifeless Nurumachi.

It had been three years since he left the Imperial Palace, guided by the whims of the status window.

Once a naive country boy, Owen had now grown into a robust young warrior. Years under the hot southern sun had toughened him, his physique intimidating even to seasoned Varsha warriors. Who would believe he was just over 17?

As he was tying back his disheveled hair, someone called out his name from a distance.

"...Owen! Owen!"

It was a Varsha warrior, his long braided hair ornately decorated with cormorant feathers.

Chikudanka of Volanta.

He was Chikudanka, the son of the tribal chief Chikutaruku and a recent friend Owen had made. Considering the number of feathers in his hair, signifying his valor, Chikudanka was undoubtedly a strong warrior himself.

As Chikudanka approached and noticed the massive beast lying dead on the ground, his eyes widened in awe.

"Did you hunt the Nurumachi alone again today! I hurried to lend a hand, but you are truly remarkable!"

"Haha. This marks the end for today, Chikudanka. There are no more Nurumachi left on these plains now."

The Nurumachi, ferocious beasts, had ravaged the plains and decimated prey populations. The Volanta tribe had suffered from these beasts since childhood, so Chikudanka's emotions, as he gazed

at the last Nurumachi, seemed especially poignant.

"Owen, you once said that alongside the warriors of our Volanta tribe, we would reclaim the glorious hunting grounds of our ancestors."

"Yes, I did say that. We will drive away the beasts of this land and expand the horizons of Volanta."

"That's why our tribe decided to stand with you. Having single-handedly eliminated all the Nurumachi of the plains, even the skeptical elders can no longer doubt your words."

"I assure you, Chikudanka. You will witness even more astonishing feats in the future."

As he spoke, a new notification window blinked into existence before Owen.

[New daily quests available.]

[new! Daily Quest – Koratila Hunt (Repeatable)]

Well, following these quests, it seemed he would inevitably have to eradicate all the beasts of this land.

Soon, Owen and Chikudanka began to dismantle the beast. Skilfully, they cut off the Nurumachi's horns, skinned it, and extracted its tendons and marrow.

As his hands moved repetitively, Owen's thoughts wandered.

He had hoped to visit Delcross at least once this year, now that the front had stabilized...

'I wonder if the gift I sent has arrived by now?'

He missed the Holy Emperor, his siblings, and Sisle back in Delcross.

Ah, except for that rascal Morres.

However, the small window in his peripheral vision continued to

display a dishearteningly low achievement rate.

[Main Stream 2 – Progress 13%]

It seemed his return to the Imperial Palace was still far off. Owen sighed softly.

As Chikudanka peeled tendons from the Nurumachi's leg, he spoke up.

"I always think this, Owen, but for someone from the Empire, you're surprisingly adept at hunting. I've seen many Imperials, but none as skilled in handling prey as a Delcross warrior like you."

"Those warriors you're talking about are probably mostly knights dispatched from the capital."

"So, you're different?"

"My parents were both skilled hunters. Although I was young, I must have learned a lot by watching them."

Chikudanka, puzzled, asked, "But Owen, aren't you the eldest son of a tribal chief? I heard the current tribal chief of Delcross isn't a hunter, but the most powerful shaman of the tribe."

"Haha, yes. The tribal chief of Delcross is another father to me."

Owen paused his work and looked up at the distant horizon.

"My parents passed away when I was young. My father now, the tribal chief of Delcross, is my esteemed foster father."

[Chikudanka called the Holy Emperor as tribal chief here and shaman probably because Nate has the most divine powers in the entire Delcross.]

Tap, tap.

Seongjin quickly stepped back to dodge a sword strike, then

hesitated, halting his movement too late. Masain, who had been pressuring Seongjin, also stopped his attack and stared at him perplexedly.

"You're widening the gap too much again, Your Highness."

Masain tilted his head in confusion.

"It's strange. I haven't had much practice in sparring, so I wonder where this habit comes from."

"Hmm....."

Seongjin scratched his head with an awkward expression. It seemed challenging to completely shake off the habits developed over decades of battling giant monsters in a short period.

Recently, Masain had started giving him swordsmanship lessons and occasionally sparring with him.

While sparring with Masain, Seongjin realized that he still found hand-to-hand combat more comfortable in a one-on-one fight. When facing an opponent with a sword, he involuntarily tensed up, often disrupting the flow of the exchange.

Moreover, when he wielded a sword, he found himself reverting to habits formed while battling giant monsters, swinging it as if it were a monster's tentacle.

It appeared Seongjin wasn't a natural swordsman like the Holy Emperor or Logan. While he found sword practice enjoyable, his progress in swordsmanship was slower compared to his advancement in aura cultivation.

'And when I think about it, even my aura cultivation feels like I'm using some kind of shortcut..'

Logan had mentioned it. Seongjin's way of manipulating aura seemed different from that of other Delcross people.

His rapid accumulation of aura layers might be because he handled aura more easily than others, almost like a monster's energy.

'Well, there's only one solution.'

Repetitive practice.

Resolute, Seongjin gripped his practice sword tightly and charged at Masain again.

"...The more I watch, the more perplexing it gets."

Kurt muttered as he observed the sparring session between the prince and Masain. Vincent, a knight recently dispatched from the 1st Knight Division, looked at him curiously.

"Is there a problem? Initially, he seemed a bit lost, but now he seems quite accustomed to sparring."

Kurt crossed his arms, deep in thought, responding to Vincent's question.

"Not sure if that can be called being lost..."

Kurt often found Prince Morres's training sessions peculiar. Although Morres appeared to be a beginner in handling a sword, there were moments when an odd sense of experience shone through him.

There was a familiar ease in combat situations, a comfort in the midst of battle.

Kurt initially thought that the prince's previous unruly behavior might have included some fighting. He didn't consider it significant at first.

His suspicion that something was unusual started when the prince began sparring with Sir Masain. Specifically, after recognizing the distance Prince Morres maintained during combat.

Prince Morres had a habit of suddenly closing the gap from a seemingly safe distance, diving deep into the attack at what he perceived as the right moment. His swordplay might have been clumsy, but this agility was indeed impressive.

Additionally, when Sir Masain attacked, instead of clashing swords,

the prince would swiftly move backward, significantly widening the gap.

It seemed more like a movement pattern familiar with fighting something much larger than a human, not a person-to-person combat style.

Yes, it reminded him of the movements of hunters who roamed near the Northern Demon Borders, hunting large beasts.

Initially, the sparring sessions did not progress well. Before the swords could clash, the prince reflexively kept widening the distance.

After several repetitions, the prince slowly adapted to the new distance. Soon enough, he was able to exchange blows with Sir Masain, an advanced knight, for extended periods.

What Sir Vincent perceived as 'wandering' was actually the prince diligently adjusting to the combat distance.

"...And yet, His Highness has never been completely overpowered."

Despite the absolute gap in skill and experience between an advanced knight and a junior knight, the prince strangely seemed to have an ease in dealing with Sir Masain.

Even in situations where he was overwhelmingly on the defensive, Sir Masain couldn't completely break down that last bit of composure from the young prince.

However, Kurt had witnessed firsthand how Prince Morres's demeanor changed when he truly intended to strike with his sword.

In the basement of the Digory estate, he had seen the young prince thrust his sword like lightning into the vital spot of an indescribable monster.

What would happen if the young prince turned that clear intent to kill and the tip of his sword towards a person?

After an intense morning training session, Seongjin couldn't help but chuckle as he entered the dining room for lunch. There, as if it were

the most natural thing in the world, Logan and Amelia were already seated together.

At this rate, Sisle might become a regular at lunch too.

And Logan's eyes visibly shook with shock upon seeing Seongjin's flamboyant butterfly-patterned indoor robe for the first time.

"That... What bizarre thing is that?"

Ah, seeing his disgusted face makes me want to tease him a bit.

Seongjin, with a mischievously wicked smile, approached Logan and spread his arms wide to display the butterfly pattern more prominently.

"How about it? Pretty cool, right?"

"Are you serious?"

"Of course. Don't you see this trendsetting fashion sense? Just wait and see. By next year, the whole capital will be covered in these butterfly patterns!"

"...Good heavens, Almighty."

Logan murmured with a pale face.

That guy, not particularly devout, is invoking the Almighty. I'm somewhat looking forward to his reaction if the Brittany-style volant skirt becomes a trend in Delcross soon.

Seongjin chuckled and turned around.

But he had to stop abruptly as Logan suddenly reached out and swiftly grabbed the hem of his robe.

"Hey!"

Caught off guard by the sudden pull on his robe, Seongjin grabbed his throat, struck by the collar.

"What the hell, Logan! What's with the sudden move?"

As Seongjin turned around in irritation, Logan's face had hardened into a rigid expression.

"Where did you get this robe from?"

"Huh?"

"Why does it have the Dilerial butterfly on it?"

"...What?"

Seongjin blinked, slowly realizing the implication of Logan's words, and was shocked. Quickly flipping the hem of his robe to inspect it, he soon let out an incredulous laugh.

"...It really is?"

The unique patterns, hidden among the wings of the tiger butterflies, were hard to notice at first glance.

But those eye-like patterns amidst the various wings closely resembled the wings of the Dilelaria butterfly mentioned in the apocalyptic texts of another world.

"...Salon de Merci."

Facing Logan's serious gaze, Seongjin spoke with emphasis.

"We need to find the designer of these patterns there."

[TL/N: I've never once thought that any mention of butterflies would even be important until now. When Madame Justine was 1st introduced in the story, you can find that he had already shown his preference for butterflies patterns in his design as early in Chapter 59. Also, read Chapter 110 again for description on Dilelaria butterfly, if you can't remember about it.]

Seo Yi-seo halted in surprise as she opened the newly spawned white door in front of her.

She had just installed and launched the MyHome mode, but unexpectedly, there was a stranger in the room that should have been empty.

"Who are you? How did you get in here? I haven't invited anyone..."

However, the intruder did not respond to her questions and, seemingly enchanted, looked around the room, murmuring.

"...Sturdy and beautiful."

His voice carried a heavy resonance.

The man was tall, wearing a half-mask, with long, partially grey hair and draped in flowing robes resembling a priest's garb. The wrinkles on the lower part of his face, visible below the mask, suggested he was not particularly young.

Fluttering around him were a couple of blue butterflies.

"...Are you from Impulse Soft? Even if it's an internal alpha test, illegally entering a private space is not allowed! Hey, are you listening?"

Seo Yi-seo called out, wary.

But the man ignored her and walked towards a bookshelf on one side of the room. He started to gently caress the books as if they were precious treasures.

"Amazing. A dimension formed by just a small house. To think such a tiny Imaginary World could actually exist. I've traveled through

dimensions for so long, but this is a first for me..."

After enjoying the texture of the books for a while, the man finally looked directly at Seo Yi-seo and asked,

"Are you the ruler of this dimension? How exactly did you create this space?"

What? Ruler?

"...I just installed the MyHome expansion pack. If you're from Impulse Soft and interested, why not apply for the alpha test yourself?"

"Speaking as if anyone could do it. Then why didn't such tiny Imaginary Worlds exist until now?"

Not fully understanding what the man meant by 'Imaginary Worlds', but assuming he was referring to virtual spaces, Seo Yi-seo responded thoughtfully.

"Well, the MyHome expansion pack was just recently developed."

"Heh..."

The man let out a hollow laugh, seeming incredulous.

The number of butterflies had increased, fluttering and rising as if responding to his laughter.

"Then, one last question for you. Why are the laws that govern this world the same as those over there?"

"Over there?"

"That noisy and flamboyant world. I'm talking about the dimension of Pangea Chronicle. The scale and mass of objects, their texture, the flow of time... everything is identical."

Seo Yi-seo frowned.

What? Isn't this man from Impulse Soft?

"That's because it uses the same Homunculus Integrated Engine. The

physics engine is the same."

"Engine... yes, they call it an engine... Such sturdy and beautiful rules!"

The man sighed softly and then closed his eyes, deeply inhaling as if to savor every particle of air in the room.

Maybe I should report this to the company first.

As Seo Yi-seo pondered this, the man opened his eyes and strode toward her. Startled, she instinctively stepped back.

"What are you doing all of a sudden?"

"This meeting must be some kind of fate. I'd like to make you the protagonist of my new chronicle."

"...What?"

Confused by his statement, Seo Yi-seo questioned him, and the man's lips curved into a long smile beneath his half-mask.

"Seems like a fortunate coincidence, as you appear to enjoy such stories quite a bit."

Surprisingly, the man now held several books taken from the shelf, all of which were Seo Yi-seo's linked e-books.

– The Obsessive Male Lead and the Fake Saintess.

– The Saintess Tames the Demon King.

– I'm an Unintentional Saintess Managing a Love-Harem, Is There a Problem?

Seo Yi-seo's cheeks flushed red.

These were her cherished collections, but her skewed reading preferences weren't something she was particularly proud to show others.

However, the man's next words made her eyes widen in disbelief.

"Recently, I've become quite sensitive, so I believe I can create a story well-suited to you. How about it? Would you grace my new story by becoming its saintess?"

...Saintess?

And then.

Suddenly, a swarm of blue-winged butterflies filled her vision, appearing as if from nowhere.

* * *

Summoning a citizen of the Imperial Capital as a reference in an investigation requires certain procedures.

It must be done through specific law enforcement agencies such as the Capital City Guard or the Heresy Tribunal, and the reason and basis for the summons must be clearly stated in a document.

Although they could directly go to Salon de Merci and inquire, Masain explained the potential for it to look like wrongful harassment in the eyes of others. Additionally, if the designer attempted to flee, having a legal method to detain them was crucial.

'Masain, always sticking to formalities...'

Seongjin found it a bit cumbersome but agreed that it was likely necessary to use force in bringing the person in question.

So, he, along with Masain and a few resident knights, visited the Capital City Guard.

"So you suspect that an employee of the dressmaking shop might be linked to the previous monster incidents?"

The captain of the City Guard asked with reluctance upon Seongjin's request for deployment.

"Yes. This is a matter of great importance, potentially threatening the safety of the Imperial Capital, so I earnestly request the active cooperation of the City Guard."

Masain, adding weight from the side, and Seongjin firmly pressed the issue.

"Most importantly, the use of a monster from the banned book 'Otherworld Apocalypse' in the design is critical. Depending on the investigation, it might even need to be escalated to the Heresy Tribunal."

The mention of the Heresy Tribunal prompted the City Guard captain to straighten up and nod in agreement.

"Understood. We will deploy the City Guard. But..."

"Yes?"

"Whose peculiar garment is this?"

The City Guard captain looked at the butterfly-patterned outfit Seongjin had brought as evidence, his face slightly queasy.

"Oh, it's mine. Why?"

"....."

The captain's gaze on Seongjin shifted from seeing him as a troublesome ruffian to regarding him as an eccentric of the highest order.

What? Can't he recognize this high-level fashion sense? Huh?

[...You were the one who despised it the most at first.]

I grew fond of it after wearing it a while. After all, comfort is key in clothing.

In any case, the captain provided Seongjin with ten personnel, including three armed knights.

Thus, leading the City Guard troops arrayed at the entrance of the building, Seongjin couldn't help but smile contentedly.

'Feels quite reassuring to have the force of law on my side, doesn't it?'

But then, the very guards who seemed so sturdy were startled upon seeing Seongjin's face, each avoiding his gaze!

What's with them?

[Have you forgotten how you roughed up some City Guards recently?]

Tsk, did I unknowingly make enemies with the law enforcement?

While heading to Salon de Merci, Seongjin soon joined up with Logan waiting for him at the entrance to Deste Street.

"The Orthodox Church suggests that it would be better to directly transfer the employee to the Heresy Tribunal for interrogation."

Despite his status, Logan was currently affiliated with the Saint Bastian Paladin Order. Therefore, his official activities had to be reported and approved by the Church and the Knight Order Commander.

Having left earlier to visit the Knight Order, Logan returned not alone, but followed by a group of paladins dressed in the white uniforms of the Knight Order.

The blue swords and lilies embroidered on their uniforms indicated they were from the Saint Bastian Order, and their faces were uniformly stern, lips pressed into straight lines. They were as serious as rumored, notoriously hard to communicate with.

"And thankfully, the Knights of Lilium have voluntarily come to assist."

As Logan began to explain about them, the faces of the Knights of Lilium seemed to soften from their previously rigid expressions.

"I tried to decline their offer, but they insisted on stepping forward for the sake of the capital. They truly are exemplary paladins, serving the citizens."

"Uh, right..."

Seongjin's response was lukewarm. The knights' gazes towards Logan's back seemed to shine with admiration, almost as if they were shooting beams of light.

Rather than exemplars of paladins, they seemed more like fervent fans of Logan. Or was that just his impression?

In any case, leading a larger group than expected, Seongjin arrived at Salon de Merci.

The sudden appearance of numerous knights in front of the capital's most famous dressmaking shop caught the attention of passersby, who stopped to watch curiously.

With Madame Justine absent, a manager appeared instead and politely inquired about their purpose.

"Ah, you mean the designer of that pattern. That would be an employee named Seo Yi-seo."

Apparently, she was an employee Madame Justine had brought in out of the blue, with no significant credentials.

Her hiring seemed suspicious, almost as if Madame himself might need to be questioned.

"She's currently on duty. I'll bring her right away, Your Highness."

The manager bowed respectfully and left.

Seo Yi-seo.

Seongjin furrowed his brow with a sense of unease as he heard the name 'Seo Yi-seo,' which sounded familiar yet somewhat foreign to him.

Soon after, guided by another employee, a woman appeared at the shop entrance. She paused briefly upon seeing the people lined up in front of the shop, then gently lifted the hem of her skirt in an elegant manner.

"My name is Seo Yi-seo."

The pattern designer was younger than Seongjin had expected.

She had a modest yet pretty face with black hair and a distinctly familiar Asian appearance. Her demure approach, eyes cast down as she walked towards them, made her seem almost pious, causing Seongjin to doubt for a moment if she really could be involved in the monster incident.

'...Wait a minute?'

Seongjin was struck by an odd sense of *déjà vu*.

—"Do you have a type, brother? I think I'm a bit attracted to women with black hair and exotic looks."[1]

Suddenly, he remembered Sisle's words.

As he stared at the woman with a strange premonition, she turned her head towards Seongjin and smiled faintly.

'What's this?'

Feeling inexplicably irritated, Seongjin frowned, but the woman had already approached the group and bowed her head politely.

"I always thought the Imperial Palace would come looking for me someday. All this is guided by Saint Gracia."

At her words, a tingling sensation seemed to prick Seongjin's heart.

'...What's this?'

Confused by the sudden turn of events, Seongjin clenched his jaw and glared at her.

Meanwhile, passersby began to gather around Salon de Mercier, drawn by the commotion.

Seongjin, sensing a strange shift in the atmosphere, looked around to find not only the passersby but also the City Guards and the Knights of Liliun, as if entranced, staring at the woman.

With an uneasy feeling, he turned back towards her just as she spoke again.

"However, it seems there's a misunderstanding, and I wish to prove my innocence first. I swear to the [Supreme Deity] that I have done no wrong."

Another peculiar wave rippled through Seongjin's chest as she spoke.

"....."

In the suddenly quiet Deste Street, as if a spell had been cast, everyone around, including Seongjin's group, stared at the woman with their mouths agape. Even Masain seemed entranced, his usually alert face blank with bewilderment.

Only Logan looked at the woman with a shocked expression, quickly turning to Seongjin with a grave look.

"Haha..."

The woman, Seo Yi-seo, wore a serene smile as if she had anticipated this situation. After briefly scanning the group, she declared in a melodious voice,

"To prove my innocence, I request a trial of ordeal here, with all present as witnesses. I am willing to undergo the 'Saintess's Trial'."

Another subtle ripple spread out. Amidst the stunned silence of the crowd, Seongjin blinked in confusion.

Why? What exactly is the 'Saint's Trial'?

[Seongjin.]

Then, the Demon King whispered softly.

[It's clear. That woman, she's a being from an Imaginary World.]

...What?

T/N:

1. Chapter 115[↵]

122

Saintess Gracia of Servitude.

She lived over 700 years ago, a woman likened to an angel for devoting her life to serving those in need. She shared her bread with the poor and, with her limited knowledge, prepared herbal remedies for the sick.

One day, a plague struck her village. Despite Gracia's best efforts to care for the people, some tragically died. Subsequently, a villager accused her of witchcraft, leading to her being reported to the heresy tribunal.

"What? Why accuse someone who helped?"

"Well, it was a long time ago. They believed the plague was a curse from a witch, and falsely claimed she was the source from the start."

Gracia faced three trials ordered by the inquisitor. She was thrown into a cold riverbed, made to walk over hot coals, and submerged in boiling oil.

However, due to the divine care of the merciful Lord, admiring her pure heart, Gracia safely passed these trials and was eventually acquitted, returning home. The villager who falsely accused her was struck by lightning as punishment from the Lord.

Even after this ordeal, Gracia continued to serve people throughout her life. On her deathbed, she left this testament:

"Should danger ever befall blessed Delcross, I will be reborn time and again to serve the Kingdom of the Lord."

Her noble will was recognized by later generations, and the Orthodox Church canonized her as a saint.

Currently, one of the five orders of knights, inheriting her legacy and valuing [Sacrifice] as a virtue, conducts missionary work. This is none other than the Order of Saint Gracia.

The trials she faced—of water, fire, and oil—became known as the "Trials of the Saintess."

"Since then, occasionally, some challenge these three trials to prove their faith and innocence," Logan explained.

Seongjin frowned upon hearing this.

Not even a triathlon, and they choose to challenge this? That's insane.

"So, are these trials actually passable?"

To Seongjin's question, Logan shook his head.

"Since her time, no one has successfully completed these trials. The very first trial is impossible to endure."

The trial of water requires one's body not to float to the surface when submerged in a river. The logic is that those whose souls are pawned to the devil weigh less spiritually, and thus, cannot help but float.

Well, one might think that with adept use of aura concealment or strong divine power, it could be possible, but the real challenge is the duration. A person is thrown into the water and must be submerged for two to three hours.

"Even if someone is skilled in using aura or possesses strong divine power, no one can survive without breathing underwater for more than two hours."

Inevitably, they either come up for air or drown. Those who survive this face the trials of fire and oil, only to suffer terrible burns and death.

So why do people still request these trials?

The reason is clear. Rather than dying slowly under the prolonged torture of the heresy tribunal, they prefer a swift suicide.

"The problem is that the will to undertake the Saintess's Trials is still respected. Once a woman declares her intention to undergo the trials, she cannot be interrogated or tortured until the trials are over."

Seongjin looked up at Seo Yi-seo, who was walking ahead at a distance.

Surrounded by the capital's guards, she maintained a demure posture, her hands clasped over her chest, even while being escorted. For someone seeking suicide, she was remarkably composed.

What could her true intentions be?

"Seongjin, do you know this?"

Logan, who had been gazing at him, suddenly asked.

"The reason why Sisle was unanimously declared a saint by the Orthodox Church despite her young age?"

"Huh? I heard it was because of her strong divine power. Is there another reason?"

As Seongjin looked puzzled, Logan continued in a calm tone.

"It probably happened when Sisle was around seven. One day, stigmata appeared on her body. These were the same marks said to have been acquired by Saintess Gracia during her trial by fire."

After Gracia's death, there had been several instances where young women developed such stigmata.

Since these women possessed immense divine power, the Orthodox Church believed it to be the realization of the saintess's will to be reborn. Therefore, each of them was consecrated as a saintess and dedicated their lives to serving the faithful.

Then one day, a clear divine symbol was engraved on the soles of the youngest princess, who had peacefully woken from her sleep. The Orthodox Church acknowledged Sisle as the reincarnation of Saintess Gracia.

"If, by some rare chance, that woman actually passes all of the Saintess's Trials..."

Logan's voice trailed off, worry evident on his face.

I have a feeling I know what he's worried about.

"Needless to say, that woman will be regarded as the reincarnation of Gracia and become a saintess. And then..."

"She might be required by the Orthodox Church to prove the same thing, right?"

"Yes."

Logan nodded towards Seongjin, his eyes deepening with concern.

"I just hope it's an unfounded worry."

[Yi-seo's POV]

Hi? My name is Seo Yi-seo.

I'm just a regular employee at a gaming company who loves romance fantasy novels!

One day, I found myself inside the world of a novel.

It's a high-class romance action fantasy adventure, where the beautiful and strong protagonist, the reincarnation of the noble Saintess Gracia, teams up with charming male leads to save the world from menacing enemies!

...Or so it was supposed to be.

But this story isn't complete yet and hasn't been published.

"Huh? But if it's not published, isn't it not a book yet? How can you call this a world inside a book?"

"Hmm, since it's destined to become a novel anyway, let's not fuss

over such trivial details."

The reason this story is unfinished is that the very foundation of this world is shaking.

Sadly, due to the schemes of high-level demon lords targeting Delcross, this world in the novel faces an unprecedented crisis.

The protagonist meant to be reincarnated as a saintess hasn't been reborn, and the divine representative meant to protect this world has long been corrupted.

And a false saintess, who has appeared in place of the protagonist, is causing chaos by ensnaring the male leads!

She is about to turn into a key for summoning high-level demon lords into this world.

That's why the creator of this story came to me, asking me to complete the story and save the world in place of the protagonist.

But what should I do?

I'm just an ordinary girl without any divine powers or abilities.

"Wait a minute. If you work at a gaming company, you're already an adult, right? Why suddenly a girl? There's no consistency!"

"Doesn't a girl sound more appealing? It's cuter, no?"

"...Are you a lolicon?"

So, how should I navigate this unfavorable situation?

Can an ordinary me successfully impersonate a false saint and defeat another false saint?

Everyone, watch my journey to save the world! Teehee!

"Teehee? Why is the writing style like this? Teehee?"

"Huh? I thought it was trendy, but maybe I'm mistaken?"

"No, it's too frivolous! As a lover of romantic and poetic fantasy, I cannot forgive such poor writing!"

"Let's overlook that. To become a part of a grand narrative, it first needs to be read by many. But more importantly..."

"...?"

"Can't you become a bit prettier? You are the female protagonist, after all."

"Argh! How much more customization do you expect me to undergo?"

Seo Yi-seo. She is a human from the regular world.

According to the demon king, she, like Madam Justine, emanates a vast order fundamentally different from this world.

'...Hmm, maybe I should have tested her?'

Seongjin was skeptical. Even after observing her closely, he hadn't felt any particular sense of incongruity.

[It's not surprising you felt that way. Her body was intricately constituted. It might be slightly heavier, but her weight wouldn't be much different from the humans of this world.]

Compared to Seo Yi-seo, Madam Justine's body was almost like an empty can.

Indeed, unlike Madam with his almost non-existent aura activation, Seo Yi-seo had a level of aura activation similar to an average person.

[If her soul hadn't had the typical characteristics of a human from the regular world, I wouldn't have noticed so quickly.]

The demon king explained that the souls from the regular world don't take on the complete human form like those from the world of appearances or the original world. They usually have the characteristics of a round sphere or a hard crystal.

It's somewhat reminiscent of the soul terminals that the Arenja creatures create, isn't it?

'Anyway, if it's confirmed that she came from the regular world to here, it's not strange for her to know about Dilelaria butterfly, which crosses dimensions.'

She might even know how to open gates between dimensions. It's worth investigating.

The problem is, since she publicly declared her intention to undergo the Saintess's Trials, the heresy tribunal, which oversees the trials, has swiftly taken her into custody.

[If she's gone there, isn't she as good as dead?]

'Well, the Saintess's Trials are supposed to be public. She'll be safe until then. Just get a cooperation document and barge into the heresy tribunal.'

Seongjin thought so, but the information Dasha brought him that evening was unexpected.

"Already in the torture chamber...?"

Wait. Wasn't it that nobody could touch her before she underwent the three trials?

As Seongjin expressed his shock, Dasha shrugged her shoulders.

"As you know, Your Highness, that place is a den of high-ranking clerics. Probably by the time she's presented to the public, all her wounds will be meticulously healed."

"....."

Seongjin felt a chill run down his spine.

The idea of a den full of clerics filled with divine power felt terrifying in a way he hadn't expected. They torture, heal, and then torture again.

It made sense now why those who underwent the heresy trials would go mad if they didn't die.

"So, there are rumors within the heresy tribunal itself that she might indeed be a saint."

According to the information brought by Dasha, Seo Yi-seo was enduring the torture remarkably well. Despite having her flesh cut and being branded with hot irons, she maintained her devout demeanor, continuously praying to the Lord.

The inquisitors, notorious for their cruelty, were reportedly so moved by her devotion that they even joined in her prayers.

'...Could she really be a saint? That can't be, right?'

Seongjin slightly furrowed his brows.

A true saint should possess strong divine power. However, both the demon king and Logan had asserted they couldn't sense any divine power from her.

Furthermore, Logan had said this with apparent disgust:

—Everything she says is a lie; it's hard to know where to begin questioning. Her guidance from Saintess Gracia and her oath to the Lord, none of it is true!

The unsettling feeling Seongjin had when Seo Yi-seo was first taken into custody still lingered.

That strange, tingling sensation in his chest, as if being enchanted, and the odd reactions of the people around her, mesmerized by her face.

Lost in thought, Seongjin eventually looked up.

"...Has there been any word from my father?"

Indeed, the emergence of a suspicious saint candidate who might threaten Sisle's position was significant.

What would His Majesty, the emperor, think of this situation?

"Hmm..."

Dasha's response to this question seemed a bit stiff.

"It's that... His Majesty didn't say anything but just gave a slight smile."

Smiled?

"But... they said it was incredibly frightening."

"....."

Ah, I think I understand what that means.

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[Yi-seo's POV]

Every story needs a background, right?

In Delcross, there is a powerful ruler known as the Holy Emperor, essentially the divine representative. He guides the citizens on behalf of God and governs the Kingdom of the Lord, being the most noble cleric.

However, years ago, the Holy Emperor fell into the schemes of high demon lords, committing an irreversible sin.

The corrupted Holy Emperor is now a source of evil, shaking the very foundation of the world and threatening its existence. He has disrupted the boundaries between dimensions, exposing Delcross to invasion, and obstructed the reincarnation of the saint, the world's protector.

Yes, to save this world, I must ultimately confront this powerful Holy Emperor.

"But how can I, devoid of divine power, stand against him? Who would support me if I suddenly declare myself a saintess?"

"First, request to undergo the Saintess's Trials. If you pass, you can find the [Scepter of the Holy Emperor] in the Saint Bastian Church."

The Scepter of the Holy Emperor.

It's a precious relic where the body of the first demi-god Holy Emperor is enshrined.

If a worthy person prays before the scepter, the soul of the first Holy Emperor bestows upon them the blessing of divine power.

Only one person in each generation can receive this blessing. Once bestowed, no one else can receive it until the blessed one dies.

"Uh... But the trial of the saint, isn't that like some medieval witch trial? Do I really have to do that? It's kind of scary."

"What's the problem? People from the regular world can adjust their sensations at will, can't they?"

"Sure, I can turn off my sense of pain, but that's still a world within a book, right? What if I can't control it there?"

"Don't worry about that. The rules of the regular world that apply to your body will be transferred over there."

That's also possible thanks to the Holy Emperor weakening the dimensional boundaries.

Hmm, but just to be safe, I should still pack plenty of potions in my inventory.

"But I'm curious. Isn't the Holy Emperor a sub-male lead?"

"He's a married man with many princes and princesses. But, didn't I just explain he's the mastermind behind the world's peril?"

"Huh? In romance fantasy, isn't the mastermind as important a sub-male lead as any?"

"....."

Screech.

With a faint whiff of smoke, the acrid smell of burning flesh assaulted the nostrils.

"Confess the truth now, you witch!"

As the jailer pressed the branding iron against Seo Yi-seo's body, Cardinal Benitus watched with fierce eyes, growling in anger.

Due to the unprecedented situation where several inquisitors had thrown in the towel, Cardinal Benitus, the head of the heresy tribunal, was personally interrogating her.

Already agitated from hunting remnants of the dark cult, he was infuriated by this madwoman claiming to continue the legacy of the saintess.

"What sort of trickery is this! You, devoid of even a speck of divine power, how dare you pretend to be a saintess! Confess your schemes now!"

Despite Cardinal Benitus's furious shouting, Seo Yi-seo, enduring the excruciating torture, remained calm, hands clasped in prayer, without so much as a whimper.

"I am but following the will of God. He decreed that a true crisis is impending over Delcross, and we must all unite to overcome this challenge."

"This is still—"

"I am not seeking the burden of [Saintess] for any selfish reasons! Everything is for the blessed Delcross!"

Zing. Her words carried a deep, moving resonance.

Her devout demeanor, concerned only for the welfare of Delcross, even caused one of the jailers, who was heating the iron, to involuntarily make the sign of the cross, earning a stern glare from Cardinal Benitus.

At that moment.

"His, His Majesty has arrived."

A jailer's trembling voice announced from outside, and the Holy Emperor, unannounced, strode into the torture chamber, accompanied as always by the Commander of the Saint Aurelion Knights.

"Your Majesty! To what do we owe the honor of your presence

here...?"

Everyone in the chamber, including Cardinal Benitus, hastily bowed their heads in shock.

The Holy Emperor surveyed the chaotic scene in the cell for a moment before sighing softly.

"...Engaging in futile actions."

Seo Yi-seo, sneaking a glance at the Holy Emperor with one eyelid slightly raised, involuntarily swallowed hard.

'...Wow, incredible!'

Why! How! Why isn't he the male lead?

Hey, dear author! Are you listening? Huh?

Can't we change the course of the story now?

As Seo Yi-seo internally screamed in silence, the Holy Emperor continued to scrutinize her, his eyes occasionally flashing a mysterious silver glow in the dim light of the dungeon.

"Do you wish to become a saintess?"

After a while, the Holy Emperor, in a quiet tone, broke the silence.

"Yes? Y-Yes... that is my intention..."

As Seo Yi-seo stuttered in surprise, the Holy Emperor nodded gravely.

"Very well, let it be so."

"...What?"

"Huh?"

Seo Yi-seo, along with everyone else in the dungeon, was visibly startled by the Holy Emperor's declaration. The Holy Emperor then turned to Katrina and commanded.

"Inform Archbishop Wesker immediately. Say that she is recommended by me, and there will be no need for further verification. Ensure she is officially inaugurated before the Birth Festival."

He was making a monumental decision with an air of nonchalance, as if he were merely approving a minor expense report!

"...Gasp!"

Cardinal Benitus, who had been deflating in shock, suddenly snapped back to attention, his eyes bulging.

"Your Majesty, what do you mean! How can you elevate this witch to sainthood!"

"She is not a witch. She has expressed a firm intention to live her life in service as a saint, and such resolve should be respected."

"But this woman has no divine power whatsoever!"

"The virtues of a saint are not in divine power, but in steadfast faith and unyielding will. Saint Gracia, too, was not a priestess in her lifetime. This woman has shown her dedication to the people, enduring harsh torture for them. Haven't we seen enough of her faith and will, or is more verification needed?"

"But, but... the Trials of the Saintess are still..."

As Cardinal Benitus stuttered, pale-faced, the Holy Emperor slightly clicked his tongue.

"Tsk, still harping on ancient customs? From now on, no one is permitted to undergo public trials under the pretext of proving their faith."

Cardinal Benitus stood there gaping. Meanwhile, Seo Yi-seo, who had managed to collect her thoughts amidst the shock, was quickly processing the situation.

Wait a minute. What does this mean for me?

What about my plan to be acknowledged by the citizens and the Orthodox Church, to be elevated to sainthood amidst everyone's cheers?

What about my plan to seize the Scepter of the Holy Emperor and triumphantly defeat the false saintess?

"But, this cannot be!"

As Seo Yi-seo raised her voice in protest, everyone in the torture chamber looked at her in disbelief.

She was being offered sainthood on a silver platter, and yet, why was she objecting?

"I haven't proven anything! If it ends like this, no one will recognize me as a true [Saintess]! I won't be able to fulfill [God's] will! I can't complete my mission!"

"....."

"Please consider! Allow me to undergo the trial and emerge as a true servant of [God]!"

"...Is that so?"

After intently observing Seo Yi-seo, the Holy Emperor softly responded, then faintly curled the corners of his mouth.

A chilling sensation crept over her, permeating her entire body.

As Seo Yi-seo felt an ominous atmosphere and clamped her mouth shut,

"Katrina, a moment."

The Holy Emperor suddenly swayed and tilted forward. Katrina quickly supported him.

"Your... Your Majesty?"

Then, as if sensing something, Cardinal Benitus's eyes widened in

shock. He quickly prostrated himself on the ground, bowing his head.

What's happening? What's going on?

Confused, Seo Yi-seo looked around, only to suddenly notice something and jerk in surprise.

"What? What's this? Why is the control panel acting up? Hey, wait... just a minute?"

Her eyes widened in horror.

And then.

"Kyaaaaaaaaak!"

A piercing scream echoed through the torture chamber.

"It hurts! It hurts! Ack! Please! Don't touch! Don't mess with the sensitivity settings! Aaaaack!"

"....."

"Kyaaak! Potion! Potion! Sob! Why? Why won't the shortcut work? Potion! Sob! It hurts!"

Seo Yi-seo, who had maintained a dignified demeanor just moments ago, suddenly erupted into hysterics, rolling on the floor.

Everyone in the chamber was bewildered, looking at her in confusion. How could someone change so drastically, so suddenly!

"No! No! Aaack! Stop! Don't go over 50%! Stop increasing it! Aaaaak!"

Now, Seo Yi-seo's face was terror-stricken, tears and snot streaming down as she pleaded.

"Please! I was wrong! Just let me have a potion! It's all a lie! I'm not a saintess! I'm not! Waaah!"

"....."

"Sob, sob! It hurts so much! Please stop! Please, hiccup."

"....."

"Sob! Hiccup! Hiccup! I won't do it! I won't, just let me go! I really regret it! Hiccup!"

In the silent torture chamber, only Seo Yi-seo's sobbing filled the space.

As her sobs gradually subsided, the Holy Emperor, who had been leaning on Katrina's shoulder, opened his eyes.

He slowly stood up and walked over to Seo Yi-seo, who was crouching flat on the floor, trembling.

Looking down at her, he said,

"The Scepter of the Holy Emperor. That must be what you desire."

".....!"

Noticing Seo Yi-seo's body flinching, the Holy Emperor gently touched her head.

Suddenly, a sacred white light burst from his hand. The numerous wounds on Seo Yi-seo's body began to heal without a trace.

"There's no need to worry. I will make you a proper saintess and present you before the people. However..."

The Holy Emperor then whispered softly into the ear of Seo Yi-seo, who was still trembling and unable to raise her head.

"Stay quiet, live as if you were dead, according to the will of the Orthodox Church. Do not wander about claiming to undergo the Trials of the Saintess or serve the citizens."

"....."

"Do you understand?"

"Hiccup!"

Seo Yi-seo, hiccupping uncontrollably, nodded her head in a daze.

Tap tap. After indifferently tapping her head a couple of times, the Holy Emperor stood up and, just as he had come, briskly exited the torture chamber. Katrina quietly followed behind him.

"...Your Majesty!"

Cardinal Benitus, stunned by the sudden turn of events, snapped back to reality and hurried out of the chamber after the Holy Emperor.

"Your Majesty, the Scepter of the Holy Emperor, surely you don't mean!"

He quickened his pace, trying to catch up with the Holy Emperor who was striding ahead.

"Do you really intend to bestow the Holy Emperor's family blessing upon that witch? That's preposterous!"

Not all Holy Emperors were born with immense divine power like Nate. Sometimes, when a successor without divine power had to assume the throne, the Scepter of the Holy Emperor was the highest treasure of the Holy Emperor's family, empowering them to stand as a worthy representative of God.

"Your Majesty! There must be a more suitable recipient for that blessing...!"

"Cardinal Benitus."

The Holy Emperor, pausing for a moment, continued speaking without turning around.

"You were probably thinking of using it for Masain."

Startled, Cardinal Benitus's face turned ashen as he was caught off guard.

He deeply respected the current Holy Emperor, who was befitting of the title of God's representative more than anyone. However, he was always concerned about the ominous blood inherited from the

current Holy Emperor's mother.

In his mind, it was only right for Masain, the eldest legitimate heir, to succeed the throne next. But to think his intentions were already known?

As Cardinal Benitus's face twisted with confusion, guilt, and shame, the Holy Emperor looked at him with a cold gaze and added softly,

"However, let it be clear. That is not a blessing, but a curse."

Archbishop Wesker massaged his throbbing head as he closed the letter. His headache was so severe, he almost felt as if his long-gone right eye was about to pop out again.

The sudden orders from the Holy Emperor were not new, but still perplexing.

'A saintess out of nowhere...'

It wasn't a request to verify a potential saintess candidate.

Instead, it was an order to present an ordinary person as a dignified saintess in just a few days.

'What does His Majesty really think of the Orthodox Church and the Holy Council?'

However, it was a command from the Holy Emperor himself. There must be a reason behind His Majesty's actions.

Having decided this, Wesker began to quickly plan his course of action.

'First, find a suitable rural church to issue a recommendation letter, hire a couple of witnesses who would testify to miracles performed by the saint, convene the bishops this afternoon for a quick decision, submit the paperwork to the Holy Council, and casually drop a hint to Cardinal Mayer...'

It was a plan that blatantly disregarded doctrine and regulations, but Wesker and the Holy Emperor had always been in sync in such matters. Unlike Cardinal Benitus, who always insisted on principles, Wesker prioritized practicality.

He remembered concocting similar schemes with the Holy Emperor during the early years of his reign. Recalling Cardinal Mayer's frantic efforts to manage the aftermath always brought a wry smile to his face.

Chuckle. Suppressing his laughter, Wesker was about to move on when he noticed a small girl standing quietly in a corner of the hallway.

Saintess Sisle.

With her long silver hair and white priestly robe, she looked like a pure and faultless creation of the Lord. The girl, glowing with an ethereal light, stood dazed, staring down the forbidden corridor.

"Saintess Sisle."

At Wesker's call, Sisle slowly turned around, clutching a small diary to her chest as always.

"...Archbishop Wesker."

"Why are you here alone? What about Sister Ursula?"

Wesker thought of the talkative sister who usually accompanied the saint and touched his forehead.

Leaving the small blessing of the Lord alone in such a place was a serious negligence of duty.

However, Sisle, with her innocent eyes, looked up at Wesker and asked an unexpected question.

"I heard from Sister Ursula that a new saintess candidate has appeared."

"....."

"Will she become a saintess?"

Her question wasn't about the authenticity of the new candidate's sainthood.

She was asking if the Holy Emperor had approved her.

Wesker was silent for a moment, but then slowly nodded.

"Yes, Saintess Sisle. It seems that will be the case."

"Then, unlike me, will she have the opportunity to meet the first Holy Emperor?"

Wesker recalled the instructions he had just received from the Holy Emperor.

Make Seo Yi-seo an impeccable saintess in the public eye. Arrange for her inauguration before the Birth Festival, along with the bestowal of the [Scepter of the Holy Emperor].

"...It appears so."

As soon as he answered, tears fell from Sisle's clear gray eyes.

Her face, always expressionless like a doll, made her sadness even more poignant to Wesker.

"Why... Why are you crying?"

Wesker, startled by her sudden tears, awkwardly bent over and put his arm around her shoulder.

"Archbishop Wesker, I have served the citizens earnestly. I did my best for Delcross. But why does His Majesty still not recognize me?"

"Saintess Sisle..."

Wesker looked at the quietly weeping girl with a heavy heart.

It wasn't unreasonable for the young girl to think that way. When the Orthodox Church initially motioned to consecrate Sisle as a saintess, the Holy Emperor had categorically refused.

If it hadn't been for Sisle's firm determination, her elevation to sainthood would never have occurred.

Even though the Holy Emperor reluctantly allowed Sisle's

consecration, he never permitted the bestowal of the [Scepter of the Holy Emperor], a ritual that all saintess traditionally underwent.

The young girl seemed to interpret this as a sign of not being fully recognized by her father.

"Your Highness... Saintess. It's not just you. His Majesty has forbidden the bestowal of the Scepter of the Holy Emperor to all members of the Holy Emperor's family. Don't you know?"

Indeed. Even Masain, now Clanos, was prohibited.

During the reign of the previous Holy Emperor, it was almost an annual event for the entire Holy Emperor's family to visit Saint Bastian Church. The current decision was indeed inscrutable.

But as always, Wesker assumed that the Holy Emperor had a valid reason for his actions. However, convincing this deeply saddened young girl was another matter.

"Saintess Sisle. Don't you know? You were the first child His Majesty embraced. I was there that day. I had never seen His Majesty so joyously smiling in my entire life."

"....."

"How could he not recognize someone like you? That's impossible. One day, we will all understand His Majesty's intentions."

Wesker comforted her, gently patting her shoulder.

[Yi-seo's POV]

What do you think is the most important element in a romance fantasy novel?

Yes, that's right. The existence of a charming male lead.

This novel also has a magnificent main male lead.

He is the eldest son of the Northern Border Duke, a genius swordsman with a cold charm, Prince Orden Siegmund!

He unravels the dark secrets of his family, fighting internal enemies, and at the same time, protects his domain from external threats. A truly capable man.

But despite his seemingly indifferent and cold demeanor, he's actually a pure-hearted person who still cherishes the memories of his first love.

And soon, he will fall for the saintess female lead and transform into a man of immense obsession.

Ah, I just wanted to save this world from peril, but now I have a male lead who's obsessed with me and won't let go. How troubling is that?

"So, what does this Young Master Orden Siegmund look like? Are there any illustrations of him?"

"Very handsome."

"That's it? What about his skin? His hair and eye color? Is he ruggedly handsome, or a more delicate beauty? Does he have the wild charm of a wounded beast, or the elegance of a flower blooming on a cliff?"

"...Is that really important?"

"Of course, it is! In a proper romance fantasy, you should be ready to spend pages praising the male lead's appearance!"

* * *

Recently, Orden's feelings were complicated.

He was busy tracking down suspicious forces hiding in the Siegmund territory, but the cold words Amelia had thrown at him a few days ago kept swirling in his head, disturbing his thoughts.

—Was I ever of any significance to you? Until the day His Majesty rescued me, I was as good as nonexistent in the duke's family.

No, it's not like that, Amelia.

I've always...

"What are you thinking about, sir Orden?"

Startled by the voice calling him, Orden looked up to find Herman, his face full of dissatisfaction, thrusting a stack of documents at him.

Herman, virtually Orden's right-hand man, was a cheeky subordinate, not exactly known for his loyalty.

"Isn't it a bit urgent for you to be daydreaming? Once the Birthday Celebration is over, you won't have the chance to move around the capital without the head of the family knowing."

Orden wiped his face with his hand before taking the documents.

"We've got a rough idea anyway. There should be some progress in the investigation."

"A rough idea? Are you referring to your speculation that Scarcepino is the link connecting Lord Siegmund and the Milo Trading Company?"

"It's not speculation. It's a conclusion I've reached through our investigation."

Herman looked incredulous.

"Your own investigation? Surely, you're not referring to the recent incident where you harassed an innocent lady, are you?"

"What innocence. She was utterly despicable."

Orden scoffed.

Isabella Scarcepino.

A prominent figure in social circles, she was indeed skilled at feigning ignorance.

Despite knowing she had been frequenting the Milo Trading

Company with young Count Riccardo, she pretended to have no memory of it, shaking in fear.

Orden then tossed a small medal he had been fiddling with onto the desk.

A crude medal with a spider engraved on it.

Recently found in various parts of the territory, Orden was secretly investigating it without the knowledge of the head of the family.

The strange occurrences in the Siegmund territory had deep connections with the Milo Trading Company, which had started dealings with the head of the family years ago. Orden had been suspecting Asein or Scarcepinio as the backers of the Milo Trading Company.

During this investigation, he received a letter from young Count Riccardo, enclosed with the spider medal. It was a veiled threat asking him to attend the celebration with his sister as a partner, with an agreement to keep silent about this matter.

After witnessing Isabella feigning ignorance at the Salon de Merci, he was convinced that the Scarcepinos were deeply involved in the events occurring in the Siegmund territory.

"This spider symbol seems indeed to be a mark of the dark cult. I got this information from an exorcist I know personally. Recently, the 'Cult of Repentance' has been frequently appearing across the northern and eastern regions."

Herman glanced at the medal and added with a hint of concern,

"Sir Orden, if this situation is indeed related to the remnants of the dark cult, it's too much for us to handle alone. Wouldn't it be better to seek the help of inquisitors or exorcists?"

Orden let out a bitter laugh.

"Herman, these are matters orchestrated by the head of the Siegmund family. If the heresy tribunal gets wind of this, do you think our family would remain unscathed?"

"But considering it's an internal whistleblowing, wouldn't they take that into account? If the Siegmund family falls, the defensive wall guarding the border would collapse. The authorities in the capital wouldn't want that."

"No, we'd be lucky just to escape with our lives. The heresy tribunal doesn't consider the repercussions; they only focus on eradicating heresy. Whether our family is destroyed by devil worshippers or smashed by inquisitors, the outcome will be the same."

"...Sigh. I spoke out of frustration due to the dire situation."

Herman sighed.

"We should have contacted Prince Logan when the Lilium Squad was passing by our territory. He seemed to have noticed something."

At that time, returning from a sea monster hunt, Prince Logan had requested a formal investigation of the territory, which the head of the family promptly refused.

"The head of the family was uncomfortable even with the squad staying briefly in our territory. Keeping an eye on Prince Logan, it would have been impossible to meet him without the head's knowledge."

"That's true."

Besides, Lilium was a detachment of the Saint Bastian Knights, known for being tightly controlled by the Orthodox Church, hardly better than the heresy tribunal.

Well, since there's been no significant reaction so far, it seems Prince Logan didn't find any crucial evidence.

"If only there were another force not under the church or tribunal, with some flexibility..."

As Orden sighed and mumbled, Herman suddenly brightened up, as if he remembered something.

"Oh, speaking of which, I heard the administration recently

established a special division for handling magical beasts. Did you know about it?"

"A division for magical beasts?"

"Yes. It's led by the Third Prince and operates independently of the church, investigating malign entities. It's a new division, so it hasn't made any significant achievements yet."

"Prince Morres..."

Suddenly, the image of a young boy who had stood beside Amelia that day flashed through Orden's mind. The boy with fierce eyes and an annoyingly smug smile, who had seemed unusually skilled.

Orden frowned.

Hadn't their first interaction been rather unfavorable? Would the prince really agree to help if requested?

But with no time and limited options, involving the magical beast division seemed the only feasible course of action. After much deliberation, Orden, accompanied by Herman, decided to visit the administrative annex.

To his surprise, the prince listened quietly to Orden's explanation. When he finished speaking, the prince curled one side of his lips into a mischievous, almost sinister smile.

"Just with words?"

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[Yi-seo's POV]

In other worlds, isn't it important for a saintess to have some romantic tension with charming secondary male leads?

Of course, my mind is filled only with thoughts of saving the world, but how can one not be swayed when surrounded by numerous male leads, each whispering words of love?

- "I engaged a woman I do not desire for the sake of the throne. But the true owner of my heart is you, the noble saintess."

Prince Leonard of Rohan.

Though he has a flirtatious nature, he ultimately becomes irresistibly captivated by the saintess. He's an attractive, ambitious character who will forsake a beautiful queen for the saintess.

- "Strange, isn't it? The free winds lead my soul, but in the end, I always find myself returning to you."

The wandering knight, Fernand.

A romantic swordsman, currently creating a love epic across the continent. He's seen as a frivolous playboy destined to follow the saintess.

- "I cannot leave Delcross, worried about your safety. From now on, my duty is not to fight the sea monsters, but to protect the saintess."

Prince Logan, the genius paladin.

A cool, calm beauty, who would give everything for his beloved saintess... a sucker, perhaps?

"Wait a minute, 'sucker' might be a bit too much, don't you think?"

"If you capture his heart, you'll receive the most devoted love. What, don't you like him?"

"Ah, that's a contrarian statement again. Remember! These days, male leads who are cruel to everyone else but kind to the female lead are popular!"

"...He's very handsome though?"

"...Of course, appearance is the most important plausibility."

And in this novel, there's even a hidden secondary male lead.

"Everyone has rejected me. My royal father and mother abandoned me long ago. But you, you're the only one who truly sees me."

Prince Morres, the overweight troublemaker.

Recently, he's undergone a transformation after deciding to mend his ways and train his body. However, unable to overcome the emotional scars from childhood, he's drawn to the saintess's warmth like a chick to its mother...

"What's this now? This underdeveloped kid? Isn't saving the world enough, now I have to take care of a baby bird too?"

"So, it's about the face..."

"Okay. Noted!"

Yes, in romance fantasy, the most important thing is ultimately the appearance.

A fool's actions are seen as folly, but when a charming man does the same, it becomes a poignant appeal to maternal instincts.

Ah, I am such a slave to appearances, alas!

"Ah, if you happen to capture his heart, there's something you should be careful about."

"Something to be careful about?"

"Yes. This prince has his peculiarities. If handled incorrectly, the world within the novel could face the worst bad ending."

"Ah! So there's a reason he's a hidden character? What should I watch out for?"

"Well, the thing is, he actually is..."

* * *

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

'What is this now...'

After finishing his morning training and starting his work at the Monster Special Task Force office with a refreshed feeling, that unpleasant guy he thought he'd never see again had brazenly shown up at the task force office.

Orden Siegmund, with a stoic face, bowed his head slightly, showing the bare minimum of courtesy.

"Greetings, Your Highness."

Still as stiff-necked as ever.

"Well then."

"...!"

Still, seeing his flustered face was somewhat amusing.

Seongjin, with a smirk, asked,

"But what brings you to our department?"

Orden soon composed himself and spoke with a calm face.

"Actually, I've come to report a grievance to the Monster Special Task Force."

"A grievance?"

"Yes, about the atrocities of a large trading company called Milo."

Seongjin tilted his head in confusion.

Isn't he at the wrong place? If there's illegal activity, it should be reported to the judiciary, and if it's a matter of trade ethics, it should be taken to the commerce-related department within the administrative branch, right?

"The Siegmund territory, indeed the entire continent, is under a threat that can jeopardize our safety. Since corrupt elements are involved, resolving this internally in the territory seems difficult, so I earnestly request that the royal palace take some action."

"..."

Corrupt elements.

Seongjin silently observed Orden's expression. It was hard to read due to his usual stern face.

'He's not requesting an Inquisitor or an Exorcist, but he's come straight to a department that has no record of dealing with such matters...'

This must be a case involving his family.

There are differing stances within the family, making internal resolution difficult, and if it goes to the heresy court, they won't be able to escape responsibility.

"...Let's hear it then."

As Seongjin settled into his seat, Orden glanced uncomfortably to the side.

Ah. He's worried about Inquisitor Valerie.

"Don't worry about him. He is entirely a part of the Monster Special Task Force, and without my permission, he won't disclose anything to

the heresy court. Right, sir Valerie?"

At this, the red-haired Inquisitor weakly smiled with a bitter expression.

"Of course. I could never go against Your Highness's orders."

Why is he secretly smuggling out forbidden books and hiding in the Monster Special Task Force office to read them, this maverick Inquisitor?

"Hmm hmm. The same goes for me. Your Highness's words are the future of the Monster Special Task Force."

Dame Sharon snickered on the side, worsening Orden's complexion.

He seemed to regret coming here, probably thinking Sharon doesn't seem all that sane.

With no choice, Seongjin had the Monster Special Task Force members step back. Then, with a warm smile on his face, he quickly reassured Orden before he could escape.

"Come on, don't hesitate to tell us. Our Monster Special Task Force is always open to help the empire's citizens."

At that moment, Orden visibly tensed up and froze.

Huh? Why's he reacting like this all of a sudden?

[Wow, you just looked really evil. Like a broker pressuring someone to sign an organ trafficking contract!]

...Shut up, unnecessarily detailed and realistically patched-up demon king!

After much persuasion and overcoming the Eldest Young Master's wariness, the situation in the Siegmund territory that he finally heard about was quite serious.

Recently, a suspicious drug has been circulating in the territory, and since then, there have been frequent instances of people behaving

strangely or suddenly disappearing.

"...Is it a drug?"

"We suspect so, but it's not a type known throughout the continent."

A few years ago, the Siegmund Border Count signed an exclusive contract with a large trading company, Milo. Given the barren environment, the territory relied heavily on the company for many necessities. The company offered goods at low profit margins, aiming for volume sales, so there was no reason for the territory to refuse the deal.

Along with cheap, high-quality goods, a suspicious herbal powder began circulating in the territory.

Those who brewed and drank tea from this powder began to talk nonsense and go mad, or suddenly ventured into the Black Forest and disappeared.

"Why not just ban its distribution?"

"That's a bit complicated. Initially, it only gives a slight euphoria and well-being, and Milo is marketing it as a tea that boosts vitality."

The man explaining all this, showing various documents, was Herman, a subordinate of Orden. Unlike the rigid Eldest Young Master, this man seemed more reasonable and articulate.

"To legally ban its distribution, we need clear evidence that the herb is a narcotic. But it doesn't have a particularly strong analgesic effect, nor does it cause a state of extreme mental or physical debilitation..."

"Hmm."

Listening to the explanation, Seongjin could roughly guess the underlying situation.

Whether it's legal or not, if the Border Count simply bans it, that's the end of the story. Thus, needing to request a ban with legal justification implies that someone in the family, in cahoots with Milo, is a powerful figure pushing the drug's distribution.

And if the official heir, the Eldest Young Master, finds it too overwhelming to handle, it must be the work of.

'The Border Count.'

Perhaps he is acting in opposition to the head of the family. That must be quite a burden for him.

"The Eldest Young Master was away from the territory participating in a martial arts tournament in another country recently. Upon his return, he found that everyone in the territory was drinking this tea. But since it's distributed in powder form, it's impossible to identify the ingredients."

As he said this, Herman took something out of his pocket. It was a few flat, seed-like objects wrapped in a handkerchief.

"We've only recently been able to track down the distributors and obtain these, the original ingredients of the tea."

Seongjin, feeling a strange premonition, closely examined the objects.

Although they were flat and dried, these were clearly not herbs but rather.

'Hey, demon lord. Doesn't this look familiar?'

[Yeah? It's actually the dried seed of Lophellum!]

What? Where did this come from?

As Seongjin looked at Orden with newfound surprise, Orden seemed to sense something ominous and shivered.

"So? You're saying this tea suddenly flooded the territory, causing severe harm to its people. But why do you suspect that corrupt elements are involved in its distribution?"

Responding to Seongjin's question, Orden and Herman exchanged a glance, remaining silent for a moment.

But then, as if making up his mind, Orden let out a sigh and placed a

small medallion on the table. It was a small, red-tinted medallion with a crudely engraved spider symbol on it.

"This is a mark of the Dark Cult, found during our investigation of the distributors."

As Seongjin picked up the medallion, Herman added to the explanation.

"In the process of investigating Milo Trading, we frequently encountered this mark. It's clear that Milo Trading is connected to the remnants of the Dark Cult."

This means the force spreading the seeds of Lophellum in the Empire is also linked to Milo Trading. The trail of the Dark Cult, which had disappeared after Priest Heiz, has resurfaced.

The Dileraria butterflies seen near the Siegmund territory by Logan might not be entirely unrelated to them either!

'I thought he was just a troublemaker, but turns out, this guy is a goldmine.'

As Seongjin grinned, Orden jolted in surprise, then scowled disdainfully.

But what does it matter? To Seongjin, Orden no longer seemed like a brash, arrogant youngster but rather a plump lamb, innocently awaiting its turn at the table.

"Alright, the Monster Special Task Force will assist in this matter."

Seongjin smiled contentedly.

"But just like that?"

"...Yes?"

As the two men looked bewildered, Seongjin explained calmly.

"As you know, our department is short-staffed, and we're already overwhelmed with investigating the Grey Plague. Even so, we're

stepping up for the Siegmund territory."

"..."

"Of course, we're doing this for the Empire's citizens, so we're not asking for a labor fee. But at least, the expenses for our department's activities should be covered by you, right?"

Orden, looking stunned, nodded.

"Yes, that's only fair."

"And let's make one thing clear,"

Seongjin said, looking him in the eye.

"I'll let this go this time. You owe me for this one."

"..."

"Whenever the time comes, in whatever form, you'll have to repay this debt to me. Understand?"

Orden's pupils quivered slightly.

"Of course... As soon as this matter is resolved, I will find a way to compensate you..."

"No, that's not it. That's just another debt that will arise after the resolution. We need to settle this one now."

"...?"

"Don't you get it? I'm keeping quiet about the Siegmund family's collusion with the Dark Cult. I'm hiding your family's misdeeds from the heresy tribunal. Surely, you aren't planning to just let this favor slide?"

There seemed to be a draining of color from the Eldest Young Master's face.

Given the gravity of the situation, both men appeared shocked and out of sorts. Hence, not only Herman but even Orden failed to notice

the whispers of the task force members behind them.

"Wow... Creepy. I didn't see that coming from His Highness Morres. He's really good at playing it cool. Did you see? His expression didn't change at all."

"Jibril-nim, we should refrain from disrespectful remarks."

"But, sir Masain, wasn't His Highness just deliberating on how to send an investigation team to the Siegmund territory? This seems like a good opportunity, so why is he now pressuring the Eldest Young Master like this?"

"His Highness must have his reasons. We just follow his lead."

"Hmm hmm. I... I knew it all along. His Highness's potential is truly remarkable."

"Dame Sharon? You're not implying that this potential is about being a con artist, are you?"

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Hello? My name is Seo Yi-seo.

I'm a regular employee at a gaming company who loves romance novels.

One day, during the alpha test of the [Homunculus Integrated Engine] in my personal space [My Home], I met a man.

He introduced himself as a storyteller who travels through dimensions, aspiring to become a grand rule that governs all stories, eventually reigning as the king of tales. At first, I thought he was completely insane.

But then, he told me an incredible story.

Our company's finely crafted integrated engine had become a great rule that composes various dimensions. The first MMORPG created with this engine, [Pangaea Chronicle], became one of the most splendid and vast dimensions among many others.

After that, I traveled through various dimensions with the storyteller, engulfed in blue butterflies.

He showed me various constructed worlds like Pangaea Chronicle, countless natural worlds, and even a few small natural dimensions created by his stories.

After witnessing those vivid scenes, I had no choice but to believe him. If his words weren't true, I'd be suffering from severe schizophrenia, lost in perfect hallucinations.

The dimension's storyteller said,

He wished for the stories he created to gather and become a massive

rule that shapes dimensions, just like this [Homunculus Integrated Engine].

But he mentioned that one of his most important stories, which he had been working on diligently, was falling into disarray.

So, he asked for my help. To become the new saintess in a world where the main character had vanished and the villain ran rampant, and to save the world within the book.

I had no reason to refuse. He guaranteed my safety, and besides, as a romance fantasy enthusiast, who wouldn't dream of stepping into a novel's story at least once?

But I had forgotten an important fact.

Many protagonists struggle to return to reality. And in most cases, they gradually assimilate into the world, eventually reaching an ending with the novel in some way or another.

Time flew by incredibly fast.

Seo Yi-seo was suddenly released from a torture chamber and brought to a large church. Guided by the hands of kind-hearted priestesses, she received extraordinary treatment.

She was bathed, dressed in white, luxurious clothing, and fed refined meals. Every day, she joined the priests in the chapel for mass and memorized thick, incomprehensible scriptures.

In this whirlwind of activities, she suddenly found herself sitting demurely in a grand church, donning a white veil, waiting for some ceremony.

Judging from the circumstances, it seemed to be her inauguration as a saintess.

The majestically decorated church was filled with a multitude of people. Nobles in luxurious clothing and dignified high priests continuously approached to offer their congratulations.

'What is all this...'

So many things were happening one after another, it was dizzying. Seo Yi-seo couldn't even begin to guess how her future would unfold.

As she stared blankly into space, a man quietly approached and spoke to her.

"What happened? Isn't this very different from our plan? Why have you suddenly become the saintess?"

Seo Yi-seo's eyes widened in shock.

The man was clad in a lavish robe that covered his body and face, leaving only his smooth lower jaw exposed. However, she recognized his voice distinctly.

He was the young man who had guided her to Salon de Merci when she first arrived in this world, another avatar of the storyteller.

"...Writer!"

Tears welled in Seo Yi-seo's eyes.

"Why, why did you only appear now? Writer!"

"Shh!"

The man glanced around cautiously and whispered softly.

"Many eyes are upon us. I'll read your thoughts, so just think your responses, don't speak them."

Seo Yi-seo swallowed hard and nodded.

"It was unavoidable that I couldn't contact you sooner. You were detained within the palace, a place where I had no means to reach you independently. The palace is the absolute realm of the Holy Emperor. A space where I can neither enter nor interfere."

Seo Yi-seo, having personally experienced the Holy Emperor's terrifying powers, understood that the storyteller must have had no

other choice.

"But our plan has gone seriously awry. Why were you suddenly taken to the palace? Weren't we supposed to lay low until the Grand Festival Mass of the Nativity?"

I don't know. Suddenly, Prince Morres came to the dressing room looking for me. He said he had something to ask about a butterfly design.

"Prince Morres... as expected, he was the unpredictable factor!"

Yes. He came with a group of knights and insisted on taking me to the palace. I had no choice but to agree to undergo the Trials of the Saintess right there.

"But why didn't you undergo the Trials of the Saintess? How did you suddenly become a saintess without doing anything?"

I don't know, Writer.

Suddenly, the villain of this world appeared and turned me into this.

But listen. Do you know what the Holy Emperor did to me?

He completely blocked my inventory and arbitrarily manipulated my sense of pain. I thought I was going to die from the pain that day!

".....!"

The man swallowed hard.

"...I never imagined he could tamper with the rules of the constructed world like this. My predictions were slightly off. Proceeding with the plan as is seems to be too risky now."

What do we do now?

What should I do next?

"Just follow the original plan for now – reveal the Holy Emperor's scheme and become the saintess. The [Minor Edict] I placed on you

seems to still be intact, so use it judiciously. It should ensure that those around you won't treat you too harshly."

What? Writer! What are you talking about?

You're not going to rescue me from here now?

"Stay within the Order for the time being, and another opportunity will arise soon. I will find time to come back for you. Until then..."

"Wait!"

"Farewell, and good luck!"

Seo Yi-seo, in a panic, reached out to grab him, but just like when he arrived, the man quickly disappeared into the crowd.

No, Writer! Wait! If you leave like this, what am I supposed to do!

"....."

Overwhelmed, Seo Yi-seo aimlessly gazed at the church entrance where he had vanished.

"...You jerk..."

With no one to hear her feeble reprimand, tears streamed down her face.

You jerk! How can you just leave someone like this?

Who did I trust to come this far? Who suffered all those hardships because of you!

"...You irresponsible... Such a jerk!"

Sobbing bitterly, Seo Yi-seo clutched at the veil covering her face, rubbing her face in despair. Her sudden, reckless behavior caused a stir among the people, but what did she care!

Left alone in this strange world, a world lurking with a terrifying villain!

That's when it happened.

"Why are you crying? Are you hurt?"

Startled by the question, Seo Yi-seo instinctively turned and was shocked into silence.

"A... fairy?"

There stood an ethereally pale girl.

With a porcelain doll-like innocent face and shimmering silver hair, a white lace veil similar to Seo Yi-seo's was delicately draped over her.

The girl's clear grey eyes, like polished crystals, looked at Seo Yi-seo with concern.

"The inauguration ceremony will start soon, followed by a long ceremonial mass. You won't have much time to rest for a while, so if there's anything wrong, you should tell me in advance."

Gosh, even her voice is so clear and pure!

She was shockingly, almost dangerously heartwarming.

"I, I am just..."

As Seo Yi-seo stuttered without forming coherent words, the girl tilted her head, then moved closer.

Soon, her tiny hand gently grasped Seo Yi-seo's. As Seo Yi-seo felt the frail warmth of her touch, a white light suddenly burst from the girl's fingertips.

'Oh...'

The soreness from rubbing her eyes with the coarse veil eased, and she felt an overall improvement in her condition.

Above all else.

'...It's comforting.'

Wrapped in this warm light, Seo Yi-seo felt a sense of solace.

'This is divine power...!'

She had experienced a similar force in the torture chamber not long ago. However, while the Holy Emperor's use of it felt like a merciless trap constricting her tightly, the power emanating from this girl felt like unbounded affirmation and encouragement.

As her sobbing subsided, the little girl examined Seo Yi-seo quietly before speaking up.

'This girl must be the false saintess!' Seo Yi-seo realized.

But why? Contrary to what she had heard in stories and read in texts, this little girl seemed to radiate with all the goodness of the world, shining so brilliantly.

Her turning evil? Becoming a key for the Demon King's advent?

That's ridiculous!

'I... I knew nothing, and I was about to fight against such a kind child...'

Tears began to flow again.

Then, once more, the girl's hand emitted a white light, enveloping Seo Yi-seo in its warmth.

Confused, Seo Yi-seo sniffled and asked,

"I don't feel any physical pain now, so why do you keep using your divine power?"

The girl tilted her head.

"Hmm. Someone said that when our hearts are hurt, our bodies recognize this pain and actually feel it. So, if we heal the body whenever it feels pain, wouldn't the heart feel a bit less pain too?"

"....."

"If we warm the body, wouldn't the heart feel a bit less cold too?"

"Uh... um..."

What is this? A healing girl who seems like the ultimate healer in the realm of recovery?

Is this what a saintess is supposed to be?

Seo Yi-seo blinked her eyes.

Hey, Mr. Writer. Are we sure we're on the right track here?

This novel might actually be about something else. You know, like those clichés where the youngest princess adores me! Or, I received the youngest princess's favor, and now everyone is obsessed with me!

"Are you feeling better now?"

The girl tilted her head and asked Seo Yi-seo, who had finally stopped crying.

Charmed anew by her adorable demeanor, Seo Yi-seo made up her mind.

Let's protect this girl!

I will care for her, and then become her friend!

If the world inevitably revolves around this false saintess, perhaps clinging to her and surviving till the end is a viable option.

It's not about finding another way to save the world. It's about protecting this girl from turning evil.

'Let the Demon King and the villain come at us! I'll protect her! Think I can't do it?'

Seo Yi-seo clenched her fist towards the sky.

Listen up, Holy Emperor, Mr. Villain from another world!

If she comes to like me, can you still treat me the same way?

If I protect her and she cares for me, can you still harm me carelessly?

Hmph! No way!

Nate, who had been gazing into his teacup, suddenly looked up in surprise.

"Hmm? Why are you asking? Is something wrong?"

"No, nothing..."

He felt an inexplicable chill.

Why? He had preemptively dealt with those intending to harm Sisle, but why did he have this unsettling premonition that something was going awry?

"Did you do something again this time?"

"...Me?"

His troublemaker son appeared momentarily confused before breaking into a cheerful smile.

"Oh, yes. I just mentioned that I'd be going on a business trip. After the birthday celebration, I'll be heading to the north."

"The north..."

"Yes, to the Border Count of Siegmund's territory. There's something I need to investigate for the Monster Special Task Force."

"....."

Nate looked at his son enveloped in a sense of unease.

Then, his naive son added with a proud look,

"Oh! You don't need to give me any expenses for the trip. I've already secured them. Leave it to me!"

Did I do well?

With a smug expression, his son gulped down his tea and then added with a sigh, "I'll bring back souvenirs too!"

"....."

Really, is everything going to be alright...

Nate slowly raised his hand to his forehead.

From a very young age, little Sisle was always a child on the move.

She constantly ran, trying to catch up with her ever-busy father.

"Your Highness! You'll fall if you run like that!"

The maids chased after her, stomping their feet in frustration, but Sisle paid them no heed.

Even if she stumbled, she knew that a gust of wind would always come from somewhere to catch her before she fully fell.

"Appa-mama!"

She loved the way he would stop and turn around quietly when she called out like that. Embracing him and feeling the rustling sound of his white robe was her favorite moment.

"Think of those who must run with you, Sisle. They cannot keep up with your recovery rate."

He would caution her, tapping her forehead affectionately, and she loved that.

Indeed, the maids often collapsed from exhaustion in front of His Majesty the Emperor without even having the chance to properly greet him, but Sisle didn't care. Being by her father's side was all that mattered to her.

She clung to the Holy Emperor so much that even the Second Queen Melody seemed envious.

If she fell asleep in the office, she would wake up in the Silver Rose Palace the next morning. As soon as she woke up, Sisle would start running again to find her father.

However, there were times when she had to return early to the Silver Rose Palace alone, especially on the days when the Holy Emperor retreated to the prayer room.

Occasionally, he would spend the night in the heart of the main palace, away from everyone else.

Though it was called a prayer room, it was actually a huge hall with an artificial pond. Sisle thought of it as a glamorous yet somehow lonely place.

"Why does Appa-mama have to be alone in the prayer room?"

As she parted ways with him at the entrance of the prayer room and was carried out of the main palace by the Knight Commander Katrina, Sisle asked.

"His Majesty bears many heavy burdens that we cannot know, Your Highness."

"Wouldn't it be better if we all stayed in the prayer room to help Appa-mama?"

To this, the gentle Knight Commander replied with a slightly bitter smile.

"How wonderful it would be if it were something we could help with. For now, the best we can do is to quietly avoid disturbing him. Just knowing that Your Highness cares so much for him will surely be a great strength to His Majesty."

Katrina said this, but Sisle couldn't agree.

She pouted, thinking to herself.

Mother always said not to disturb Father and kept a tight watch on my visits to the office, but Appa-mama always seemed happy when I did show up. So, if I'm with him in the prayer room, wouldn't he be happier? I'm sure of it!

Then, one night happened.

That day, she had separated from the Holy Emperor and returned early to the Silver Rose Palace, falling asleep. But in the middle of the night, she felt as if someone was shaking her awake.

"...?"

Rubbing her eyes, Sisle woke up.

Was it an illusion? As she sat up, she found herself alone in her bedroom, with no sign of anyone who might have shaken her awake.

No, it wasn't her being shaken; perhaps it was the world itself that trembled.

She tried to sleep again, but her mind wouldn't settle. An intense unease enveloped her, a strange alienation as if the world around her had completely changed overnight.

Unable to sleep, Sisle eventually slipped on her slippers and left her bedroom. Strangely, that night, none of the maids woke up, and the palace guards stood asleep on their feet.

Tip-tap.

Unconsciously, Sisle found herself walking towards the Holy Emperor. Then, remembering he was in the prayer room, she hurried towards the main palace.

Despite the warm spring night, a chilling coldness gripped her, forcing her to stop and rub her hands together now and then.

Finally arriving at the heart of the main palace, Sisle hesitated before the prayer room door.

'I shouldn't enter; I was told no one should...'

But then, a voice inside her head said,

[Open the door. Go inside and see what is happening.]

It sounded like someone else's whisper, yet it seemed to be her own thought. She opened the door slowly, in a daze. Creeeak...

Suddenly, a strong smell of blood hit her.

Sisle's eyes widened as she took in the dark interior of the prayer room.

There, in the center of the blood-red pond, stood her father. But something was off.

Under the dim moonlight, the Holy Emperor stood with a blood-soaked Nutcracker in one hand, staring intently at something. His usually pristine white robe was splattered with blood.

And sensing her presence, the Holy Emperor slowly turned his head towards Sisle.

In the dark hall, only his bright gray eyes emitted a chilling silvery glow.

"...!"

Sisle was utterly shocked. The eyes that always looked at her with warmth were now cold and indifferent.

Is that person... Is that really Appa-mama?

As she stepped back in fear, a voice whispered in her ear,

[Yes. That is his true nature. He ruthlessly cuts down those he deems useless. Soon, you too will meet the same fate at his hands, just like them.]

...Appa-mama, would do that to me?

[Yes. What do you think? Don't you want to see the future prepared for you?]

A soft, mocking laughter echoed.

Staggering backward, Sisle turned and fled back to the Silver Rose Palace. The Emperor simply watched her go without saying a word or following her.

Once back in her room, Sisle dived into her bed in a frenzy. She soon fell into a deep sleep, only to be tormented by disturbing nightmares.

The next morning, a Saintess's mark suddenly appeared on the beloved youngest princess's body.

The Silver Rose Palace was thrown into chaos, and high priests from the Holy Church rushed over, proclaiming it the return of the Saintess.

Hearing the news, the Holy Emperor also visited the Silver Rose Palace. His face, full of tender concern, was no different from usual, making Sisle doubt if the events of the previous night were just a nightmare.

However, the scene from that night, the Holy Emperor's cold gaze, remained a vivid afterimage in her mind. It resurfaced from her subconscious, repeatedly evoking the sensations of that chilly spring day.

And since that day, Sisle no longer ran after her father.

* * *

Good news often comes in succession.

Feeling elated from the achievements of his meeting with Eldest Young Master Siegmund, Seongjin visited the main palace to report his business trip to the Holy Emperor. Returning to the Pearl Palace, he was greeted by Commander Bruno with more news.

"A message from Arenja. Two of the missing persons you've been investigating are currently detained at the Milo Trading Company's capital branch."

Bruno detailed the identities and current locations of the two individuals, Jonathan and Ashley, the theological academy students who apparently were beaten up by the jailers.

"...This is unexpected?"

Arenja, who had agreed to close cooperation but often made excuses

like 'the time isn't right' and was reluctant to share information, had unexpectedly come through.

Caught off guard, Seongjin murmured, and Commander Bruno shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly.

"I'm not entirely sure about their criteria either. It's just that, based on what Your Highness discovered today, this information would have naturally surfaced once we intensified our search efforts."

"So, it was crucial to understand the connection with the Milo Trading Company?"

"It seems so. Of course, I get the feeling that's not all there is to it."

Then, Commander Bruno stroked his mustache lightly.

"Your Highness, this is just my personal opinion based on our interaction with them. Arenjar seemed to assume that there's another force behind the Milo Trading Company."

"Eldest Young Master Siegmund said something similar. He mentioned a high likelihood of involvement from Asein or Scarcepino."

Originally, the Milo Trading Company was not known for its activities in the North.

Thus, it must have been operating across the continent with the tacit approval of Assein through the merchants' union, or closely connected with Scarcepino, who has deep ties with the northwestern lords and border counts.

And he strongly suspected Scarcepino.

"Hmm?"

Commander Bruno suddenly furrowed his brows, focusing on something, then continued.

"Yes, exactly. I just asked whether Asein or Scarcepino is behind this, but they said they couldn't answer that. However, they suggested that

Scarcepino is someone Your Highness should keep an eye on, in some sense."

...Is that so?

"Scarcepino..."

More than being the mastermind behind the grey plague, perhaps it's related to the past actions of Mores. Come to think of it, didn't they say a young lord from the Scarcepino family had ties with Mores?

"But why is my so-called only friend not in touch?"

With everything that had been happening recently, it had slipped his mind, but now that he thought about it, it was strange. A lot of time had passed since the fever, and the restrictions on visiting the Pearl Palace had been lifted long ago.

At that moment, Edith, who was tidying up the bedding behind Seongjin, chimed in.

"Maybe Your Highness is just ignoring his contacts?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Well, doesn't the young lord send you an invitation like this every week?"

Edith rummaged through the pile of letters on the desk and held up a golden envelope.

"...Huh?"

Had such things been coming in?

"Yes. They've been arriving every week without fail, but since Your Highness told us to dispose of all the social gathering invitations, I've been taking care of them over time."

"....."

Ah, now he remembered.

The memory of the first social gathering was so strong that he had decided to live in voluntary seclusion and ordered all the letters to be discarded.

Seongjin took the glittering envelope from Edith and examined the sender.

Ricardo Scarcepino...

– Ricardo, a prince of the Scarcepino family, is known for his sociability and regularly hosts gatherings with the scions of influential families.

He remembered hearing this description from Sir Masain.

The person who hosted the most mainstream gatherings in Delcross was really the only friend of the notorious Morres?

Seongjin rubbed his chin, pondering.

The date on the invitation was tomorrow. Maybe it was worth attending to meet him in person?

"Shall I prepare for an outing tomorrow?"

Edith, noticing his hesitation, quickly asked.

"...Hmm, yes. Let's do that."

Ignoring the weekly invitations didn't seem right, and the gatherings didn't appear suspicious.

As Seongjin made up his mind, Commander Bruno suddenly tensed and looked into space with a troubled expression.

"...Is that possible? I'm not keen on it."

"...?"

"Yes, I will convey that."

Confused by the commander's grimacing and incomprehensible words, Bruno turned to Seongjin and spoke.

"Your Highness, the leader of Arenja has a direct message for you."

Direct? How? Is he coming here?

"No, he's not coming. He can temporarily 'possess' me through an open channel."

"...Possess?"

Is it something like that? Like when the twin possessed Ashley and grabbed her by the collar?

As Seongjin nodded in agreement.

Suddenly, Commander Bruno's demeanor drastically changed. The aura of the former Decalon Knight, which had been softly blending with the surroundings, shifted to a distinct, slightly sharp unfamiliar presence.

Most notably, his deep green eyes turned a light gray with a strange glow.

[Your Highness.]

His voice was different too.

It sounded layered, almost genderless and ageless.

Kneeling on one knee and bowing his head, Commander Bruno – or rather, the leader of Arenja – greeted Seongjin.

[Nice to meet you. I am the leader of Arenja, currently acting as the Oracle of Cornsheim.]

...Oracle?

"I am the leader of Arenja, and currently, I'm acting as the Oracle of Cornseim."

Seongjin blinked in surprise.

The Oracle, whom he had tried but failed to find any information about, had suddenly appeared.

But what did it mean to be acting as the Oracle?

Anticipating Seongjin's confusion, the leader quickly added an explanation.

[The Oracle is a prophet of the Cornsheim tribe, guiding the tribe towards the right future and the path they should follow. However, unfortunately, our tribe has long lost such a prophet. Thus, I, with my albeit limited ability to understand causality, am serving in their stead.]

In essence, it meant that Arenja was the ultimate decision-maker regarding what information to share.

"So, what about the most important part you left out in your introduction?"

Puzzled by Seongjin's question, the leader asked in return.

[What important thing are you referring to?]

"What's your name?"

[Ah!]

Caught off-guard, the leader's face showed a moment of surprise before he promptly responded.

[In our clan, one's position is their identity, so I apologize for the discourtesy. My name is Rebecca. I have come to speak to you, albeit in this manner, due to an urgent message that suddenly arose.]

As the leader spoke, faint gray lights occasionally flickered in Masain's eyes.

That strange glint in his eyes. Seongjin thought it felt eerily familiar.

[Your Highness, there is much I want to explain, but time is short. His Majesty probably does not appreciate my interference.]

Father?

"Yes. the Holy Emperor wishes for Your Highness's path to be laid upon complete uncertainty."

...Complete uncertainty?

Before Seongjin could inquire about the meaning, the leader of Arenja hurriedly continued.

[The reason for this abrupt meeting is to minimize the repercussions of the message I'm about to deliver.]

According to the leader, there would be a total of three instances of information disclosure: from him to an internal agent, from that agent to Commander Bruno through channeling, and finally, from the commander to Seongjin.

The consequences of this chain of communication could be quite unwelcome. This, too, was a side effect of tampering with uncertainty.

"So, what is this important message you're so eager to convey?"

[Yes, Your Highness. It is to urge you to meet the Saintess before visiting the Scarcepino estate.]

"The Saintess? Do you mean Sisle?"

[.....]

However, no further response came.

With that final remark, the leader bowed his head as if to say goodbye and then seemed to stagger for a moment before lifting his head. By then, his eyes had returned to their original deep green color.

Seongjin asked skeptically.

"...Commander?"

"Yes, Your Highness, it's me."

Commander Bruno frowned and rubbed his forehead.

"It seems difficult to maintain this state for long with my abilities. Having someone overlay my body... it's not a pleasant feeling."

After massaging his temples for a while, as if suffering from a severe headache, the commander added.

"Hmm, the leader of Arenja asks for understanding for not properly saying goodbye before leaving. And he insists that you remember the message."

Meet the Saintess before encountering Scarcepino.

"Why such an out-of-the-blue message?"

"Who knows. Perhaps the predictions seen by Arenja have suddenly changed."

Bruno, straightening his slightly disheveled attire, continued.

"It's just my guess, but it seems to be because Your Highness has just decided to meet Scarcepino young lord in person."

"...What?"

Just for that?

"If Your Highness intends to do something, it happens... or so they say. I'm not quite sure of the exact meaning."

"Wow, that's some detailed prediction. Was the young lord of Scarcepino that important a figure?"

If so, they should have hinted at meeting him earlier!

"But Commander, about the Saintess that the leader mentioned earlier..."

Seongjin started to say something more but then abruptly closed his mouth as Commander Bruno silently brought a finger to his lips, signaling for discretion.

"Please, Your Highness. Understand that the whole process that just occurred was meant to minimize the repercussions of the message."

"...."

This is complicated.

Referring to her specifically as [the Saintess] rather than Sisle – was that an intentional avoidance of naming a specific person, or...

'Could it be referring to that suspicious woman?'

But if it really means Seo Yi-seo, how can I arrange a meeting so suddenly? Now that she's grandly inaugurated as the Saintess, it's not easy to just call her over.

Besides, for some reason, I don't feel too keen on meeting her.

[Why? Something bothering you?]

The Demon King, who had been quiet until now, suddenly chimed in.

'Well, I have this strong feeling of dislike and annoyance.'

[Is that so...]

The Demon King seemed to ponder for a moment before cautiously suggesting.

[Hmm... In my opinion, if Arenja hadn't mentioned it, you wouldn't have known, right? How about just doing nothing and see what

happens?]

'...Huh?'

[I'm not an expert in causality, but matters involving it are often too complex to judge in a single moment. The guy from before must have thought it wouldn't cause a big problem and thus advised you, but maybe there's a reason your father insists on such uncertainty?]

'.....'

[As you know, he's a character who recklessly meddles with causality, balancing on a fine line. Who else could be more adept at judging causality than him? If your father says not to do it, then don't. Whatever is meant to happen will happen eventually.]

Hmm, the Demon King's words sounded quite convincing.

Seongjin glanced at Commander Bruno, still grimacing and clutching his head, and made up his mind.

It might be a bit unfair to the commander who had struggled with this unexpected role of medium, but...

'Alright, let's just ignore it!'

Deciding this, he felt an unexpected sense of relief.

'Ah! That reminds me of a thought.'

[What is it?]

So, the leader of Arenja believed that his message wouldn't cause a major issue in causality, right?

Doesn't that mean he thought that even if he told me, I wouldn't have taken it seriously anyway?

[Oh? That's true.]

Whether it's an acting Oracle or whatever, that side must have a capable prophet too.

* * *

"Really? The Milo Trading Company and the Grey Plague, that's an unexpected combination."

That evening.

Dasha, who had visited Pearl Palace, tilted her head in confusion upon hearing the new information from Seongjin.

"I couldn't have imagined their involvement with the Grey Plague. After all, Milo is a foreign trading company that mainly distributes liquor in Asein and Rohan. Besides supplying wine to some taverns, they aren't known to be very active in Delcross."

"Since they are a foreign-based company, perhaps the remnants of the Dark Cult, who fled Delcross, might have found refuge with them?"

"That does seem plausible."

Dasha nodded and said,

"Anyway, let's track the activities of the Milo Trading Company. I'll focus on their connections with the Dark Cult and gather information as quickly as possible to report back."

Seongjin nodded with a satisfied expression.

Always so competent, no matter when.

"Ah, and about the two individuals tipped off by Arenja, if their information turns out to be true, just keep them under surveillance for now, without taking any rash actions."

Dasha then asked with curiosity,

"Aren't they just minions of the Dark Cult we've finally found? Shouldn't we interrogate them for information?"

"Well, I don't think they are the kind to have valuable information. If we capture them rashly, it might alert the Milo Trading Company, making our investigation even more complicated."

The fact that they are loosely held by the company itself might indicate they are just low-level underlings who know nothing. The whereabouts of the key Inquisitors or priests among the missing are still unknown.

If there's any sign that the company might kill them to silence them, then it won't be too late to extract them.

"That makes sense. I'll proceed as advised."

Dasha responded briskly.

Despite the increasing workload with various investigations, Dasha didn't seem overly burdened. Seongjin hadn't even brought up the investigation into the heretical organizations, given how much he had already requested.

But as Seongjin had limited manpower, he had no choice but to rely heavily on Dasha.

The tasks Seongjin personally undertook often ended up entangled in odd situations.

A visit to the Judiciary led to the discovery of the plague, opening a gate at the Heretical Judiciary, and the woman he sought information about the Dileraria Butterfly suddenly became the Saintess.

"Ah, why do my endeavors always end up like this..."

"Your Highness?"

"Oh, it's nothing. By the way, how is my mother doing these days?"

Queen Lizabeth hadn't visited Pearl Palace recently. Seongjin had asked Dasha to keep an eye on her, so he only heard about her through occasional updates.

The queen, usually active in various social engagements, has been busy recently hosting dignitaries from Asein.

"Any particular patronages?"

"It's well-known that Her Majesty enjoys ballet. Besides her longstanding support for the Chatellet Theatre, she has recently long-term rented the Oranje Theater and is inviting famous ballet companies from Brittany to perform."

"Hmm..."

So it seems Empress Elizabeth wasn't the one sponsoring the heretical groups in the name of Morres?

In any case, it was reassuring to hear that she seemed to be doing relatively well.

"That's a relief, though."

He had been quietly worried, not seeing her for so long and wondering if she might be ill.

Then, Dasha asked with a hint of curiosity,

"Why don't you just send a servant to Ruby Palace to check on her? Don't you usually visit the Ruby Palace personally for such matters?"

...Oh? Now that she mentioned it?

Seongjin blinked in realization.

'Why haven't I thought of visiting the Queen myself?'

Even with the Holy Emperor, he had been keeping in regular contact lately.

Although it had been quite some time since the regular audience due to the upcoming birthday celebration, Seongjin often visited the main palace to share news and see the emperor.

'Have I been too indifferent towards the Queen all this time?'

Seongjin felt a deep sense of self-reproach.

He was hardly in a position to criticize Mores for being unfilial. There might be some dubious aspects, but still, she was someone who

believed in him as her son and showed affection.

"Yeah, visiting the Ruby Palace directly..."

As Seongjin unconsciously made a blank expression, the Demon King inquired,

[What now? Something bothering you?]

But then, what should I do?

Feeling guilty is one thing, but I still can't help but feel it's a huge hassle and annoyance, right?

[...Indeed...]

The Demon King seemed to ponder for a moment before cautiously continuing.

[Then don't go? You're extremely busy yourself, so it's understandable if you can't spare the time for this. Besides, if you visit, you might just end up being a disturbance.]

'...That makes sense, doesn't it?'

Right. I don't know the Queen well, but she always seemed somewhat obsessive-compulsive. Hearing about her recent activities, it seems she's tightly scheduled every day. What if my sudden visit disrupts her plans?

'I'll see her at the birthday celebration anyway.'

Seongjin felt convinced.

With that thought, he felt an unexpected sense of relief again.

* * *

Whatever will happen is bound to happen, regardless of what I do.

Yesterday, the Demon King said something along those lines, but Seongjin had taken it as a mere excuse, not seriously considering it.

However, the next day, after finishing his morning training and entering the palace, he was greeted by unexpected visitors.

"Hello? Big brother, if it's alright, can we talk for a moment?"

""

Sisle, dressed in her white priestly robes, greeted him with an expression as blank as a sculpted doll. Like before, she was carefully holding a small book-like object.

And standing behind her.

"Shaaak!"

It was Saintess Seo Yi-seo, hissing at him like a cat on high alert.

The leader of Arenja had indeed said to meet the saintess, but he never specified who she was.

But who would have thought that two saintesses would visit Seongjin at the same time?

"Look, I knew this would happen. I had a feeling something like this was coming."

The Demon King boasted for the first time in a while.

[How about it? Behold my foresight! Things that are bound to happen, do happen, after all.]

"Yeah, right. That's interesting."

Seongjin observed the doll-like little girl and Seo Yi-seo, who was closely following her, growling and guarding against everyone.

Anyway, having a conversation was also what he wanted. Seongjin nodded agreeably and said,

"Alright, let's go inside. Shall we have some tea together?"

But no sooner had he spoken,

"Be careful, Princess Sisle! This man is the worst time bomb, pretending to be the best gentleman!"

".....?"

So, what has this woman been doing all this time?

"You say I carry something strange, but what you have is quite formidable too."

"...Um, Orabeoni (elder brother). It's complicated to explain, but there are some intricate matters here."

A rare look of contemplation appeared on the poker-faced Sisle's face.

The three of them sat facing each other in the Pearl Palace reception room.

Again, Seo Yi-seo clung tightly to the hem of Sisle's dress and sat close to the girl. She began to be wary of everything around her.

She was wary of Seongjin, the sofa, the cookies on the snack table, and even Bruno, the commander serving tea... Wait, Commander Bruno?

"What are you doing here?"

Seongjin looked up in disbelief at the manager neatly filling the tea cups, and Bruno cleared his throat.

"I happened to see this maid dragging a tea tray into the reception room! If I had been a bit later, it could have been a real disaster, Your Highness."

He looked proud as if he had preempted some grand conspiracy.

Sure enough, behind the commander, Edith was seen sweating and avoiding eye contact.

"Thank you, Commander."

When Seongjin sincerely expressed his gratitude, Commander Bruno lightly tugged at his mustache and replied,

"It's nothing. I'm just fulfilling my duty to assist Your Highness."

Ignoring Edith's resentful gaze, Seongjin gulped down his tea.

Ah, indeed. As expected from someone who prides himself on his tea knowledge. The taste is on par with Louis's Melbourne tea.

In this manner, Seongjin and Sisle quietly sipped their tea for a while.

"Actually, there's a serious matter I want to discuss with you, brother."

After some time had passed, Sisle, placing her teacup down on the table, finally spoke.

"A serious matter?"

"Yes."

After broaching the subject and pondering for a moment, Sisle, as if having made up her mind, looked straight at Seongjin and continued.

"It's a significant issue involving you, me, and Miss Seo Yi-seo."

"What's the matter?"

"Before I tell you, there's something you should know in advance. It might be hard to believe, but Miss Seo Yi-seo here is no ordinary person."

Seongjin nodded seriously.

That makes sense. An ordinary person wouldn't have a staring contest with an innocent teacup like that.

"Miss Seo Yi-seo isn't from this world. She's a dimensional traveler who crossed over from another dimension to this place."

"Oh, really?"

That's quite believable. She actually is a human from the Regular World.

But, interpreting Seongjin's nonchalant attitude in her own way, Sisle added with a slightly anxious voice.

"It's true, brother."

"I know, I know. But how did you come to know about it?"

"....."

At Seongjin's question, Sisle's eyes widened in surprise. Following suit, a startled Seo Yi-seo quickly turned to Seongjin and exclaimed,

"See, Sisle-nim! What did I tell you? There's something suspicious about this man! He might even be the second mastermind, you know?"

Mastermind, really? What do they take me for!

I'm just a benign spirit who accidentally possessed a body in this world.

[Mastermind... Right. So that's what it was! There was a reason behind this damn personality after all!]

'No, what's this Demon King convincing himself of now?'

"Really, it's dangerous! Shouldn't we reconsider involving this person, Sisle-nim?"

"Who are you to talk? Who's the one casting strange spells to charm people?"

"What? How do you know about the [Minor Command]? Writer Lee said ordinary people can't sense it."

"And who is this Writer Lee?"

"Why are you trying to extract information from me? Before, you were unnecessarily making a fuss about a perfectly fine blueprint, and now you're suspicious too!"

Due to Seo Yi-seo's constant nitpicking, it took some time for Sisle to finish explaining to Seongjin.

And the facts she revealed were quite astonishing.

This world was actually a world within a book, and Seongjin and Sisle were characters from that book. Moreover, Seo Yi-seo was a dimensional traveler summoned from another dimension through the book's author.

"...This is a world within a book?"

Seongjin asked, finding the explanation somewhat unbelievable.

[How could that be?]

The Demon King also seemed puzzled.

[A world created solely from the contents of a book isn't impossible, but such a place would naturally be a world of imagination. However, this place is unmistakably the Main World!]

The Main World could be the basis for imagination, but it wasn't something that could be recreated through it. Could there be some misunderstanding?

Seongjin tilted his head, but it was clear that Sisle firmly believed this place to be a world within a book.

"In fact, when I was young, I read the novel Seo Yi-seo mentioned. Since then, I've had lingering doubts that this world might be the one from the book."

Sisle continued, her eyes settled and somber.

"But I couldn't be completely sure until recently, when Seo Yi-seo, the protagonist of the book, actually appeared. Sharing various information with her made me certain that it was true."

"Well, let's assume that's the case for now. But, you know..."

Seongjin glanced at Seo Yi-seo, who was perched on the back of the sofa hissing, and then asked Sisle again for confirmation.

"Is she really the protagonist?"

"Um..."

Sisle seemed at a loss for words to that question.

Who would have known? The new saintess destined to bring about his doom turned out to be someone with such a severe distrust of

people.

In fact, Sisle's visit to the Pearl Palace with Seo Yi-seo had its complications. When she arrived at St. Sebastian's Church in the morning, she found Seo Yi-seo causing a commotion over a bunch of letters that had been delivered to her.

All these were nothing but swift moves by the influential people of the Imperial City to impress the new saintess.

"These suspicious invitations, what are they all about? Throw them all away!"

"But, Your Holiness, you should at least look at this one. Cardinal Diggory is the head of the administration. He must want to meet you personally to offer his assistance in various matters."

Sister Electra, newly assigned to assist her, tried to calm her down, but Seo Yi-seo was adamant.

"They invite me with pure goodwill? Even if I had no value to them, would they make such offers? I find it all suspicious! I won't meet anyone who suddenly sends me an invitation like this!"

Then, she eventually started hissing at the tray piled high with letters.

"Shaaa!"

Is this really the main heroine consecrated as a saintess, or just a stray cat picked up from somewhere?

"Ah! Sisle-nim!"

Noticing Sisle, Seo Yi-seo's face lit up, and she quickly ran over and clung to her.

"You're the only one I can trust now, Sisle-nim! From now on, I'll protect you!"

Refusing to leave her side, Seo Yi-seo ended up accompanying Sisle all the way to the Pearl Palace.

"So, what's this serious issue involving you and me?"

"Yes. Don't be shocked, brother. According to the book, a great crisis is approaching this world soon. Powerful high-ranking demon lords will descend, Delcross will lose the blessing of the Supreme God and fall into ruin, and a terrible calamity will finally befall this world."

"Uh..."

Surprisingly, this information was not new to Seongjin.

At Seongjin's composed reaction, Seo Yi-seo frowned and exclaimed,

"See! He already knew all about it, this mastermind!"

...What exactly is the problem with her?

"Anyway, Miss Seo Yi-seo is here to save the world from that crisis. A storyteller who travels between dimensions, the writer of this book, came to her and asked her to become a saintess and save the world. He said he's a storyteller of dimensions, destined to become a great ruler, the king of stories one day."

[What? A storyteller of dimensions?]

The Demon King exclaimed in surprise.

Could it be Sigurd Sigurdson? The self-proclaimed Dream Demon King, who wanders through a thousand dreams and speaks with a thousand voices.

As I was blankly looking at Sisle, Seo Yi-seo asked with suspicion,

"Don't tell me, you already knew about him?"

"Well, not exactly 'know,' but there is someone I'm slightly suspicious of..."

At that response, Seo Yi-seo clung to Sisle in shock.

"Wow! I'm really scared of him now, Sisle-nim!"

What is she talking about?

As I stared in disbelief, she pointed at me, trembling,

"Writer Lee said so! If you mess with him, it'll be trouble! He could be the greatest benefactor who bestows everything in this world, but if you step on his toes even slightly, he could become the worst disaster that destroys everything!"

...Was I such a variable character in the story?

While Seo Yi-seo's gestures swayed back and forth, Sisle let out a small sigh.

"Anyway, that writer is said to have different bodies, traveling between dimensions. He has an avatar here in Delcross Imperial City, but sadly, Miss Seo Yi-seo doesn't know his true identity. He's carefully hidden his appearance."

Sisle looked at me and continued seriously,

"But the book I read had some clues that might hint at his identity."

This feels like the main point now.

"And my guess is, the writer's avatar might be Prince Riccardo Scarcepero, brother."

".....!"

"Your friend."

...So this was why the leader of Arenja insisted I talk to the saintess first!

Sisle stayed in the Pearl Palace almost until lunchtime, conversing with Seongjin.

Returning to St. Sebastian's Church somewhat weary, Sister Ursula was waiting for her with a small box.

"Sister Sisle! A gift has arrived from Prince Owen."

"A gift?"

Oh, that's right. A letter came from dear brother recently.

—"I'll send a gift to father and you soon."

Sisle, curious and excited, opened the box.

But what popped out of the box was a small, pink piece of cloth, its purpose unclear. It was slightly longer than a palm, adorned with peculiar embroidery, and had an elastic band attached to the back.

...What is this?

Sister Ursula, who had been observing the gift with curious eyes, suddenly cringed and exclaimed,

"Ugh, what is this? It looks like some kind of underwear. How scandalous!"

"Could it be....."

Did Prince Owen really send something like this after such a long time?

As Sisle was tilting her head in confusion, Seo Yi-seo peered over and remarked,

"Huh? This is a sleep mask, isn't it? It's incredibly cute, but seems a bit out of place for our times, doesn't it?"

"A sleep mask?"

"Yes, you wear it over your eyes to sleep comfortably."

Wow, it's shaped like a bunny! Absolutely adorable!

As Seo Yi-seo kept admiring the mask, Sister Ursula, who had mistaken it for underwear, awkwardly averted her eyes.

But then, as Seo Yi-seo was inspecting the mask, her eyes suddenly widened in astonishment and she blurted out,

"Wait? What? There's item information appearing here?"

"Information?"

"Yes, I'm sure of it. This is an item from our world, Sisle-nim!"

Seo Yi-seo then gently caressed the mask, seemingly reading something invisible in the air.

"...Pangea Chronicle?"

Upon entering the imperial office early in the morning, the chief chamberlain and administrative officers were already deeply engaged in a serious meeting.

"What exactly is this?"

"Since it's a gift sent by the prince, it must surely be no ordinary item."

What they were examining was an eye mask in a small box.

The eye mask, shaped like a white rabbit, was delicately embroidered with cute eyes and a mouth. Of course, no one there could recognize it as a character merchandise, which was the real problem.

"This is serious. We need to find an answer before His Majesty arrives."

As Louis pondered deeply with a serious expression, stroking his chin, the young administrative officer Dorian offered a plausible explanation.

"Perhaps it's a folk craft from the Varsha tribe. Prince Owen has been engaging with Volanta recently, hasn't he?"

"Hmm..."

His suggestion didn't seem to convince everyone. For something supposedly made by southern pagans, the material was too luxurious and the finishing too neat. It was undoubtedly custom-made by a renowned fashion house.

Amidst this discussion, a priest spoke up with a somewhat peculiar expression.

"It's strange. I don't know what this embroidery signifies, but looking at it makes my heart flutter and feel ticklish. Isn't it somewhat cute?"

At this, the others jumped back in alarm from the eye mask.

"A charm?"

"Heart arrhythmia?"

"It might be an object of witchcraft!"

Just as one of the anxious priests was about to bless the eye mask,

"What are you all doing now?"

"...Your Majesty!"

As the emperor strode into the office, everyone awkwardly bowed their heads.

Observing the priest with a holy book in one hand and a rosary with the divine emblem in the other, the emperor seemed to quickly grasp the situation. He glanced briefly at the box surrounded by the crowd and nodded understandingly.

"Don't worry. There's no magical energy detected. It's merely a creation of the mundane world."

Phew. The administrative officials let out a sigh of relief.

Although they were unsure about the mundane world His Majesty mentioned, it seemed it wasn't anything dangerous.

"So, it's a birthday gift from Owen, is it?"

The Holy Emperor pondered over the profound intention of the 1st Prince who had sent him such an obscure item, tilting his head in contemplation for a while.

And finally, the conclusion he reached was:

"It's concerning. It seems that this child has been on the frontline for too long. It's about time he returned to the capital."

"....."

It appeared Owen had shown a temporary lapse in judgment due to fatigue accumulated on the frontline.

"Anyway, isn't it quite cute? Since it was sent with good intentions, maybe I should display it as a decoration."

Thus, the adorable rabbit eye mask was carefully hung on one side of the Holy Emperor's office wall.

* * *

That evening, Seongjin prepared to go out for the first time in a while.

As he was lazily putting on his coat with the assistance of Edith, his attendant sir Masain, who was waiting nearby, smiled brightly and said:

"The gathering at Count Scarcepino's is famous as a social event for promising young masters. The future bearers of Delcross will surely exchange brilliant and sharp insights. I'm truly looking forward to it!"

He seemed uncharacteristically excited, as if he himself were attending the event.

It wasn't surprising, considering the prince who had been cooped up in Pearl Palace for training was finally engaging in a social activity. Masain must have been worried in his own way, despite his usual silence.

"Well, I guess it'll just be some casual chat until we get there?"

Seongjin was focused solely on dealing with the Scarcepino young master and had little expectation for the gathering itself.

What else could a group of vigorous young men do when they get together?

In a world without idols, perhaps they would gossip about actresses on Bertrand Street or critique famous courtesans. At least, it wouldn't

be a serious discussion like the ones Sir Masain imagined.

However, Masain's thoughts were a bit different.

"It's a gathering of high priests, central nobility, and the offspring of wealthy merchants. Even in casual conversations, valuable information is exchanged. Spending time there will give you a feel for the overall trends in Delcross society and economy."

"Really?"

"Yes, and I've heard that sometimes small performances are held there too. Inviting the most famous minstrels and musicians from the continent, it would greatly benefit your cultural knowledge."

"Hmm..."

Considering Sir Masain's words, who had received the finest education as a royal prince in his youth, it seemed worth heeding.

That was all well and good. The problem arose when the oblivious Edith casually mentioned as Seongjin was about to board the carriage.

"Will Sir Masain be accompanying you today? Usually, Your Highness goes alone, quietly."

"...Alone, without an escort?"

"Yes, you always rode alone in the carriage."

Masain seemed profoundly shocked. He asked again, his voice trembling.

"...You've been going out of the palace, all this time, without any escort?"

As his excitement visibly plummeted, clueless Edith nodded and innocently replied.

"Yes, it's just a visit to the townhouse. And the Scarcepino family's mansion, after all. Why would there be a need for an escort?"

".....!"

Masain's pupils violently trembled.

He climbed onto the carriage with a stiff face and remained silent, lips tightly sealed, throughout the ride as the carriage left the imperial palace and sped along the main road.

'It looks like he might explode if I so much as touch him....'

In the uncomfortable silence, Seongjin cautiously observed him. Though sitting quietly, Masain's face was a sight to behold, turning from red to pale in rapid succession.

Wow, I wouldn't be surprised if the knights get a collective scolding tomorrow.

The Scarcefino, known as one of the wealthiest families in Delcross, like other central nobles, had their main mansion in the capital.

However, it was known that they primarily stayed in a separately arranged townhouse for convenience, owning the largest number of houses in the area and using them like several annexes.

The social gathering this time was held in one of those annexes.

Arriving at the mansion surrounded by bright lights, visible even from afar, an elderly man who appeared to be the butler came out to greet Seongjin.

He seemed momentarily startled by the completely changed appearance of the prince and the presence of a robust knight standing firmly by his side.

However, as a seasoned servant, he quickly managed his expression and bowed politely.

"I am honored to meet you, Prince Morres. The young master has been eagerly awaiting your visit."

Instead of leading the way, the butler quietly glanced at Masain, who was about to follow Seongjin, giving him a subtle hint.

"What insolence..."

"Sir Masain."

Seongjin stopped Masain, who seemed ready to charge at any moment with a menacing aura.

"I'm fine, so don't worry and wait here."

Meanwhile, carriages carrying other young nobles also began to arrive.

Seeing the princes entering the mansion alone, without their escort knights, Masain's expression finally softened a bit.

Having recently engaged in frequent sparring and sensing the prince's extraordinary combat skills, Masain was aware of Seongjin's progression to the full aura of the seventh level, a presence he too found far from light.

However.

"Your Highness, should anything happen, you must, absolutely must let me know! Do you understand?"

Still harboring a nanny's instincts, Masain embarrassingly clung to Seongjin, earnestly admonishing him in front of the elderly butler.

Goodness, man. Take it easy. If something really happens, will I even have a moment to inform you?

Having parted with Masain, Seongjin finally managed to step into the mansion.

But as he followed the butler, Seongjin soon noticed something odd. Instead of leading him to the main entrance of the banquet hall where other nobles were entering, the butler guided him through a dark corridor leading to a narrow staircase.

Seongjin glanced at him, but the elderly butler seemed perfectly calm, as if this was the usual route.

[Hmm, blood pressure and pulse are normal? Doesn't seem nervous.]

The Demon King murmured to himself.

Seongjin heightened his senses, but aside from the occasional passing servants, he detected no unusual presence.

'Was it always like this?'

It did seem odd that a prince, notorious for being an irredeemable reprobate, was attending a mainstream gathering. Perhaps it wasn't a conventional visit.

"Then, have a comfortable time."

Eventually, Seongjin arrived at a small resting area on the second floor. It resembled an open balcony within the building, offering a panoramic view of the brightly lit banquet hall.

Conversely, due to the dim lighting, it seemed unlikely that this area would be visible from the outside.

Seongjin sat in a small armchair beside the railing and looked around. It seemed that the only thing to do in this space was to observe the banquet hall.

'...Could it be that I'm just supposed to watch the gathering from here? Really?'

What on earth was Morres doing previously? The more he knew, the more inexplicable his actions seemed.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere in the banquet hall was becoming pleasantly lively.

On one side, there was a long table with refreshments, drinks, and finger foods, and in the center, an exotic-looking minstrel with slightly dark skin was singing a gentle song.

And a fair number of youngsters were gathered in small groups, enjoying light conversations in the relaxed atmosphere.

'Well... Better to hang out here than to laugh and build pointless connections down there.'

[Sigh, as if someone only focused on training would be a recluse.]

'Shut up!'

With nothing much to do, Seongjin leaned languidly against the railing, watching the scene below, when he suddenly felt someone's gaze on him.

Turning his head towards that gaze, Seongjin immediately recognized him.

Eldest Young Master Orden Siegsmund.

The man was looking precisely in Seongjin's direction, having sensed him from afar.

He too seemed to recognize Seongjin right away, furrowing his brow momentarily, but then realizing the delicate situation, he turned his head away, pretending not to know him.

Around him were gathered young nobles with noticeably active auras.

In the Salon de Merci, Seongjin had teased him for having celebrity syndrome, but now it seemed clear he was indeed a person of fame. Looking at the excited faces approaching him to talk, Masain's description of him as an idol among the martial family's children came to mind.

'For someone like him, it would be odd not to be invited to mainstream gatherings...'

As Seongjin continued to observe the banquet hall, he noticed a few other standout individuals. Those who were the center of their conversation groups, receiving admiring glances.

Over there, judging by the colorful clothing, were probably heirs of merchants or wealthy families. A slightly chubby man, laughing more than others, seemed to be the main figure in his group.

And on this side, there was a young man in neat attire, reminiscent of Kenneth DiGory, passionately discussing something with the people around him.

While Seongjin was casually surveying the atmosphere, someone approached him from behind and started a conversation.

"It's always a heartwarming sight to see. There's something special about young people of this age, something that only they seem to possess. Each one of them carries a small ember, ready to burst into flame at any moment. Isn't their potential truly dazzling?"

Turning around, Seongjin saw a rather tall and handsome young man walking towards him, smiling. Under the dim light, his deep teal eyes somewhat resembled Isabella's.

Is this guy that Riccardo Scarcepino?

"Do you know? I've been eagerly awaiting news about you. Why haven't you been in touch?"

But setting aside his identity for a moment.

No matter the age difference, did this guy just address a prince so casually?

"Are you that young Scarcepino Lord?"

"...Hmm?"

As Seongjin asked sternly and glared at him, Riccardo appeared confused for a moment, tilting his head.

"I've heard rumors that you've changed a lot or lost your memory, but this is really unexpected. You seem like a completely different person."

The young man, who looked quite youthful, spoke with a heavy tone, as if he were an elder. If he really were Sigurd Sigurdson's avatar, it wouldn't be entirely incomprehensible.

However, Seongjin was genuinely surprised by his next words.

"But the important thing is that you have returned to this place. Now, what interesting story will you share with me today? My old friend, the young oracle of Delcross."

...Oracle?

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Young oracle of Delcross.

Before Seongjin could respond, taken aback, Riccardo strode over and settled himself in the chair opposite.

Crossing his legs and leaning comfortably into the plush seat, his demeanor was the epitome of a carefree scion of wealth.

"Hmm? What's with that look? Wasn't that the reason you sought me out? I thought you'd spend time with me as always, sharing various prophecies."

Seongjin's mind became cluttered.

Wait a minute, Morres was an oracle? What kind of nonsense is that?

[Lee Seongjin]

Then, the Demon King murmured as if a bit tense.

[There's no significant change in that guy's blood pressure or pulse. It's a bit unsettling how overly relaxed he seems, but he doesn't appear to be lying. It's just...]

'Just?'

[No matter how much I observe, I can't be certain if that guy is Sigurd Sigurdson. And it makes sense, because his body and soul belong to a human from the real world. A proper human!]

What does that mean?

[I'm not exactly sure what this avatar concept entails. But if we assume it's merely like a puppet being controlled, could someone like him maintain such a pristine state of soul?]

'...That makes sense.'

So, was Sisle's speculation wrong after all?

Frowning, Seongjin turned his gaze to Riccardo, who continued to smile broadly, observing Seongjin's face as if amused.

With no other choice, Seongjin decided to methodically ascertain the facts.

"I told you prophecies?"

"Indeed. Hmm... It seems the rumors of your lost memory are true."

With a look of regret, Riccardo stroked his smooth chin while gazing at Seongjin.

"You seem quite perplexed, my precious friend. Does this mean I won't be able to hear your stories today?"

"That's right. I didn't come here to talk today, but to listen. So, you need to cooperate with me."

"Of course. Ask anything you're curious about. Aren't you a rare gem in Delcross, the only one of its kind that's alive and vibrant? For you, there's nothing I wouldn't do."

A chill ran down my arm for a moment.

What's with his way of speaking since a while ago? Is it some kind of mental attack?

"...Do people often tell you that you come off as creepy?"

"Even if it's meant as a harmless jest, hearing it continually can be hurtful."

He hears it a lot, then.

"Very well. Today, I'll make special time for you, setting aside other engagements. Think of it as a gesture of respect for the days we've spent together."

"Then, to start, tell me what I've mainly been doing here."

"I shall do so."

With that, Riccardo stroked his chin as if organizing his thoughts.

"How shall I put it? You and I mainly shared stories about people."

"People?"

"Yes. We crafted narratives about the many possibilities they hold and the various futures that could unfold from those, while overlooking the banquet hall. It was a thoroughly fascinating and meaningful endeavor."

"Does that mean I made prophecies about the people attending the banquet?"

"Well, to put it simply, yes."

Riccardo added with a furrowed brow.

"But I wonder if there's any point in you asking me anything. Regardless of what your memory holds, if you decide to know something, wouldn't it be possible for you with your capabilities? Your mysterious eyes still haven't lost their shine."

"Eyes?"

At Seongjin's query, he nodded.

"Yes. Those oracle eyes that penetrate the truth."

"Oracle..."

Wait a minute. Wasn't the oracle mentioned as a prophet of the Cornsheim clan? It was said to be extinct now.

So why is it coming up here?

Riccardo tilted his head, observing Seongjin's complex expression.

"...You really don't know anything, do you? Yes, the oracle. Shall we

start from there?"

"..."

"Ah, by any chance, do you know about the Cornsheim clan?"

The Cornsheim clan.

Seongjin had heard a brief mention of them from Commander Bruno before.

"I am the leader of Arenja, currently acting as the oracle of Cornsheim."

The leader of Arenja, who had possessed the commander back then, introduced himself in such a manner.

After he was quickly expelled, Commander Bruno had provided additional explanations about things Seongjin hadn't managed to hear from him.

"The Cornsheim clan has been a secluded minority clan in Delcross from ancient times. Rumors say that they all possessed exceptional abilities to manipulate souls, using bizarre sorcery beyond the imagination of ordinary people. Looking back, it seems the entire clan might have been channelers.

They were also said to possess many extraordinary technologies that seemed not of this world. As a result, they were branded as devil worshippers and most were executed by the Inquisitors years ago.

The internal agents of Arenja are among the few Cornsheim clan members who survived that purge.

"...But now, with no oracle, I heard someone is acting in their stead?"

At Seongjin's question, Riccardo nodded.

"Indeed. The Cornsheim clan lost their prophet decades ago. However, strictly speaking, the oracle hasn't disappeared. It's just that they decided to go into hiding to avoid their clan."

Having said that, Riccardo lifted his head and gazed into the void with unfocused eyes for a moment, then smiled meaningfully.

"The same goes for the oracle of this era. He is still alive. He has simply chosen to seal his prophecies and opt for complete silence."

...Why is it that upon hearing those words, Seongjin momentarily envisioned the familiar face of someone flickering through his mind?

"Could it be?"

"But do you know this?"

Focus gradually returned to Riccardo's eyes. He looked down directly into Seongjin's eyes and continued.

"An oracle who does not prophesy is like a bird that does not sing, utterly useless to this world. And the natural order of the world never lets those who defy their true calling go unpunished."

"..."

"The oracle of the previous era met a very lonely and miserable end. And the oracle of this era was destined for the same. How he has managed to escape thus far is beyond me, but it won't last long."

Riccardo then stretched his lips into a suspiciously eerie smile.

"Now, there lies the riddle. What fate awaits you, the next in line?"

"..."

"If you can no longer share prophecies with me, what do you think will happen to you next?"

Seongjin felt increasingly disgusted.

It was clear that Riccardo was referring to Morres as the next oracle.

Regardless of whether that was true, Riccardo's intentions were clear. He might pretend to be cooperative, but in fact, this guy...

"Are you threatening me right now, you bastard?"

"..."

"Let me ask you straight. Are you that Storyteller from another dimension?"

Riccardo, momentarily taken aback by Seongjin's blunt accusation, soon burst into laughter, finding the notion highly amusing.

"Ahahaha! A threat, you say? Such words are truly disappointing between us."

At least he's not denying knowledge of the Dimensional Storyteller.

"Are you Sigurd Sigurdson?"

"Hahaha, well, what do you think?"

What do I think? You're the culprit.

Despite the lack of solid evidence, Seongjin was convinced. It was a kind of intuition that was hard to explain.

How a person from the real world with a sound soul could become an avatar for another was beyond him. But this man was Riccardo Scarcepinio, and at the same time, Sigurd Sigurdson.

"Was it also you who showed that butterfly demon to Seo Yi-seo? Why did you tempt her into becoming a fake saintess?"

"Ahahahaha!"

Riccardo burst into laughter as if he found the whole situation truly delightful. Despite his loud laughter, it was strange that no one in the spacious banquet hall seemed to pay any attention to them.

Feeling an ominous premonition and glancing down towards the lower floor, Riccardo, now with tears in his eyes from laughing so much, spoke up.

"Yes, it seems you've heard something from her. Despite appearing naive, she's a woman with more caution than one might expect. How exactly did you manage to sway her?"

Not bothering to hide the fact that he knew Seo Yi-seo.

Feeling uneasy, Seongjin stood up, prompting Riccardo to look up at him and ask, "Leaving already? It's a pity we haven't fully enjoyed our time. Will you grace this friend with your presence at the next gathering?"

"I doubt that'll be possible."

"And why is that?"

Is this guy really asking because he doesn't know?

Turning towards the corridor, Seongjin retorted sharply, "I have no use for unlucky friends. Our ties end here!"

"How regrettable..."

"Better not engage in any more foolishness. The imperial palace will soon conduct a formal investigation, so don't even think of running away. Be ready to face it sincerely. I'll make sure to report everything about you to my father."

At that, Riccardo smiled with an air of confidence.

"Well, we'll see about that. Do you really think the Holy Emperor is unaware of my existence? There are certain unspoken rules in this world that sometimes cannot be violated. It's something even he cannot help."

Something unavoidable.

Suddenly, Seongjin recalled something the emperor had said before, flashing through his mind.

"Do as you wish. If you seek to rectify such injustices, so it shall be."

And Katrina also said:

—"His Majesty cannot help everyone unconditionally."

—"Would my request serve as a [condition] for my father to help the

Commander?"

—"Sometimes, even words spoken casually can shake and crumble the very foundations, Your Highness."

[TL/N: Refer Chapter 81]

...It feels like I'm onto something.

"How about this?"

Now, it was Seongjin's turn to smile at Riccardo.

"What if I want it? What if I ask my father to deal with you properly?"

"..."

"Would he still leave you alone as he does now?"

The expression drained from Riccardo's face like a receding tide.

Gone was the ease, and a slowly burgeoning menace began to flicker in his eyes as he looked at Seongjin.

"That's it!"

Just as Seongjin was about to turn away, he suddenly felt as though he had bumped into something.

'...Huh?'

The corridor was clearly visible ahead, but something invisible was blocking his way forward. What on earth?

As Seongjin puzzled, feeling the air with his hand, the Demon King's voice, tense with alarm, shouted in his mind.

[Seongjin, this is a barrier!]

A barrier?

[Yes. It's not governed by the laws of this world, which is why I didn't

notice it sooner! I don't know since when, but this area is now under the dominion of the rules of the Imaginary World!]

The rules of the Imaginary World.

Seongjin turned back to the one he suspected was the root cause of all this.

- "It's truly regrettable that things have come to this."

Riccardo, having risen from his armchair, approached Seongjin with a voice that resonated oddly as he spoke.

- "In this halted world, you were the only unique friend who could understand me."

Then, fluttering from somewhere, a blue butterfly circled around Seongjin.

Dileraria's butterfly?

- "It would be wise not to think of escape. You already know, don't you?"

Fluttering. Meanwhile, the number of butterflies continued to increase.

And then.

- "I am the Demon King of Dreams."

Like a storm, a swarm of blue butterflies surged towards Seongjin.

Inside a dilapidated warehouse on Bertrand Street.

Romaine, who had been clumsily stitching a shabby yellow plush doll, suddenly jerked his head up in surprise.

"What's the matter? Pricked yourself with the needle again? That's what you get for fussing over such pointless puppet shows."

Leonard, who had been swigging from a bottle of liquor beside him, chided.

"...Leonard-nim."

Excitement, though faint, tinged Romaine's voice as he addressed Leonard.

"The [Puppeteer] has finally opened the entrance to the labyrinth!"

"...What?"

Leonard, blinking in confusion for a moment, gradually showed a look of astonishment on his face.

"Is that for real?"

"Yes, it is."

Romaine threw aside the crochet hook and doll, standing up abruptly.

"Hahaha. After all this time of hiding, to think he'd commit such an act of suicide now!"

"Where is it? Shouldn't we hurry before he slips away again somewhere?"

"Don't worry, Leonard-nim. Even if he somehow manages to escape before we find him, it won't be a problem."

The eyes within the half-mask stared into a distant, unseen place, gleaming fiercely.

"After all, the guardians of Delcross will never let him slip through their grasp."

Riccardo hurried out of the mansion, throwing on his overcoat as he went. Time was running out for him.

"Young Master? The gathering is still in full swing, where on earth are you off to?"

The old butler, taken aback, rushed over, but Riccardo, without so much as looking back, responded, "An urgent matter has come up; I must step away for a while."

"But what about the guests you've invited...?"

"Ask my brother Domenico to handle the gathering and wrap things up appropriately!"

Flustered, the butler stuttered in response, but Riccardo couldn't afford to delay any longer. He was so rushed that he almost let slip a curse out loud.

Damn Sigurd Sigurdson!

Despite Prince Morres's threatening provocation, how could he stir up such a huge mess all of a sudden, leaving him to deal with the aftermath?

He didn't even have time to gather travel expenses. How long would it take for the imperial authority to catch on and reach out here?

'First, I need to dash to the carriage and get out of the capital. Then, in the morning, I'll stop by the nearest Hayden Bank to withdraw some money!'

Riccardo hastened towards the back gate, where the Scarcepino family's carriage, ready for departure at any moment, awaited him,

having been brought from his family home.

'Once out of the capital, the imperial surveillance will lax. Should I pass through Asein to Carthago? No, better to head for one of the secluded rural estates in Anatolia...'

That's when it happened.

Suddenly, someone from behind grabbed him by the nape of his neck and slammed him forcefully to the ground.

With a whoosh, Riccardo was lifted into the air, then pressed down from above with such force that he fell back-first onto the ground.

Crash!

"Ugh!"

Riccardo, having fallen squarely without any technique to break his fall, felt a sharp pain as if his spine had shattered. As he swallowed a groan from the tingling agony, he realized someone was grabbing his collar and squinted to see who it was.

The one who had pinned him to the ground was a paladin.

A tall woman dressed in the dark ash-colored uniform of the Holy Order of Saint Terbacchia stood before him. Her pale face was framed by crow-black hair[1] that cascaded down smoothly.

"An Inquisitor?"

Where did an Inquisitor come from all of a sudden?

As he looked up at her with bewildered eyes, the woman lifted one corner of her mouth in a chilling smile.

Then.

[Speak now.]

A voice that seemed to bore into his head and resonate, gender indeterminate, reached his ears.

[Where has he sent my son?]

"You are...!"

As night fell and darkness enveloped them, a cold silvery light, brighter than the moon in the sky, flickered in the woman's eyes.

Seongjin was never one to believe in superstitions.

That's why he used to find it hard to understand when his fellow Hunters would make a fuss about accidentally stepping on a crack before a battle, or predict the success of their mission based on the color of their underwear for the day.

Take, for example, a junior from his university days who was also a Hunter.

That guy had a peculiar habit of needing to stare at the monster with his left eye right before combat, despite the fact that his left eye was relatively weaker than the right!

What a case of irrational and superstitious behavior arising from an inability to shake off such faulty conditioning.

"You idiot! How is using an eye that barely sees supposed to help in defeating monsters?"

Seongjin never hesitated to smack him on the back of the head whenever he did that.

'Looking back, I might have been too narrow-minded...'

Lying on the damp floor, Seongjin pondered this for a moment.

By now, it wouldn't be unreasonable to believe that he was cursed with bad luck whenever he attended social gatherings.

Yes, 'The Curse of Social Gatherings' sounds like an apt name for this jinx.

[Seongjin, are you alright?]

'...Yeah.'

At the sound of the Demon King's voice, Seongjin blinked for a moment before getting up. Since he could feel his arms and legs properly, it seemed he hadn't been ejected soul-first like before.

After patting the handle of the nutcracker at his waist, Seongjin slowly looked around.

'Where am I?'

Seongjin found himself in a dark corridor.

It was wide enough for about four men to walk abreast, but it was so dimly lit that it was hard to tell where it led.

The floor was damp stone, suggesting moisture, and the walls were also made of flat stone. There seemed to be some sort of relief on them, but it was too dark and covered in moss to make out any details.

—"I am the Demon King of Dreams."

After Riccardo's sudden change in demeanor and these words,

Seongjin found himself enveloped by a swarm of blue butterflies that seemed to appear out of nowhere, and before he knew it, he was falling into this predicament. Considering where Seongjin was just moments ago, the only plausible place to fall into would have been the ballroom downstairs.

'...But this clearly isn't the ballroom, is it?'

[This might very well be a completely different world, Seongjin. I can sense the laws of a vast, governing realm here.]

The Demon King cautiously suggested.

Given that Dileraria's butterflies have the ability to traverse dimensions, the theory that Seongjin was swept into another world

by them isn't far-fetched.

One thing, however, was certain.

'Sigurd Sigurdson, you cowardly bastard...!'

Though it's unclear what method he used, the moment Sigurd felt at a disadvantage, he sent Seongjin flying to who-knows-where and made a quick escape!

[Why did you have to provoke him, losing your temper like that? You could have slipped away to inform your father, or at least tried to coax some information out of him more subtly.]

The Demon King scolded, but Seongjin shook his head.

'Do you think he would have just let me go? That bastard had been setting up that barrier from the start.'

That probably explained the unease Seongjin felt several times during their conversation.

'The moment he realized I wasn't the same Morres from before, he must have been preparing for this situation. Do you really think such a guy would've just spilled the beans if I asked?'

[Still, that's no excuse.]

Moreover, Seongjin had been feeling an odd sensation since a while back.

"The Oracle of the previous era met a very lonely and tragic end. And the Oracle of this era was destined to meet the same fate."

Hearing those words, Seongjin couldn't understand why a surge of anger suddenly welled up inside him. The thought that everything was that bastard's fault crossed his mind, and he felt an involuntary urge to throw a punch, his fist tightening with the impulse.

Why did I react like that at the time?

Puzzled, Seongjin scratched his head for a moment.

[What's the plan now? If this really is another world, we might not be able to return to Delcross.]

"Hmm..."

Well, to be honest, he wasn't overly worried.

First, he'd look around for an escape route, and if that failed, he could always call on the emperor.

After all, wasn't he the same person who had followed Seongjin all the way to the Sigurd-34, and even across the distant dimensional boundaries? Surely, he'd manage to find him this time too?

Of course, he was prepared to receive at least a light reprimand.

"Let's start moving in one direction."

With that resolution, Seongjin drew out the Nutcracker and carved a large X on the stone wall.

The stone dust flew up as a shallow mark was etched into the wall.

"Alright. This will be the starting point."

Then, Seongjin surveyed the corridor to his left and right, pondering which direction to take. Both were shrouded in deep darkness, making it hard to decide.

"...Right."

Was it just a feeling? It seemed like there was a faint presence of someone beyond the right corridor.

Without hesitation, Seongjin added a small arrow next to the X to indicate the direction and then turned to walk towards the sensed presence with determined steps.

For a while, Seongjin and the Demon King were silent, each lost in their own thoughts.

The sudden drop into this strange place had left them disoriented, but

the conversation they had with the storyteller from another dimension had provided them with a wealth of information that needed to be sorted through.

Firstly, regarding the Oracle.

Assuming what the storyteller said was true, Morres might have been the next Oracle, endowed with the power of prophecy. Then, it was quite clear who the current Oracle was.

The Cornsheim clan, known for skillfully manipulating souls and being channelers.

And the secret organization Arenja, where the surviving members of that clan were active.

Then, wouldn't it be strange if the Holy Emperor, who freely moves as a soul and directly leads Arenja, had no connection to that clan?

"He is still alive. He merely sealed the prophecy and chose complete silence."

Right. Now that he thought about it, the Holy Emperor always clammed up whenever sensitive topics arose.

No matter how he thought about it, it seemed too coincidental for what he had said to match up so perfectly.

"Setting that aside..."

What was that other thing he said?

"In this halted world, only you were the unique friend who could understand me."

What did it mean by the world being "halted"?

As Seongjin pondered this, he suddenly stopped in his tracks, noticing something odd.

"Huh? What's this?"

[What? What's going on?]

"..."

Narrowing his eyes, Seongjin carefully examined one side of the stone wall. Although it was faint due to the darkness, there appeared to be some sort of rectangular gap in the corridor wall.

Surrounded by a rectangle about the size of a person, the gap looked almost like a door at a glance.

As Seongjin approached to get a better look, he instinctively touched the stone wall. Suddenly, a clear window appeared before his eyes.

☐The conditions to open this ☐ have not been met.☐

Seongjin stepped back in astonishment.

What is this?

"Hey, Demon King, did you see that? What is this? Some kind of text appeared out of thin air?"

The Demon King let out a thoughtful hum.

[It seems we are indeed in a realm governed by rules, Seongjin. Such notices are common features in such worlds.]

"...A notice?"

[Yes. Depending on the laws that govern the world, messages like this can appear frequently. In places where the influence is strong, even minor details like an individual's abilities, vitality, fatigue levels, and so on can be displayed numerically.]

"Wow..."

When Seongjin cautiously touched the gap again, the broken text reappeared before his eyes.

☐The conditions to open this ☐ have not been met.☐

Doesn't this feel somewhat like a game?

While Seongjin was amusingly touching and detaching his hand from the wall surface, the Demon King spoke in a slightly more serious tone.

[This isn't the time to find it amusing. The problem is that this notice is completely broken, Seongjin.]

"Huh? Why is that an issue?"

[A properly functioning realm governed by rules operates under a set of standardized laws, making it an extremely stable world. It's uncommon for notices like this to be broken.]

The Demon King then continued in a soft voice.

[There are only two explanations for this. One is that this place is a dead world, no longer maintained or cared for. The other is that it's surplus space, abandoned and never integrated into any world from the beginning.]

...Surplus space?

[Yes. I've heard rumors about it. Somewhere within the gaps between dimensions, there's a place like a cosmic junkyard, where fragments of old, useless realms governed by rules gather.]

Seongjin slightly furrowed his brows.

A junkyard, huh? That doesn't sound too promising.

[It's a place created by the laws of a realm governed by rules, but since it's already broken, it's not bound by those laws. Once you enter, it's a nightmare from which it's nearly impossible to escape under normal circumstances.]

"....."

[Another term for it is 'Labyrinth.']

Just then,

"Hey, wait a minute!"

Seongjin suddenly tensed up, his senses on high alert.

The sound of rapid footsteps approached, signaling the presence of someone unknown moving quickly towards them. It was the same faint presence Seongjin had initially felt.

But as the presence grew closer and became clearer...

"Huh? This feels strangely familiar?"

Swoosh.

As Seongjin reflexively drew his Nutcracker, contemplating this, a figure emerged from the dark corridor. It was a young man with a notably robust physique.

He had his sword pointed in their direction but gradually halted his steps. Upon seeing Seongjin, he startled, then lowered his weapon and said,

"...Your Highness?"

Seongjin blinked in surprise.

Wait a minute, why is Orden here?

T/N:

1. It's Sharon[↔]

"Why are you here?"

Seongjin couldn't hide his astonishment, and Orden retorted as he brushed his bangs aside.

"That's what I'd like to ask you. Where exactly are we?"

"I don't know. Why are you asking me?"

"I ended up here chasing after Your Highness, so naturally, I thought you might know best, wouldn't you?"

"You followed me? Why?"

At Seongjin's question, Orden frowned.

"Well, when the presence of someone who was just fine upstairs suddenly vanishes without a trace, wouldn't it be normal to go looking for them?"

"..."

Essentially, when Sigurd Sigurdson activated the barrier, to Orden, who was downstairs, it felt as though Seongjin's presence had suddenly popped out of existence.

It was already bothering him why the prince wasn't attending the banquet and was on the second floor instead. And when the presence of someone who was just fine disappeared, he had no choice but to go look for him.

"But when I finally got to the second floor, Your Highness was surrounded by something like butterflies. So, I ran towards you, but suddenly I fell somewhere, and when I came to my senses, I was here."

"Ah..."

This guy, really got himself involved in something completely unnecessary.

Seongjin clicked his tongue.

"You should have just left it alone."

At those words, Orden's expression soured significantly.

"How can you say that? Of course, I had to!"

"Hm?"

"Of course, I had to..."

As Seongjin stared intently, Orden trailed off and subtly averted his gaze.

"...pay back the debt I owe to Your Highness."

Seongjin blinked for a moment.

Could it be, this guy thought something was wrong with me and tried to help in his own way?

"I appreciate the sentiment. But what's the use if you end up falling here with me?"

It would have been better if he could have dealt with Riccardo somehow.

"That's..."

"And remember this. If we get out of here thanks to me, you'll be owing me even more. Got it?"

"...!"

His indignant face is kind of amusing to see.

[What are you, a loan shark? Why does it feel like the principal

grows the more he struggles to repay the debt?]

'Did you think anyone could easily clear their debt to me?'

Well, since we're here together, might as well try to be of some actual help.

Seongjin chuckled and patted Orden's shoulder lightly.

At that moment.

☐Would you like to invite %rd☐10 to your party?☐

☐Accept / ☐ecline☐

A broken text window appeared in front of him.

...Huh?

As Seongjin suddenly looked into the air and tilted his head, Orden asked nervously.

"What's... Is there something?"

"Huh? You can't see this?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Hmm..."

After a moment of thought, Seongjin extended his arm towards him and said.

"Hit it."

"...Excuse me? What do you mean by..."

"Just give my arm a hit."

"...?"

Orden looked at Seongjin skeptically. But, seeing Seongjin's clear and unhesitant expression, he hesitantly extended his hand and lightly

tapped Seongjin's sleeve.

And then.

"...What is this?"

It seemed that the text window had finally appeared before Orden's eyes as well. Since Seongjin couldn't see it this time, it seemed likely that only the person involved could read it.

"Accept... what?"

As Orden muttered 'accept', a new window popped up in front of Seongjin.

Presumably, Orden had read out the part of the text that was legible enough for him.

☐ %rd□10 has sent you a party□ invitation. Would you like to accept?□

☐ Accept / ☐ ecline□

This really feels like a game.

"...Accept."

Saying so, just in case.

☐ You have formed a party□ with %rd□10.□

Oh, it actually worked. So then?

With a somewhat triumphant expression, Seongjin shouted towards the void.

"System!"

"...?"

"Minimap! World map! Status window! Stats! Party! Quests! Logout! Logout!"

Unfortunately, nothing happened afterward. Perhaps because it's a broken world, as the Demon King explained, it didn't function properly.

Even a map would have been greatly helpful in finding our way out of here.

"Your Highness? What exactly are you..."

Confused by the prince's sudden eccentric behavior, a look of realization dawned on Orden's face after a moment. It was clear what he was thinking.

Ah, this guy was famously a troublemaker. He must think I've lost my mind. Something like that, perhaps.

"Why must embarrassment always fall to my lot!" the Demon King lamented.

Nonetheless, Seongjin felt the need to offer some explanation to Orden, who had inadvertently become entangled in his affairs and was thoroughly bewildered.

"I'm not sure where we are either. But one thing's for certain: the person who sent us here is none other than Young Master Scarcepinio. He cast some unknown spell on me."

Explaining to Orden that this was another dimension wouldn't make any sense to him. So, Seongjin started by mentioning the person responsible for their current predicament.

Orden's demeanor instantly became more aggressive.

"Scarcepinio! I knew it had to be him!"

Now that he thought about it, Orden had been suspecting Scarcepinio as the mastermind behind the Milo Trading Company.

Seongjin recalled the time Orden had threatened Isabella with a fierce demeanor. Back then, he thought of Orden as someone who lived recklessly on confidence alone.

However, having encountered Orden a few times recently, the impression Seongjin got was that Orden was more rational than initially thought.

"Ever since Riccardo threatened me with the Dark Cult's emblem, I've been suspicious. What does it mean for someone to possess such a suspicious object if not proof of their involvement with the Dark Cult? It wouldn't be strange at all if such a person resorted to some deceitful trickery."

Orden's attendance at the event, despite usually skipping such gatherings, was also for the sake of investigation.

"Especially his sister, Isabella, is even more suspicious. What I discovered while investigating the Milo Trading Company is that the person who frequently interacts with them on behalf of the Scarcepinio family is none other than Isabella herself."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. And when I subtly brought up the Milo Trading Company and various other matters to her, she brazenly acted as if she knew nothing!"

...That's unexpected.

"And that's not all. I happened to meet her at the mansion today, do you know what happened? After acting so scared the other day to gain Princess Amelia's sympathy, today she approached me with a beaming smile, pretending as if she had no recollection of our previous encounter. Truly a repulsive woman!"

Indeed, that does sound strange.

Seongjin recalled Isabella, who had been hopping around with a sewing pin stuck in her arm.

Hmm, she didn't seem like someone who could adeptly hide anything.

"...So, what will you do now?"

Having vented his suspicions and seemingly calmed down from his excitement, Orden asked in a slightly subdued voice compared to before.

"Well, we'll have to look for an exit first."

Whether it involved dealing with Riccardo or investigating Isabella, they needed to return to Delcross to proceed with anything.

After a brief exchange of opinions with Orden, Seongjin decided to head back in the direction from which Orden had come. Partly because Orden, who had arrived later, might have landed closer to an exit, but more importantly,

"There was a body where I first arrived. I only caught a glimpse, so I'm not certain, but it seemed to be wearing the uniform of the Imperial Guard."

He too had been in a hurry, detecting Seongjin's approaching presence and running fast, so he hadn't had the chance to properly examine the body. That's why they concluded it would be best to go back and investigate more thoroughly.

Orden seemed to take this rather casually, but for Seongjin, who knew this place wasn't the main dimension of Delcross, the body held significant implications.

'If it was the Imperial Guard, does that mean someone from Delcross had crossed over to this place before?'

[Yeah. It's unlikely that the Dimensional Storyteller moved us here randomly.]

Given the suddenness of the event, it's probable that they were sent to a place most familiar to him.

Mazes aren't places one can easily wander into and out of.

It seems likely that the Dimensional Storyteller has an easy means of connecting Delcross with the labyrinth, and such shortcuts are usually anchored to a specific location.

"If we can just find that path, we might be able to return more easily than expected," the Demon King mentioned, his tone slightly brightening.

With that, Seongjin and Orden started trudging down the dark corridors together.

'But the more I think about it, the more absurd it seems, doesn't it?'

[What's absurd?]

'Sigurd, that bastard. Inviting the prince of the Holy Empire to his mansion and then openly trying to eliminate him there...'

Especially since sir Masain had clearly seen Seongjin entering the mansion.

Even if they sent the prince to another dimension and completely erased his traces, they couldn't possibly escape responsibility for his disappearance.

No matter how you looked at it, it seemed like an incredibly impulsive decision, even more so considering Riccardo Scarcepino's standing afterward.

[Hmm. Maybe the Dimensional Storyteller decided to completely abandon the avatar named Riccardo.]

'Just like that?'

[It might not have been as simple a matter for him as we think.]

There's a possibility that Seongjin's provocation was more fatal to him than expected.

The sudden change in the usually composed demeanor of the Dimensional Storyteller might have been because of what Seongjin said:

—What if I want that? What if I ask my father to deal with you properly?

Just because of that?

[If that becomes a condition where your father can act freely, would you still say 'just because of that'?]

'...Fair point.'

Wait, does this mean...

Just like with Commander Bruno's case, it seems the decisions I make might be more significant than I thought?

Indeed, Dame Sharon had mentioned something along those lines as well.

—"From now on, every single action of Your Highness will serve as a significant milestone determining the course of our Monster Special Task Force."

Seongjin had an epiphany.

'Me, somewhat remarkable? Perhaps I'm not just an ordinary person?'

At that, the Demon King snickered.

[Most kids who were born to good parents fall into that kind of delusion.]

'...What, did you say?'

[Moreover, you've been light-years away from ordinary from the start, you psychopath.]

'Shut up!'

How long had they walked, guided by Orden?

The passage, which seemed like it would be straightforward, surprisingly had forks and sharp turns. The farther they went, the moss on the stone walls seemed to lighten, and the surroundings appeared to gradually brighten.

It felt like they were making the right choices in direction.

"This place is quite complex, but you seem to remember the way you came pretty well."

To that, Orden replied with a peculiar answer.

"Whenever I came to a fork, I just ran down the middle path."

"..."

He was unexpectedly simple.

"We just need to turn at that corner."

And finally, they arrived in front of a vast cavern. The entrance was open, allowing a clear view inside.

Delicate carvings surrounded the entrance, exuding an atmosphere that was anything but ordinary.

"I was inside there."

With those words, Orden strode towards the entrance.

Seongjin glanced inside the cavern, but it was too dim to discern its full extent. However, judging by the echo of air returning from the empty space, it seemed to be quite spacious.

Orden, noticing Seongjin's hesitation, reassured him once more.

"It's alright. Earlier, there was nothing but a single corpse around."

"Hmm, alright then."

In that case.

Pushing aside an uneasy premonition, Seongjin followed Orden.

But just as they crossed the entrance together, Seongjin's vision was suddenly interrupted by a notification sound and a text window popping up.

□Party□ □ntry detected. Lai□□roph Lord has been regene□ed.□

"...Huh?"

Whatever it was, it didn't feel promising.

Orden, too, seemed startled and halted, indicating he might have seen the same window.

"What is this..."

And both Seongjin and Orden tensed up simultaneously, drawing their swords from their waists.

Grrrrr...

In the cavern, where there had been nothing just a moment ago, a low-frequency growl resonated from its depths. Suddenly, two glowing red eyes appeared, emitting a fierce light from beyond the darkness.

In the annex of Scarcepino, brightly illuminated as if it were broad daylight.

In the dark shadows of the deserted rear garden, slightly away from the splendid lights, Riccardo was helplessly caught by an unidentified inquisitor.

Creak. The joints of his elbow, pulled back as far as they could go, creaked ominously.

"Argh...!"

Riccardo attempted to scream, but suddenly, a gust of wind from nowhere sealed the sound from his vocal cords.

"...!"

Riccardo, his face pale with terror and pain, twitched as the exorcist looked down at him with an utterly expressionless face.

After a while, just as Riccardo was about to lose his strength and slump, the wind blocking his mouth disappeared.

[I will not ask again. Speak. Where did that person send my son?]

Finally regaining the ability to breathe, Riccardo gasped for air for a moment. Then, before this frightening visitor ran out of patience, he quickly exclaimed.

"The labyrinth! It's the labyrinth!"

[Where in the labyrinth?]

"I do not know the exact location! But I caught a glimpse of it in the memory of that storyteller. I am not sure when, but you have

definitely been there before!"

[.....]

The inquisitor's grip relaxed.

Riccardo, barely freed in his upper body, struggled to turn around and asked.

"...But why? Why do you ask me this? Surely you can find out everything you want to know!"

The woman looked down at Riccardo silently.

In that cool face, from which no expression could be read, the only sign of life was the gray eyes that occasionally flickered silver.

And this individual with unique eyes could be no one else but that person.

'As expected! This woman is currently possessed by the Holy Emperor!'

Given her waxen pale face and raven-black hair, she must be of the Cornsheim clan or a descendant bearing their blood. A channeler with enough capability to host the Holy Emperor would likely not have such diluted lineage.

This must be one of the temporary measures the Holy Emperor has put in place to avoid leaving the palace.

'Then... if I can just find a way to escape from this place, does that mean the Emperor will no longer pursue me?'

If he heads to the labyrinth in search of his son, it means there is still a chance left for him.

While he was pondering, the inquisitor, who had been quietly observing him, spoke in a calm tone.

[Alright. If that's the case, then the child will safely return.]

".....?"

[It seems accidental that he sent my son there, but surely the child must find something in that place.]

...What?

"...You're not going to the labyrinth?"

Riccardo's voice quivered with shock as he asked this question.

"Why on earth? I can't understand you or the prince at all! Why do you keep doing this instead of taking the clear path that's right in front of you..."

[.....]

"...No, that's not it. That's not the issue."

How long has it been since Sigurd Sigurdson dispatched Prince Morres, and now this inquisitor appears before Riccardo?

It was clear that she was ordered to stand by nearby in anticipation of any unfortunate incident that might occur during the prince's outing.

But why? If they knew something like this could happen, why didn't they prevent his outing in the first place...

".....!"

Riccardo's eyes widened with sudden realization.

"Could it be! Not looking at all?"

Could it be that it's not just the prophecies that are sealed, but they are not making any predictions about the prince at all?

Was that what the storyteller meant by complete indeterminacy?

"But how, how is that possible? How can you do that? Especially since you are..."

However, Riccardo's voice trailed off as he inhaled sharply. His body stiffened as if frozen, feeling the cold and eerie gaze that seemed to pierce through his thoughts and soul in an instant.

Those peculiar eyes.

The woman's bright, silvery-gray eyes scrutinized Riccardo for a moment.

[Seeing that you know so much, it's clear you were willingly cooperating with that person.]

".....!"

[To voluntarily become a slave to such a wicked being, isn't that a grave sin that deserves immediate execution?]

An ominous premonition flashed through his mind.

The Holy Emperor has no intention of letting him go just like that!

"Your Majesty! I am... I am a member of the Scarcepino family! You cannot just harm me recklessly like this!"

[Your lineage background will not shield you as you serve the corrupt. Do you think I am unaware of who you are?]

The inquisitor, or rather the Holy Emperor, drew a sword from his waistband, responding ominously.

A deadly curved sword with a significantly bent blade, resembling a hook. The sharp shotel, considered a symbol of inquisitors, reflected the moonlight, casting a sinister silver sheen.

"Wait! Then remember the pact... Do not forget your constraints, Guardian of Delcross!"

Trying to control his trembling jaw, Riccardo desperately shouted.

"The unforeseen incident caused by Sigurd today was never my intention! I have not defied the rules of the main world thus far, nor have I acted beyond the bounds of humanity. Then, then you have no

right to blame my free will!"

[.....]

"Please, do not ignore the consequences stemming from your own mistakes!"

The Holy Emperor paused for a moment and quietly observed Riccardo.

As Riccardo swallowed dryly, looking at that terribly inorganic face devoid of any emotion, the Holy Emperor eventually nodded and said calmly.

[Yes. Indeed, that was the promise.]

Did it work?

[So rest assured. Severing you from that person is nothing other than the free will of this inquisitor.]

'...What?'

Sweating cold sweat from an ominous premonition.

[Is it not so, Dame Sharon?]

".....!"

Riccardo was shocked. The eyes looking down on him had turned a deep, dark black.

A chilling shiver ran down his spine.

"Hehehe."

And the emaciated inquisitor split his lips into a grin.

"Yes, indeed, Your Majesty."

The woman's shotel, raised high into the air, shone round like the crescent moon in the night sky.

https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0048/5988/7672/files/BladesPro_Shotel_480x480.png?v=1630542105

And before Riccardo could say anything else.

Crash!

The shotel, flying like lightning, struck down on his crown.

* * *

Beep, beep, beep-

A series of loud notifications assaulted his ears.

Text windows, difficult to comprehend, flashed incessantly before his eyes, disorienting his vision.

Party recognized. Lairophe Road is regenerating.

Error! Unable to recognize accurate information of the party!

Requesting update of target entity's from the street.

Requesting scale adjustment from the street.

Ah, this.

Although unclear, there's a feeling that something significant has been messed up again?

[This is serious, Lee Seongjin!]

The demon king shouted, tense with anxiety.

[For some reason, it seems a condition tied to this place has been met! Something dangerous might appear, so we need to escape from here before it's too late!]

'Ah, right.'

Seongjin, sweating profusely, began to backpedal towards the entrance when he felt a thud as if his body hit a wall.

'.....!?'

Feeling around with his hands, the entrance to the cave was completely blocked by something invisible, similar to the intangible barriers created by Sigurd Sigurdson.

"...What is this?"

Orden, like Seongjin, murmured in confusion as their retreat was blocked.

And then.

Suddenly, within the deep cave that had been empty just a moment ago, the presence of a gigantic creature appeared, emitting a terrifying aura.

Two flickering red eyes in the darkness shone with a chilling light.

□Lai□□rophe Lord recognizes the intrusion□ into the bor□lum.
Clear ho□tile response!□

'Hey, demon king. It seems like we're doomed, right?'

Grrrrr...

The extreme infrasound emanating from it made all the hairs on their bodies stand on end for a moment. Seongjin and Orden, as if by agreement, drew their swords and glared straight ahead.

Then, thud. The sound of something heavy stepping.

Simultaneously, whoosh, the surroundings lit up brightly. Though the principle was unclear, torches encircling the cave walls were all lit at once.

□Error! Unable to recognize accurate □ information of the party□!□

□Requesting update of target entity's □ from the stre□.□

What appeared before them was a gigantic beast with a blue hue.

Despite having a head resembling that of a canine, its rough-furred

torso and the way its hands clutched at its stance were eerily similar to a human form.

In contrast, its legs were clearly those of a quadrupedal animal, bent backward, yet it moved with an eerie grace on two legs, a bizarre sight indeed.

"A Lycanthrope? But of such size?"

Orden, observing the creature with a pale face, exclaimed softly.

Indeed, the beast's appearance closely resembled that of the Lycanthrope, occasionally spotted in the northern demonic frontiers.

Only, everything about this creature was significantly larger than those Lycanthropes. Its height surpassed nearly 4 meters, and each of the two blades it wielded seemed to be over 2 meters in length.

☐Requesting scale ☐ adjustment from the stre☐.

☐Error! Unable to ☐ a clear standard for adjustment!☐

Another curiosity was that, unlike ordinary Lycanthropes, this one adorned intricately crafted metal ornaments.

Contrasting its seemingly mindless red eyes, the elaborate adornments gave it an appearance akin to an intelligent being with a civilization.

Clank.

With each step the creature took, the metal ornaments hanging from various parts fluttered, reflecting the blue flames of the torches.

'...What exactly is that?'

While Orden was plunged into utter confusion, Seongjin's assessment of the beast was rather straightforward.

'Ah, a boss mob. We've entered a boss room.'

[...Is that all you have to say?]

'What else? You fight the boss in a boss room. What's there to ponder?'

Roar!

At that moment, the beast let out a thunderous roar and charged forward.

Simultaneously, whoosh. The creature's blades swung with lightning-fast speed, incongruous with its massive size.

Seongjin, moving out of habit, easily dodged, while Orden, who had been expecting a Lycanthrope of usual speed, couldn't react in time to the unexpected velocity.

'Damn...!'

Reflexively raising his aura-infused sword above his head, Orden braced for the impending impact, clenching his teeth.

Then, clang! The sound of weapons clashing!

".....?"

Orden blinked in surprise.

It was quite heavy. However, the impact was not as severe as Orden had anticipated.

❑Error! Unable to calculate dama❑ due to an unidentifiable ❑!❑

❑Requesting scale ❑ adjustment from the stre❑.❑

The beast's weapon swung again, a strike accompanied by a terrifying sound of cutting air, yet threatening as it was.

Thud! Again, it was repelled by Orden's sword with a relatively light impact sound.

Grrrr.

The beast paused its movement, growling at Orden with evident displeasure.

During this moment, Orden quickly retreated to Seongjin's side. However, his eyes were filled with unprecedented confusion.

❑Error! Unable to ❑ a clear standard for adjustment!❑

❑Requesting update of target entity's ❑ from the stre❑.❑

"Hmm, to confront with your sword so boldly without scouting first, you're quite brave, aren't you? Seems like it's manageable after all?"

As Seongjin spoke with a relaxed face, Orden retorted with a burst of frustration.

"Do you think so? But what can I do? I can't predict that thing's movements at all!"

"Really?"

"Yes! It's strange, Your Highness! Although it resembles a Lycanthrope in appearance, its strength, speed, and movement patterns, none of them are proper!"

At that, Seongjin tilted his head in wonder.

"Hmm, I see. I've never actually seen a real Lycanthrope, so I just assumed it'd be similar to a Blatta Mantis. It's about the same size, after all."

"Blatta... What is that?"

"Ah, a demon beast from Gehenna. Quite a grotesque one. Compared to that, this one here looks downright adorable."

As Seongjin spoke,

Beep. A clear notification sound rang out.

❑Stre❑ confirms the registration of the target entity.❑

❑Player ■■■■ ■■■.❑

❑Adjustment base entity❑ Blatta Mantis.❑

□Stre□ initiates scale □ adjustment.□

And then,

Flash! The beast, scattering red glares from its eyes, charged at them again, slamming both of its blades downward simultaneously.

Feeling an eerie sensation different from before, Orden, this time, did not rashly block with his sword but rolled to the side along with Seongjin.

And that was the correct response.

Roar!

With an enormous impact that shook the entire cave, a trench at least 1 meter wide was gouged into the floor.

Facing the terrifying destructive power, Orden's face turned ashen, realizing he had almost taken the beast's attack head-on.

"See? Since it's about the same size, the attack style and power are similar too. It's just like watching that thing's foreleg slam down, right?"

Amid the rising dust, only Seongjin maintained a calm demeanor, offering such an assessment.

With a thunderous roar, the cavern was filled with the sound of a massive beast.

Gone was its initial awkward appearance, and the menacing aura it now exuded could easily rival that of a Glacier Troll hiding deep within the demon realm.

Orden, with a pale face, stepped back cautiously, keeping his eyes on the enormous Lycanthrope.

He had already slashed at the beast several times with his sword. However, whether it was due to the creature's thick hide or not, it seemed completely unscathed, without a single visible wound.

Despite the clear feeling of his blade cutting through, he couldn't understand why there was no apparent damage.

".....!"

With a resounding crash!

Without a moment's respite to think, a gigantic blade once again aimed for him, crashing down into the ground. Stone shattered, sending fragments flying in every direction.

Orden narrowly dodged the attack, maneuvering to the side of the Lycanthrope. Seizing the moment when the beast was momentarily distracted by its embedded blade, Orden quickly thrust his aura-imbued sword into the creature's leg.

Thunk!

Yet, the beast, without even flinching, swung its fist towards him.

"...It doesn't react at all?"

Ducking swiftly, Orden's eyes widened in shock.

Was it not feeling any pain? Despite his sword deeply piercing its thigh, why did it seem as if not a scratch was left on the beast!

While he pondered, Prince Morres, who had leaped into the fray, used the deeply embedded blade as a step and ran up the thick forearm of the beast. With a light jump, he drew his blade downwards in a long arc.

Swoosh!

The long gray blade deeply sliced through the creature's carotid artery.

'This has to be a fatal blow!'

Orden thought so, but astonishingly, the beast turned towards the prince, seemingly unharmed, with not even a mark on its neck where the blade had touched.

The Lycanthrope then swung the blade it held in its other hand violently towards the prince.

"...Your Highness!"

Despite the unexpected counterattack, the prince, as if anticipating it, kicked off the beast's shoulder and leaped away.

Landing safely next to Orden, he commented, "It seems there's no recognition of vital points? It looks like only the damage is being reflected quite straightforwardly."

At that dry assessment, Orden was dumbfounded.

"Your Highness, this is strange! This Lycanthrope seems to be regenerating like a Troll. We can't even tell where its vitals are, so I'm not sure how we're supposed to fight it..."

But the prince simply tilted his head at him, seemingly unbothered.

"Hm? No, your last attack was quite good. It took off a significant

amount of HP."

"...What?"

"Look above the creature's head. There's an HP bar showing its life force. Don't you see it?"

Above its head?

Only then did Orden notice a glowing bar above the beast's head, which had slightly decreased from its original length.

He had ignored it, not knowing what it was.

"...That represents its life?"

"Yes. Given the lack of visible wounds or bleeding, it seems we're in a world with rules akin to those of an old game."

"Old games... what are you talking about?"

"Or is it because we're minors, and some kind of minor protection mode is activated?"

Orden couldn't grasp the meaning of the prince's words.

But more importantly,

"You're the only one here who's not of age!"

Orden exclaimed, unable to hold back his frustration, to which the prince looked at him as if the remark was absurd.

"Is that really what's important right now?"

"...No, I mean..."

"...Here it comes!"

Before Orden could finish, the prince whispered a warning.

The massive body was swiftly approaching them.

Its red eyes left a long trail as it swung its blade horizontally with a whoosh! Orden narrowly ducked to avoid it, but the wind pressure alone from the blade passing overhead was enough to send tingles throughout his body.

As Orden rolled on the ground to gain some distance, the prince had already retreated far away.

The way he maintained a safe distance and engaged in minor skirmishes didn't seem like it was his first time dealing with such a colossal beast.

'...How can he do that?'

Orden thought to himself as he quickly regained his posture.

He had been a prodigious swordsman since his youth, accustomed to facing the demons of the demon realm, but this strange battle was particularly draining for him.

The giant beast seemed to shift its center of gravity unpredictably, displaying bizarre movements that were difficult for Orden to comprehend. Even the range of motion in its joints appeared slightly off from what was visible.

Moreover, every time it swung its weapon, the length of its reach seemed oddly different, as if its shoulder joint was dislocating and then popping back into place. Given the size of the beast, these differences resulted in significant changes in distance.

These uncomfortable gaps constantly wore on Orden's nerves.

"Sigh..."

There was another problem.

Every time he swung his sword, the aura he expended seemed to slip away hopelessly.

Whatever trick Scarchapino had used, the aura spent here was not easily replenished.

"No need to rush. Even small attacks are steadily accumulating damage."

Prince Morres approached the heavily breathing Orden, offering a gentle reminder.

"So, don't push yourself too hard and conserve your aura. The aura is extremely scarce in this environment, making it difficult to recover normally."

Orden looked at him with a somewhat incredulous expression.

What in the world? Those overly calm eyes.

He had thought of him as a pampered prince, hardly ever leaving the palace, yet now the prince seemed as seasoned as a veteran from the Sigmund territory, who had spent his life subduing demons.

That's when it happened.

With a deep rumble, as the Lycanthrope took a step towards them, its aura grew even more intense.

Then, a sharp warning sound pierced their ears.

□The Lyc□□thrope Lord is greatly enraged!□

With a thunderous roar, the staggering beast suddenly arched its body backward and let out a terrifying howl.

* * *

The vast cavern was already in shambles.

The beast, wielding the blades in its hands, had rampaged through the cavern with the intent to bring it down. The rounded walls and stone floors were almost entirely destroyed.

Amidst the chaos, it was miraculous how the torches lighting the interior remained unscathed, still burning in their places.

"...Huff, huff."

Seongjin gasped for breath as he watched Orden trying to regain his composure.

He had to admit, facing an unfamiliar boss mob and holding his ground proved the man was indeed formidable. However, due to several hits from the Lycanthrope during the ongoing battle, his clothes were torn, and blood flowed from various parts of his body.

And that wasn't all. He seemed to stagger occasionally, likely having expended most of his aura.

'It looks like we can't drag this out for much longer...'

On the other hand, Seongjin was relatively at ease. His habit of keeping a wide distance from giant demons, dodging, and looking for opportunities to strike deep had served him well.

The demons of Gehenna were known for their unpredictable movements, after all.

Take, for instance, the larvae of the Bantra Moss. The range from which their tentacles extended from their highly adaptable exoskeletons was incredibly diverse.

'The more I think about it, the more it resembles the movements of the Blatta Mantis...'

Ah, excluding its appearance, of course.

At least this 'cute' dog didn't have more than four legs.

Most of the demons of Gehenna, except for some cephalopods, had the form of arthropods, typically having more than six legs.

The Blatta Mantis, too, was a giant insect-like demon, wielding two powerful forelegs like a praying mantis. But its streamlined form covered in dark chitin was more reminiscent of a cockroa...

'...Ah, I need to stop thinking about it. It's making me lose my appetite again.'

After facing that creature, the entire superhero squad suffered from a

lack of appetite for days.

[Are you sure you can handle this? I know you keep comparing it to the Blatta Mantis, which was a fairly strong demon.]

'As long as they don't swarm, I can handle one.'

Although Seongjin's stats had significantly decreased from his prime, strangely, he didn't feel any sense of danger facing this creature.

Feeling a baseless confidence as if, somehow, he could manage even if things went awry.

'I've really become quite laid-back...'

Considering Seongjin's personality during his hunter days, this was indeed baffling. Back then, he was meticulously thorough in approaching battles.

He would accurately assess the enemy's strength, organize combat personnel, and plan operations based on objective data.

He had a disdain for those who rushed in thoughtlessly.

[What are you talking about, going berserk yourself when things get tough?]

'That was a different story. I was always well-prepared.'

[Really? Maybe it's because you believe that no matter what happens, your father can handle it.]

'...Is that so?'

Seongjin blinked.

Thinking about it, it did make some sense, didn't it?

'Yeah, maybe you're right.'

It was an interesting realization.

Is this how people with parents generally feel?

As he pondered this, a sharp warning beep echoed again.

□The Lyc□□thrope Lord is greatly enraged!□

Simultaneously, the dog-like creature started trembling violently as if electrocuted.

As its aura grew stronger, it suddenly let out a thunderous roar towards the sky.

With a deafening roar, the Lycanthrope's blue fur began to turn purple, and its body started to swell dramatically.

It was too dramatic a change to be merely flexing its muscles. How could its volume increase so suddenly from thin air?

While Orden was shocked by the transformation, Seongjin's observation remained simple.

'Ah, looks like it's phase 2 of the boss fight.'

[...It must be nice to be so laid-back.]

'Well, take it positively. Considering its remaining health, it doesn't seem like there'll be a phase 3.'

Before their eyes, a purple dog, now about 1.5 times larger, slowly rose.

Its long, white fangs protruded more prominently, and white steam rose from its elongated, sharper snout.

The red glow in its eyes, fixated on Seongjin and his group, brightened ominously, as if its eyes were ablaze.

"...What in the world."

As Orden opened his mouth to speak, the Lycanthrope's ears twitched.

And then.

"Hey! Watch out...!"

Before any warning could be given, Orden was slammed against the stone wall. The purple beast had swung its blade at an incredible speed, sending him flying with the flat of the blade.

"Ugh..."

Impaled into the wall like a siege ram, Orden let out a faint groan.

Fortunately, he seemed to have wrapped himself in aura to protect his body, preventing him from losing consciousness, but the impact was so severe that it seemed impossible for him to get up immediately.

With a low growl and the creature slowly advancing towards him, Seongjin steeled his resolve.

'...Can't be helped.'

He had intended to take it slow this time, given the sharp eye of the higher-ups, even if it meant pushing himself a bit.

Sighing, Seongjin wrapped his legs with aura and, with a burst, kicked off the ground.

Before the startled Lycanthrope could react, Seongjin flew onto its back, swinging his blade in a wide arc.

Slicing through the beast's back, he landed on the stone wall before the creature could turn, and launched himself again towards its legs.

With a deep slash, he targeted the bent knee joint, stirring it deeply with his blade.

The beast swiftly swung its blade diagonally, but Seongjin, keeping low to the ground, narrowly dodged and struck the ground, following up with a long slash across its belly.

The creature, unable to keep up with Seongjin's movements, swung its blade irritably.

Then, using the handle of his blade as support, Seongjin spun around and deeply cut into one of the giant creature's shoulders.

Orden, sitting slumped in front of the stone wall, watched the scene in a daze, the intense pain piercing his body momentarily forgotten.

It was like witnessing a dream.

What seemed like mere hit-and-run tactics were actually precise attacks by the prince, who didn't waste a single movement escaping, constantly stabbing the beast with his sword.

As evidence, the Lycanthrope's remaining health steadily decreased.

The prince's spacing.

When Orden first faced him, he felt that the prince's spacing was incredibly narrow compared to his sword strikes.

Now, however, Orden realized he had been greatly mistaken.

The prince's spacing wasn't just a domain that could be defined by distance. The bounced-off stone walls became his foothold, and the trench created by the beast's strike immediately became a barrier protecting him.

Everything within the prince's view became his domain.

The entire surroundings were within the prince's spacing.

"Sigh..."

Finally, as the prince settled back to the ground, letting out a long breath he had been holding.

With a thud!

The massive beast that seemed impossible to defeat collapsed to the ground.

That colossal purple beast was undoubtedly a formidable opponent even for Seongjin.

Upon entering Phase 2, it displayed an attack power that far surpassed Blatta Mantis. Moreover, it possessed incredible speed that even Orden, who was close to being a senior knight, couldn't react to it in time.

Thus, Seongjin had to draw upon every ability he had.

He maximized his aura concealment to prevent any leakage of aura to the outside.

He gathered all the aura he could muster, focusing it on the smallest area possible to supplement his lacking strength.

By employing assassination techniques to blur his presence, he made it difficult for his opponent to detect his location, compensating for his comparatively slower speed.

And he utilized every aspect of the surrounding terrain.

"The more I see, the more incredible your movements seem. What kind of spatial awareness do you have?"

Hadn't one of his comrades, with whom he fought during his early days as a hunter, made such a remark?

True to that comment, during combat, the most straightforward paths for attack and evasion would vividly form in Seongjin's mind in three dimensions.

All he had to do was follow those images, and he would hardly ever get hit, and most of his attacks would land.

And that meant, as long as Seongjin's body moved correctly, there was always a chance for victory.

Boom!

Finally, the massive body of the Lycanthrope collapsed to the ground.

"Huff..."

Only then did Seongjin stop and release the breath he had been holding.

'I really ran around to my heart's content for the first time in a while.'

The battle had been quite intense.

He had used his aura so cautiously that, despite the reckless swinging, his muscles didn't burst as they had before.

Of course, there was no helping that his legs, having been busy darting in every direction, were worn out and had stiffened up, barely moving now.

Yet, by the end, his aura was completely depleted, and he had no choice but to draw upon some of the aura blocking the passageway.

[Did you really take that down all by yourself?]

The Demon King expressed admiration, a rare occurrence.

'See? I told you it seemed doable.'

After all his efforts, Seongjin was now faced with a barrage of new text windows popping up incessantly before his eyes.

[Clarity!]

[You have successfully defeated the Lycanthrope Lord!]

[Calculating rewards...]

Huh? Is something like a game reward actually coming up?

[Your achievement exceeds the registered records.]

[Requesting update from the system.]

[The system's adjustment function will be activated.]

[Currently loading...]

And beep. A cheerful notification sounded, and for a change, a perfectly legible text appeared.

[Some systems have been successfully restored.]

Oh, this is the first time the text isn't broken.

[You have been granted rewards appropriate to your completion grade.]

[A return portal has been generated.]

And whoosh. Suddenly, a long beam of multicolored light appeared in the middle of the cavity.

"...Portal?"

Does this portal means that it's a shortcut back to Delcross?

[Hmm...]

The Demon King seemed to scrutinize it carefully for a moment before affirming.

[I'm not sure where it leads, but it's definitely some kind of gate. As expected, it's a product of the main world, seems very stable, doesn't it?]

Alright, let's take it and see.

[But we don't know where it leads. Isn't that a bit risky? Better to just call your father.]

"Tsk, ts. Knowing only one thing and not the other."

Seongjin shook his head in disapproval.

Think about it, Demon King.

If this portal is connected to Delcross, we can avoid getting caught by my father for causing trouble.

And if it leads somewhere else?

Then we can call my father at that time. Whether we're here or there, calling him once is all the same.

At Seongjin's utterly logical explanation, the Demon King was immensely impressed.

[...Wow, are all kids like this? Going to great lengths just to avoid getting scolded by their parents?]

A scolding is just a scolding, but a slap is just a slap!

Meanwhile, the Lycanthrope that had collapsed on the ground had returned to its original size at some point.

As its body gradually became fainter, it seemed like it might just evaporate into thin air, just like in a game.

As he slowly approached, thinking this, the creature suddenly turned its head towards Seongjin. Its eyes, clear as glass and blue, stared intently at Seongjin with a discernible purpose.

'...?'

Caught off guard by the sudden turn of events, Seongjin stared back at the creature when an unfamiliar voice echoed in his head.

[■■■■ ■■? Why are you here...?]

...What?

Seongjin listened intently, puzzled, but the beast, which seemed like it wanted to say something, soon weakly closed its eyes.

Soon after, its massive form faintly shimmered and then disappeared

without a trace, turning into a small cluster of light.

Stunned, Seongjin watched the scene unfold and then asked the Demon King.

"Hey, did you just hear that?"

[Huh? Hear what?]

The Demon King seemed genuinely clueless.

'...Was it just my imagination?'

Where the creature had vanished, only a small accessory remained, twinkling.

As Seongjin picked it up, a beep sounded, and the name of the item appeared before his eyes.

[Lycanthrope Lord, Nebraska's Summoning Amulet]

Could it be that the creature's name was Nebraska? Or was it just the name given to the item?

It almost seemed like the creature recognized Seongjin at the end, but what was that about? Was it just his imagination?

With those thoughts, he examined the item, and small texts began to pop up one after another.

[There are 4 souls bound to player ■■■■ ■.]

[Open list]

...Bound souls?

Puzzled, Seongjin hesitated for a moment before saying, "Open."

Then, a selection window rolled down in front of him.

[List of souls available for summoning as familiars 2/4]

[1. □□□□ (Inactive)]

[2. □□□ □□ (Inactive)]

[3. Hayes Martin (Active)][1]

[4. Red (Active)]

[Would you like to select a soul?]

[Accept / Decline]

...Huh?

Huff huff huff!

Amelia, who almost seemed to leap off her trotting horse, entered the Scarcepinio mansion with a worried expression.

'Morres...!'

Strangely, today was a day filled with heart flutters and an inability to concentrate on anything.

This wasn't the first time something like this had happened.

There had been days in the past when a bad premonition had tormented her all day, and on such days, something would invariably go wrong, resulting in Morres getting seriously hurt.

Eventually, in the evening, Amelia put down the book she was reading and went looking for Morres. Hearing from Edith that he hadn't returned from his outing yet made her heart sink.

That's why she had ridden her horse to the townhouse, leaving her escort knight behind.

'Why? Why do I feel so anxious?'

Trying to suppress her trembling heart, Amelia was led by the servants to the second-floor lounge.

There, she found Masain-orabeoni shaking the poor old butler by the

scruff, demanding answers.

"Can you not speak the truth at once! The meeting has been over for ages; why has His Highness not shown himself? Where exactly is His Highness now!"

"I'm sorry, but I too am not sure..."

"Then summon Young Master Scarcepino at once! Wasn't it said that he was accompanying His Highness?"

"That's the thing, his excellency Riccardo has also unexpectedly left..."

"What? Left His Highness alone? Does that even make sense!"

Normally, Marquis was a kind older brother who only showed a gentle face to his siblings.

But now, baring his teeth and growling at the butler, he seemed like a completely different person, exuding a menacing aura.

At this, Amelia realized.

'As I thought, something has happened to Morres!'

Biting her lip anxiously, a desperate voice called out to them from behind.

"Masain-hyungnim! Amelia-noona!"

Just then, Logan, dressed in the uniform of the White Knights, entered the lounge.

A long Henesys longsword was strapped to his waist, and on his left arm, he wore the small buckler used during the conquest of the Sea Witch, fully armed.

"I received a message from Sisle that something serious might have happened to Morres. I rushed over immediately upon request, but what in the world is going on?"

Since Sisle wasn't one to talk nonsense, he must have come fully

armed, just in case.

And his response touched the heart of the Knight Commander, who had always been concerned about the discord between the two.

"Prince Logan, to come in person for Prince Morres like this..."

Masain's eyes reddened. Of course, he still had the old butler by the scruff.

And the butler, dangling from his grip, silently sweated as the situation began to escalate.

'Why... Why has it come to this?'

Until now, Prince Morres had been nothing more than a secretive guest who passed through quietly as if a mouse.

But now, with the appearance of the renowned Knight Commander from the imperial family pressing for answers, the Princess whom the Holy Emperor cherishes the most, and Prince Logan who is now the most probable candidate for the next Holy Emperor's seat, it was an unexpected turnout for the imperial family members to rally for that notorious prince.

"So, where is Morres now?"

As Logan asked again, a bright beam of multicolored light suddenly appeared before them.

"...!?"

The light quickly brightened and then vanished, but everyone's eyes widened in shock as they stared at the spot where the light had passed.

Incredibly, in a place where no one had been, the figures of two people appeared as if by magic.

"Sir Masain?"

What had happened in the meantime was unclear, but there stood

Orden, covered in blood, being supported by Seongjin.

"Huh? Amelia-noona? And Logan too? What's everyone doing here?"

Seongjin asked as he helped Orden sit on the ground.

Logan, noticing the severity of Orden's condition at a glance, rushed over with a stern face. As bright holy power burst from Logan's hands, Orden's face, which had been tightly scrunched up in pain, visibly relaxed.

After all, wasn't he a leading candidate for the next Holy Emperor? Seeing the wounds heal so quickly, it was clear that Logan possessed an extraordinary holy power.

Meanwhile, Amelia approached Seongjin with a worried face and asked.

"What exactly happened, Morres? Did he cause you trouble again?"

"...Excuse me?"

Feeling the nuanced misunderstanding, Seongjin asked back, and Amelia continued in a cautious tone.

"Of course, Young Master Siegmund isn't someone I'm particularly fond of, but I'm worried this might have been a bit too harsh this time."

Seongjin was so dumbfounded that he just gaped in disbelief.

Was the Princess under the impression that I had dealt with him?

Sure, it wasn't unreasonable to think that way since the two had disappeared together and one came back bloodied...

"..."

And Orden, having heard the blunt expression of disfavor from the Princess, sullenly lowered his head in silence.

Although his physical condition had greatly improved, his

complexion seemed even worse than before.

"It's all a misunderstanding, noona."

Just as Seongjin was about to protest, Logan, who had finished the healing and approached Seongjin, glanced towards Orden and then whispered in Seongjin's ear.

"What exactly happened, Lee Seongjin? No matter what, why would you beat someone to that extent?"

"...Huh?"

"For now, I've done a rough patch-up job, so if the Siegmund family lodges a complaint, just deny that you hit him that hard, okay?"

"No, that's what I'm saying, I didn't do it!"

Seongjin was flabbergasted.

What do these people take me for!

And Orden, an exceptional aura user who had caught every whisper of the siblings' conversation without missing a beat, felt utterly dejected.

Of course, the actual skills he had witnessed of the Prince were indeed admirable.

But even so. He was known as the most promising swordsman on the continent, having swept through every prestigious martial arts tournament with authority!

Regarded alongside Prince Logan as the strongest youth in Delcross, did these people truly believe without a shadow of a doubt that Prince Morres had unilaterally beaten him?

"We just got caught in Riccardo's trap together!"

"Trap?"

"Yes. Orden did nothing wrong. He just got involved while trying to

help me!"

Seongjin explained the situation while also defending Orden, who had suffered alongside him.

"Of course, it was needless effort, and he ended up being more of a burden that needed my help!"

Cough.

Orden's face turned a sickly shade of green as Seongjin's explanation dealt him a critical blow to his pride.

T/N:

1. The priest if you remembered him[↔]

"Traps set by the young master, what exactly does that mean? Could it possibly be related to His Highness suddenly appearing out of nowhere? Is it some sort of mechanism?"

"I'm not entirely sure what he did or how he did it. I was trapped somewhere with Orden and barely managed to escape. We'll have to find him and ask for details, won't we?"

"But what did you do to Young Master Scarcepino for him to resort to such measures?"

"Hey, what did I do, really? I'm innocent here! Listen, the truth is that Riccardo was the one who from the start..."

Prince Morres, growing heated in his explanation, was being watched blankly by Orden when his subordinate, Herman, approached and asked cautiously, "Are you alright, Young Lord Orden?"

On the usually not-so-loyal subordinate's face, a faint sense of guilt surfaced for having neglected his duty and letting the young duke end up in such a state.

It was something beyond his control, after all. He had orders to gather as much information as possible at this gathering and to stand by without any further instructions.

Besides, with Orden's strength, what danger could there possibly be at a mere social gathering?

"To think you would be beaten by that young prince..."

"That is..."

Orden opened his mouth to retort but eventually remained silent,

unable to come up with a response.

He was unaware that he had been flung to another dimension and returned, but he understood that what Riccardo had done was not something a normal person could achieve. The involvement of the Dark Order or a demon race was suspicious.

The fact that the heir of the wealthy Scarcepino family was involved with such malevolent forces was, in itself, enough to cause a huge stir in the Imperial City.

Thus, until the connection with the Milo Trade Association was confirmed, he and Prince Morres had agreed to keep quiet about the detailed events that occurred there.

After pausing to rub his face with his hands, Orden asked, "And Riccardo Scarcepino?"

"He has been absent since the middle of the gathering. According to the butler, he had urgent business and said he would return shortly."

"Urgent business?"

"Yes. Of course, our people have been closely monitoring the surroundings, so it's certain he hasn't left the mansion."

Herman then looked at him with a slightly worried expression.

"I'll have someone investigate further, so for now, Lord Orden, please return to the mansion and receive proper treatment. Your current state is truly not good."

"Yes, let's do that."

Orden responded thus and lifted his head to look towards the people of the Imperial family gathered together.

More specifically, his gaze was on the beautiful face of Princess Amelia, who was smiling softly at her siblings.

"But Herman."

"Yes, Lord Orden."

"Do you know? Amelia's... Amelia's face looks incredibly happy..."

"Oh dear."

Herman sighed.

He couldn't fathom why his normally stern and taciturn superior would act so foolishly whenever it came to the princess.

As if feeling their gaze, Princess Amelia turned around. Then, to their surprise, she began to slowly approach them!

Orden froze in shock at the unexpected turn of events.

"Young Master Siegmund."

Princess Amelia, now close enough to look down upon him, had an unusually soft gaze.

"I heard from Morres. You tried to help him, didn't you?"

Orden replied in a disheartened voice.

"...In the end, I wasn't much help."

"But still, the fact that you tried to help my brother remains unchanged."

The princess said, her lips curving into a gentle smile. Although it was a faint smile, it was enough to momentarily take Herman's breath away, brightening the atmosphere around them.

"Thank you very much, young master."

"...!"

This was perhaps the first time Orden had received such a friendly response from the princess.

He was visibly moved, unable to hide his emotions.

Meanwhile, the reprimands toward Seongjin from the members of the Imperial family continued.

"It seems you're quite the troublemaker too. I'm starting to understand why Princess Amelia is always so worried about you."

"What, me?"

Seongjin bristled in response, and nearby, Masain frowned and clicked his tongue in disapproval.

"Exactly. It's truly impossible to let one's guard down around you. Despite my being here, you've managed to create such a mess in just a moment of inattention!"

"No, Sir Masain. Why do you always blame everything on me?"

Of course, if one were to delve into it, all of this was probably a result of the actions Morres had taken in the past.

In any case, Seongjin felt wronged.

"Let's not do this here. Let's head back to the Imperial Palace. I have things to report, so I need to meet with Father in the main palace for a moment."

As Seongjin started to walk away, Logan quickly stepped in front of him.

"Just a moment before you go. Sit down here for a second."

"...Huh?"

"I'll give you a quick treatment. You're quite injured, aren't you?"

Huh? Seongjin was somewhat taken aback.

His leg did hurt a bit. But he thought he was moving quite well, all things considered. How did Logan notice?

"No, I think I'll be fine after some rest..."

"Morres."

Amelia's cool voice cut him off from behind, and Seongjin looked back hesitantly.

Those quiet, gray eyes staring at him exerted an unspoken pressure, somehow reminding Seongjin of someone he knew all too well.

"With your leg like that, what are you even talking about?"

Really, she could see that?

Such keen observers!

"Anyone can see you have a serious injury right now. Just do as Logan says."

"...Yes."

Intimidated, Seongjin obediently sat down, and Logan placed his sword aside and laid his hands on Seongjin's leg.

Bright divine energy flowed down, beginning to ease the pain in his leg.

Masain, watching with a stern expression, asked, "Is it serious?"

"I've administered first aid for now. But it would be best if he refrained from any strenuous activity for a while."

"I see."

Masain nodded and then sternly admonished Seongjin.

"You heard what Prince Logan said, didn't you? How can you even think of going to the main palace in your condition? I'll carry you to Pearl Palace myself, so don't even think about walking on that leg today."

"What?!"

Seongjin was taken aback.

No, wait a minute, everyone. I'm already completely fine! It's not a big deal at all!

Why are you treating me like a baby?

"And that's not all, Your Highness. You are forbidden from training for the entire day tomorrow. Do you understand?"

"But Sir Masain? I really am..."

As Seongjin tried to protest, he was simultaneously scolded by the siblings.

"Be sensible and listen while you're being spoken to nicely!"

"Don't even think about training!"

"Uh..."

Seongjin blinked in confusion.

What's going on here? Why am I being scolded by them to this extent?

[Tsk tsk. Your character is so flawed that you lack extreme empathy for others. Can't you see your family is worried about you?]

I've been thinking about this lately, but somehow, this Demon King has an unnecessarily deep understanding of humans.

'No, but isn't this concern a bit too excessive?'

[Exactly. I don't understand why they're making such a fuss over this damn brat...]

'...'

Seongjin blankly looked up at his siblings and Masain.

Three different colored pairs of eyes were all looking at him with the same worried expression, as if they were looking at a child by the water.

"Ha ha..."

Perhaps it was the absurdity of the situation, but a laugh escaped him

involuntarily. When had Seongjin, the strongest hunter of humanity, ever been treated like this?

—It's just that you have so many family members around you.

He remembered the Holy Emperor saying something like that once.

At the time, he thought it was a bothersome and annoying relationship.

Why, then, did he suddenly not feel so bad about being with them?

* * *

Young Master Scarcepero was found by people late into the night.

The old butler, finding it strange that the carriage was still there, had summoned the servants to search the entire mansion, leading to the discovery.

He was found collapsed in one corner of the garden, surrounded by an alarming amount of blood.

The servants initially panicked, fearing something dreadful had happened to the young master, but surprisingly, there wasn't a single wound on his body.

Riccardo, carried back to his room by the servants, regained consciousness only late into the night.

"The connection... the connection has been severed! Oh, no!"

Upon waking, Riccardo immediately fell into a panic.

"Ahh! I'm finished! It's all over now!"

The startled servants restrained him as he began to thrash about.

"Lord Riccardo! Your Grace! What's the matter?"

"The Guardian! He's destroyed my mind! He's completely severed me from the grand flow!"

"Lord Riccardo, what do you mean by...?"

"Sigurd! Sigurd! Where is he? Please, bring him to me!"

This behavior was uncharacteristic of the always gentle and refined young master.

The commotion prompted the attending physicians to rush over, and the pale-faced old butler quickly called for a healing priest.

Riccardo's outburst continued for a while.

And around dawn, when he had finally calmed down, he ended up cowering under his covers on the bed, still not in a normal state, trembling and with a haunted look in his eyes.

Unable to bear it, Isabella approached him with a worried expression.

"What's the matter, Riccardo-orabeoni?"

Riccardo clenched the blanket tight and gritted his teeth.

"Ah, I'm so afraid, Isabella. Terrified."

"What are you so afraid of?"

"The connection to the noble spirit has been severed. The link that was to lead to a grand tale..."

Riccardo's eyes, as he murmured, were unfocused, darting aimlessly.

"Now I see nothing. Everything that was once so clear is now obscured as if veiled in thick mist, so ambiguous..."

"Brother."

"Is a mere human's spirit so trivial? Not even able to see the world properly, let alone oneself, like a blind man with eyes wide open!"

"..."

"Ah, Isabella! What should I do? I have become nothing in this universe. I, who should have been a tributary connected to the grand

flow, a pillar of the great order, am now but a speck of existence!"

Tears welled up in Riccardo's bloodshot eyes.

Isabella, who had been quietly watching this scene, cautiously took his hand and began to comfort him.

"I see. Yes. But don't be too sad, brother."

" ... "

"Being suddenly expelled from the grand order. It must be a tremendous loss. I understand all of your feelings, brother."

Her beautiful turquoise eyes looked at him with deep compassion.

"...Isabella?"

Riccardo turned his head towards Isabella, puzzled by his sister's reaction. Her face was unusually calm and peaceful.

She continued with an unprecedented gentle smile.

[But you need not be so sad. To dare to be a part of the grand order, that was never something you were permitted, brother, who were no more than a puppet at midday.]

Her lips, red as a flower, slowly approached and whispered sweetly in his ear.

[Since it was never there to begin with, you haven't lost anything, brother. What a fortunate thing, isn't it? So now, forget everything and rest easy, brother.]

"Sigurd Sigurdson. The maliciousness of that man lies exactly there. Even though the avatars he manipulates retain their consciousness, in many cases, they are unaware that they are merely puppets moving at his will."

At Romaine's explanation, Leonard asked with curiosity.

"They retain consciousness but fail to perceive it?"

"Yes. It's because of the cunning methods he employs."

Romaine continued after a brief pause.

"He usually manipulates the puppets in two ways. One is by drastically boosting the human ego, and stimulating the desire to become a more remarkable being, making the puppet accept itself as it is."

"Hmm?"

"The problem arises after acceptance. Once the connection is made, the extensive experience and knowledge he has accumulated, along with the mad desire to become part of a greater flow, all converge, elevating the puppet's spirit immensely. At this moment, the puppet believes it has become his accomplice, mistaking his strong desires as their own, and readily lends their body without hesitation."

Romaine and Leonard.

The two were currently walking down a long corridor made of stone.

The old stone walls, covered in moss, bore the clear marks of time, but the sporadic blue torches, seemingly just lit, illuminated the path brightly.

"The other method is even more malicious. It involves completely tearing down a person's self-esteem or driving them into a severe corner, making the puppet give up its sense of self entirely. The puppet then moves entirely according to his will. In extreme cases, the puppet might even come to believe that it is Sigurd Sigurdson himself."

Leading the way, Romaine glanced around at the fork in the road before deciding on a direction and proceeding.

"In this case, the puppet literally lives as Sigurd Sigurdson. Of course, the process of making them give up their self-consciousness is not exactly humane, so it's inevitable that there will be some gaps in the puppet's memory."

"Gaps in memory? But how can they not realize they are being controlled?"

"Because most of those gaps are filled the moment they fully connect with him. As I mentioned earlier, humans connected to Sigurd cannot escape the euphoria brought on by the intensely stimulated mental activity. The sensation is so strong and captivating that the disappearance of some human memories is hardly noticeable."

Romaine paused to let out a soft, hollow laugh.

With each smile, his lips twisted into a dark smirk.

"Such unaware puppets continue their delusions even after he leaves, pitifully believing themselves to be not merely human but, in fact, demons. They think they are demon lords who traverse dimensions, destined to become part of a grand tale someday."

"....."

"Deeply despairing over their own insignificance, they easily become engrossed in the brief euphoria bestowed upon them by another for convenience. It's truly a foolish thing, isn't it?"

Leonard, feeling a bit embarrassed by Romaine's words that sounded like a profound self-mockery, distracted himself with a cough.

Fortunately, before the atmosphere could become any heavier, they arrived at their destination.

Romaine stood in front of a large door adorned with elegant relief work and said to Leonard,

"This is my base of operations. For you to enter with me, Mr. Leo, you would need to become a member of my party. As I mentioned earlier, you simply need to agree."

As soon as he finished speaking, a broken text window appeared in front of Leonard.

☐■■■■ invites Mr. \$ks□Rns to join the party. Do you accept?☐

☐Accept / ☐ecline☐

Startled, Leonard glanced at Romaine's face and then nodded.

"...I accept."

Then, another text window popped up.

☐You have joined ■■■■'s party.☐

"Phew."

Leonard shook his head in disbelief and took a swig from his flask.

"Well, I must say, even though you gave me a fair warning, it's still surprising. It seems this place really is another dimension."

The two were currently inside the labyrinth.

Due to Sigurd Sigurdson urgently accessing the labyrinth for some reason, Romaine was also able to successfully recover some lost connections.

With a heavy creaking noise, the door opened to reveal another corridor lined with multiple rooms.

Unlike the previous areas, the interior was brightly decorated, causing Leonard's eyes to widen in surprise. Romaine strode inside

and said,

"Mr. Leo, I will grant you access to certain parts of this base. From now on, you will be free to come and go in the authorized areas."

"Wow, Romaine! I never imagined. This is really...!"

Leonard looked around excitedly, his face flushed with enthusiasm.

"Isn't this the perfect hideaway! Can I bring others here?"

Romaine looked back at him as if he had said something absurd.

"We deliberately came here to escape the eyes of guardian of Delcross and the high-ranking demon kings. If we blatantly bring women here, do you think our concealment will hold?"

"Wouldn't it?"

"Of course not. Besides, with all the hideaways you have scattered across the continent, do you really need another secret place?"

"There's always a shortage. I don't like to return to a hideaway I've used before. It smells of corpses."

"....."

Romaine fell silent.

On the outside, he appeared to be a perfectly normal young man, but in fact, this Leonard was a person with quite a brutal aspect.

As a child, the prince used to bring small animals into the palace to torment for fun. As he grew older, he created secret hideaways and lured people to them. Most of those he brought ended up as cold corpses, buried right there in the hideaways.

If it weren't for his status as a prince, he would have been branded a devil worshipper or a notorious murderer and executed long ago.

Indeed, such an extraordinary temperament must be why he is fated to become a conqueror of the continent someday.

Had Delcross fallen into [Famine]'s hands as planned, instead of wasting time drinking, he would have been fervently engaged in wars of conquest.

"By the way, if the labyrinth is so good at evading others' gazes, why doesn't the Storyteller of Dimensions flee here?"

Leonard, who was busily opening various doors and exploring the interiors, asked as he gulped down his drink.

"Sigurd Sigurdson cannot leave the dimension of Delcross."

"Why is that? Because his physical body died in Delcross?"

"Not exactly. The problem is that the moment his soul leaves the Delcross dimension, he would face the full brunt of the Holy Emperor's fury with all restraints removed. Didn't we just lose one of the puppets as an excuse for briefly opening the labyrinth?"

Sigurd Sigurdson has been a target of the Holy Emperor for years.

The reason he has been able to preserve even his soul thus far is by clinging to the bodies of puppets and not significantly deviating from human laws. He is exploiting the constraints of the Holy Emperor.

Now, there's only one way for him to be free.

He must bide his time within the few remaining puppets, waiting for the day the Holy Emperor, as a human, reaches the end of their life and dies.

"Even that would only be possible if the lifespan of the puppets is exceedingly long. Now, only two puppets remain, and creating new ones would clearly be an act beyond human laws."

In that brief connection, Romaine, who had fully grasped Sigurd Sigurdson's predicament, smiled confidently.

It was then.

"...Huh?"

Leonard paused in front of a door at the end of the corridor and said,
"Romaine, something feels off? I'm sure I've seen this place before."

"Really? That shouldn't be possible."

Romaine asked, puzzled, but Leonard silently opened the door, feeling an odd sense of déjà vu as if he frequently opened and closed this door in the same manner.

Creeeak...

The room revealed was modest.

Simple furniture including a small bed, and the walls were adorned with clean, pastel-toned wallpaper that conveyed a modern sensibility.

"That wallpaper..."

A strange memory flashed through his mind.

The faint warmth in his hands, and those eyes looking up at him.

Leonard stared down at his hands with a dazed expression.

Was it a misconception? He felt certain he had strangled someone here...

Noticing his unusual demeanor, Romaine opened his mouth with concern.

"In the labyrinth, numerous thoughts and sentiments linger, and sometimes they can affect people. But those sentiments surely aren't yours, Mr. Leo. This is your first time here, isn't it?"

"...Right. It must be."

It seems he confused it with one of the hideaways in Rohan.

Leonard tilted his head, puzzled, and closed the door.

Upon returning to the imperial palace, Seongjin immediately sought out the Holy Emperor's office.

Despite his siblings and Masain insisting he should rest, Seongjin persuaded them with the following argument:

"I'll just go to father and ask him to fix it! Won't that solve all the problems? I won't have to delay urgent reports, and I can continue training tomorrow without needing to rest!"

Of course, Seongjin thought he was relatively fine, so this was just an excuse to not miss out on his training.

Fortunately, this persuasion was quite successful.

"Is that so?"

"Indeed, that makes sense."

"Well, if it's His Majesty the Holy Emperor."

Yes, the Holy Emperor's cheat key is always an invincible logic.

Thus, when Seongjin arrived at the imperial palace, despite the late hour, the Holy Emperor's office was brightly lit as usual.

Perhaps due to working late, the Holy Emperor appeared slightly tired as he greeted Seongjin. He looked at Seongjin with an inscrutable gaze for a moment before slowly calling out to him.

"Morres."

"Yes."

"Morres."

"...Yes?"

"....."

As Seongjin responded again, puzzled, the Holy Emperor remained silent for a while.

Just when Seongjin was starting to worry if something was amiss, the Holy Emperor suddenly gestured for him to come closer.

As expected, a strong light poured down from above, and Seongjin could feel his condition improving instantly.

Had the Holy Emperor seen something lacking even after Logan's treatment?

Moreover, the difference in condition before and after the treatment was distinctly noticeable.

Indeed, the Holy Emperor's power is said to be different from ordinary divine energy.

"Sit down."

"Yes."

Seongjin sat down opposite, slightly amazed.

Then, as if waiting for the right moment, Louis served tea at the perfect temperature.

It seems this person had anticipated my arrival.

'Well, if he roughly knows, it'll be easier to report...'

As he thought this and was about to take a sip of tea,

"So, did you have a good trip to the labyrinth?"

Seongjin almost spit out his tea in surprise.

"...You knew?"

As Seongjin asked with a wary face, the Holy Emperor tilted his head slightly.

"I thought that's what you came to report. Was it supposed to be a secret?"

"No, it's not that..."

Sweating, Seongjin replied.

Of course, it was difficult to keep anything hidden from this person, but he had hoped to avoid mentioning the dangerous part of his trip to the labyrinth.

He had intended to report about the suspicions surrounding the Scarcepino family and the true identity of that Riccardo fellow.

And, while he was at it, to inquire about the Oracle.

"I apologize. It seems I've caused unnecessary worry again."

As Seongjin bowed his head in apology, the Holy Emperor responded with a serene face.

"No, it's alright. I wasn't overly worried. You once told me you had swiftly dealt with the monsters in the labyrinth."

"...Excuse me?"

Confused, Seongjin asked again, and the Holy Emperor's eyes deepened as if recalling something.

"Yes. I wonder how I could have forgotten that until now. You had clearly told me so."

".....?"

And the corners of the Holy Emperor's mouth lifted faintly.

"You said that you have become quite strong now, so I shouldn't worry about anything and just trust you."

Seongjin couldn't help but ask again.

"...Did I really say that?"

To believe me just because I've become stronger?

When did I ever?

Could it be, the old reckless Morres?

His mind was baffled, but the Holy Emperor nodded.

"Yes, you did. And you also mentioned there was something to be found there."

Something to be found.

Seongjin had a guess about what that might be.

But, that's not what's important right now.

"When did I ever say such a thing? Are you referring to before I fell ill with the fever?"

At that, the Holy Emperor closed his lips and cast his gaze down to the teacup before him.

The faint smile that had been playing on his lips disappeared, and the somewhat buoyant air settled into calm.

"....."

Seongjin was beginning to understand.

When the Holy Emperor is sparing with his words, it involves the

future. That means it's something that hasn't happened yet, but why does he seem to dwell on the past like this?

Could it be that the occasional phrases from Sister Amelia are influenced by the Holy Emperor?

"...So, did you find what you were looking for?"

After a while, the Holy Emperor, breaking the silence, asked an unexpected question.

Seongjin, giving up on getting any more answers, silently pulled out two small accessories from his pocket.

The summoning amulet from Nebraska.

And a small pendant with a broken jewel, found in the dungeon.

* * *

Right after obtaining the amulet in the labyrinth.

A selection window popped up before Seongjin's eyes.

☐List of Souls Available for Summoning 2/4☐

☐1. ☐☐☐☐ (Inactive)☐

☐2. ☐☐☐ ☐☐ (Inactive)☐

☐3. Hayes Martin (Active)☐

☐4. Red (Active)☐

☐Would you like to select a soul?☐

☐Accept / Decline☐

Faced with the unexpected text, Seongjin couldn't even think about making a choice and just stared blankly at the words.

'Summoning a soul?'

If this was a game world, such an item wouldn't be incomprehensible.

But wait, it makes sense for the demon lord to be listed, but why is this one on the list too?

Hayes Martin.

A remnant of the dark cult that had wreaked havoc on the Heresy Tribunal before meeting his demise.

[Why? What is it? What's going on? Huh?]

As Seongjin stared blankly into space, the demon lord grew curious and urged for an answer.

'...Can't this guy see it?'

But then again, a Demon King as a summon?

I understand the concept, but I can't quite predict the outcome.

'It feels a bit uneasy to test this out on the Demon King right away...'

Maybe I should try summoning Hayes first? Just as he was considering this.

"Ugh....."

A soft groan next to him snapped Seongjin back to reality.

Ah, right, this isn't the time for this.

Seongjin hastily shoved the amulet back into his pocket and, with a slight limp, approached Orden.

"Hey, are you alright?"

Seongjin asked cautiously, looking at Orden who was embedded a good inch into the stone wall, bleeding profusely.

Then, the man gave a visibly frustrated response.

"Do I really look alright to you right now?"

"No. Sorry."

Seongjin apologized sincerely.

Indeed, the impact was so severe that it wouldn't have been surprising if his spine had shattered on the spot.

For an ordinary person, it would have been instant death. It was fortunate that he was an aura user close to an advanced knight, which probably saved his life.

Careful not to twist his cervical spine, Seongjin slowly helped him up from the wall.

".....!"

Orden grimaced and held his breath as he was moved.

His face rapidly paled as moving seemed to exacerbate the pain dramatically. It was commendable that he didn't scream out in agony.

After enduring the pain for a while, sweating profusely and groaning, Orden finally caught his breath and asked.

"So... what do we do now, Your Highness?"

"Well, I think if we go through there, we might be able to get back to where we came from."

Seongjin pointed towards the multicolored light pillar in the center of the dungeon, and surprisingly, Orden didn't question further and simply followed his lead.

Perhaps he thought since he was swept here by a whirlwind, there might be a chance to return through the light, albeit vaguely.

"This guy, the more I see, the more he seems surprisingly simple."

As Seongjin carefully supported him towards the portal.

Suddenly, something on the opposite side of the dungeon caught Seongjin's eye. A figure was slumped against the wall, leaning

slightly.

Feeling Seongjin's startle, Orden followed his gaze and upon spotting it, opened his mouth.

"Your Highness. That's what I mentioned earlier. The corpse of an imperial guard knight."

"....."

"Would you like to take a closer look?"

Somehow, Seongjin felt compelled to do so.

He set Orden down on the ground and approached the corpse.

Was it an imperial palace knight? But the uniform on the body was slightly different from what Seongjin knew.

While the overall color scheme was somewhat similar and the knightly emblem was clearly embossed.

"Is this an imperial guard's uniform? It looks different?"

The current imperial guard uniform was a long coat with three splits. But this was a short, unsplit coat.

Then, Orden nodded.

"Yes. It's probably a fashion from over 10 years ago. Due to complaints about it being uncomfortable while riding, it was changed to the current design."

So, this body must be at least over 10 years old.

But for such an age, the decomposition doesn't seem too advanced. Is it because the inside of the dungeon is cool and dry?

'Or maybe it's just because this place is closer to a game dimension.'

Regardless, the body was that of a fairly robust man.

Considering he was dead in what appeared to be a boss room, one

might think he fell to that giant Lycanthrope, but his sword was still neatly sheathed.

It likely means he didn't die in combat.

Overall, the body seemed quite intact.

Wondering why he died, upon closer inspection, a small metal rod-like object was found piercing exactly through the center of the corpse's Adam's apple.

'Wait, isn't this... a letter opener?'

An imperial palace knight killed by such a small, blunt knife?

Seongjin was baffled, but no other significant marks were found on the body.

The only peculiar thing was a piece of cloth tightly clenched in the corpse's right hand.

Curiosity piqued, Seongjin carefully pulled at it, revealing it to be a torn sleeve.

Judging by its size, it seemed to belong to a child's garment, finished with delicate embroidery at the hem and adorned with a rather luxurious button.

And then, with a clatter, a necklace hidden within the sleeve rolled out. It was a necklace adorned with a small gem shaped like a clear droplet.

It shone with a radiant crimson, quite beautiful to behold, but regrettably, the gem was completely split in half.

'...Huh?'

But this gem. It felt oddly familiar, was it just his imagination?

[Seongjin!]

Suddenly, the Demon King shouted sharply.

[We need to hurry! Something's off with the portal!]

Seongjin quickly turned around, and sure enough, the multicolored light pillar was becoming blurry and flickering.

[The gate is becoming unstable. It might close soon!]

'What?!'

Indeed, it might be too much to expect an interdimensional gate to remain stable for long.

So, Seongjin impulsively grabbed the necklace and, supporting Orden, dashed towards the portal.

* * *

"This item was obtained after defeating a monster in the labyrinth."

Seongjin pushed the amulet from Nebraska towards the Holy Emperor while explaining.

Initially, due to the confusion and the consecutive pop-up text windows upon touching it, he hadn't had a proper look.

Now, upon closer inspection, it was quite a finely crafted item. The flat metal plate was densely filled with intricately carved reliefs.

There were also small empty notches here and there, presumably once adorned with gems.

The Holy Emperor picked up the amulet and carefully examined it.

'Hopefully, no text windows pop up suddenly here.'

The initial test had already been conducted.

Curiously, when Seongjin took it out again upon returning to Delcross, it had become an ordinary ornament, unlike in the labyrinth where text windows would appear.

Perhaps because this place wasn't the Rule World but the Main World. If he had known, he might have tried summoning Priest Haze

just for the sake of it.

However, the amulet seemed to appear somewhat different in the eyes of the Holy Emperor.

"This item adheres to the rules of the Imaginary World. It seems to require some special conditions to operate."

Ah, so this gentleman knew about other dimensions after all.

With that somewhat unsurprising realization, the Holy Emperor returned the amulet to Seongjin, continuing his thoughts.

"It seems to be an item that fundamentally alters the soul. It's undoubtedly valuable, but it would be wise to use it with caution."

That must mean he should keep it.

It seemed like a simple soul-summoning item at first, but to think it could cause fundamental changes.

It was indeed a great fortune that he hadn't experimented with the Demon King.

"And this is....."

Seongjin also pushed the broken necklace towards him, continuing.

It was a completely ruined trifle, but since it belonged to a royal guard, it seemed right to report it.

"It belonged to an imperial guard knight who died in the labyrinth. I ended up bringing it with me, somewhat inadvertently."

"....."

This time, the Holy Emperor didn't pick up the necklace. He just stared silently at the split gem with an inscrutable gaze.

Just as Seongjin was regretting showing it to him, the Holy Emperor uttered something unexpected.

"This belonged to your grandmother."

...What?

"Your grandmother gave it to me a long time ago. I always wondered where it had gone, it seems it ended up there."

Seongjin's eyes widened.

What did he say?

Wait, hold on? Then, the child's clothing that was with this pendant?

"Father, then is it possible that back there....."

Seongjin started to ask reflexively but had to trail off.

Because, true to form, the Holy Emperor had turned his gaze away and clamped his mouth shut again!

Father, are you really doing this?

Feeling frustrated, Seongjin gulped down his tea, and the Holy Emperor, in a dry tone, offered some praise.

"You said you had to find something important, and you indeed did. Well done."

But even as he said that, he made no move to touch the necklace himself.

Even though it was a relic of his mother?

"So what should I do with this now?"

"Keep it safe yourself. This is no ordinary item. Your grandmother was a very special person, and there must be a reason it has come into your possession."

A special person.

Suddenly, Riccardo's, no, Sigurd Sigurdson's words came to mind.

—"The Oracle of the previous era met a very lonely and tragic end. And the Oracle of this era was destined to meet the same fate."

(Chapter 132)

He had clearly referred to the Holy Emperor as the oracle of this generation.

That means.

"Grandmother... I mean, was my grandmother an oracle?"

At Seongjin's question, the Holy Emperor, who had been looking down and pondering for a moment, eventually nodded.

"Yes, there's no need to hesitate now. That was indeed the case."

The Holy Emperor's mother, Empress Bessheva II, was a woman from the Cornsheim clan.

Black hair and gray eyes. She passed on the characteristics of her clan to him in full.

From a very young age, she was aware that she was an oracle. However, knowing the weight of her prophecies, she kept this a secret from her clan until her death.

Therefore, the Cornsheim clan, oblivious to this fact, proceeded with her marriage to the Holy Emperor's family.

Had they known Empress Bessheva was an oracle, they would never have allowed the clan's treasure to be exposed to the outside world in such a manner.

But now, the clan has come to know.

What she was, and who the current oracle is.

"Then, is it no longer necessary to hide that fact?"

When Seongjin asked, the corner of the Holy Emperor's mouth twisted slightly.

"What would they do even if they knew? Who would dare."

That somewhat chilly smile.

Seongjin could easily guess the unsaid part of that statement.

Who would dare to coerce the current Holy Emperor into making prophecies?

"The jewel of that necklace serves as a milestone for the Oracle."

"A milestone?"

"Yes. It breaks and shatters, awakening the realization that this is not a prophecy, but reality."

The Holy Emperor did not deny being the Oracle and even went so far as to provide Seongjin with quite detailed explanations.

It was an unusual sight to behold.

"However, the fact that it remains in shape despite being broken suggests that its purpose has not yet been fully served. Its coming into your possession is likely no coincidence."

"That means..."

Seongjin paused for a moment before asking.

"Does that mean I am to be the next Oracle?"

"..."

The milestone of the Oracle must hold its meaning when in the hands of an Oracle.

The Holy Emperor gazed silently at Seongjin's face for a moment before nodding.

"...Yes. You must have heard it from him as well. That is indeed the case."

It seemed surprisingly straightforward for him.

Perhaps it was because Seongjin had already received a fair amount of information from Sigurd Sigurdson.

But to think that the reckless Morres could really be an Oracle?

How could a so-called prophet live such a reckless life without a care for the future?

"As you said, the storyteller of dimensions told me I am to be the next Oracle. But..."

Seongjin hesitated before continuing.

"As you know, I am different from who I was before the fever. I don't possess abilities like foresight."

I am not your real son. So, I'm probably not the Oracle.

But why would you, who know this best, entrust me with this jewel?

"Do you know this, Morres?"

The Holy Emperor looked at Seongjin with a deeper gaze.

"The Cornsheim clan possesses the eyes to see the truth. Many of them have the ability to foresee the future. Even if it's not a distinct foresight ability, they possess a kind of intuition to somewhat predict the future."

"..."

"In fact, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the entire clan possesses the qualities of a prophet."

The entire clan as prophets? Then why is the Oracle so special among them?

Why could Morres, without any distinct foresight ability, surpass them to become the next Oracle?

"The most important quality for an Oracle is not foresight."

Seongjin blinked in surprise at this unexpected statement.

"Not foresight?"

"Yes. An Oracle is not one who sees the future, but one who lives through it. The path he contemplates and treads becomes the future he chooses."

It seems understandable, yet not quite.

Doesn't one need to foresee the future to make proper choices and live accordingly?

Then the Holy Emperor interlocked his fingers, appearing to organize his thoughts, before posing a question.

"Let's take an example. You've met him recently, right? Livga, the leader of the Arenja."

If he's referring to the time Seongjin was possessed by Commander Bruno.

"Yes, that's correct."

"Yes. He is quite adept at foresight. Apart from the occasional unnecessary actions, he can be considered quite capable."

Ah, so it seems.

Livga was cautious about being discovered by the Holy Emperor, but it turns out the Holy Emperor knew all along.

"So, how was it? Did his words seem helpful to you?"

"Hmm..."

If asked whether it was helpful, well, perhaps not so much?

Livga informed Seongjin that two of the missing people he was looking for were detained by the Milo trade association. He also advised meeting the Saintess before confronting Riccardo.

'Wait a minute.'

What was the information he provided again? Seongjin did instruct

Dasha to keep an eye on them, but it wasn't information urgent enough to act upon immediately.

And what about his advice? Seongjin had ignored it, finding it bothersome, but then the Saintess unexpectedly sought him out without it being planned!

"...So, it really was utterly useless, wasn't it?"

As Seongjin expressed his astonishment, the Holy Emperor asked again.

"In living your life, do you need anything more than your own will?"

"..."

"Is it really that important whether you are the Oracle or not?"

At that question, Seongjin recalled something the Holy Emperor had said to him not long ago.

—"Do as you wish. If you seek to rectify such injustices, so it shall be." (Chapter 75)

Just do what you want.

What's important isn't seeing the future, but the will to live through the future.

This brought another question to Seongjin's mind.

"Then, why would the leader of Arenja go through such pointless efforts..."

Seongjin trailed off, furrowing his brows.

He claims to act on behalf of the Oracle. Surely, he must be aware of these things as well.

Yet, why would he go to the lengths of possessing Commander Bruno to contact Seongjin? His intentions seem quite peculiar.

Then, a fleeting silver glint passed through the Holy Emperor's eyes

as he locked gazes with Seongjin.

"There's one thing we need to clarify first. Why didn't you act on the information he provided and investigate the trade association?"

"Uh, that's because..."

Perhaps stirring up the Milo trade association in search of some insignificant missing persons would bury more critical matters even deeper?

"Yes, that would be the case."

The Holy Emperor nodded, continuing the conversation.

"Consider another point. Let's assume you followed his advice and sought to meet the Saintess. How do you think you would have approached it?"

"Hmm. I probably would have tried sending a letter to arrange a meeting?"

"Indeed. But if you had done that, do you really think the Saintess, who is currently declining all invitations from the imperial court due to her wariness, would have agreed to meet you so easily?"

"Uh..."

"Did Livga, truly not know this? Do you think he genuinely wanted you to meet the Saintess beforehand and thus gave that advice?"

A chilling realization washed over Seongjin.

As his expression turned stern, the Holy Emperor calmly continued his explanation.

"Remember this well, my son. The Cornsheim clan are the most untrustworthy beings in this world. I keep them close in the imperial court and make use of their talents because they are as useful as they are dangerous."

"..."

"The words spoken by the Cornsheim clan to anyone are all manifestations of their will to predict and alter the future. Therefore, everything they say carries a clear intent, and without exception, it's all deceptive."

The Cornsheim clan are all liars.

That's what the Holy Emperor said, in a voice so calm and even that it almost felt like anger.

Suddenly, Seongjin's gaze fell upon the broken pendant lying on the table.

But Father, what about Grandmother?

What about your mother, who was from the Cornsheim clan?

* * *

"I want to go home!"

With a booming shout, the hefty body of a Varsha warrior was thrown onto the sandy ground. Boom!

A moment of silence.

Then, a massive roar erupted.

Woaaaah!

"Is that Owen? Quite the fighter for an Imperial."

"He's certainly a formidable warrior! But wasn't it said that today is his first time at Varsha-style wrestling?"

"What of it? He's undefeated so far! And his next opponent is last year's wrestling champion, Azjatur!"

The youths of the Volanta tribe exchanged excited words in an animated tone.

Caught up in the heat of the wrestling ring, their attention was focused on a particularly standout man in the center of the sandy

arena. Among the sizable Varsha warriors, he was a young man of tall stature who was in no way inferior.

Owen of Delcross.

The son of the tribal chief and a formidable warrior of the battlefield, he was fundamentally different from the warriors of Delcross, who were like sandmen.

Unlike the cowards of the Empire, wrapped tight in hard iron armor like turtles, the young man always moved freely across the battlefield in light armor.

Contrary to the empire's young soldiers with their short, baby-like cropped hair, the young man rode his horse with long hair flowing behind him, much like a Varsha warrior.

Even now, tied up tightly, his bright, tawny hair was adorned with several cormorant feathers, each symbolizing his splendid battle achievements.

"Can you believe that he accumulated such battle honors in just a few days? He's an excellent warrior! No matter how strong the enemy, he never backs down!"

True to those words, Owen's unyielding eyes were steadily fixed on the fierce-looking Varsha warrior who had just stepped into the arena.

And then, the resounding cry echoed once more.

"I want to go hooome!"

With a powerful throw, the previous year's wrestling champion was spectacularly slammed to the ground.

Boom!

Woaaaaah!

The cheers pouring out solely for him vigorously shook the cool air of the beach.

+ + +

[Special Quest – Achieve more than 5 victories in the beach wrestling tournament! (Completed)]

[Quest Grade: B +]

[Summary: You have effectively impressed your toughness upon all members of the Volanta tribe. This has earned you the favor of the aggressive youths and some of the stubborn elders. This minor achievement will serve as a foundation for further solidifying alliances with the Volanta. Your record of complete victories beyond 5 wins is commendable. If not for the somewhat lacking battle cry, you would undoubtedly have received a higher completion grade, perhaps by two levels. As a token of this slight regret, a bonus cash reward is provided.]

+ + +

Receiving a bonus was rare enough, but a mere 20 cash seemed rather stingy.

Owen pursed his lips at the thought, but he dared not voice his opinion. After all, there had been instances where the system, seemingly taking offense, had reduced rewards by up to 50%.

[Main Stream 2 – (Progress 19%)]

Nonetheless, this quest had significantly increased the overall progress.

As Owen wiped the sweat off his brow and sighed, his friend Chikundanka[1] approached him.

"You were truly magnificent today, Owen."

"Well, it's all thanks to you for properly teaching me the wrestling techniques beforehand."

Owen replied with a broad smile.

As he turned towards Chikundanka, the sole crimson jewel hanging

around his neck, exposed due to his wrestling attire, sparkled and shone brightly.

Chikundanka's eyes lit up with interest at the sight.

"Is that stone some kind of talisman protecting you? You always wear it."

"Ah, this?"

Owen lifted the necklace to show it off, grinning.

"Pretty cool, isn't it? I heard it was a gift from my godfather on the day I was born."

"The chieftain of Delcross? Then it must indeed be no ordinary item. It makes sense that you always carry it."

Chikundanka nodded in understanding.

"But I'm curious about something. What's that chant you always shout?"

"...Haha."

Owen laughed awkwardly, scratching his cheek.

"That? It's the Delcross victory chant. Quite magical, really."

Yes. At least for Owen, it was an invincible battle cry.

He was getting so homesick for the Holy Emperor and his siblings that he was even starting to miss that reckless Morres.

"Looks like all the warriors are already gathered. Since we've caught the chieftain's black sheep today, you should rest up and join the feast soon."

Chikundanka patted his shoulder and turned away.

After waving back lightly, Owen checked the small window that persisted in his right field of vision with a slightly gloomy face.

[Main Stream 1 – Defend the Southern Front! (Completed)]

[Main Stream 2 – Form an Alliance with the Volanta Tribe! (Progress 19%)]

Truth be told, regardless of quest achievements, Owen really wanted to return to Delcross.

But here lay the cruelty of the system. It subtly revealed subsequent quests that Owen couldn't ignore.

[Main Stream 3 – Rescue the Holy ☐!]

[Main Stream 4 – Rescue the Holy ☐!]

[Main Stream 5 – Defeat the ☐☐☐ ☐☐!]

Owen wasn't a fool; he knew what those blanks implied—either the Holy Emperor or the Saintess.

And it was unlikely that a quest to rescue the same person would appear twice.

In other words, the more Owen delayed, the greater the risk to both the Holy Emperor and the Saintess. How could he possibly return to Delcross with peace of mind under these circumstances!

"Damn it! I miss Sisle! I miss the kids! I miss Father!"

Under the star-filled beach sky, poised to spill over, the mournful cry of a young man unable to return echoed long and far.

T/N:

1. First mentioned in Chapter 120[↔]

"Indeed, Your Majesty mentioned so..."

Commander Bruno stroked his mustache with a troubled expression.

"I had simply thought His Majesty gathered psychics to form a useful secret organization. I never imagined the reason for organizing and keeping Arenja close was such."

The next day, Seongjin briefed Commander Bruno about the conversation he had with the Holy Emperor the day before.

Since he was also close to Seongjin, he thought it necessary to have a more accurate understanding of the organization he was a part of.

Of course, he left out slightly sensitive topics like the Oracle or the sarcophagus of the previous empress.

"His Majesty never quite reveals his intentions clearly. So that's what you were thinking."

Masain was also present here.

Feeling left out in recent conversations with Commander Bruno, it was decided to openly share everything with everyone. However, Masain seemed more anxious than pleased.

"When I was the captain of the guard, I also didn't properly know about the organization Arenja. I only vaguely guessed that something existed. Is it really okay to inform me of such critical secrets now?"

This was a noticeably cautious attitude, different from the past.

"What are you saying? It's just that there hasn't been a proper opportunity until now. I'm actually embarrassed for not having discussed it sooner."

Initially, Masain seemed to regard Seongjin as a child who needed his sincere care. After the boy's near-death experience at the Diggory estate, he became frantic over not being able to control Seongjin's every move.

However, after experiencing various events recently, it felt like he was trying to find an appropriate distance, acknowledging that Seongjin wasn't just a child.

'It seems he's realized I'm not just a kid anymore. It's probably safe to say he's started to trust me to some extent.'

Then, the Demon King snickered.

[Or maybe he's given up entirely? You did give him a hard time.]

'...Shut up!'

The fact that it hurts quite a bit is irritating. It's like he's hitting my nerve.

Seongjin managed his expression and added,

"I believe it's only natural to consult you first on such important matters. You are the head of security at Pearl Palace and my swordsmanship instructor, aren't you? So, I hope you will continue to support me as you have been."

At that, Masain grimaced, making a strange expression before slowly turning his head to the side. Seeing his eyes slightly reddened, it seemed he was quite moved.

'This man is also unexpectedly sensitive...'

It's not just Arenja. Seongjin was thinking of soon informing Masain and Commander Bruno about Dasha and formally introducing her to them.

She has been visiting Pearl Palace frequently, and the ones she is most nervous about are Commander Bruno, a former Decalon Knight, and Sir Masain, a senior knight.

The commander is already aware that someone has been sneaking into Seongjin's room, and lately, Sir Masain seems to be catching on to something as well.

In that case, instead of wasting time on unnecessary probing, it would be better to be open and get along. Seongjin felt that these three would continue to be together for a long time.

"So, what should we do now, Your Highness?" Commander Bruno asked with a serious face. "Given that we cannot fully trust Arenja, wouldn't it be better for me to withdraw from there now?"

"Hmm? No, Commander." Seongjin shook his head. "Just because we can't fully trust Arenja doesn't mean they aren't useful. And the position I've offered you remains a sweet deal."

Everyone knows a sword is a weapon.

Whether one gets cut by the blade or wields it properly as a weapon entirely depends on the user.

"...So?"

"If you have no particular desire to return to the knighthood, I'd be grateful if you continued to play the role of Arenja's salary thief and stayed by my side. There's a good chance we'll need to cooperate with Arenja at some point, and above all, I really do enjoy the tea you make."

Indeed, at some point, Seongjin had come to appreciate the aroma of tea. This was a significant development compared to the days of surviving on calorie-dense preserved foods.

This was all thanks to Chief Chamberlain Louis and Commander Bruno.

Their skill in making delicious tea was so renowned that even the Holy Emperor, who rarely touched food, was often seen contemplating a cup of tea.

At that, Commander Bruno looked quite proud.

"It's truly an honor, Your Highness."

No, a former commander of the knights shouldn't be so pleased about being acknowledged for his tea-making skills.

As the warm atmosphere continued for a while, Masain's expression suddenly darkened as if he had thought of something.

"What's wrong? Is there something bothering you, Sir Masain?"

"...Indeed, there is, Your Highness."

After some hesitation, Masain cautiously began to speak.

"This goes back to my childhood, when I used to visit my uncle, His Majesty, before he ascended to the throne..."

And what he revealed was quite a heavy story.

"I'm only saying this now, but back then, His Majesty didn't have a strong standing within the palace. He was always at risk of assassination, and the previous emperor paid no attention to his son."

Poison in every meal was the norm, and it seems there were even a few instances where he was openly attacked by his own knights. The more one hears about how a young child survived in such an environment, the more astonishing it seems.

The precarious position of the Holy Emperor at the time was partly due to his older siblings, who had already reached adulthood and solidified their own power bases.

But fundamentally, the issue was the origin of the former Empress. It was because he bore the bloodline of the Cornsheim clan, which was ostracized and considered ominous.

And within the palace, disrespectful individuals would openly call the young Holy Emperor 'the unpleasant Cornsheim' or 'the unlucky Cornsheim.'

"...What does that mean?"

"Yes, His Majesty said all Cornsheims are liars. But thinking about it, isn't it true that His Majesty also seldom speaks on personal matters outside of official duties?"

Ah, Seongjin seemed to understand what Masain was concerned about.

"Could it be that His Majesty considers himself as part of the Cornsheim, in a negative light?"

"....."

"I've been worried about this for a while now."

"Hmm....."

And then, the three, including Seongjin, simultaneously fell silent with serious expressions.

The atmosphere in the drawing room became so gloomy that Edith, who happened to walk in humming a tune, flinched and looked around cautiously.

"What's wrong with everyone... Is there something bothering you, Your Highness?"

In Edith's hands, worriedly asking, was a bouquet of bright yellow flowers.

"No, it's nothing. But what's with the flowers?"

Curious about the somewhat sloppy packaging compared to the usual ones sent by Chloe, Seongjin asked, to which Edith responded with a beaming smile.

"The priests are distributing these flowers all around the palace. They're Golden Crocuses. Today, after a long time, there's an event to commemorate the first Holy Emperor."

After having her tea-making duties usurped by Commander Bruno, this carefree lady did not reflect or strive to improve but instead joyfully roamed around, enjoying her newfound leisure time.

"Was there such an event?"

"Oh? Did you really not know, Your Highness?"

Edith shrugged her shoulders while arranging the flowers in a vase.

"The outside is in a complete festive mood right now. Today is the day the new Saintess is going to reveal the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus."

* * *

Delcross's first Holy Emperor, Cardmos Klein.

He was the divine representative who founded the millennium holy nation on this land and a demigod who transcended humanity, living for over 300 years.

Fitting the title of demigod, Cardmos maintained his youth throughout his life.

Even after his soul left his body, his physical form did not wither, appearing as if he was merely sleeping.

The proof of this holy miracle was enshrined in a splendid sarcophagus and carefully placed in the basement of Saint Bastian Church.

"Today is truly a glorious day, Lady Seo Yi-seo. The ceremony to reveal the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus is being held for the first time in nearly 20 years!"

While adjusting Seo Yi-seo's attire, Sister Electra excitedly chattered.

"What does that mean? It means you are an incredible Saintess, Lady Seo Yi-seo! Even Princess Sisle has not yet been granted permission to reveal the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus!"

At those words, Seo Yi-seo, already full of pride, narrowed her eyes sharply.

"What? Are you trying to say that Princess Sisle is inferior to me?"

"...What?"

Taken aback by the unexpected response, Sister Electra stuttered in confusion.

"No, not at all. Saintess, I just meant..."

"I can never forgive such irreverence! Be more careful in the future!"

Humph! Snorting in disdain, Seo Yi-seo left the frozen Sister behind and moved on with a chilly demeanor.

She was already in a foul mood from being dragged around for special masses and event preparations since the morning.

'Because I can't go meet Princess Sisle!'

Even as she was swept up in a grand procession led by Archbishop Wesker and other high-ranking clergy, her dissatisfaction only grew.

'Because I can't go meet Princess Sisle!'

Muttering to herself, she suddenly realized she was standing alone in a wide corridor, a large and ornate sarcophagus sitting starkly before her.

Seo Yi-seo blinked.

She remembered hearing from that writer what the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus was, but now that she was alone with it, a part of her heart suddenly sank.

She had to be in the same room as the corpse inside the sarcophagus?

"Wait a minute..."

As Seo Yi-seo panicked, the door closed harshly behind her with a creak and a thud.

"The spirit of the first Holy Emperor is said to bestow blessings, but what if there are really ghosts?"

Having only heard of the sarcophagus as a treasure of the Holy

Emperor's family, Seo Yi-seo only then felt a chill run through her body, realizing the full implications of being alone with the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus.

And soon after, a voice that seemed to shake her soul resonated strongly in her mind.

[Despicable. That one, truly despicable.]

".....?"

[Unchangingly audacious, perhaps. That child has always been like this. Despite my clear signs of whom I desire, my call has been ignored twice already.]

And then.

Suddenly, a man shimmering with light appeared out of thin air and lightly descended upon the sarcophagus.

".....!?"

For a moment, Seo Yi-seo thought she was beholding a god.

Everything about the translucent man shimmered in resplendent gold.

His hair was like strands of spun gold, and his eyes shone like the sun, golden and radiant. A halo of gold enveloped his entire being.

Even the robes he wore were adorned with elaborate golden patterns.

His presence was overwhelmingly majestic, an undeniable fragment of divinity.

It was as shocking as the first time she had seen the Holy Emperor.

As she stood stiffly, staring up in a daze, the man tilted his head and mused.

[And to think, the vessel sent to me is so flawed, how shall I receive it?]

"What, what?"

Not only was she being treated like an object, but she was also being deemed defective?

Fear was one thing, but anger was another!

Seo Yi-seo couldn't help but bristle.

"Excuse me? What did you just say? Flawed? Hey! Just because you're a demigod, does that make it okay? Huh?"

[Ha. How utterly foolish...]

The man chuckled as if amused by her ignorance.

[Fortunately, you have not yet become a puppet, but still, such a soul with too many defects.]

"...What do you mean by that?"

[Exactly as I said. Tell me, woman, were you always such a flounder, unable to discern right from wrong, always so impetuous?]

"What....."

[Do you even properly remember when you came to this world?]

The man, observing Seo Yi-seo rendered speechless, slightly curled the corners of his mouth.

[Well, it doesn't matter anyway, false Saintess. Even if there are some flaws, you are still a vessel capable of containing something. I shall willingly accept you as the new Saintess.]

The man's golden pupils slit vertically and narrowed, like a predator spotting its prey.

Seo Yi-seo instinctively felt a sense of danger and stepped back.

"What are you planning to do to me?"

[Isn't it obvious? Since that child won't come here to meet me, I must

leave this place myself.]

A hand, glowing with a golden aura, slowly reached out towards her.

[Be at ease, woman. I shall make good use of you. For now, rush to the palace and give that despicable one, who lacks respect for ancestors, a piece of your mind. That will satisfy me.]

And in an instant, darkness engulfed her vision.

The entire city of Delcross is blanketed in yellow crocuses, commemorating the first Holy Emperor.

It's the first such celebration in nearly 20 years since it was last held; the Festival of the First Holy Emperor.

The citizens of the Imperial Capital relished the long-awaited festive atmosphere, lauding the imperial family for bringing unprecedented prosperity to Delcross.

However, at the same time, a heavy atmosphere enveloped the Princesses' Palace, the Silver Rose Palace. Unexpectedly, Princesses Amelia and Sisle were subjected to a sudden prohibition on leaving the palace.

Deprived of her scheduled fencing lesson, Amelia was profoundly disheartened. But her disappointment paled in comparison to her younger sister's.

Sisle, who had been crying since morning, had eyes swollen and red, despite her remarkable ability to heal.

"Cheer up, Sisle. There's always a reason behind Imperial Father's decisions."

"But what could that reason be? I understand being barred from the Holy Emperor's celebration, but why am I also forbidden from attending the special mass?"

"That's..."

"If there's a valid reason for all this, why hasn't Imperial Father explained anything to me?"

"..."

Amelia was at a loss for words; she didn't have any more insight than her sister.

However, she faintly recalled a passing comment made by Leonard before her regression.

"Do you really think your father can now halt Rohan's unbridled ambitions? A man so bound by restrictions in his actions and words, can he truly persuade other monarchs to stand with us?"

'Restrictions...'

Amelia remembered the complicated expression on the Holy Emperor's face as he silently gazed at her, following her declaration to marry Leonard.

Reflecting on it now, it seemed that at the time, the Holy Emperor had foreseen that the union between Leonard and her could lead to an unfortunate end in some way.

Hence, he was busy tightening her security by significantly increasing the number of knights guarding her and frequently issuing orders prohibiting her from leaving. He did not shy away from worsening relations with Rohan, even attempting to banish the prince from Delcross without any justifiable reason.

Had Amelia not shown an extreme sensitivity to being confined, the Holy Emperor might have truly kept her locked in the Silver Rose Palace until Leonard was expelled.

And that slight gap led to irreversible consequences.

Leonard's loyal servant, Romaine, using a cunning strategy unheard of in this world, managed to secretly whisk Amelia away.

"Sister, it's not too late. Let's return to Delcross together. If you knew how Imperial Father is faring now, you couldn't possibly stay here."

At her wedding banquet held in Rohan, Logan, who had come from Delcross with a tremendous dowry, spoke with a somber expression,

words that still linger in her memory.

"Sisle, do you remember?"

Amelia continued, gently stroking her sister's soft silver hair.

"In the time of our ancestors, it was an annual event for every member of the Holy Emperor's family to pay homage to the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus. The entire family would gather before the sarcophagus to pray for the long-standing glory of the Holy Emperor's family and the endless prosperity of Delcross."

Sisle stopped her sobbing and listened intently to that affectionate voice.

"However, at some point, our ancestors ceased the homage ceremony, and coincidentally or not, Delcross faced a period of decline in the following years. Are you aware of the incident when demonkind hid within the capital? It was then that our ancestor passed away."

"Why? Why did our ancestor stop the ceremony?"

"Well, there's no record of their reasoning, so we can't know for sure now. But my guess is, maybe after that point, paying homage to the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus lost its significance."

"Lost its significance?"

"Yes. For instance, perhaps the blessing of the first Holy Emperor suddenly vanished?"

This was like a hunch she occasionally had.

The fact that the homage ceremony hadn't been held for 20 years suggested there might be a significant issue with it.

"Or maybe the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus have become something dangerous?"

Otherwise, why would the current Holy Emperor prohibit the homage by the family members?

Hearing this, Sisle widened her eyes and whispered softly to Amelia.

"Sister, do you realize the gravity of what you've just said? The clerics of the Orthodox Church would not take kindly to such words."

"Heh, is that so?"

"Of course! We must not deny the miracles of the first Holy Emperor. All the priests of the Orthodox Church can feel it, you know? The holy aura that emanates from the underground where the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus are enshrined."

Sisle said this and fiddled with the pink rabbit eye patch around her neck.

"And if there really was a problem, His Majesty wouldn't have just sent Lady Seo Yi-seo there."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. She is the most important person in this world and will always be under His Majesty's protection."

"...Is that so?"

Feeling an unusual presence, Amelia, whose senses had become more acute since she began practicing aura manipulation, lifted her head. She sensed a large group, likely knights, approaching the palace.

Shortly after, Mirabel, Amelia's personal maid, who also sensed the unrest, peeked outside the window and exclaimed in surprise.

"What's all this commotion?"

"What's the matter, Mirabel?"

"What could it be? Lady Amelia, the Order of Saint Aurelion knights are outside the palace."

Amelia and Sisle hurried to the terrace.

True to Mirabel's words, a large assembly of paladins had gathered,

encircling the Silver Rose Palace.

Instead of their usual ceremonial armors, they were donned in full battle gear, a rare sight.

They were clad in shining silver plate armors, holding large silver shields emblazoned with red swords.

The most formidable shield of the Holy Emperor, the emblematic armament of the Order of Saint Aurelion.

"What in the world is happening?"

As Amelia and Sisle stood side by side, gazing at the scene, a familiar voice came from behind them.

"Do not be alarmed, Princess Amelia, Princess Sisle. The situation will be under control shortly."

A knight, head and shoulders taller than the rest, the Vice-Captain of the Order of Saint Aurelion, Francis, entered the reception room in full armor.

He placed a hand over his heart, bowing politely to the two.

"I apologize for not informing you in advance. This is merely a precautionary measure by His Majesty's command; please, do not be overly concerned."

Indeed, the figure of Commander Katrina, leading the knights, was visible. Her presence indicated that all this was under the Holy Emperor's directive.

Next to Dame Katrina stood an exorcist clad in somber attire, a familiar figure to Amelia from her visits to Morres. It was, if she recalled correctly, Dame Sharon of the Monster Special Task Force.

"Now is the time."

As the inquisitor, who had been staring blankly into space, spoke up, Katrina nodded and stepped forward.

"Form the third-grade demonkind defensive formation! All knights, to your positions!"

At Commander Katrina's command, the paladins efficiently arranged themselves into formation, creating a sharp, spike-shaped perimeter around the Silver Rose Palace.

Finally, with a resonant thud, Katrina, standing firm in the center of the formation and slamming her shield into the ground, took her stance facing the main palace.

She looked every bit the iron shield of the Holy Emperor, as reliable and steadfast as ever.

And then,

"Deploy the Granus Type-2 Formation!"

With her shout, beams of holy light spread out in unison, unfolding a vast sacred barrier around the Silver Rose Palace.

* * *

Recently, Archbishop Wesker realized that his white hair was noticeably increasing.

As if worrying about the gray plague for weeks wasn't enough, he now had to deal with the Holy Emperor's command to sanctify a woman he had never heard of before. And once he did elevate her to sainthood, this Seo Yi-seo turned out to be quite the handful.

She was lackadaisical in her doctrinal studies and half-hearted in special masses.

Her main activity seemed to be following Princess Sisle around all day.

Even now, during the important homage ceremony held for the first time in nearly 20 years, she was absent-mindedly lost in thought.

"Are you listening, Saintess?"

"Ah, yes, yes. I just need to go and receive the blessing, right? Yeah, yeah."

"....."

Despite repeated explanations about the ceremony, this was the kind of response he got. It was clear to anyone that this woman was far from normal.

Seo Yi-seo, for her part, seemed to finally snap to attention once she entered the corridor where the Holy Emperor's Sarcophagus were enshrined.

"Wait a moment..."

With a heavy thud, the doors firmly closed, and Wesker watched with a worried gaze.

Her flustered appearance until the very end made him wonder if she could truly receive the blessing, even if the First Holy Emperor were to bestow mercy upon her.

Despite the Holy Emperor's command, Wesker couldn't help but worry if this was all too hasty.

After all, it was unprecedented for someone outside the Holy Emperor family, without the mark of sainthood, to undergo the homage ceremony.

However, when Seo Yi-seo emerged from the doors shortly after, Wesker sighed in relief.

It was proof that she had indeed received the blessing of the First Holy Emperor. Her eyes shone with a brilliant golden light, looking directly at Wesker.

An immensely strong and sacred aura cascaded from her like a waterfall. All the clergy observing the ceremony from outside were overwhelmed and bowed their heads in unison.

And then,

[I shall go to the Imperial Palace directly. Let no one follow me.]

A voice that seemed to shake the soul resounded deeply in their minds, issuing that command.

* * *

The main palace of the Imperial Palace was empty, not a single guard in sight, having been cleared out since morning.

"I had thought you might come here, but your predictability never ceases to amaze me."

The Holy Emperor spoke to a woman exuding a commanding presence upon boldly stepping into the office.

For the indomitable First Holy Emperor, also known as Cardmos, settling scores from the past five years of humiliation took precedence over any tactical advantage he owned. Nevertheless, the Holy Emperor had already made preparations for the possibility of Cardmos going directly to Sisle.

Then, Seo Yi-seo, or rather Cardmos, rebuked him with a dignified voice.

[You are arrogant, child! I showed you mercy and consideration, yet where have you cast aside the respect due to your ancestors!]

To which the Holy Emperor coldly retorted.

"Ancestors? Did you expect my respect after branding such a mark upon my child's body?"

[You insolent!]

Cardmos's displeasure was evident as his eyebrows twitched.

"Still so full of yourself, I see. Five years of penance were evidently not enough."

[What did you say? I deigned to look upon you with favor, and you dare...]

Cardmos growled, baring his teeth. Sparks seemed to fly from his vertically slit golden irises.

Previously, right after he left, the mark of sainthood appeared on Sisle's body.

However, his audacious descendant before him preposterously sealed his soul in the church's crypt without a word. And now, this same descendant even had the gall to mock him, suggesting his penance was still insufficient.

With a thunderous roar, the main palace trembled under the wrath of the enraged Cardmos.

The doors to the terrace rattled as if they might fall off, and documents fluttered down as office furnishings crashed to the floor.

[She was a child doomed from the start!]

"....."

[Left alone, she would have eventually fallen prey to malevolent forces and perished! Out of pity, I sought to protect her from such fates!]

There was a mix of anger and a hint of injustice in his outburst.

Cardmos, having lived an unnaturally extended life, faced death as the First Holy Emperor due to the negative impact his continued existence would have on Delcross. Yet, his soul was still very much alive.

Occasionally, he would take over the bodies of his descendants or other saintesses to live anew.

At first glance, it seemed akin to the deeds of a demon usurping others' bodies, but he had his own set of rules.

He only chose bodies of descendants who were in precarious positions due to their lack of innate divine power or those destined to die soon. He also took over the bodies of women who, despite their kindness and willingness to serve others, were doomed to die as

witches due to their extraordinary deeds.

The souls that encountered Cardmos's sanctity would soon fade away, but this did not concern him. Their lives were destined to end, and their souls were meant to vanish anyway.

Thus, 20 years ago, he marked a child doomed to die as a hostage in a foreign land. And five years ago, he marked another child thought to be at risk of being overtaken by malevolent forces, potentially becoming a threat to the empire.

In his way, it was a form of protection he could offer descendants facing a grim fate.

However,

"Do not bestow judgment with your limited insight. That shall never come to pass."

20 years ago,

The descendant who had narrowly escaped Cardmos's grasp was still alive, smirking as he spoke those words.

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The reason Cardmos Klein decided to take his own life was quite simple.

It happened after he had been in power for over 300 years.

One day, as he was idly leaving the government meeting to his descendants, as he always did, he heard a commotion coming from the courtyard.

"How much longer must I live like this, following after that old man?"

"But Lord Remus, you know very well that you are the firstborn of the imperial family."

"That damned firstborn, firstborn!"

Cardmos, rarely hearing anyone raise their voice to him in the palace, listened with interest instead of annoyance.

Remus. That was the name of the clever descendant who had recently been presiding over the government meetings in his place.

He was quite old, but it seemed his vigor had not waned.

"If I fulfill my duty as the firstborn, will that monster finally die? Will he give up the throne?"

"Lord Remus! Calm yourself. Such talk could be misconstrued as treason!"

"Let them misinterpret it!"

The content of his descendant's words was more serious than he had thought.

But it was the desperate tone of his voice that struck him the most.

That day, the despair, anger, and resignation in his voice resonated deeply with Cardmos.

"Don't you understand, uncle? My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father all lived like this! They were crushed by the responsibility of being the firstborn, spending decades polishing a throne they could never inherit!"

"But Lord Remus..."

"And that monster's youngest son is only one year old! That suckling baby is now first in line to the throne! How much longer does he intend to live? Are my children, decades later, to be forced to watch their great-grandfather be born?"

His descendant was almost sobbing.

"Do you know how the officials look at me in the government meetings, uncle? What am I to them? Am I the one who will inherit the throne and rule over them, or am I just a servant who keeps the throne warm?"

It was then that Cardmos realized.

What a mess of a family tree!

It was no wonder. The children he had with his empress in his youth had all died long ago, leaving behind grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

And the baby he had with his young empress a few years ago was now learning to walk.

Although Holy Emperor Cardmos was revered as a demigod, he did not rule them directly. And the authority of the true ruler had already fallen to the ground due to the fact that he had no chance of inheriting the throne.

Even Cardmos, who lived without much thought, could see it by now. This country could not last long.

"It seems it's time for me to step aside..."

Cardmos stared at his hands. At his will, the divine power moved, and the faint gold scales on his forearms rippled and disappeared.

He had never shared his divine power with his descendants before. Because of this primal power, he had complete control over the divine.

But would a slightly longer lifespan and slightly stronger divine power be enough for Cardmos to lead the vast empire he had maintained?

"I will use the laws of the imaginary world."

When he confided his worries to his old friend, Sigurd Sigurdson, the storyteller who traveled between dimensions, suggested this.

"If you seal your body so that the primal power doesn't run wild, you can easily pass on part of your divine power to your descendants."

"But what if I lose control completely?"

"Wouldn't it be possible to slowly collect the divine power from your descendants before that happens? Perhaps their divine power will become weaker over time, but by then the empire will be on a stable course."

I see.

Cardmos still looked anxious, but the storyteller smiled reassuringly and added,

"Don't worry too much, my old friend. Even if the primal power is released because the timing is wrong, this sarcophaguss will prevent the slightest bit of its demonic energy from leaking out, as if the dimensions are being separated. That is the nature of the laws of the imaginary world."

Cardmos smiled in satisfaction after confirming that the Sarcophagus of the Holy Emperor was working properly.

Well, now it's time to take a break. Not that I've ever really worked.

And so, the first Holy Emperor was buried in the sarcophagus, still in his living form.

And Remus, who inherited part of his divine power and became the second Holy Emperor, began his bloody reign by executing his infant great-grandfather and all the courtiers who were out of favor, starting with the execution of his newborn baby, great-grandfather.

After hundreds of years, the Holy Empire of a Thousand Years had firmly established itself as the center of the continent.

Cardmos had enjoyed a truly leisurely retirement during this time.

He spent decades wandering around as a soul, and occasionally, when he got bored, he would borrow the body of a person who was about to die and live a new life.

It was unfortunate that the souls who faced his divine power usually melted away without a trace, but he didn't care.

According to the [Covenant] of the Primal God, most of the souls who died in Delcross would end up in the hands of the high-ranking demon kings anyway.

Cardmos was in the midst of rationalizing to himself that it was better for them to disappear comfortably than to suffer eternally in their hell.

The Saintess Gracia was also a saint born during one of these amusements.

She was a woman who neglected her own body and served others for some reason.

Cardmos watched her as she went through the trials and tribulations, using his divine power to keep her alive. He wondered how far she would go, and before he knew it, she had become a saint and was revered by future generations.

And then, 20 years ago.

Cardmos decided that it was time to finally reclaim the divine power that had been granted to his descendants.

It so happened that all the divine power that remained with his descendants was strangely concentrated in one child. Cardmos saw that the child was destined to die soon, so he decided to mark the child with the Saintess's mark.

However, contrary to his expectations, the child did not appear at the next Holy Emperor's crown coronation ceremony.

Cardmos was furious and appeared before the 16th Holy Emperor, who had brazenly entered the ceremony alone, and rebuked him harshly.

But this useless descendant of his did not even think of looking for the child. He was terrified and fled, never to seek him out again.

'It's all because of that child....'

Cardmos's golden irises narrowed as he stared at his outstanding descendant, who was sneering at him.

It was truly a strange thing. Where did such a guy come from?

Unlike his useless father, this guy immediately became furious when the mark appeared on his daughter's body and sealed him, who was labeled a demigod, in the basement of the church.

Although it was possible because it was a place where the rules of the imaginary world applied, Cardmos had no choice but to admire his strength.

Of course, the fact that he was so annoying was a separate issue.

[It's not too late now, child. Do you know how many fates have been twisted because of the laws of causality you have overturned? That's why you sent this fake saintess to drag me out, isn't it?]

"....."

[Now, hand over your child obediently. Only then will I personally descend into this world in her body and punish those who are wrong. I will gladly relieve you of that heavy burden.]

"...I will give you those exact words back."

As soon as the story of Sisle came out, a chilling light flashed in the Holy Emperor's silver-gray eyes as he glared at Cardmos.

"Who do you dare speak of cause and effect to? Did you think I really didn't know your true identity?"

[...What?]

"If you truly want to hear that impure name of the Primal God from me, then so be it."

[.....!]

Krrrrrrng.

Cardmos's aura, which had let out a beast-like cry from his larynx, became extremely sinister.

Fangs protruded from his mouth, and the shapes of golden scales began to ripple here and there on his skin.

[You are determined to see this through to the end, aren't you.....]

The Holy Emperor's aura also became immensely fierce.

The hem of his white robe fluttered in the wind that blew from nowhere. The furniture scattered around the office was swept up by the wind, crashing into each other and then soaring into the air.

"That seems like it would be good for both of us. I thought there might be room for dialogue, but it was purely my mistake."

Kuuung!

The entire palace building began to shake as if an earthquake had struck, due to the violent currents of air that erupted from them and

collided.

Cracks appeared in one of the walls of the office, and stone dust fell down.

It was then.

"Hmm, shouldn't you two stop now? Thanks to you, the garden outside is completely ruined and it's a total mess, you know?"

".....!?"

[...How did you get here?]

The Holy Emperor and Cardmos simultaneously looked back at the entrance of the office where the voice had come from.

There, a boy stood staggering, holding onto the cracked doorframe.

It was unclear when he had arrived, but he was covered in wounds. He wiped the blood flowing from his nose and mouth with his sleeve and smiled brightly.

"It seems you were both so focused on the conversation that you didn't notice. If you don't stop soon, the palace might collapse. It's almost the birthday celebration, and you know there are a lot of guests staying in the palace, right?"

The two of them simultaneously retracted their aura, as if they had made an agreement.

[That wicked thing.....!]

Before Cardmos could say anything.

Whoosh!

Suddenly, a tremendous gust of aura swept in and blew him out of the terrace in the blink of an eye.

[.....!?]

Kaboom!

Cardmos, who had suddenly been thrown into the palace garden along with the desk, got up feeling bewildered. The Holy Emperor was no longer paying attention to him and had already rushed to the boy, pouring divine power on him from head to toe.

"Morres! Where on earth are you sticking your head in!"

"Ah... I guess you were in the middle of an important conversation. Did I interrupt you? I apologize."

"No, it was nothing. I was just wasting my time on trivial matters. Are you okay?"

"Hmm, I'm fine now. Thank you."

What is this atmosphere?

Cardmos, who had suddenly become a bystander, stared at them blankly.

"Anyway, what's going on here?"

"Oh, it's nothing. I just had something to tell you, and I stopped by while I was at it. But the palace was strangely empty. And the palace was shaking and I felt a strange aura inside, so I came to see what was going on."

"Then you should have called the guards, or just waited for the situation to end from a distance!"

"Haha, as you know Father, I have a hard time holding back my curiosity."

"Are you saying that you did the right thing now!"

Smack! With a sound, the boy screamed and fell backwards.

Cardmos, who was speechless, jumped back up to the second floor terrace and saw the boy clutching his forehead and rolling around on the floor, while the Holy Emperor looked down at him and clicked his tongue.

He seemed completely at peace, not even considering his existence.

Cardmos swallowed the unknown anger that was welling up inside him and clenched his teeth.

[...Are you saying that you guys are ignoring me right now?]

The Holy Emperor looked at him with a very annoyed expression and opened his mouth.

"Watch carefully, son."

"...Yes?"

As the boy rubbed his forehead and looked back at him, the Holy Emperor slowly stretched out one hand towards Cardmos and continued his explanation.

"The laws of the imaginary world are very unique. Sometimes, things happen that cannot be understood by the logic of power alone. Among them, the most important law is [Condition]."

"Condition?"

"Yes, as long as that condition is not met, there is an absolute domain or boundary that cannot be broken through, no matter how strong the power is."

The boy tilted his head.

"Can't you break through it with force?"

"Yes. For example, a door that will never open without a specific condition would be one of them."

"Aha!"

The boy's expression brightened as the Holy Emperor's explanation continued, but on the other hand, Cardmos's ominous feeling grew stronger and stronger.

And then.

"That's why the souls of the imaginary world are not destroyed and preserved even with such strong divine power, and the bodies of the imaginary world can only contain him."

With those words.

Click.

Suddenly, Cardmos heard a sound of something fitting into place in his head.

Although he had told the Holy Emperor that he had stopped by on a whim, there was another reason why Seongjin had reluctantly come to the palace.

At the time when Cardmos, who had acquired Seo Yi-seos body, was pushing aside all the priests and heading towards the palace with a menacing air.

Seongjin, Masain, and Bruno, who were heading to the training hall for morning practice, almost simultaneously sensed an ominous aura heading towards the palace.

It was a violent aura that did not hide its presence at all, like a storm.

"Come to think of it, an emergency action directive was issued to the entire imperial guard corps this morning."

Masain said, after staring at the palace for a moment.

"The guards are to stop guarding the palace, and instead block all paths leading to the palace and go on high alert. The knights stationed at Pearl Palace didn't pay much attention to it because there was nothing specific about it, but it seems something happened at the palace."

".....?"

Seongjin was momentarily speechless because his expression was so calm.

Hey, Sir Masain? If something happens at the palace, shouldn't the guards prioritize guarding the palace? Why aren't you worried at all, even though you received such an order?

"I don't know who it is, but they're a great warrior. Even Balthazar can't compare to them. It's the first time I've seen His Majesty the Holy Emperor with such a great aura. Who could it be?"

".....?!"

Even Bruno spoke with a peaceful face.

No, sir? You're saying he's a great warrior you've never seen since the Holy Emperor? Why is everyone so relaxed when such a guy is rushing towards the palace?

"Well, His Majesty the Holy Emperor is in the palace, isn't he?"

"There must be a reason why His Majesty lifted the guard."

Oh, my God. These people are all crazy.

'Am I the only one worried about that gentleman here?'

Seongjin's head was spinning.

W, weird? I'm sure I'm normal, but why do I feel like I'm the only one overreacting?

"I think we should reconfirm the security status of Pearl Palace just in case. Your Highness, please postpone your training for now and return to your room."

Masain strangely worried about the state of Pearl Palace and left to find Maria, the head of security for the day.

"This is a message from Arenja. The Knights of St. Terbacchia are on their way here. I will join them, so it would be better for Your Highness not to leave the palace for the time being, as Master Masain said."

Bruno also frowned and channeled, then suddenly disappeared towards the main gate.

"....."

Seongjin, who was suddenly left alone, turned around and saw Sir Haven, who was in charge of today's escort duty, smiling foolishly.

"Are you going in, Your Highness? Everyone is busy with the high alert, but I'm the only one on indoor escort duty. Isn't that great?"

...You jerk. Why are you saying that now?

Anyway, Seongjin quietly returned to his room, and as soon as the door closed, he unfolded his aura concealment and headed for the terrace.

Of course, Haven outside the door didn't notice a thing. Seongjin's concealment technique had improved by leaps and bounds recently, so it would be difficult for anyone below a certain level of knight to easily sense his aura.

Seongjin, who had thus safely escaped through the back door of Pearl Palace, immediately began to run towards the palace.

[Why are you in such a hurry? Whatever happens, your father will try to figure it out on his own.]

The demon king asked curiously.

Of course, Seongjin couldn't imagine that guy being in danger either.

'But that's not the point, is it?'

Think about it, Demon King.

Something is happening right in front of your eyes, and you're just going to leave someone there alone? No matter how safe you think it is.

In the past, our parents always told us this. They said that they knew I would overcome the adversities that life would throw at me, but that they would never leave me alone.

[...Your parents? They said that?]

Yes, you bastard of my parents' enemy.

You should be grateful that you only got three days of beating from me.

[.....]

And as Seongjin got closer to the palace, he realized that the situation at the palace was more serious than he had thought.

[Uh? A huge divine barrier over there?]

According to the demon king, a huge barrier was being deployed on the side of the Silver Labyrinth.

Kuuung!

In the palace, the buildings were already shaking from the violent aura of the two sides clashing before the battle even began. It was so intense that he was worried that the palace would suddenly collapse.

Above all, the aura.

The flow of aura that was swirling around the palace and growing stronger was strangely agitated.

'Is this guy in a bad mood right now?'

Seongjin thought unconsciously, because the flow was completely different from the well-organized aura that usually surrounded the Holy Emperor.

Furthermore.

[What is this again? Lee Seongjin. I feel a strange power coming from inside there. It feels impure for divine power, and it's too holy to be magic. It's the first time I've felt this kind of thing in this dimension, so it's confusing.]

When even the demon king said that, Seongjin's uneasiness grew even stronger.

Uprooted by the strong wind, Seongjin looked at the garden trees flying away and made up his mind.

'I have to go in and stop them.'

[What? Are you crazy? Are you going in there?]

—Stop! I'll die! I'm really going to die!

The demon king screamed in his head, but Seongjin ignored him and checked the aura in his body. He had a strong feeling that he couldn't let them collide like this.

The countless turbulence created by the violently swirling collision of forces was like invisible blades spinning around wildly.

Even for a hardened person like Seongjin, he couldn't help but sweat when he actually jumped into it.

'...Let's try to let out as much as I can.'

With that determination, he didn't even reach the stairs to the second floor before he felt a bloody taste rising from his throat.

With the rough force stirring up his whole body, a silent roar rang in his ears and he felt like his blood vessels were being torn apart.

If this kept up, he would die from a ruptured aorta or a cerebral hemorrhage!

Seongjin hurriedly concentrated his aura on his head and heart, and gritted his teeth as he took one step forward at a time.

Thud thud.

Soon, blood was flowing from his nose and making a trail on the floor.

When he finally reached the office after suffering so much, Seongjin found a completely unexpected person.

'...Seo Yi-seo?'

The person wearing a priestess garment and letting her black hair fly was definitely the suspicious saintess.

However, Seongjin could tell right away that it was not actually Seo Yi-seo herself. The aura she was giving off was completely different from before.

Her face, distorted with ferocity, briefly showed a glimpse of something like scales, and her golden eyes shone brightly with a terrible murderous aura.

[Hiiik! I didn't know there would be two of those monsters!]

The demon king cowered in fear in his head.

—I don't know who they are, but they're very powerful. Even Balthazar can't compare to them.

That was how Bruno had evaluated them. Certainly, even by the standards of Seongjin at his peak, they were definitely out of the ordinary strong.

But more than their strength, Seongjin was really concerned about something else.

'...Isn't that unlike him?'

The Holy Emperor, who was in a tense standoff with Seo Yi-seo, had an infinitely calm face on the outside.

But Seongjin could tell. That guy was really pissed off right now.

"Um, can you stop now?"

Seized by a strong feeling that he couldn't leave them alone, Seongjin squeezed out the last of his strength and stepped in between them.

"Then you should have called the guards, or just waited for the situation to end from a distance!"

While scolding him and pouring divine power over Seongjin's head, the Holy Emperor had quickly cooled down and regained his usual composure.

Only then did Seongjin, relieved by his usual calm eyes, let out a

laugh without realizing it.

"Haha, as you know Father, I have a hard time holding back my curiosity."

Well, thanks to that, he ended up cracking his forehead and rolling on the floor.

Let's just say it was a noble sacrifice for the peace of Delcross.

[...Are you saying that you guys are ignoring me right now?]

As the thing that had possessed Seo Yi-seo's body approached them and growled, the Holy Emperor explained to Seongjin with a slightly annoyed look on his face.

"The laws of the imaginary world are very unique. Sometimes, things happen that cannot be understood by the logic of power alone. Among them, the most important law is [Condition]."

Condition?

"For example, a door that will never open without a specific condition would be one of them."

Aha, Seongjin quickly understood.

Come to think of it, the imaginary world was like a game. The laws that governed such a world would not be strange if they were like some kind of coded program.

"That's why the souls of the imaginary world are not destroyed and preserved even with such strong divine power, and the bodies of the imaginary world can only contain him."

As he finished speaking, the Holy Emperor snapped. Lightly flicked his finger.

[.....!?!]

For a moment, a great light of shock appeared in the saintess' eyes.

[What is this? What is this! What have you done to me?]

Kuaaaak?

The saintess seemed to be greatly surprised by something and jumped around the office for a long time.

She shook her head roughly, waved her hands in the air, and even jumped around here and there. She looked crazy.

During that time, the Holy Emperor briefly explained the situation to Seongjin.

So, the one who is wearing the appearance of that fake saintess is actually a guy named Cardmos, the first Holy Emperor of the Holy Emperor's family.

To think that the disgusting bastard had survived for 700 years as a soul, even though he was called a demigod! He had possessed the saintess through the Holy Emperor's coronation ceremony and was now running wild.

'Wow, even though he's a long-time ancestor, isn't that flick just now too merciless?'

As he was thinking this, the Holy Emperor sternly rebuked Seongjin.

"Anyway, Morres. Didn't I tell you not to cause trouble? You must never do something so dangerous again. Do you understand?"

Seongjin protested with a feeling of injustice.

"Um? But father. I didn't cause an accident today, I came to prevent an accident."

"....."

"Really."

The Holy Emperor stared at Seongjin silently for a moment. The strange silver light that always lingered in his eyes flickered.

Seongjin always wondered whenever he did that.

What on earth is he seeing with those eyes? Is that the special eye of the Oracle?

"...Alright."

After a short while, the Holy Emperor gave a short answer and sighed as if he didn't like something.

Then, he reached out and lightly patted Seongjin on the head.

"That's right. You've worked hard."

Pat pat.

"Um....."

Seongjin was caught in a subtle mood.

It was hard to describe. He felt proud, but also a little embarrassed. It was a very ticklish feeling.

In the meantime, Cardmos, the ancestor, who seemed to have finally calmed down, approached them with a fierce face.

[How did you lock me in this body? What on earth did you do?]

A faint smile appeared on the Holy Emperor's face.

"It seems that even after being trapped in that small coffin for 700 years, you are still so ignorant of the laws of the imaginary world. If you had known, you would not have entered that body so easily."

[What?]

Cardmos gritted his teeth fiercely.

[I'll smash this artificial body to pieces! Do you think I can't do it?]

"It would be wise to be more careful with that decision. If it wasn't for the saintess' body, do you think you would be able to crawl out of the church basement again?"

[.....]

"Who else but the humans of the imaginary world can contain your soul and still survive? Surely you didn't think I would offer you the body of another person, knowing full well that it would destroy your soul?"

After staring at the Holy Emperor for a long time, Cardmos asked.

[Then what's the point of taking me out of there like this? I can't fully express my divine power in this body.]

"Of course I don't plan to release you."

[Then why!]

"But liberating you is also possible for the original owner of that body."

[.....!]

"Then you will have to take good care of that tricky soul."

Cardmos, who had been standing there blankly for a moment, finally smiled with a dispirited face.

[In that case, I have no choice but to protect this woman from the puppeteer. And this woman will try to stay by your daughter's side.]

"....."

[...Have you ever seen such a cunning thing?]

The Holy Emperor did not respond to his sharp criticism. Instead, Seongjin, who was feeling unnecessarily wronged, raised his hand towards him.

"Excuse me for a moment, ancestor?"

[Don't you dare call me ancestor, you wretched thing!]

"Hmm, then Mr. Cardmos?"

[...What?]

Although his expression became even more ferocious, Seongjin did not bat an eye.

Seongjin looked around the devastated office with slightly exaggerated gestures and said.

"You almost destroyed the palace, so you should at least clean up what you yourself did, right?"

[.....]

"Come on! Please show me how to take responsibility for your actions, like a great ancestor. Okay?"

Cardmos fell silent at that.

Soon, the brilliant golden light from his eyes disappeared, and his dark brown pupils wavered with a faint light as if waking up from sleep.

Huh? Did he run away?

"...Huh?"

Seo Yi-seo, who had been blinking her eyes for a moment, unable to understand the situation, suddenly widened her eyes when she saw Seongjin and the Holy Emperor.

Then she jumped up and down and screamed.

"No, what the hell is going on! Why are the two villains¹ and villains² together!"

...Why does this woman seem less sane when she's sane?

And so, that afternoon, Seo Yi-seo had her first official schedule as the new saintess.

It was to clean the palace all day long with the servants of the palace, encouraging them.

"Why me?!"

Amelia and Sisle held each other tightly, standing as they gazed at the sky beyond the barrier, which looked particularly ominous.

Suddenly, the sky above the main palace, which had been partially darkened, was filled with a raging storm that swirled like a vortex.

Trees, uprooted from the ground, shot up into the air, accompanied by sizzling sounds and occasional flashes of small, golden lightning. It was a surreal sight.

"It must be the aftermath of the ceremony of Sarcophagus of the Holy Emperor, which hasn't been held for a long time. Don't worry too much, it will calm down soon."

Francis, standing behind them, explained in a calm tone.

Even without his words, both princesses could vaguely sense that something was amiss in the main palace.

Amelia sensed the faint disturbance in the aura.

Sisle could feel the aftermath of the clash between the great divinities.

Each in their own way, they sensed the danger and worried about the Holy Emperor, who was alone in the storm at the faraway main palace.

-In my opinion, that's probably it. Perhaps from that point on, the audience before the Sarcophagus of the Holy Emperor lost its significance

Sisle's mind was filled with the words Amelia had said to her earlier.

-Or maybe that it has become something dangerous now?

What if it really is like that?

What if the Holy Emperor's sarcophagus is actually some terrifying unknown, and that's why such danger has befallen His Majesty?

"Dear Father..."

Unwittingly, a term of endearment Sisle hadn't used since that night slipped from her lips.

-How wonderful it would be if there was something we could do to help. For now, the best we can do is to quietly ensure we're not in the way.

The loyal captain of the knights, standing firmly in front of the barrier, protecting the princesses, had indeed said something like that before.

Just as he had on that night drenched in blood, and now, as a storm unexpectedly descends.

The Holy Emperor must surely be bearing something on his own, and continues to do so.

-If he deems something useless, he cuts it off without hesitation. Perhaps, in the not-too-distant future, you too will meet your end by his hand, just like the others."

That was what someone had warned the girl in her head that day.

But surely that can't be the case, right?

Even Katrina, who claims to be the Holy Emperor's shield and is always by his side, can only stand so far away when danger really strikes and wait for the Holy Emperor to solve everything.

If she is called a shield, could there be a more useless shield in the world?

Perhaps it is simply because the Holy Emperor cherishes his knight commander so much.

After all, this sacred barrier protects not only the princesses, but also the entire Order of the Paladins of St. Aurelion.

'There's no way Father His Majesty would do that on purpose...'

Sisle was slowly coming to realize.

If the future shown in the book was so bleak, and if, according to its contents, the Holy Emperor ends up contributing significantly to her misfortune.

At least, it would not be something her father truly wished for.

How much time had passed like this?

At one point, the raging storm suddenly subsided and the sky cleared up as if it were a lie.

"...Situation over."

As the inquisitor, who had been staring vacantly into space, muttered, Katrina, who had been tensely focusing ahead, relaxed and nodded her head.

"Situation over!"

"Situation over! Situation over!"

Following their commander's cry, the commands of several squad leaders echoed.

Soon, the silver sacred barrier that had been spread out wide enough to cover the entire Silver Labyrinth began to fade.

The adjutant of the Order of St. Aurelion, who had been standing guard behind the two princesses until then, spoke, exhaling a sigh of relief and packing his weapons.

"Fortunately, it seems that nothing major has happened. Your Highnesses, please rest assured. The curfew is now lifted."

Francis said so and, after bowing politely to the two, left the room.

"It's really... really fortunate."

Amelia finally let out the breath she had been holding and said.

She hugged Sisle once and then turned around and quickly began to prepare to go out.

Judging by the fact that there is no other message, His Majesty the Emperor must be safe as well. But still, I can't be completely relieved. I must hurry to the main palace and see.

That's when Sisle, startled, spoke up.

"...Amelia-noona."

"Hmm?"

"The mark... the mark of the Saintess hasn't disappeared yet."

"What?" Amelia turned her head in confusion, and her younger sister was already looking up at her with tears in her eyes again.

"I can still feel it under my feet. Originally, my mark should have disappeared right after Sister Seo Yi-seo paid homage before the Sarcophagus of the Holy Emperor. I was supposed to be disgracefully expelled from the position of the Saintess..."

As Sisle murmured, clear tears streamed down her cheeks.

"...Sisle!"

The surprised Amelia quickly hugged her sister without knowing what to do.

But now, instead of the bitter sadness of the morning, Sisle's face was filled with awe and a glimmer of hope.

"Sister, you won't believe it! Something is really, really changing!"

That night.

An inquisitor sneaked into Saint Bastian Church.

Passing by the guards closely watching the main gate and easily evading the patrolling groups of Saint Bastian knights, their steps were incredibly light and leisurely.

The stealth ability that not even the best assassins could detect was the Decalon Knights' stealth technique.

Descending to the church's basement and approaching the Holy Emperor's sarcophagus, the exorcist's eyes flickered with the usual silver-grey glow.

[I seem to keep imposing on you, Dame Sharon.]

Then, the inquisitor chuckled as if sobbing.

"Not at all, Your Majesty. Whenever Your Majesty comes to me, all those noisy ones completely shut up. The world couldn't be more peaceful and wonderful."

It was a rare moment of peace for the inquisitor, who always suffered from uncontrollable channeling.

"Now that the ceremony is over, this door won't open for a while. It seems we can afford to take a leisurely look around."

And Dame Sharon began to slowly circle the Holy Emperor's sarcophagus as if searching for something.

At a certain moment, her eyes shone with a bright silver-gray light.

[That.]

Following the Holy Emperor's directive, Dame Sharon tore off a small object decorated on one side of the sarcophagus. It was a gem emitting a deep green light.

"...Quite a small device."

[Indeed. It seems that this being is someone who cannot be taken lightly.]

A dangerous trap that would have been activated the moment Cardmos tried to draw upon his true power during their confrontation with the Holy Emperor.

It was one of the many traps that the storyteller had been preparing for hundreds of years.

[The artifacts of the Imaginary World are always so cunning. No matter how carefully one inspects, the deeply hidden layers of activation conditions are difficult to find.]

This is why the laws of the Imaginary World are so formidable.

They can isolate the demi-god's immense power from the Delcross dimension so easily, yet,

the primordial power, well-suppressed by the divine, could be unleashed without reason in an instant.

[That child truly saved Delcross from peril.]

"Is it the future that Your Majesty has sent forth?"

[Indeed. It's now an event that will not happen, having become the past.]

The Holy Emperor never sees his own future.

Just predicting a slight possibility is enough to make it certain in some way. That's how heavy the Oracle's prophecy is.

—I'm not here to have an accident today, I'm here to prevent one.

Those were the words of his son, who approached him even as he became bloodied.

As he said, the Holy Emperor was only able to properly confirm the destruction that would have happened if the child had not come.

The primal power that was released without control.

And the mad, unholy monster that ran rampant.

[Now bring it to me.]

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Dame Sharon secured the gem and continued,

"But Your Majesty, if I may be so bold to ask one thing?"

[Speak.]

"The first Holy Emperor, being a demi-god, was easily trapped in the flesh of the Imaginary World. Then, wouldn't it be just as dangerous for Your Majesty to descend into Homunculus?"

The Holy Emperor was silent for a moment before answering.

[...I shall keep that in mind.]

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The inquisitor chuckled before disappearing into the darkness.

The day after the Rite of the Holy Emperor's sarcophagus. Fortunately, Sisle's symbol had not yet disappeared and remained clear.

And then,

"Sisle, my sister!"

Despite having completed the ceremony and received the first Holy Emperor's blessing properly, Seo Yi-seo was astonishingly still very much Seo Yi-seo.

Of course, that's not to say there were no changes at all.

"Listen, Princess Sisle. Guess what, when I woke up, there was a new skill in my skill window!"

...What on earth is a skill window?

"The skill name is super cool too. It's called Descent of the Demigod, Descent of the Demigod! But I have absolutely no idea how to use it!"

That was the problem.

This skill, which seemed like an ultimate skill just by its name, was actually a passive skill that was always activated.

Thanks to that, if she tried to take a nap, she would find that several hours had passed, or that she had been wandering around here and there after stretching.

When she was about to eat a delicious meal, she would find herself sitting blankly in front of an empty plate after thinking, "This is going to be delicious!"

"But Princess Sisle, it's almost time for mass, why are you getting ready to go out? Where are you going?"

"Yes, to the main palace. I'm going to see His Majesty after a long time."

"What? You're going to meet that terrifying mastermind? What if he does something to you, Princess Sisle!"

Seo Yi-seo was horrified, to which Sisle laughed as if it was absurd.

Isn't it funny how Seo Yi-seo, the protagonist of the book, is more afraid of the Holy Emperor than Sisle, who is supposed to be the villainous?

"It's okay."

The girl smiled transparently at Seo Yi-seo.

"Even if something like that were to happen, the fact that His Majesty is thinking of me will not change."

The office, still in disarray from Cardmos's tampering, awaited her.

With a heart that fluttered slightly, Sisle entered the office, guided by Louis.

"...Sisle."

Recently, he had been away from the palace on missions and inspections, and even the few regular audiences he had had been avoided.

The Holy Emperor was a little surprised, but soon dismissed the others and greeted her.

"Am I interrupting you?"

"No, you're welcome. I was just about to take a break."

However, what immediately caught Sisle's eye upon taking a seat was the sleep mask hanging on the wall.

A white mask embroidered with a cute rabbit, hanging at a slightly skewed angle on the wall.

"That is..."

Following Sisle's gaze, the Holy Emperor nodded.

"Owen sent it. He said it was a birthday present, so I put it on display."

The Holy Emperor had realized from the beginning that it was an object from the Imaginary World..

He had not been able to figure out exactly what it was used for, so he had left it aside to investigate later.

"I know what it is. I received the same thing from Owen-orabeoni."

Sisle showed the pink mask she wore around her neck like a piece of jewelry.

According to Seo Yi-seo, it was a helpful item for sleep. True to his words, since wearing it, Sisle had seen a significant decrease in the frequency of prophetic dreams and nightmares, much to her satisfaction.

"It wards off nightmares...?"

"Yes, would you like me to show you how to use it?"

With those words, the mysterious item from the Regulated World was slowly brought before him in his daughter's hands.

The Holy Emperor blinked but did not avoid Sisle's hands.

Perhaps anything given by his child, be it poison or a trap, he would gladly accept.

As the white rabbit mask was placed over his head, the Holy Emperor's eyes widened slightly.

After sitting in stunned silence for a moment, he slowly tilted his head and uttered a word of reflection.

"...It's quiet."

Indeed.

As soon as he put it on, the world became instantly quiet.

The voices of the past that had always clung to him were nowhere to be heard. The voice that insidiously whispered the future was nowhere to be heard.

Above all, the desperate screams of souls coming from a distant place were nowhere to be heard.

"It's truly quiet..."

As the Holy Emperor slowly blinked his eyes, Sisle chuckled softly and sat down beside him.

Realizing that she missed the rustling sound of the white robe hem that reminded her of her childhood, the girl closed her eyes slowly, leaning against the Holy Emperor's arm.

On that day, the chief chamberlain took great care with the refreshments for the youngest princess, who had visited the Holy

Emperor for the first time in a long time.

He decorated a table with sweets and flowers and brought out the precious tea that the foreign delegation had brought in for his birthday.

Thinking it was the perfect timing, he confidently entered the office with the tea tray but...

"...?"

Louis's eyes widened in surprise. An unexpected scene unfolded before him.

On the plush office sofa, the Holy Emperor and Sisle, father and daughter, sat side by side, asleep with their eyes closed.

Each wearing a white and pink, adorably indescribable object around their necks.

In an unusually quiet afternoon where not even a bird could be heard. In the stillness where even the warm sunlight seemed to be frozen.

Only the gentle breeze blowing from the terrace was the only thing that seemed alive, occasionally brushing through the hair of the two people.

"... ."

Louis soaked up the sight for a long time, feeling a strange sense of emotion.

In his ten years as head chamberlain, had he ever seen His Majesty with such a relaxed face, eyes closed!

Although the carefully prepared tea cooled down mercilessly, Louis left the tea tray there and quietly tiptoed out of the office, closing the door behind him.

On the day of the grand imperial ritual.

The Pearl Palace was thrown into chaos as soon as Seongjin returned. It was a shock to everyone when the prince, who was thought to be safely in his room, suddenly appeared at the main gate covered in blood.

Although his body had been healed by the sacred power of the Holy Emperor, the bloodstains that soaked through his torn clothes were unmistakable.

In the midst of the panic, an imperial knight dashed to summon physician Ninnias, while Seongjin was forcibly taken to his bedchamber by Masain without a chance to resist.

"But father has healed me completely. I'm telling you, I'm fine now."

Seongjin protested, but Masain looked as if he was about to faint.

"What in the world happened? All this blood..."

It was utterly bewildering for him.

He had intensified the palace security, worrying about the prince's safety and preparing for any possible incidents, only to find the prince returning drenched in blood from somewhere.

"How could this happen when the escort knights were supposed to be with you...!"

"Don't be too harsh on him, Sir Masain."

Bruno, the commander, consoled Masain, seeing the downtrodden Haven.

"The prince's skill in stealth is extraordinary. He has mastered it so quickly that even I am caught off guard by him sometimes."

"...Stealth?"

"Ah, you didn't know? It seemed like His Highness was learning from the assassin he's been seeing lately."

"...Assassin?!"

"Hmm? Ahem."

Seongjin was stunned.

Sir Bruno? He just poured oil on a fire he's trying to put out, didn't he? Right?

"Who in the world would dare teach such dangerous things to the reckless prince...?"

Woaaaaosh.

An ominous aura swirled around Masain.

'Oh, this is bad!'

Seongjin broke out in a cold sweat.

He was just about to formally introduce Dasha, but it felt like things were getting off to a terrible start.

Unable to stand it any longer, Seongjin tried to salvage the situation.

"Ha, but sir Masain! I don't know the details, but I stopped the crisis in Delcross! I even got praised by my father! Really!"

"Crisis?"

Sir Bruno, who also felt responsible for the situation, hurriedly chimed in.

"That's right, Sir Masain! I heard from Aarenja that His Highness accomplished something great earlier! Isn't that amazing?"

However, Masain's expression darkened even further.

"And it seems I wasn't by His Highness's side during that critical moment."

"..."

"I'm just a useless escort who isn't there when Your Highness needs me the most...!"

"What?"

"This is all my fault! I should never have taken my eyes off of Your Highness, even for a moment...!"

In the end, Seongjin had no choice but to raise both hands and feet in surrender.

"I'm sorry! I was really wrong, sir Masain!"

Someone, please stop this guy from digging a hole into the ground!

[I've told you over and over again, you can't talk to him like that.]

The Demon King sighed and muttered.

"You seem to be more sane than I thought, Lee Seongjin."

Logan, who had visited the Pearl Palace around lunchtime, said that.

Judging from the fact that he was neatly dressed in the ceremonial attire of the Order of the Knights of St. Bastian, it seemed that he had come here straight after finishing his official duties with the Order.

Seongjin, who had been lying in bed meditating (or not meditating), raised himself up.

"You didn't even go to the ceremony. How do you know about this?"

"Who wouldn't know when such a large amount of aura collided? Most of the knights must have noticed it. If it wasn't for the ceremonial event, they would have come running right away... ."

No, aren't you just sensitive to aura?

The distance between the palace and the church isn't that far.

"I went to the Silver Labyrinth first since I heard that the Order of the Knights of St. Aurelion had been called out on an emergency, but Amelia and Sisle were more worried about you."

So he said he came here instead after promising to check on him.

But when he actually arrived, the resident knights were all on the verge of death, and sir Masain was running rampant in front of them.

"I heard from brother Masain. You were badly injured?"

"Oh, don't even mention it. Sir Masain is really unlucky. Today, he told me not to leave the bed at all after seeing me."

Thanks to him, I'm in the middle of developing a new aura cultivation method called "lying down meditation."

Logan then sat down next to the bed and lightly patted him.

"You should at least take care of your body. You know that, right? After you were badly injured that time before, brother Masain... ."

Then, suddenly halting, he stopped speaking.

Ah, it seems he got confused again.

"Did something like that happen to Morres in the past?"

"...Hmm. Yes, that did happen."

And then, Logan murmured with a slightly gloomy expression.

"I wonder where Morres' soul is now. Whether he is safe..."

"Hmm..."

Unable to offer the empty reassurance that everything would be fine, Seongjin awkwardly turned away.

"So, what exactly happened that caused such a commotion?"

"Well, actually..."

Seongjin candidly revealed the events following the Emperor's ritual, where the spirit of the First Emperor, Cardmos, ended up trapped in Seo Yi-seo's body.

Logan had a knack for detecting lies, and Seongjin felt it was necessary to share some details with him to prevent further mishaps. After all, Logan had previously instantly noticed the difference between Morres's and Seongjin's presences.

How could he then assure that Logan, who harbored strong mistrust towards Seo Yi-seo, wouldn't draw his sword in suspicion upon noticing her suddenly altered demeanor?

"...What exactly do you take me for? I may be many things, but I'm not so uncouth as to publicly rebuke a saintess in an official setting."

Oh, right. Instead, you planned to sneak to her window and knock softly at night, didn't you?

"....."

Unable to deny it.

Logan stroked his chin and pondered. "The soul of the first emperor, huh..."

"I knew he was revered as a demigod, but I always thought it was just an exaggeration to sanctify the founding of the empire. But to think he's still alive after a thousand years..."

His face looked quite complicated.

Perhaps the thought of containing Delcross, the biggest obstacle to his dream of rebuilding Ortona, was not as easy as he thought.

"And all the saintess who acted as the reincarnation of Saint Grazia for hundreds of years were actually being controlled by Cardmos?"

"Yes, that's right."

"To take their bodies and even destroy their souls, what kind of devil would do such a thing? They turned the saintesses, who were deeply respected by the people, into such things. Where on earth does the root of the empire's deep evil lie?"

Logan, who had said this far, noticed Seongjin's subtle expression and quickly added.

"Oh, of course, I think the current empire is definitely a necessary evil. It protects the continent from the demon race, and the current emperor is pursuing an unprecedentedly moderate policy towards neighboring countries. As the prince of Delcross, I have no intention of shirking my duty to the empire and its people."

"..."

"But I will say this for sure, Lee Seongjin. From a long-term perspective, I believe that this empire must eventually disappear. If it doesn't disappear altogether, or at least change fundamentally, this continent has no future."

Seongjin looked at Logan's serious face and thought.

Maybe what he said was mostly true. But Seongjin didn't care about such a macroscopic perspective as the cause or the future of the continent.

What was important was that Cardmos was extremely dangerous. And that the emperor or Sisle might be in danger because of him.

That was all that mattered.

"Anyway, don't ever take your eyes off him, Logan. For now, it seems like our father has locked him up pretty well, but I don't know when he'll go crazy and try to kill Sisle and harm my father."

"...?"

"Think about it. He's still after Sisle. So who would be the biggest obstacle there? Wouldn't he be the first to try to harm our father?"

Logan stared blankly at Seongjin for a moment before smiling bitterly.

"You have someone else to worry about."

"..."

"He is a strong man who deserves to be called the representative of God, Lee Seongjin. You are probably the only person in the world who can worry about him like that."

Hmm. Judging from the attitude of Sir Masain and Commander Bruno, it was clear to see how the emperor was perceived in Delcross.

'But still.....'

Apart from that, Seongjin couldn't help but think that Logan's attitude towards the emperor was unusually dry.

Of course, with his memories of his previous life intact, it wouldn't be easy for him to accept him as a parent.

Come to think of it, that man was no different from an enemy who had destroyed Logan's country.

'No. Maybe because he treats him so dryly, he doesn't hold any particular grudge.....'

Seongjin looked at the guy who seemed to be a collection of dilemmas with a slightly pitiful gaze.

Was there anything that could help this poor guy?

'...Ah! Come to think of it, wasn't there such an organization?'

The Blue Republican Revolutionary Front.

It was one of the terrorist organizations that Morres used to sponsor.

It seemed to be somehow connected to the remnants of the Ortona Republican Party, but should I ask Dasha to investigate it once?

A mansion in a townhouse, often used by distinguished guests from foreign countries.

Leonard, who was dressed neatly for the first time in a long time, smiled bitterly at the sight of the splendid carriage procession prepared for him.

"Finally. They really charge a lot for this! This damn emperor of Delcross!"

He is a member of the royal family of the rising power Rohan.

Even though he was clearly a guest who should be treated with the utmost priority, he was only allowed to enter the palace on the eve of his birthday!

"There are many ears listening. Please be careful with your words and actions."

Behind him, a man wearing a half-mask approached him and rebuked him.

"Once you enter the palace, you will have to judge everything for yourself. I won't be able to take care of everything for you like I used to."

"...Romaine."

Leonard turned around with a sullen face.

"To be honest, I don't feel confident. Can't you come with me?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot enter the palace."

Romaine glanced back at the palace and snickered.

"The palace is currently like the absolute domain of the guardian. Agreements and constraints are meaningless there. The moment you step inside, wouldn't he immediately kill you, saying that he is right?"

"Oh, come on?"

"It's not a joke. There are no exceptions for royalty, so please don't do anything that would unnecessarily upset the servants."

"This is such a bloody place..."

"That's not all. You must always keep in mind that you are under his surveillance even when you are alone. Be careful, and be very careful."

At those words, Leonard's face immediately turned into that of a donkey being dragged to the slaughterhouse.

"Oh, I don't want to go."

"..."

"Oh, okay, okay. I was just kidding."

Leonard waved his hand and headed for the carriage.

"But I still don't understand, Romaine."

Leonard, who was about to step into the carriage, suddenly turned around and asked.

"Everything is fine, but why are you suddenly asking me to make contact with not only the princess, but also the third prince out of the blue? Even a child in Rohan knows that he is a terrible bastard."

"Don't trust all the rumors, Lord Leonard. He is a man who effectively hides his true identity, and he is the one who will one day show the sharpest fangs towards the empire."

"The prince of the empire? How do you know that?"

"Because I faced his soul directly not long ago."

It was an achievement obtained by wasting the last seed that had not yet fully bloomed.

"But if he is hiding his body like that, will he really reveal his identity if I approach him?"

"That's not what I'm expecting. I just want to create some room for maneuver. Hmm, I see....."

Romaine stared at the palace for a moment and thought deeply before opening his mouth.

"Then, let's try this first."

And, the lips under the half-mask draw a confident curve.

"Come back. The brothers of the forgotten old sect are eagerly waiting for your order only."

The birthday celebration was approaching, just one day away.

Seongjin was unable to leave Pearl Palace for the entire morning due to the late dress fitting. The final fitting was delayed significantly due to major changes in the fabric and design.

"Hmm..."

Seongjin looked at the mirror, adjusting his collar.

The neat yet vividly detailed dress seemed to suit him well.

He had thought that Madame Justine only presented unconventional designs, but it seemed the man could also make such modest clothes.

Of course, the color, which was almost black except for a faint hint of gray, was mostly the result of Amelia's active input.

"Changing the fabric was an excellent choice. You will surely stand out among the brightly colored gowns."

The head designer from Salon de Merci said as he finished adjusting Seongjin's outfit.

"By the way, where did Madame go?"

"She suddenly had an urgent matter and went down to her hometown for a while."

"When will she be back?"

"Well, we don't really..."

Originally, Seongjin was supposed to visit Salon de Merci in person to meet Madame.

He had intended to talk to him about the circumstances of Seo Yi-seo's employment, but how did that kid find out and send him away in advance?

'Still, it's convenient to have the costume team here.'

In any case, Seongjin had to attend the main banquet for three whole days, starting tomorrow. Even though it seemed like there was nothing to do, there were actually many things to prepare for in secret.

Seongjin and Amelia were still relatively better off.

A grand mass was scheduled at St. Bastian Cathedral tomorrow afternoon, followed by a complex and elaborate ceremonial procedure in front of the imperial palace for the next two days.

Since Logan and Sisle also had official positions within the Orthodox Church, they had to attend both the events and the banquets for three days.

No, isn't that too harsh of a schedule for children who are still minors?

—Of course, those two are overflowing with divine power.

Sir Masain smiled and said that in response to Seongjin's concern.

In particular, Sisle had such a vast amount of divine power that she had never been seen to get tired of anything.

'I'm envious. Then she can train all night for several days without any problems?'

[The point of envy is a bit.....]

Anyway, the entire palace was bustling with everyone busy with their own schedules.

"Brother, if you don't mind, can we talk for a moment?"

So that's why Seongjin couldn't help but feel surprised by Sisle's

sudden visit that afternoon.

"Talk?"

"Yeah, just for a moment."

Sisle, with a face as expressionless as a carved doll, was holding a small book-like object in her arms, just like last time.

And following behind her was.

"Shaaaak!"

The still-growling Saintess Seo Yi-seo.

"When are you going to stop taking her around with you?"

"I can't help it, brother. Seo Yi-seo shows extreme separation anxiety if I'm not in sight for even a moment."

Is she really being treated like a pet cat?

"What is Cardmos doing?"

"It seems like the first emperor only appears during mealtimes."

Cardmos, trapped in Seo Yi-seo's body, had been behaving quietly for several days without any problems. For now, it seemed he had decided to enjoy having a new body for a change.

Thanks to that, Seo Yi-seo, who had not been able to eat properly for several days, was now in a state of extreme nervousness.

"But do you have time for this? Have you fitted your dress?"

"No. I have an official position, so I can just wear a priest's robe. As a saintess who serves God and should be an example to the priests, I should always avoid and be wary of luxury."

"...Hmm, really?"

Seongjin looked at the youngest of the imperial family with new eyes.

Maybe it was because he thought of them as the same age, but he couldn't help but compare her to Chloe.

Even though she was smart beyond her years, Chloe, who gave off the impression of a child who had grown up with plenty of love, could not erase the impression that she was mature.

Well, if she was proud of her life as a saintess, then that was it.

But how should he feel about the fact that a 12-year-old girl had to live a frugal life wearing only a simple priest's robe for the rest of her life?

"Let's have some tea first."

Thinking that the conversation might take a while, Seongjin headed to the living room with Sisle.

"I've never shown this to my brother before."

As Commander Bruno naturally served tea and disappeared, Sisle put down the small book-like object she had been holding in her arms on the table and opened her mouth.

"What is this?"

"It's a diary where I've been writing down the contents of the book."

Some time ago, Sisle had come to Seongjin and told him that this world was actually a world inside a book.

—In fact, when I was young, I read the novel that Seo Yi-seo mentioned. Since then, I've always had a vague suspicion that this world might be inside a book.

Of course, the Demon King's opinion was that it couldn't be.

He had said that a solid real world like Delcross could never be maintained by the mere imagination of a book.

As Seongjin was lost in thought, Sisle pushed the diary forward slightly and continued speaking.

"Brother Morres. You may not remember this, but I've been having prophetic dreams since I was a child."

"...Prophetic dreams?"

"Yes. Of course, it's hard to believe right away, but..."

"Oh? No, I believe you."

Seongjin looked into Sisle's clear gray eyes and replied. He knew that those eyes, which were exactly like the emperor's, came from the Kornseim family, so how could he not believe in prophetic dreams?

"Hehe. You're like that before too, but you say you believe me even when I say something strange out of the blue."

Sisle let out a small laugh without much change in her expression. However, Seongjin's sharp eyes did not miss the faint blush on the girl's cheeks.

Why do I feel like I can tell her expression even though I look at that poker face?

Under Sisle's expectant gaze, Seongjin silently picked up the book.

When he turned a page, he saw childish, round handwriting on the first page.

—The Chronicles of Delcross, Volume 2: The Fall of the Saintess.

Wait, hold on. Not only the title, but...

"...Volume 2?"

"Yes. I actually saw Volume 1 first, but I started writing after Volume 2."

So it was probably around the time the saintess's mark appeared on her body. That was when a person who was always the same started appearing in Sisle's dreams, unlike her usual prophetic dreams.

The man was wearing a mask, so his face was not visible, but he was

said to be sitting at a desk, humming a tune and writing something diligently with a quill pen.

And then, every time before the dream ended, he would proudly show Sisle what he had written.

It was an exciting novel set in the real Delcross.

"That's how I read Volume 1, little by little, over two years, whenever I had a prophetic dream."

The title of the Chronicles of Delcross Volume 1 that she read was 'The Young Wolf of the North'.

It was an exciting story about Orden Siegmund, the protagonist, who grew up hunting sea monsters and eventually conquered the martial arts competitions of the continent.

"You mean the story of that simple-minded brute Orden? How can it be interesting just by hearing it?"

"If you had read even once about the battle between the Order of the Wolf and the Glacier Troll, you would never say such a thing. It was a vivid description, as if you were watching the battle with your own eyes. The way the Order captured that huge troll was by forming a double envelopment and driving it down the mountain slope, which it was weak on....."

As she spoke, Sisle waved her hands and imitated the last blow of Orden that she had read in the book.

"The protagonist cuts the troll's throat like this."

".....!"

Seongjin's eyes flashed in an instant.

"Sisle, wait!"

"Huh?"

Oh, wait, didn't that feel like part of the properly executed Banaha's

3rd Form just now?

"When did you start learning Aura?"

"What are you talking about?"

Sisle blinked her eyes.

Aura initiation? Me?

"What do you mean?"

"But that move just now!"

"Oh, that was just me imagining the move I read in the book. I've never learned swordsmanship or aura cultivation specifically?"

"....."

"This move was so impressive and memorable that I would do it from time to time when I thought about it."

Seongjin's mouth dropped open.

What the heck? Where did this talented person come from?

Even if it was just one move, how could she follow the Banaha's Aura Weaving just by reading it in a book?

Until now, he had thought that the reason this child's aura activity was more active than ordinary people's was simply because she was too healthy due to her overflowing divine power.

'But if that's actually because of the aura layer unconsciously accumulated in her core....'

And the fact that it flowed out properly woven into aura movements meant, in other words, that the aura this child had accumulated had already exceeded the 3rd layer!

"Anyway, that's not important right now, brother."

No, it seems very important!

You're just wasting such natural talent and tireless energy by doing nothing but volunteer work!

"Focus. This is a serious matter that involves you, me, and Seo Yi-seo."

Sisle, who dismissed Seongjin's internal outcry as mere attention deficit, continued speaking.

"Anyway, at the end of Volume 1, Eldest Young Master Orden subjugates all the martial arts competitions and arrives in the imperial capital. And then the female protagonist, Seo Yi-seo, who crossed over from another dimension, appears, and Volume 1 of the Chronicles comes to an end."

It was when Sisle was just 9 years old.

At that time, Eldest Young Master Siegmund was just making a name for himself as a genius swordsman of the North, and rumors were circulating that he would soon be participating in martial arts competitions in other countries. Sisle, too, was solidifying her position as a saintess, so she thought it was another form of her prophetic dream and didn't think much of it.

And not long after Volume 1 ended, the man in the prophetic dream appeared again.

The half-masked man, who smiled brightly at Sisle, showed her the title of the new book he had just started writing. It was none other than The Chronicles of Delcross Volume 2.

"The Fall of the Saintess.....!"

The girl was greatly shocked.

If the story proceeded as the subtitle suggested, then the new chronicle was nothing less than a prophecy of her own downfall.

Waking up from her sleep that day in a cold sweat, Sisle began to transcribe the contents of the book she had seen in her dream into a diary. She tried to be as detailed as possible, not wanting to miss a single story.

The story unfolded roughly as follows.

The female protagonist, who is the true reincarnation of the Saintess Grazia, appears, and Sisle, who has lost the mark of the Saintess, is greatly criticized by the Orthodox Church and the people of the imperial capital.

—It is God's punishment! The saintess has fallen and lost her divine power! She must have colluded with the devil!

The little girl struggled to clear her name, but each time she did, the story strangely went in a worse direction.

A series of vicious cycles where repeated misunderstandings made Sisle harbor malicious thoughts, and her actions in turn caused even more vicious misunderstandings.

It was an unlikely development that made one wonder how anyone could be so malicious to a single character.

—Why are you persecuting me so?

The kind protagonist Seo Yi-seo eventually cried out in tears.

—I never thought you would be like this, Saintess.

The serious protagonist Orden looked at her with eyes of deep contempt.

—Restrain yourself for the time being.

The fallen Holy Emperor commanded in a cold voice.

As she read each word, Sisle felt her breath getting caught in her throat. It was as if she was slowly sinking into a deep mire from which there was no escape once she took a step in.

She wondered if she would really do such things, but as the dream continued, she began to doubt herself and whether she would really become such a person.

For about two years, Sisley was haunted by the harrowing dream of

her tragic demise. During this time, the young girl lost her laughter, becoming increasingly consumed by severe anxiety.

And in the climactic final chapter, Sisley ultimately met her end at the hands of the divine envoy.

"After reading that chapter, I couldn't bring myself to look at His Majesty directly for a while."

"....."

Seongjin, with a rigid expression, quickly flipped through the diary to the last chapter of the infamous second volume.

Indeed, the trembling hand that had pressed down hard while writing those words seemed to smear the occasional teardrop that fell from the girl's eyes.

"I've mentioned this to you before, brother. With Seo Yi-seo actually appearing before my eyes, I moved beyond trusting the content of this book to realizing that this place is merely a world within a book."

Sisley's voice sounded painfully calm as she continued.

"The bigger problem is what happens after I die, brother. Since last year, I've been reading the third volume of the Delcross Chronicles."

Seongjin looked at the neatly written text on the next page.

—Delcross Chronicles Volume 3. The Executor of the Apocalypse.

It detailed the greatest and worst crisis in Delcross, where a fallen Holy Emperor uses the saintess's body to summon high-ranking demon kings.

"Ha ha."

A soft laugh echoed.

Sisley, puzzled by the sound, looked up at Seongjin and flinched.

He was baring his teeth in a fierce smile.

"Sigurd Sigurdson, this bastard...!"

Sigurd Sigurdson.

The dimensional storyteller who walks through a thousand dreams and speaks in a thousand voices.

He once wrote a forbidden book called 'Otherworldly Apocalypse,' predicting the destruction of Delcross long ago, and recently, he has drawn in Seo Yi-seo, a human from the imaginary world.

His stated purpose has always been the same from the beginning.

That is, to become a great single rule, a single story.

What exactly that meant was beyond anyone's guess. Seongjin, too, had once dreamt of becoming a Tyrannosaurus in his childhood, so he wasn't inclined to outright dismiss someone else's future dreams, no matter how absurd they were.

"Yeah, whatever it is, it's all good."

But, what?

That man, who is extremely devoted to caring for his children, wrote a story about killing a child with his own hands?

And he shows it to a kid who's hardly dry behind the ears?

"Haha, Sigurd Sigurdson, this son of a b*tch...!"

No matter what, I will definitely grind this bastard to dust.

While Seongjin was thinking about significantly increasing the interest rate to apply to this guy, suddenly, the Demon King spoke in a creeping voice.

[Calm down, Lee Seongjin. Why are you scaring the kids all of a sudden?]

"What?"

Confused by the trembling attitude of the Demon King, Seongjin looked up, and Sisle's face, clutching her teacup tightly, seemed to have turned pale.

Moreover.

"Shaaaaa!"

Seo Yi-seo, who had retreated to a corner of the drawing room, was frantically hissing.

Why is everyone making such a fuss? What did I do?

"Your expression, that expression! Like a broker ready to harvest organs at any moment!"

"...Huh?"

Seongjin then realized his lips had twisted into a sneer without him noticing.

Come to think of it, his juniors always panicked when he smiled, asking who he was planning to "pickle" next.

He cleared his throat with a cough and slowly sipped his tea.

"Phew..."

Good. Bruno's Melbourne tea.

It was a taste that purified the soul.

After a short pause, Seongjin put down his teacup and asked Sisle,

"There's something I've been wanting to ask you. Sisle, why didn't you tell Father about this story?"

"That's..."

Sisle hesitated for a moment.

How could she explain what happened that day?

The day when the whole world seemed to have changed, as if a veil had been lifted.

The day when the person she once knew better than anyone else, and for whom she had a deep affection, suddenly felt terrifying and unfamiliar.

And the kind voice she heard in her head.

-That is his true nature. If he considers something useless, he will cut it down without mercy. In the near future, you too will meet your death at his hands, just like them.

True to his word, the Holy Emperor in the dream vision showed no hesitation in executing the real Sisle.

"I thought it was dangerous, brother. According to the Chronicle, His Majesty has already been on the path of degeneration for many years."

"So you don't trust our Father?"

"Of course I don't think His Majesty sincerely wants my downfall. But he is already being manipulated by something evil, and so I couldn't completely rule out the possibility that he might unintentionally harm me."

Seongjin tilted his head.

"Why do you believe the contents of your dream so much? The one who appeared in your dream must be the storyteller of that dimension that Seo Yi-seo mentioned, right?"

"Yes. I think it's him."

"You heard yourself what he did to Seo Yi-seo. And yet you still believe the dream you had was a real prophetic dream? You don't suspect that he made it all up?"

At that, Sisle smiled wistfully.

"It's hard to explain. Brother, I can tell the difference between a prophetic dream and a simple dream. That was definitely a vision that I saw with my own power, and so far everything has happened exactly the same as in Volume 1 of the Chronicle."

Ever since Sisle showed the signs of the Saintess, the Holy Emperor had been consistently opposed to her becoming the Saintess.

It was as if he was a villain in a novel, who would never acknowledge her as the Saintess.

"And think about it simply, brother. If my prophetic dream is true, then telling His Majesty won't solve anything. And if my prophetic dream is wrong, then there's no need to worry him about something that might not happen. His Majesty would probably be very upset that I had such a dream."

That was right. For whatever reason, Sisle didn't want to tell the Holy Emperor about the miserable future that lay ahead for the two of them.

After all, no matter how afraid she had been, she still loved him very much.

"Then why are you telling me now?"

"Because I think you're the only one who can change the future that's been predetermined."

Sisle said this as she carefully stroked her teacup.

"As I said before, everything has been happening exactly as it did in Volume 1 of the Delcross Chronicle. It's only recently that things have started to go wrong. Right at the beginning of Volume 2."

The gates that were supposed to open simultaneously in multiple locations across the empire a few months later had suddenly not opened.

A special department called the Demon Special Task Force, which

didn't exist in the book, had even been created.

And the protagonist, Seo Yi-seo, had been discovered earlier than expected and had become the Saintess without even going through the 'Trial of the Saintess.'

"And I realized that all of these events have one thing in common."

Sisle's eyes deepened as she looked at Seongjin.

"It's you, Morres-orabeoni. All of these things are somehow connected to you."

"....."

The Delcross Chronicle did indeed contain some information about Prince Morres.

In Volume 1, he was hurt by the Emperor and Empress and eventually went astray. And in Volume 2, after the fever, he suddenly changed his mind and worked hard to improve his swordsmanship.

However, in the book, Prince Morres, despite his efforts, was unable to accumulate any aura for several years.

It was when he was deeply frustrated by his fruitless efforts that he met the kind and gentle Saintess Seo Yi-seo. He received her warm comfort and eventually fell deeply in love with her, becoming the tragic second male lead.

And by Volume 3, the prince was showing signs of going crazy from his unrequited love and becoming the second villain.

'That's what happened to Seo Yi-seo-ssi too. You're the second villain in the novel.'

But what was this?

The real Morres that Sisle met had become strong as soon as he woke up from the fever, and was now known as a hidden swordsmanship genius!

And from the gaps in the distorted stories, Sisle learned the truth behind the scenes that was not in the Chronicle.

That the reincarnation of Saintess Gracia was, in fact, nothing more than an illusion with no substance.

And that the ceremony of the First Emperor, which she had thought was a blessing, was actually a trap set by Cardmos to take over people's bodies.

She could no longer guess the direction of this story.

Only.

'Everything depends on Morres-orabeoni!'

It would not be unreasonable for Sisle to think so and place her hopes on him.

Meanwhile, Seongjin was having a different thought as he listened to Sisle's story.

Flipping through the diary quickly, he asked Sisle.

"But there doesn't seem to be anything about Cardmss here. What about the Chronicle you read? Was there anything about him?"

"About the first Emperor?"

"Yes."

Could there be a possibility that Sigurd Sigurdson and Cardmos were somehow related?

It was a natural question for Seongjin.

Sisle started dreaming about the Delcross Chronicle at the same time that the Saintess's mark appeared on her body. The timing was too coincidental.

"There wasn't anything except when Seo Yi-seo received the blessing. Why?"

"No, maybe Cardmos is behind all this?"

At that moment, a deep voice rang in the heads of the two people next to them.

[This is really ridiculous to listen to. I was just trying to protect this body from being swayed by the evil deeds of my descendants, but what kind of nonsense accusation is this?]

Turning their heads, they saw Seo Yi-seo, who had now returned to the front of the tea table, chewing on cookies and looking at them.

Those golden eyes that shone brightly.

"...Cardmos?"

Then Seo Yi-seo, no, Cardmoss frowned.

[How dare you! Where did you learn your manners?]

"Um, ancestor?"

[I told you not to call me ancestor! You evil thing!]

What the hell am I supposed to do?

"Anyway, you're here yourself. Now, answer me, Cardmos. Did you conspire with Sigurd Sigurdson to harm Sisle?"

At that, Cardmos flared up.

"What? Conspiring? There's nothing you wouldn't say, is there! Why on earth would I do such a thing?"

"You tried to possess Sisle under the guise of a blessing, didn't you?"

"Yes, that's exactly it! Why would I harm the child who is to become my new vessel, the one who will devote everything to me?"

"....."

"....."

Caught admitting his own intentions, Cardmos sighed upon receiving Sisle's subtle look of contempt.

"While I'm not unaware of the dimensional storyteller, it's true. I only marked her to prevent him from meddling in the dreams of my descendants with his nonsense. Why on earth are you suddenly pitting me against him?"

"You're taking over a perfectly healthy person's body, and that detail is completely omitted from the chronicles, isn't it? Usually, such individuals are the most suspect."

"What vulgar remarks!"

Cardmos clicked his tongue and picked up a piece of candy.

"What are you expecting from such a person? My descendant. Have you no thought of entrusting everything to me and resting peacefully even now?"

This madman!

Seongjin was about to burst into anger, but Sisle remained unshaken and calmly shook her head.

"The scriptures say that a temporary solution is the sweetest whisper of the devil. I am not ignorant of who can truly help me."

"....."

With an expressionless face, Sisle, who had just fiercely criticized her ancestor as being devil-like, turned to Seongjin and continued.

"Not long ago, Amelia-eonni and Logan-orabeoni said that if I had concerns, it would be good to consult with Morres-orabeoni. They said he always knows the right answer."

"Sister Amelia and Logan?"

That was unexpected.

"Yes. So, please help me, Brother."

Gray eyes filled with desperation captured Seongjin's face entirely.

"I don't want to die like that."

"....."

Though she tried to appear calm, the girl's voice trembled thinly with fear.

Sisle, who had read about her own demise for years.

The mental anguish this little girl must have endured was hard for Seongjin to fathom.

After a moment of contemplation, Seongjin nodded and began to speak.

"Hmm. How about we try this?"

* * *

That evening, Dasha, who had visited the Pearl Palace as always, opened her eyes wide at the unexpected sight.

This was because Prince Morres, who was sitting on the bed waiting for her, was in a much different mood than usual.

He was neatly dressed in the black outfit that Dasha had prepared for him a few days ago, and he even had the Nutcracker on his belt.

And the aura surrounding the prince was tense yet calm.

As a result, the air density around him became extremely high, and Dasha even felt a little short of breath.

"...Your Highness?"

"I've been waiting for you, Dasha."

The prince said as he stood up from his seat.

"Since this is the place, I think I'll need the help of a professional to infiltrate perfectly."

"Yes?"

While Dasha was confused by his unfamiliar appearance, the prince walked towards the terrace and said.

"Come on, let's go."

"Wait a minute, Your Highness! Where are you going at this time...!"

Then he jumped over the railing of the terrace with a light step and said as if he was spitting it out.

"Scarcepino Estate."

On the night there was a social gathering at the townhouse.

Riccardo was found in the garden, inexplicably covered in blood.

At the time, it was said that there were gallons of blood around him.

However, since the young lord's body was unharmed, whose blood it was remained a mystery.

'...Could it be?'

When Seongjin first heard the story from Dasha, only one person came to mind.

A human capable of not only healing wounds but also regenerating lost blood in real-time.

'Nah, couldn't be. That gentleman was at the main palace at that time...'

Regardless, from that evening onwards, Riccardo started showing severe mental disturbances and began receiving intensive treatment from physicians.

Seongjin, too, had been preoccupied with Cardmos and preparing for the birthday celebration, so dealing with him had been delayed.

But.

-I don't want to die like that.

How could he leave the one who made our little one say such things, alone!

[Sigh. Your father warned you so many times, yet why do you always

create these situations?]

Approaching the townhouse unnoticed, the Demon King sighed and muttered.

'Don't talk nonsense. This is all within the realm of possibilities. Perhaps now is the perfect timing.'

[Huh?]

Think about it, Demon King.

The day before a big event, when everyone is preoccupied with one thing, how common is that?

Everyone's busy with the birthday celebration preparations or their own social gatherings. Including the Scarcefino main house, there are unscheduled banquets happening all over the imperial capital, right?

[...Huh?]

As Seongjin predicted, with security concentrated at the main locations where key figures were gathered, the route to the townhouse was less guarded than usual.

[I can't believe it! You, of all people!]

What are you saying? Like I said before, I'm quite thorough in my preparations.

I've been ready to deal with Riccardo whenever, just didn't have the time.

Of course, there were a few encounters with night visitors dressed similarly to Seongjin's group.

"Our agents."

Dasha signaled to someone in the shadows and said.

Hmm, it feels like this might directly be reported to the Holy

Emperor through the intelligence department.

'No, if it's him, he probably knew we left the palace from the start...'

[Two soul terminals presumed to be Arenja have been following us since earlier.]

'Ah, indeed.'

But it's alright. I have no intention of causing trouble today.

[And this isn't trouble?]

Meanwhile, Dasha, who had been busy sending and responding to signals, quickly caught up to Seongjin with a troubled look on her face.

"Your Highness, was the investigation of the Scarcepino family's security system you ordered recently all for today's purpose?"

"Well, two birds with one stone."

The matters under investigation had to be sensitive enough, after all. It was presumed that sneaking around at night was the only way to proceed smoothly.

You can't just barge into places like the Milo Trading Company, which operates openly, or the Scarcepino family, who have a solid foundation as wealthy magnates, using public authority.

Moreover, it was uncertain if the public forces would readily take Seongjin's side.

If he ever tried complaining that Riccardo is in cahoots with a dark cult and sends people to another dimension, Seongjin might just end up being summoned to the Heresy Tribunal for investigation right away.

'The times when I led the capital's guard to capture Seo Yi-seo were better.'

Having the public authority on my side felt thrilling.

The Scarcepino townhouse.

Just before officially infiltrating, Seongjin double-checked the vials neatly tucked into his belt, which he had recently learned to use from Dasha.

This one's a truth serum, this one's a sleeping potion, this one's...

Watching Seongjin go through his inventory, Dasha looked pale.

"Your Highness, are you going to use those? What exactly are you planning to do there?"

"Don't worry, just think of it as a means for a peaceful conversation."

It would be troublesome if he truly showed signs of mental disturbance.

But if it's all an act to avoid questioning, he's likely to get thoroughly shaken down today.

"Too bad. If only I had divine power, I could freely beat him up and then heal him perfectly to beat him again."

Hearing Seongjin muttering this to himself, Dasha gasped in horror.

"That's the young master of the Scarcepino family, Your Highness. It will surely cause problems later!"

"It's fine, Dasha. It's not a crime as long as we don't get caught."

"...Good heavens!"

Overwhelmed by the stress of the situation, Dasha tore at her hair.

Regardless, Seongjin downed one of the prepared potions and pulled his mask up over his face.

"From now on, you can't call me Your Highness, got it?"

Sighing deeply, Dasha watched as Seongjin boldly stepped into the mansion.

Thanks to his recently improved aura concealment, Seongjin easily bypassed the yawning guards who noticed nothing and soon infiltrated Riccardo's room.

"Let's see this bastard..."

Despite reports of his mental disturbances, the sleeping figure seemed more peaceful than expected.

This bastard. How dare he sleep so soundly after causing such distress to a child?

Seongjin, who had grabbed the bastard by the collar in a fit of rage, easily lifted him using his aura.

"What...?"

And before Riccardo could fully regain his consciousness.

Whoosh!

Seongjin slammed his face back down onto the bed. Consequently, Riccardo, gasping for air, struggled and let out a muffled scream.

"Guh...!"

Before the sound could fully escape, Seongjin pressed his head deep into the pillow and whispered a command into his ear.

"Keep your mouth shut."

"...!"

"Because of you, our order has been caught by the intelligence service. You're prepared to take responsibility, right?"

Currently, Seongjin's voice was hoarse, thanks to a voice-altering drug he received from Dasha.

It seemed to work by temporarily swelling the vocal cords, but given the tingling nose and the tears, Seongjin was seriously worried it might be causing an acute allergic reaction.

Surely it wouldn't lead to sudden breathing difficulties?

"If you scream, you die right here. But if you manage to clean up this mess properly, I'll spare your life."

"..."

Riccardo, terrified, quietly rolled his eyes.

Why does it seem like his attitude has changed significantly from when he used to boast about being the Demon King of Dreams?

[His pulse is skyrocketing. He looks genuinely scared.]

'Hmm.'

Seongjin observed him for a while longer while holding him down, but no blue butterfly appeared nor anything of the sort.

Could it be that Sigurd Sigurdson actually abandoned his avatar and bailed?

After a while, as Riccardo stopped resisting, Seongjin gently let go of his head, and Riccardo asked in a trembling voice.

"Are you from the order?"

It was a bluff, thrown out in the hope he might know something since a mark of the dark order was sent to Orden. But could it be, this guy was actually in direct communication with the order?

"There's nothing I need to discuss with you, call that storyteller."

"What... Who are you exactly? Surely the Archbishop wouldn't have mentioned the 'Puppeteer' to just anyone?"

So, he refers to that storyteller as the 'Puppeteer'.

Considering the guy manipulates avatars like puppets, it's quite a fitting nickname.

"Could it be that he's decided to conspire directly with the trading head?"

He's likely referring to the head of the Milo Trading Company.

"Well, think whatever you want."

Then, Riccardo, who had been cautiously looking around, suddenly jumped off the bed and tried to run straight for the door.

Of course, Seongjin, having anticipated his movement, easily tripped him.

Crash!

Riccardo tumbled heavily onto the floor, making quite a noise, but Seongjin, carefully heightening his senses, detected no significant movement nearby.

It seems Dasha did a good job as planned.

"Ughhh..."

Riccardo, who had fallen face-first to the floor, clutched his bleeding nose and writhed on the ground.

While he was struggling, Seongjin slowly walked to the tea table in front of the bed and laid out the prepared vials.

Clatter, clatter.

At that sound, Riccardo, who had belatedly raised his head, trembled and asked.

"What, what are you going to do?"

Following that, an array of small daggers of various lengths and hooks presumably meant for gruesome purposes were revealed one by one.

Riccardo's face, which had been rotating only his eyeballs to witness the scene, turned ghastly pale in an instant.

"Why are you doing this to me? The order already knows, the 'Puppeteer' has left me! He erased all the plans from my mind! I, I

know nothing!"

Tears the size of chicken droppings began to fall from his eyes.

"He abandoned me and disappeared. Left me all alone in this vast universe! How, how could he do this to me!"

It's unclear whether he's terrified or just sorrowful about being abandoned.

'Demon King?'

[Hmm. His claim of having no memory seems genuine. Looks like he really got wiped and dumped.]

It's unfortunate. If this guy had been Sigurd Sigurdson, that would have been ideal.

Sighing, Seongjin spoke up.

"Don't worry. You don't have to say anything."

Riccardo's eyes widened in response.

"Th-then what are all those for..."

"Sometimes, after learning theory, people get the urge to do some practical work. Sadly, it seems unnecessary with you."

"What do you mean...?"

"Well, consider it retribution for associating with that bastard."

Crack. Seongjin alternately cracked his knuckles and continued.

"Relax. Fortunately, I don't see much value in torturing you for a long time. So I'll just beat you up thoroughly."

"Eek!"

Riccardo, who was sitting on the floor trying to back away, abruptly hit the wall.

After observing his terrified face for a moment, Seongjin picked up one particularly long and thin hook from the table, held it up to the faint moonlight, and continued.

"And at the end, I plan to jab this into your side. I'll stir your insides over and over with aura charged in it."

"...Huh?"

"Then, externally, there won't be much damage, but the ruined organs will slowly pool blood in your stomach, right? You might not bleed outwardly, but by morning, you'll definitely die from excessive bleeding. And the cause of death will remain a mystery."

".....!"

"You will die slowly by morning, in tremendous pain from your intestines twisting, unable to seek help from anyone."

Seongjin met the shaking eyes of the man, trembling as if an earthquake had struck him from sheer terror, and pulled up the corners of his mouth.

"Now, it's your choice. Do you prefer your liver or your spleen? If you care, I can even touch your kidneys. They're all organs rich in blood vessels."

Riccardo, his eyes fixated on the hook reflecting the light, seemed almost out of his mind.

With a sudden relaxation of his muscles, the floor became wet with his urine.

"I'm, I'm sorry... I was just his... puppet... Sob! I never, never meant to cause trouble for the order! Hic!"

His trembling jaw could hardly utter coherent words.

"Last chance. Where is the 'Puppeteer' now?"

"Hic! Sob! He must have, must have gone to another puppet!"

"And who is this other puppet?"

"I... I don't know. I really don't know anything!"

Choking as if strangled, Riccardo's cries were muffled as Seongjin looked down at him with pity.

It's a shame.

If this guy had been him, I could have made him feel the sensation of slowly dying.

Thump!

"Ugh!"

A light kick to the jaw sent Riccardo crashing his head against the wall, tumbling forward.

"Why? I told you everything, why?"

Why indeed?

Didn't I say? Beating you up was the real goal from the start.

What followed was a brutal beating.

With each strike Seongjin delivered, the room echoed with Riccardo's cries. As the violence intensified, Dasha, who had been on guard outside, rushed in, alarmed.

"Your...!"

Nearly blurting out 'Your Highness,' she whispered, muffling her voice.

"You said you wouldn't resort to violence earlier...?"

"When did I say that?"

I said I prepared means for a smooth conversation. I never said I wouldn't hit him after we were done talking.

In that short time, Riccardo, thoroughly beaten, was sprawled out on the floor, a complete mess.

"This man is a member of the Scarcepinos family! This will surely lead to big trouble!"

"Don't worry. I've prepared everything."

Seongjin took out a small medallion from his pocket.

A crude spider engraved on a copper medallion, a symbol of the dark order, handed over from Orden.

"He wouldn't openly claim he was attacked by remnants of the dark order, would he?"

From what he said earlier, it seemed the order, the Milo Trading Company, and the Scarcepinos were all cautiously watching each other.

It would be even better if this incident made them suspect each other.

After placing the medallion carefully by Riccardo's head, Seongjin twisted his lips and muttered.

"Kill each other now."

[What a wicked man...]

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Beat that bastard Riccardo to death.

With that, the primary purpose of coming to this mansion was accomplished.

However, now that he had started this night out, Seongjin had no intention of wasting this opportunity. That was why he was diligently rummaging through the first-floor study until dawn.

"How on earth did I end up... Even in the long-standing history of [Oberon's Hand][1], there has never been a member who went this far..."

Dasha was lamenting beside him, so Seongjin instructed her.

"Important documents might be carefully hidden inside the room. Dasha, why don't you investigate the bedroom area?"

"Yes, of course."

She let out a sigh of resignation and left the study.

Even on a pitch-black night with the faint moonlight obscured by clouds, Seongjin could easily read the documents with his Aura vision enhanced. It was a technique he had learned from Dasha.

[Perhaps the really important documents are kept at the main residence?]

'Who knows.'

The siblings Riccardo and Isabella, who mainly reside in the townhouse for active social activities.

According to Orden's investigation, they were also the ones who

primarily showed their faces at the Milo Company.

Seeing that there was no mention of the eldest son, Dominico, it was highly likely that the collusion with the Milo Company was the independent doing of Sigurd Sigurdsson, not the entire Scarcepinos family business.

In that case, wouldn't there be a higher probability of the evidence being kept here rather than at the main residence?

'Besides, don't you think something is strange, Demon Lord?'

[What is?]

The reason Seongjin boldly carried out this secret operation today was because he had thoroughly investigated the overall security situation of the Scarcepinos family in advance. He calculated that he and Dasha could sneak in undetected with just the two of them.

The problem was just that. The vast difference in the level of security between the townhouse and the main residence.

The strictness of the security system operated by the Scarcepinos, the wealthiest family in Delcros, was truly beyond imagination. They even had a private assassin brigade operated solely for VIP protection.

But what about this place? Although they were said to be quite strong Aura users, weren't they just rigid bodyguards who were completely incapable of dealing with skilled assassins?

If it weren't for Sisle's revenge, Seongjin would have also held back for a while to investigate if there was some fishy situation hidden.

Was this intentionally arranged by Riccardo, who was being manipulated by that damn Storyteller, for the convenience of his movements?

Or...

'Did someone from the Scarcepinos main family have a hand in this...?'

While he was thinking that far, suddenly he felt a small presence approaching from over there.

Seongjin, who was about to hastily organize the documents he had spread out and hide, paused for a moment when he realized who the owner of that presence was.

The graceful footsteps of a noblewoman with an utterly ordinary Aura activation.

'...Isabella?'

Captured by a strange premonition, Seongjin quietly stood in place and waited for her.

Creak.

Indeed, the one who opened the door and entered the study was Isabella, wearing nothing but a nightgown.

Their eyes met head-on, but she wasn't very surprised and blankly stared at the black-clothed intruder, then asked.

"Who are you?"

Seongjin's brows furrowed beneath his mask.

Isabella, was she this kind of person?

She had trembled so much in front of Orden before, yet in front of a suspicious person whose identity was unknown, she showed such a calm demeanor?

"Who are you? What are you doing here right now?"

Was that the normal reaction of a noble lady when faced with someone who had illegally trespassed into the mansion?

Moreover, it was difficult to pinpoint, but there was a subtly different feeling from when he had met her before...

"....."

"Hmm..."

While Seongjin silently observed her, Isabella also didn't take her eyes off him as she moved her steps, trailing the hem of her gown.

"You are quite young. A young man... No, a boy."

Her voice began to drop low.

"Which group do you belong to? [Oberon's Hand] does not deploy such young members to the field. And [Kaya's Breath] has not advanced into the Empire yet..."

Not only her voice but also her way of speaking seemed to be changing little by little.

As if something was being layered over.

Feeling strange about that, Seongjin just watched what she was doing, and Isabella fearlessly approached him and pressed her body close to his.

"How peculiar. Truly peculiar. Strangely, I feel a strong interest in you."

Slender fingers intertwined over his gloves. Isabella's lips came close to his face as if she was about to kiss him at any moment.

And then...

[Now, go ahead and tell me.]

A voice with a strange vibration that tickled the heart rang in Seongjin's ear as if seducing him.

[Who sponsored someone extraordinary like you? Who is behind you?]

Oh ho? Would you look at that?

Without answering, Seongjin gently took her hand. A faint bewilderment appeared in Isabella's turquoise eyes.

[...The enchantment isn't working? Who the hell are you...!]

At that moment, Seongjin grinned and pulled Isabella's hand hard.

"Sigurd Sigurdson."

[...!]

Caught you, bastard!

"...So what they demanded from Cardinal Gistier was... Your Majesty? Are you listening?"

In the midst of reporting on the current situation in Brittany, No. 21 asked the Holy Emperor, who couldn't seem to take his eyes off the window.

"What is the matter?"

"....."

For some reason, the Holy Emperor seemed to have his mind elsewhere, unable to focus on his report at all since earlier.

Judging by the occasional strange glow in his eyes, it seemed he was seeing something invisible to ordinary people again.

After doing that for who knows how long, the Holy Emperor slowly raised his hand to his forehead and spoke with a deep sigh.

"When a child tries to face the world alone, they have no choice but to whittle themselves down like that first."

"...Pardon?"

"I can't bring myself to blame him for being too hasty."

The Holy Emperor sometimes had a habit of abruptly uttering words that No. 21 couldn't understand. But it wasn't very common for him to completely deviate from the context like now.

No. 21 opened his mouth to ask something, but the Holy Emperor continued.

"You may go now, Enrique. I will..."

And before he could even answer...

The Holy Emperor's body limply collapsed to the side.

"...!"

No. 21 was momentarily taken aback, but from past experience, he realized that the Holy Emperor had moved only his soul to go somewhere again.

He slowly got up from his seat and quietly looked down at the Holy Emperor leaning against the sofa.

"....."

The Holy Emperor's body, with his soul gone, looked as if he was dead or in a deep sleep.

Enrique, who had been blankly staring at that seemingly defenseless face, gripped the handle of the dagger in his bosom out of habit.

His breathing gradually grew rough with tension.

Now?

That's right. The annoying Chief Chamberlain and the burdensome Knight Commander of St. Aurelion were not here now.

Is it possible?

That's right. Since he left in a hurry without properly informing him, it would take quite some time for him to return.

However...

"...Even if I succeed now, you still won't die in the end..."

The muttering voice was terribly hoarse.

Emotions that had been suppressed in one place for too long sometimes had their boundaries crumble like this, irreversibly mixing together.

Not knowing whether what he was feeling was resignation or relief, Enrique slowly let go of the sword and bit his lip.

"Sigurd Sigurdson."

As he cheerfully called out the name and clasped hands, Isabella flinched in surprise and opened her eyes wide.

[...You are?]

It seemed she couldn't recognize his voice since the drug's effect still remained.

Slowly pulling down his mask, Seongjin flashed a bright smile at Isabella.

"You couldn't get very far for someone who fled so frantically? Huh?"

Orden had mentioned it, and since she frequented the Milo Company with Riccardo, Isabella was also marked as a person of interest.

But to think he had daringly created another puppet right next to him?

"Impressive? Don't tell me even the eldest young master of this house is your puppet?"

At that, Isabella, no, Sigurd Sigurdson tried to pull his caught hand away in surprise.

No way.

When Seongjin tightened his grip so that he couldn't escape, the guy finally gave up and let out a deep sigh.

[Yes. There can't be many people in the world who are immune to

enchantment. It must have been you who made poor Riccardo like that.]

Recently, Riccardo had been suffering from frequent delusions and seizures.

As always, when he went to check on his condition at dawn, to his surprise, Riccardo was sprawled on the floor, beaten to a pulp!

So just in case, he had come down to the study where Riccardo's documents were gathered.

"That's right. Then you should know well what will happen to you now?"

As Seongjin began to stretch his shoulders, Sigurd unknowingly took a step back and spoke as if making excuses.

[Wait a moment, my friend! Let's have a conversation! I think there may be some misunderstanding between us?]

"Misunderstanding? What misunderstanding?"

[Calm down first! Acting violently like that won't solve anything!]

Sigurd tried his best to appease the prince. He had already tried to get rid of him by opening the Labyrinth and was properly punished by the Holy Emperor.

If he lost this puppet again, he would have no other options left.

And above all, the prince's eyes, shining alone in the darkness as if emitting light, had been unsettling since earlier.

[Our Bella is an innocent woman who knows nothing! Are you really going to harm this guiltless and pitiful person who has almost lost her self-awareness?]

What a despicable bastard!

Ignoring him, Seongjin took a step forward, and Sigurd quickly added.

[You are also partly to blame for Bella ending up like this! Didn't you greatly contribute to making her miserable and eventually turning her into a complete puppet?]

Seongjin paused his steps.

What?

"...Me?"

[That's right. You are the one who consistently eroded her self-esteem by not even treating this woman as a person! Thanks to that, I was able to easily take over Bella without much work.]

"I didn't treat Isabella as a person? Why?"

[That's because Bella has been my puppet for a long time. You probably knew that.]

Seongjin felt a deep irritation welling up inside him.

Hey, you bastard! Then it was your fault from the beginning! How dare you arbitrarily shift the blame?

[Do you understand? Bella and Riccardo are just being controlled, they are both innocent.]

The very person controlling them had the audacity to say that.

[So stop tormenting that poor young man Riccardo. He is already in deep pain of loss. Although unintended, unfortunately, the connection with him has been completely severed.]

Seongjin glared at this shameless guy with Isabella's face for a moment.

But was it just his feeling? Somehow, it felt like his personality was a bit different from when he was using Riccardo as an avatar.

"If you pity him so much, why didn't you just erase his memory completely? You clearly knew I would come to interrogate, so why did you leave memories of you?"

Then the guy nodded and explained.

[If I completely erased the memories of me, his mind would collapse as it is.]

Memories of Sigurd Sigurdson occupied such a large part that there was a risk of his mind completely breaking down.

[Although he's a hopeless older brother who spouts cringeworthy flowery writing like breathing, leaving him to become a total wreck would be too pitiful, don't you think?]

While the guy was babbling on his own, Seongjin quietly organized his thoughts.

Separate from this guy's plea, the actual controlled puppets might have some unjust aspects.

Moreover, even if he cut down this puppet now, the guy might just move to another body again.

However...

[This is all our Bella's will too. She's fundamentally a kind-hearted child. Thanks to that, I'm currently in a quite merciful state.]

Living as a puppet isn't a proper life anyway.

Rather than letting them be controlled by him and bring harm to Delcross...

Before he torments Sisle again, I'd rather...!

Seongjin made up his mind.

As a chilling murderous intent reflected in his eyes, Sigurd, who keenly noticed it, let out a deep sigh.

[Well, I thought it would be difficult to appeal to you with emotions, given your dry sensibility. In the end, I have to give up on this puppet too. You and I both have terrible luck.]

And flutter.

A blue butterfly fluttered before his eyes.

"...!"

Right at that moment, Seongjin saw something indescribable.

The instant the guy squeezed through the crack between dimensions to fling him into the Imaginary World...

In that fleeting moment of escaping from puppet to puppet, the trace of that soul drawing a long trajectory...

Seongjin had a hunch.

'...If it's now!'

It's possible.

To cut down not only the puppet but also the essence controlling it all at once!

Aura naturally gathered in his arm. Trembling finely as if anticipating something about to burst out violently.

The moment it's recognized, it becomes reality.

Not knowing what it was that gradually amplified its pulsation inside, drawn by that momentary ecstasy, Seongjin tightly gripped the hilt of the Nutcracker.

And right when he was about to draw the sword...

[Calm yourself, my son.]

Suddenly, someone lightly pressed down on Seongjin's hand.

"...!"

Looking to the side, there stood an exorcist Seongjin knew very well, not knowing when he had appeared.

"...Dame Sharon?"

However, the gaze meeting Seongjin's eyes...

Those eyes were not Sharon's inherent black, but a silvery-gray that was very familiar to him.

T/N:

1. A sect. All informants from Monkey Watchtower is from this sect.
First mentioned in Chp.83[↔]

[Calm yourself, my son.]

A voice that seemed to be conveyed directly to the mind rather than the ears.

"...Dame Sharon?"

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

Clearly, the one blocking his hand now had the appearance of Dame Sharon.

However, those eyes gazing down at him intently... They were not her original ones, but silvery-gray eyes that Seongjin knew very well, belonging to someone else.

'...Huh?'

Before he even realized it, Seongjin was calling out to him.

"Father?!"

Then Sharon, no, the Holy Emperor spoke again.

[It's not time yet. You don't need to go that far now.]

The moment he heard those words...

Slowly, the unknown pulsation subsided, and the Aura raging in his arm calmly settled down.

The bizarrely expanded field of vision returned, and the elevated spirit that had been stretching out also instantly dissipated.

Now, there was no longer any twisted crack between dimensions or

the thread-like trajectory of a soul left in Seongjin's sight. Only the sight of Isabella trembling and looking at him remained.

'...What was that?'

A feeling of his consciousness somehow vastly expanding.

He felt like it was something tremendously important that he shouldn't miss.

As he tried to recall the sensation that had already disappeared with a dazed mind, the hand that had been pressing down on him lifted away, confirming that the strength had left Seongjin's arm.

Seongjin looked up at this tall exorcist with renewed astonishment.

'It's still Dame Sharon, but...'

Although the outward appearance was that eccentric exorcist from the demon control squad, the air surrounding her now was clearly different from before.

That unique Aura that was thoroughly controlled yet also utterly natural.

Dame Sharon wasn't originally someone with such a low level, but the current Aura operation that seemed to perfectly blend into the surroundings was almost at the level of a Decalon Knight. It was no wonder Seongjin had no idea until she got this close.

And above all, those eyes.

There couldn't be another person in this world with such eyes.

This situation wasn't so unfamiliar to Seongjin. Didn't he feel exactly like this when the leader of Arenja possessed Commander Bruno some time ago?

[Hiiiieek!]

Seeing the Demon King who had been screaming strangely without being able to say a word, it was certain. The one possessing Dame

Sharon right now was definitely the Holy Emperor.

Thud!

At that moment, Isabella staggered and slumped to the floor. Her unfocused eyes, seemingly having received a great shock, were shaking wildly.

"I, I..."

The inquisitor, no, the Holy Emperor who had been looking down at her with a chilling gaze for a moment, opened his mouth.

[That one just left.]

"It can't be..."

Isabella, who had been staring at the void with a dazed face, shook her head violently.

"That's... impossible. I am... the Demon King of Dreams..."

Before long, tears began to fall from her eyes.

"I, hic! I am not... some mere human... N-no..."

And soon, Isabella collapsed, unable to support herself, and burst into sobs while scratching the floor with her nails.

The sound of crying, so sorrowful as if squeezing out all internal organs, of someone who had lost everything that supported their life in an instant.

Seongjin could instinctively tell.

That Isabella, who used to prance around the room with a needle stuck in her arm, was no longer there.

"Father."

Seongjin stepped forward with determination and opened his mouth.

"Isabella is already a complete puppet of Sigurd Sigursson. Although

he was driven away for now, as long as the connection remains, we don't know when that bastard will return here."

[.....]

"A sense of self that has been eroded to that extent may be irreversible. Even now that he's gone, she still believes herself to be the Demon King of Dreams, doesn't she?"

Seongjin didn't know how to sever the connection of a puppet. He had no idea how Riccardo's connection was cut off.

And even if, by some chance, there was a way to successfully disconnect that guy and Isabella, would that be a good thing?

Even Riccardo, who thought of himself as simply an accomplice, frequently suffered from delusions and seizures, so could Isabella, who had lost her sense of self, endure that sense of loss?

"Sigurd Sigurdson, he is an extremely dangerous individual. It's definitely not right for Isabella, but here, there's no choice but to make a decision."

At those words, Isabella raised her head and looked at Seongjin. Her turquoise eyes, filled with sorrow and fear, shook violently like a stormy sea.

Without avoiding that gaze, Seongjin finally uttered the heavy last words.

"...Father. Before bigger problems arise, we have to cut down the puppet here and now!"

Then the Holy Emperor lowered his gaze and stared at Seongjin intently.

Although he had said those words expecting condemnation or reproach, unexpectedly, the Holy Emperor's eyes toward Seongjin were filled with a deep light of understanding.

[Yes. Your judgment is reasonable.]

"Then...!"

Pat.

Before Seongjin could say anything more, a hand was placed on top of his head.

And a voice was heard softly.

[I know well that you will never hesitate to make a choice in the face of adversity,]

Pat pat.

The light gesture of patting his head had a strangely reassuring aspect to it.

Seongjin, who had been standing in a daze with a feeling of his strength draining away, finally realized that he had been unnecessarily tensing his whole body.

[But my son, you don't need to be driven to make such a choice yet.]

"Uh..."

[Isn't it okay to entrust that burden to someone else sometimes?]

Consoling Seongjin like that and patting his head a few more times, the Holy Emperor slowly approached Isabella.

[Your brother cooperated with that one of his own will, but what about you?]

"I, I..."

Isabella, who had turned pale, trembled and couldn't properly continue her words. The Emperor, who had been looking down at her, let out a small sigh.

[...It may already be too late, but what needs to be done must be done.]

And in an instant, Seongjin couldn't believe his eyes.

Because the Holy Emperor, drawing his shotel like lightning, directly stabbed the sharp silver curved blade into Isabella's crown!

[TL/N: A shotel is a Persian blade.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0b/Shotel%2C_BM.jpg/360px-Shotel%2C_BM.jpg]

Splat!

"...!?"

Splash.

Isabella's body limply fell backwards, spewing out a fountain of blood.

An enormous amount of bleeding spread out in concentric circles centered around her body.

Shocked by that sight, Seongjin just blinked and blankly stared at the Holy Emperor.

"Uh..."

What? I definitely thought he was trying to stop me from cutting down Isabella, but why did he suddenly do it himself...?

Could it be that not bearing the burden alone and entrusting it meant...

"Are you telling me to leave some of your share when taking revenge in the future?"

[.....]

After looking at Seongjin with a strange expression for a moment, the Holy Emperor was about to open his mouth when Dasha rushed into the study and shouted.

"Your Majesty, something seems off! It was too easy, and the ones watching from afar... Aaaahhhh!"

She couldn't continue her words and gaped at the gruesome sight of the study reeking of blood, and the Holy Emperor slowly bent down and touched Isabella's fallen head.

Soon, a bright light burst from that hand, and Isabella's complexion, which had been as pale as a dead person, instantly brightened.

Her blood flow had completely returned and her breathing became steady. If someone who didn't know saw her, they might think she was sleeping on the floor.

At that moment, a puzzle piece fell into place in Seongjin's mind.

Riccardo, who was found without a single wound along with evidence of strangely excessive bleeding.

"Did you perhaps do the exact same thing to that bastard Riccardo before, cracking his head open?"

[.....]

That's right, this person.

'Wait a minute, then the one who severed the connection between the Storyteller and Riccardo was possibly...?'

Seongjin looked down at Isabella lying in a pool of blood with renewed astonishment.

That appearance that seemed to be in a deep sleep, and now likely to be extremely harmless.

Didn't he say there was no need to choose yet?

'I see...'

Perhaps as long as this person is in front of me...

I...

At that moment, Dasha, who had been carefully examining outside the window, muttered.

"The presence is getting closer, Your Highness. We need to withdraw from here first, so please hurry. Lady Knight, follow me as well. Quickly!"

Dasha probably had no idea that Dame Sharon was the Holy Emperor.

"Ah, wait a moment. There's something I need to leave here."

"Pardon?"

In front of the puzzled Dasha, Seongjin grinned confidently and took out another medallion from his bosom.

"Dominico[1]. There was an intruder at the townhouse. Riccardo was badly injured, and Isabella is currently unconscious."

At the Scarcepino main residence.

Dominico, who had been working diligently until dawn, nodded his head without taking his eyes off the documents even at the informant's report.

"I see."

He spoke as if he had already expected it.

"Is it the Milo Company or the Dark Cult?"

"Well... We only managed to observe from a distance, so it's not certain. But the Dark Cult's emblem was left at the scene."

Dominico glanced at the small medallion presented by his personal informant, Olivier, and then stuck his nose back into the documents with a largely uninterested attitude.

On the day Young Master Riccardo collapsed in the garden.

After finishing the aftermath of the social gathering, Dominico had entered the main residence with all the security team escorting him.

As a result, the security at the townhouse mansion inevitably became lax, but neither Riccardo nor Isabella said anything about the reduction of security personnel.

"I should contact Grand Prince Siegmund. It seems Isabella has fallen ill and unfortunately will not be able to attend this birthday celebration."

"Haha."

Olivier, who let out a hollow laugh, crossed his legs and sneered.

"How cold. This is about your siblings, Dominico. Aren't you worried?"

At those words, the turquoise eyes that looked frigid glared at Olivier through the glasses.

"Didn't I tell you, Olivier? They haven't been my siblings for a long time."

The next day, morning.

Orden rubbed his temples, feeling a headache at the urgent news delivered early in the morning from the Scarcepinio family.

The story that Isabella suddenly collapsed yesterday and would not be able to attend the birthday celebration.

It was already ridiculous that they had threatened to be partners out of the blue while sending the emblem of the Dark Cult, but this was also infuriating in its own way.

Although he didn't want to attach meaning to every single thing, Orden himself was still a celebrity enjoying the highest popularity in the Empire.

But now he had abruptly lost his partner and had to attend the birthday celebration alone. What kind of humiliation was this!

"Well, even popular men have days like this, don't they? Cheer up, Lord Orden."

Leaving behind Herman's consolation that sounded like provocation, he received an unexpected contact while preparing to attend the grand mass with a gloomy face. It was a summons from the saintess called the Goddess's small blessing.

Arriving at St. Bastian's Church in a daze, Saintess Sisle greeted him together with Prince Logan.

"Greetings, Your Highness, Your Holiness."

Orden politely bowed and then glanced at Prince Logan standing slightly behind.

The genius holy knight evaluated as the most promising swordsman in Delcross along with himself.

His Aura activation, which could be clearly sensed, was similar to or slightly lower than Orden's. Considering that he was several years younger, it was undoubtedly a phenomenal achievement.

But for some reason... Whenever he saw him, he sometimes felt a vague fear that there might be more to him than that.

I thought it was a clear and small lake, but upon entering, it felt like an unfathomable ocean where I couldn't find my footing.

"The princes of the imperial family all have some discomforting aspects about them."

Orden thought that way as he recalled Prince Morres, who always curled his lips unpleasantly whenever he saw him.

However, if he knew what thoughts Logan had in his mind right now, he would have been astonished.

"He's a rare young man these days. His innate qualities as a swordsman can only be described as heaven-sent."

Logan was looking at Orden with quite a satisfying gaze.

'On top of that, he's a serious fellow who never utters any nonsense. He's a splendid young man who seems to have painted the virtue of practicing what he preaches!'

If Seongjin had known, he would have probably been annoyed and said, "That guy is just simply ignorant, you old geezer!"

"Young master Siegmund."

A voice as transparent as a crystal was heard above Orden's head as he bowed.

"I'm sorry for suddenly calling you here like this. If it's alright with you, Young Master, may I ask you for a favor?"

At those words, Orden raised his head and looked at the small, snow-white princess in front of him.

Unlike Amelia, who had a wide range of expressions, this girl had few expressions, like a delicate doll, but...

'Those eyes...'

Unknowingly, a layer of his heart's guard crumbled when he looked into those clear, gray eyes that resembled Amelia's.

He knelt on one knee to meet the little princess's eyes and answered,

"Yes, Your Holiness. Please give me your command."

At his uncharacteristically soft voice, Herman, who was standing next to him, looked at him in surprise.

"As you know, Young Master, today will be my first birthday celebration. So I need the help of someone as excellent as you."

Originally, the Orthodox Church planned to introduce Sisle at this birthday celebration where the continent's major figures would gather. However, unexpectedly, a new saintess appeared recently, so they decided to announce the two saintess simultaneously.

The problem was that Seo Yi-seo hadn't properly learned court

etiquette, let alone dancing.

What a disgrace it would be if she made a big mistake at an event where the empire's prestige was at stake. On top of that, there was even a bomb named Cardmos mixed in there!

-I will escort her. I'll keep a close eye on her without taking my eyes off her for a moment, as we don't know when or what kind of unexpected situation Cardmos might create.

As the strongest swordsman in the entire East and the youngest Sword Master, Logan felt a sense of responsibility to take control of this troublesome variable first.

-Then what about Sisle?

When Seongjin asked, Amelia pondered for a moment before answering.

-Come to think of it, I did hear some news about Lady Scarcepino being involved in some kind of accident...

That's how Orden was abruptly summoned to the church.

"Young Master Siegmund. Would you please be my partner at the birthday celebration?"

As a small, white hand reached out, Orden held it up and answered with sincerity.

"It would be the honor of my life to be Your Holiness's escort."

Of course, it was his utmost sincerity.

If he served the saint with all his heart and soul, perhaps Amelia, who loved her siblings, would smile at him once more.

It was a bonus that Logan, who was standing behind him, nodded his head in satisfaction at that sincere answer.

T/N:

1. Isabella and Riccardo's eldest brother and sibling. First mentioned in Chp.114[↔]

The day of the birthday banquet had dawned.

Seongjin, who had lacked sleep from wandering around outside the palace the night before, ended up sleeping in completely that day.

Skipping morning training and dozing off with food in his mouth during breakfast, Edith was shocked to see Seongjin's state like that.

"Oh my goodness, Your Highness! What's with your face!"

"Huh? Why?"

"It's completely withered and swollen! On this important day when you should be showing your best appearance, what kind of unexpected disaster is this? Huh?"

Hmm, is it so exaggerated that she's making a fuss? Although he felt a bit heavy in his body.

However, it seemed different in the eyes of the maids.

Because the other maids who came running one after another at Edith's call showed a truly variety of reactions upon seeing Seongjin's face.

As a result, Seongjin had to quietly stay in his room with his face covered in strange things like packs and whatnot right after finishing breakfast.

"Yawn."

Seongjin didn't rush to the training grounds like usual. His body felt unusually tired and sluggish.

And didn't he have the skill of meditating while lying down that he

had recently mastered?

While receiving the maids' care and alternating between dozing off and meditating, Edith grumbled as she wiped Seongjin's face with cold water.

"Your Highness, why did you choose to do an all-night meditation on the night before the birthday banquet of all days?"

"Huh?"

All-night meditation?

"Since you weren't sleep-talking unlike usual, I went to find the guard knight, and he said he received a warning from Commander Bruno. He said that Your Highness was in the middle of an important meditation and not to disturb you until morning."

"The commander?"

When Seongjin turned to the side, Commander Bruno was stroking his mustache, looking at Seongjin with a meaningful gaze.

'...He knows.'

Well, he didn't expect to be able to sneak out of the palace secretly as a former Decalon Knight.

He probably got a general idea of the situation through Arenja and prevented it from becoming a big commotion like before.

At the very least, it was a great relief that Sir Masain wasn't present at the moment. He would have definitely noticed something and tried to question Seongjin.

Sir Masain had returned to his residence in the capital the previous evening for a change. He also had many things to prepare for the birthday banquet as a member of the imperial family.

'But sleep-talking, what could it be...?'

Edith had a history of being the first to notice Seongjin's absence

before.

So when he asked for details, she said that Seongjin would sleep-talk for a few minutes every day after midnight at the same time.

She said it started after he had suffered from a fever, so it was probably a habit that Morres didn't have.

Seongjin was very perplexed because he had never heard of having such a sleeping habit before. So when he asked her what kind of sleep-talking he did.

-Well, I'm not sure? It sounded like mumbling, so I couldn't understand it well. Sometimes it seemed like it wasn't the Delcross language.

Edith spoke with a nonchalant face, but Seongjin felt a bit eerie upon hearing that answer.

This child said it without much thought, but what if another servant had heard it?

The prince they serve sleep-talks in an unknown dialect in the middle of the night, wouldn't they suspect that he was possessed by a demon or something?

When he asked the Demon King, his answer was even more absurd.

-I don't know what it means either? Maybe it wasn't proper words, but just baby talk. Don't give it much thought.

Baby talk, are you joking right now?

Seongjin was dumbfounded, but the Demon King refused to speak any further with a somewhat dubious look after that.

'It's bothering me...'

However, there was no time to ponder more about the sleep-talking. Amelia and Logan had come to visit Pearl Palace early in the morning.

Seeing Seongjin with his face covered in something, they found it amusing for some reason and sat down on either side of him.

"You of all people stayed up the night before the birthday banquet. Don't you know how important today is?"

"Yeah, Morres. I guess you'll have to spend the whole morning just taking care of your face."

"No, why is everyone making such a fuss? It's not like the banquet is only today..."

As Seongjin grumbled like that, the two looked at each other and nodded.

"It seems he really doesn't know how things work."

"Right. He said he doesn't have any previous memories at all."

Then Amelia calmly explained to Seongjin.

"Listen well, Morres. There's a reason why the maids are acting like this. It's no exaggeration to say that today's banquet is the most important one of the year."

The birthday banquet is held over a total of three days around the Holy Emperor's birthday.

At first glance, it may seem like the second day is the main event, but upon closer look, the situation is a bit different.

If the main banquet is a ceremony-focused event led by the Holy Emperor, and the banquet on the last day has a slightly lighter atmosphere, like an after-party.

The banquet on the first day is the event where people attend with the most excitement, giving off the feeling of a "grand party."

In any case, since it's an event attended by royalty and famous figures from each country, it's an important day to make a first impression on them.

"Moreover, since Father won't be present, the first day will have a rather free atmosphere. Father probably won't attend the banquet except for the ceremony on the second day. That's how it has been so far."

In other words, it's like a company dinner without the boss.

"But why does Father do that?"

Isn't it his own birthday? Why are the guests enjoying the birthday party among themselves?

As Seongjin wondered, Amelia smiled and said.

"Perhaps he's being considerate of the attendees. Who could comfortably enjoy the banquet under the watchful gaze of the Proxy of the Gods, who is closest to God?"

"Hmm..."

Well, Seongjin could bet his entire fortune that the man wasn't showing up because he found it bothersome.

Although, it was all the fortune he received from his father anyway.

"By the way, what brings you here? Aren't you all busy preparing for the birthday banquet?"

"We have something to discuss together. I have to attend the grand mass soon, so I probably won't have time except for now."

The matter Logan brought up after opening his mouth was as follows.

The state church had decided to have Seo Yi-seo attend the birthday banquet along with Sisle.

"I'm worried about letting her and Cardmos loose in the banquet hall as they are."

Logan seemed to have found it quite threatening when Cardmos almost collapsed the main palace the other day.

"I'll escort her. I'll keep a close eye on her without letting her out of my sight for a moment. We don't know when or what kind of unexpected situation that Cardmos might create."

Seo Yi-seo and Cardmos. Both of them were individuals to be wary of in different ways. Of course, Seongjin could understand Logan's concern.

However...

"Then what about Sisle?"

"Come to think of it, I did hear that something happened to Lady Scarcepino..."

"...?"

"So I was thinking, why don't we ask Young Master Siegmund?"

Seongjin was appalled by Amelia's answer.

"What?"

No way, I absolutely cannot agree to that!

Entrusting the little one to such a delinquent-like guy!

As Seongjin protested vehemently, almost tearing off the packs on his face, Amelia added softly.

"Sisle needs a partner of a certain status. As of now, Young Master Siegmund is probably the only viable option. Even though he's a regional nobleman, the prestige of Margrave Siegmund is by no means inferior to the central high nobles."

Even Logan had a positive reaction.

"He's quite a promising friend. I've only seen him a few times at the previous birthday banquets, but he seemed like a rather reticent yet sincere friend, unlike the typical youth these days."

How can this be! Am I really the only one who knows his true

nature?

How can everyone have such poor eyes for people? Especially Logan, isn't he in his second life now?

[Seeing how they fawn over a guy like you, they're definitely too naive.]

'Shut up!'

While having a fierce internal quarrel with the Demon King, Logan carefully picked up the fallen packs and stuck them back on Seongjin's face.

"Hey, dude! Are you putting the stuff that fell on the floor back on someone's face?"

"...Is that not allowed?"

Seeing that innocent face staring blankly at Seongjin, not understanding the situation, his head started to ache.

Ah, my blood pressure is rising.

Meanwhile, Amelia continued with a very worried expression.

"By the way, I'm really worried about Lady Scarcepino. I hope nothing serious has happened to her..."

"..."

"Morres, you should also send a letter inquiring about the well-being of the Scarcepino family as soon as possible. And check on her as soon as the birthday banquet is over. Although it's unofficial, she has been your fiancée for a long time."

Well, Seongjin was quite skeptical about Isabella's condition.

Although she managed to save her life thanks to the Holy Emperor, even if she regains consciousness, her state is still unknown.

If it's as Seongjin guessed, the Holy Emperor probably completely

severed her from Sigurd Sigurdsson by striking her head.

However...

-Do you intend to harm this innocent and pitiful person who has almost lost her self-awareness?

If what he said was true, Isabella's personality could be considered to have already disappeared.

If she were to experience a mental disturbance like Ricardo, it would definitely be as severe, if not worse than him.

Still, that might be better. If she still believes herself to be the Storyteller of Dimensions...

'She'll probably think and act thoroughly as Sigurd Sigurdson, won't she?'

Then how should Seongjin perceive and respond to her?

Time passed quickly while being led by the maids to make various preparations.

Finally, when evening came, the maids burst into praise one after another upon seeing Seongjin dressed impeccably in formal attire.

"Your appearance is incomparably dashing!"

"The dark formal wear really makes Your Highness's golden hair stand out, doesn't it?"

"Oh my, even the cuffs and small ornaments match Your Highness's eye color so well!"

"Ah, I think I'll fall in love at first sight!"

...Do they receive training as a group?

Why are their compliments all exactly the same?

Meanwhile, Edith looked at the red jewelry in one corner of the jewelry box with lingering eyes.

"Your Highness, why aren't you wearing such precious gifts that arrived? I heard from the maids of other palaces that red gold is a big trend for this birthday banquet. Everyone is desperate to get their hands on at least one red gold accessory."

Those accessories were expensive gifts sent from the Rabizuri Marquis family not long ago.

I heard that Amelia also received a set of high-end jewelry. It was meant as an apology for the disturbance caused by the guard knights at a local restaurant the other day.

Amelia had carefully placed those gifts in her room and never touched them at all.

Of course, part of the reason was that she was dumbfounded to suddenly receive expensive gifts from a foreign nobleman she had never met before, not knowing the full story behind the incident.

However, there was a more fundamental reason why she didn't wear red gold accessories.

-It's beautifully crafted, but strangely, I find that red luster quite unpleasant, Morres.

That's what Amelia had said.

Indeed, Seongjin also didn't particularly like the metal that shone with a reddish color as if stained with blood.

So the two of them had agreed in advance to wear other accessories while coordinating their dress code, instead of red gold.

"But Grand Duke Asein will be disappointed if he finds out. Red gold is a specialty product of the Asein Duchy."

Grand Duke Asein is Morres's maternal grandfather.

Hearing Edith's words, Seongjin tilted his head.

"By any chance, are there any red gold accessories sent directly from Asein, not Rabizuri?"

"What? No. There hasn't been anything like that..."

"Then it's fine. Don't worry about it."

Since Grand Duke Asein's power was so great, Seongjin had also heard various rumors about him. Like he was a miser who could make merchants who had been in business for decades cry.

But still, even so, how come he hasn't inquired about his grandson's well-being even once after he nearly died?

I'm not expecting him to send herbal tonics, but to this extent, it's safe to say there's almost no affection as family, right?

On top of that, surely he doesn't expect his grandson to directly purchase red gold and even advertise it for him, does he?

[Wow...]

'Wow...'

Arriving in front of Silver Rose Palace, Seongjin and the Demon King simultaneously let out an exclamation in their minds.

Although he already thought of her as a wingless angel walking on earth, Amelia, who had dressed up with determination, truly looked like the goddess of roses who had descended from the heavens.

Wrapped in a dress like intense red petals, Amelia smiled shyly and extended her hand to Seongjin.

"Isn't it a bit awkward?"

"...No, sister. It suits you very well. Truly."

How can a person be so extremely glamorous yet innocent at the same time? She was truly a remarkable beauty.

The problem was that Amelia's appearance was so overwhelming that even that bastard Orden, who had arrived to escort Sisle, couldn't

take his eyes off her for a while, completely dazed.

'You bastard, won't you look away? You're dead!'

As Seongjin glared fiercely, the guy finally hurriedly shifted his gaze to the little saint he was supposed to escort.

What kind of rudeness is this, getting enchanted by someone else in front of your partner?

Fortunately, the little saintess, who had been deeply immersed in something, didn't seem to notice that fact at all.

"...it is. Today is truly... night..."

The saintess was muttering something incessantly, mumbling with her small lips.

When Orden, who had become curious, carefully listened with his hearing enhanced by aura, the saintess was repeatedly saying the following words.

"...It's night. Today is truly a beautiful night. Today is truly beautiful..."

"...?"

Tilting his head for a moment, Orden slowly extended his hand towards the saintess.

At that time, he had no idea that it was a precursor to the bomb that would suddenly be dropped on the banquet hall that day.

As the sun set and a red glow hung in the evening sky, the main palace was wrapped in a soft golden light, shining alone like the moon that had just settled on the horizon.

The splendid exterior, with every possible light employed, was both magnificent and supremely sacred. It was indeed a grandeur befitting the reputation of a thousand-year empire.

Considering the noble status of the attendees, the carriages entering the palace were not strictly regulated. As a result, the palace entrance and gardens were already bustling with high-end carriages draped in the insignia of various countries and crowds of people.

Amidst them, the carriage carrying Seongjin's party slowly made its way through.

"...!"

The people who had been gathered in small groups, engaged in conversation, suddenly fell silent and stared at the carriage.

From within the carriage, adorned with the Delcross imperial crest, emerged a pair of siblings with dazzling appearances that could be described as sparkling.

"Oh my, that person is the rose of the imperial palace..."

"Look at that daring red dress. She's certainly not ordinary. The emperor dotes on that princess so much, doesn't he?"

"But who is that person with her?"

"Isn't that Prince Morres?"

"What? That Prince Morres? Really?"

Starting with someone's murmur, a small ripple spread out in concentric circles, slowly emanating from them.

The head designer's words were true. Among the people mostly wearing light-colored banquet attire, Seongjin and Amelia stood out as a particularly eye-catching pair.

'How is it? Doesn't it catch the eye? This is the angel who has descended upon Delcross!'

Seongjin smiled with satisfaction, relishing the gazes of the people. Then, Amelia, who had gently linked arms with him, also whispered with a delighted smile.

"Hehe, look around, Morres. Today, no one can take their eyes off you."

The Demon King, unable to bear it any longer, grumbled in disgust.

[Wow, when two attention-seekers meet, it creates such a minus synergy? It's completely spine-chilling!]

Shut up, you Demon King!

You don't even have a body, so what's with the goosebumps!

The pair that alighted from the carriage following them also became a topic of conversation.

It was the combination of the noble holy maiden, called the small blessing bestowed by the gods, and the young swordsman who had recently gained fame for easily dominating the martial arts tournament across the continent.

"Oh my! Oh my! That person is the one!"

Soon after, various cringe-worthy nicknames like Delcross's Blue Wolf and the Young Wolf of the North poured out from all directions.

Especially the reactions of the noble ladies were so exaggerated that it made one understand how Orden had acted like he had a celebrity disease when they first met.

Tsk, all those for Orden.

While Orden moved with composure, as if it were nothing new, Sisle had been muttering something with a tense face for a while. Her face, already as white as porcelain, had turned pale.

Seongjin, curious, focused his aura and listened carefully.

"...night. Beautiful..."

...Huh?

'Hey, little one. Are you still thinking about that?'

Surely she didn't take those words seriously?

Seongjin was gripped by an ominous premonition and silently broke out in a cold sweat.

As they ascended the stairs and approached the lobby, Logan, who had been waiting for Seongjin's party, greeted them. He was with Seo Yi-seo, dressed in white priestly robes.

I heard that Empress Tatiana had personally ordered formal attire for Logan, but he had stubbornly worn the impeccable uniform of the Holy Knights.

In his posture, standing tall with his back straight, one could sense not only composure but also a kind of stubbornness.

And.

'Cardmos mode from the start.'

Seo Yi-seo's eyes were currently emitting a bright golden light. I had expected him to show up to target the banquet food, but I didn't think he would be in Cardmos mode from the beginning.

"You arrived on time."

Although Logan's face appeared as calm as usual, Seongjin, who had frequently met him recently, could immediately tell. That guy's face

was actually rotting away.

'He hates Cardmos to an unusual extent...'

Logan, who had shown strong distrust towards Seo Yi-seo from the beginning, turned pale the moment he learned the identity of Cardmos within him.

To put it nicely, he disliked him, but it was almost to the point of abhorrence. It was surprising that he was silently allowing Cardmos to link arms with him now.

Considering Logan's usual personality of letting things slide with a good face unless it was a serious matter, it was truly strange.

"Brother Masain is already inside. Let's go in for now."

Logan said those words and turned around.

[Hahah! A banquet, a banquet!]

Cardmos repeated absurdly and clung tightly to Logan's arm.

And at that moment.

Boom.

Along with the unfinished ominous energy, the temperature around Logan noticeably dropped by a level.

Wow. How menacing.

As everyone observed Logan's face, only Cardmos himself laughed obliviously.

[The food of a long-awaited banquet! Hahahah!]

The interior of the banquet hall they arrived at was brightly lit, as if it were broad daylight.

The fully illuminated lights collided with the splendid chandeliers, creating a dazzling feast of light that seemed to pour down.

Against the background of the quiet melody played by the orchestra, the sound of conversation and occasional joyful laughter could be heard from here and there.

"Greetings to Your Highnesses."

"Greetings to the Princess and Prince."

Wherever Seongjin's party passed, nobles who had stopped in their tracks lightly bowed their heads and paid their respects.

He had heard that in some royal families like Brittany or Rohan, one couldn't even casually greet a superior before being spoken to, but compared to that, Delcross had a relatively free atmosphere with less strict etiquette.

As Seongjin carefully observed his surroundings, he noticed that distinguished guests invited from all over the continent were mingling in groups, wearing banquet attire that strongly reflected the colors of their respective regions.

There were also places where clergy members had gathered, and he caught a glimpse of Sir Masain, surrounded by high-ranking priests including Cardinal Benitus, sweating profusely.

And there was also a face he hadn't seen in quite a while.

"Morres!"

"Morres!"

It was the twins he hadn't met in a long time. Herna and Gades ran over with delighted expressions and simultaneously embraced Seongjin from both sides.

'This is unexpected. Seeing them like this, they do look their age.'

Normally, the twins gave off a completely childlike impression, making it hard to believe they were older than Sisle.

But dressed up neatly like this, they gave off a gentlemanly and ladylike aura, didn't they?

"Hello, Red!"

"Have you been well, Red?"

Of course, their behavior and words were still the same as always.

[What did you say? Who are you calling Red! Kraaak! You little...!]

Ignoring the Demon King who was prancing around in his mind, Seongjin turned his attention to the twins.

Apart from their formal attire, there was something particularly eye-catching: the red and gold accessories the children wore here and there.

Noticing Seongjin's gaze, the twins spoke up.

"We begged Father Emperor to buy them for us. It's the trend these days!"

"His Majesty Father was quite troubled, so we begged even more!"

"....."

Do you find it that amusing to trouble that man, you little devils!

"We couldn't help it either. Somehow, this red color feels nostalgic."

"You could say it was irresistible. This color is stimulating and, at the same time, evokes a sense of nostalgia."

"Oh, is that so."

As Seongjin tilted his head in confusion, he asked.

"...But why are you two speaking in reverse today?"

Although the twins had no distinguishing features in terms of their faces and physiques, Seongjin had been gradually grasping the characteristics of the two while interacting with them.

First, the one who impatiently opens their mouth first is Herna. She calls the emperor "Emperor Daddy."

On the other hand, the one who discreetly observes and supports Herna's words is Gades. He calls the emperor "His Majesty Father."

At that, the twins' eyes widened.

"Wow! Morres is sharp in strange places, isn't he?"

"Ooh! As expected, we can't let our guard down around Morres, right?"

Really? Did you two actually switch clothes and come here?

At the birthday banquet, which is said to be the most important event of the year?

"If we miss this day, when else would we play such a prank?"

"It's a precious opportunity that comes only once a year."

Then, tapping the violet sash, Herna said.

"Only Morres should know about this, okay?"

Likewise, fluttering the hem of her violet dress, Gades said.

"Morres can keep a secret. We trust you!"

And the two burst into laughter in unison.

"Hehehe!"

"....."

Seongjin was at a loss for words.

As he always thought, with his extremely normal way of thinking, he could never keep up with these fourth-dimensional children.

[...Who's normal?]

'Shut up!'

The twins, who had been giggling for a while, soon joined hands and

ran towards Masain.

And then.

"Her Majesty the Empress is entering! Everyone, pay your respects!"

Soon, with the empress's entrance, the orchestra's music stopped, and the murmuring of the people subsided. Everyone ceased their chatter and simultaneously looked at the head table placed at the front of the banquet hall.

Click, click.

The empress, walking towards the platform with graceful steps, looked exceptionally beautiful.

It was a rather elaborate adornment, but the peculiar thing was that there was not a single red-gold accessory on her.

Perhaps it hurt her pride to adorn herself with the specialty products of the enemy's homeland, or maybe she wanted to project a humble image; it was impossible to know.

Melody, the queen following behind her, was also dressed relatively plainly.

On the other hand, Queen Lizabeth's side looked like a living red-gold accessory display.

From the accessories decorating various parts of her dress to the small pins stuck in her hair, everything glowed red.

Seongjin suddenly wondered if the stingy Grand Duke Asein had contributed to obtaining all those accessories or if the queen had directly purchased them with her own budget.

Meanwhile, Seongjin's eyes met those of Queen Lizabeth.

"...?"

A strangely indifferent and cold expression.

Receiving that chilly gaze from her for the first time, Seongjin felt his fingertips grow cold before he even realized it.

'What's going on?'

At that moment, Empress Tatiana stepped forward from the head table and began to speak. It was the empress's opening remarks, signaling the start of the banquet.

"As always, I welcome all of you who have gathered to celebrate the day when the Proxy of the Gods personally descended upon this land."

Despite her relatively young age, her voice was full of dignity, lacking nothing as the mother of a vast empire leading the nation.

"A thousand years have passed since the first Holy Emperor, Lord Cardmos, valiantly rose to save this continent from the demons. Delcross is gradually getting closer to fully realizing the kingdom of the gods on this land. It is evident that the strength of all of you who have spared no effort from all corners of the continent has also been significant in this."

The empress then elaborately mentioned the big and small issues that had become topics across the continent since the last birthday banquet.

She commends the successful maritime demonic beast subjugation in the maritime city alliance of Cyprus and expresses deep regret for the floods that occurred in southern Anatolia.

Although her words sounded like simple consolation or encouragement, they were laced with the utmost arrogance of coaxing the royalty of other countries as if they were her own subjects.

However, among those listening, not a single person frowned or showed any signs of discontent.

This was the status that the thousand-year holy nation held on the continent.

"At tomorrow's banquet, His Majesty the Holy Emperor will personally bless your futures. It will be a solemn occasion where you can come closest to the gods. The one before whom you must stand tomorrow is the Proxy of the God who sees through and embraces all your faults."

At the end of her rather lengthy speech, the empress finally concluded.

"So today, enjoy the banquet to your heart's content and fully indulge in worldly pleasures. Cast off all the desires of the world, so that tomorrow you can stand before the Proxy of God with the most devout body and mind."

Clap, clap, clap.

With the applause of the audience, the music that had stopped began to flow again.

"I will go and pay my respects to the empresses for a moment. What will you do?"

At Amelia's question, Seongjin briefly glanced in the direction of Queen Lizabeth. She was still ignoring Seongjin and was in the midst of exchanging greetings with other nobles.

"I'm fine. I'll wait here, so go ahead."

Seongjin then picked up a drink and headed to the corner of the banquet hall.

There were more than a couple of things that bothered him, not only Empress Lizabeth but also various parts of the banquet hall.

When he turned around, feeling piercing gazes from somewhere, he noticed several high-ranking priests eyeing his movements sharply.

-Be careful of the high-ranking priests. Especially Cardinal Benitus. The old men will probably notice quickly.

Sisle had once given such a warning to Seongjin.

Could it be that they had really noticed the existence of the Demon King and were acting like that?

Or...

"May I have a moment?"

As Seongjin was lost in thought, someone approached him and spoke.

It was a young man with a slick face whom he was seeing for the first time. Judging by his lavish attire, he seemed to be of very high status.

'...Who is he?'

Since he didn't introduce himself, Seongjin wondered if Morres was acquainted with him.

But then, the man, who had been carefully observing Seongjin, suddenly lowered his head slightly and whispered softly to him.

"Bethel."

Seongjin blinked in confusion, not understanding the situation.

What's with this guy?

Leonard's immediate approach to the prince was a calculated move to a certain extent.

Prince Morres was known to be a mess of a person, so he expected it would be somewhat easy to get close to him. Moreover, the prince was currently Princess Amelia's partner, so naturally, a connection with the princess would be established while conversing with him.

However, mentioning the Dark Cult right away was an impulsive decision.

That was because when he approached, the prince happened to be glaring at the direction of the state church priests with a sullen expression.

'He really does have a negative sentiment towards the state church!'

That was what Romaine had told him before coming here.

-He is someone who effectively conceals his identity and will one day bare his sharpest fangs towards the empire.

His prediction was correct.

Having made that conclusion, Leonard unknowingly let his guard down. It was probably a reaction to the tension he had been feeling since entering the palace.

"Bethel."

Of course, after initiating the greeting, he inwardly went "oops."

"....."

But then, Prince Morres, who heard his greeting, was staring at him

blankly without showing much surprise!

It was evident that he had anticipated a Dark Cult associate approaching him at any time and had prepared in advance.

'He's supposed to be concealing his identity, but that might really be the case...'

On the other hand, what was going through Seongjin's mind was slightly different from Leonard's expectations.

'What's with this guy? And what's Bethel...?'

After the Holy Emperor had completely driven out the Dark Cult from Delcross, the state church had put in all efforts to erase any traces of heresy left in the scriptures or records.

As a result, unless one was elderly or had considerable knowledge of theology, not many people properly knew about the watchwords of this underground cult.

Naturally, it was impossible for Seongjin, who had no connection to theology, to know about it.

Seongjin was momentarily puzzled, but looking at the guy's face, he seemed to think that Seongjin must have understood his greeting.

"Hmm..."

What could it be? Seeing that confident face, why do I feel the urge to mess with him?

Suddenly, I want to pretend to know something.

[He said "Bethel." It might be some kind of secret code or something.]

As if sensing Seongjin's intention as he slightly raised the corner of his mouth, the Demon King reminded him again.

"Bethel."

Seongjin replied to him in the same way, managing his expression. It

seemed like a rarely used word, so hopefully the response wouldn't be different like a password or something.

And that was the correct answer. A noticeable look of relief flashed across the man's face.

"But who are you?"

If he was invited to the birthday banquet, he must be a high-ranking figure. He might be quite famous. The possibility of him being acquainted with Morres couldn't be ruled out either.

Well, he was already notorious for being a mess, wasn't he? Even if he committed a slight rudeness, wouldn't it be overlooked as expected of him?

Then, as if he had completely let his guard down, the guy laughed heartily while holding his forehead.

"Ah, my goodness. Look at me! I was so distracted by something else that I failed to pay my respects!"

Fortunately, it seemed they weren't acquainted with each other.

The guy smoothly swept his hair back with a stylish gesture and extended his hand towards Seongjin.

"I'm Leonard from Rohan. You probably already know, though."

"....."

Of course, Seongjin was familiar with the names of the royal families of major countries. He had even roughly learned from an etiquette teacher in preparation for the birthday banquet.

However...

"We've seen each other at the birthday banquet every year, but this might be the first time we're exchanging greetings like this. You've changed so much compared to last year's birthday banquet that I almost didn't recognize you for a moment."

What the heck? What's with this swallow-like guy?

The more he spoke, the more annoying he seemed to become.

"I'm Morres. You probably already know, though."

Seongjin shook hands with him and continued.

"So, what's the matter? It's a bit sudden."

"It's nothing major. As you may have guessed, I have some connection with them, so I thought I would just relay some news. Are you aware of it? The forgotten old brothers are eagerly awaiting your command."

Seongjin twitched the corner of his mouth.

Hmm. The strange greeting aside, the guy's cautious attitude was also suspicious. Somehow, there was a strong scent of something shady.

'Last time, I pretended to know something and ended up ruining the Heresy Tribunal...'

But what should I do? Now I really want to pretend to know!

Seongjin exaggeratedly looked around and lowered his voice.

"As you can see, given the circumstances, I hope you understand my reluctance to speak."

He mentioned brothers. It was probably implying the existence of a force lurking in the shadows, though the scale was unknown.

Perhaps they were somehow involved with the Gray Plague.

"Although I am eager to meet the brothers, I am currently in a position where it is difficult for me to leave the palace alone. Given the timing."

"That's understandable. I get it."

As Leonard nodded, Seongjin spoke softly.

"So, what do you think? The fact that you're relaying their news to me means you must have a way to resolve this, right? Can I have some expectations?"

"....."

Leonard stared intently at Seongjin for a moment. Then, he cautiously made a suggestion.

"Then, how about meeting a friend of mine? I believe he would be of great help to you."

"Friend?"

"Yes. It is that friend who has a direct connection with your brothers. It may be difficult, but I will try to arrange a meeting with him."

"Oh! Really?"

"Of course, for security reasons, it will be a secret meeting held outside the palace..."

"The location doesn't matter! I would be really grateful if you could do that for me."

Then, Seongjin and Leonard looked at each other and smiled.

Perfect! This is too easy!

'Casually establishing a relationship with a suspicious organization like this, what a shallow guy!'

'Did you see that, Romaine? I've properly created a point of contact with the prince! Expect the same with the princess!'

Hahaha.

The two people, each with different thoughts, simultaneously burst into satisfied laughter.

Meanwhile, Amelia, who was returning after paying her respects to the empress and queens, stopped in her tracks, surprised by the

unexpected sight awaiting her.

'Leonard...!'

That mortal enemy, whom she couldn't forget even in her dreams, was smiling in front of her brother with an innocent face!

Amelia bit her lip firmly.

She was well aware that she would encounter Leonard at the birthday banquet. That's why she had been preparing herself all this time.

However, now that she was actually facing him, her preparation seemed futile as her hands and feet turned cold and her whole body trembled in an instant.

It was a fear deeply etched into her subconscious over a long period of time.

-Open your eyes wide and take a good look, Amelia. Your poor lady-in-waiting is enduring this pain in your stead.

Skinning Mirabel, slicing her flesh, and shoving each piece in front of her eyes.

-Hmm? Why aren't you crying anymore? Tell me. What more do I need to show you to make you cry?

Tilting his head with a genuinely curious look on his dissatisfied face.

-If you're so precious to them, what will you do? I have no choice but to send you to them. However, I will never let you go unharmed.

Without hesitation, stabbing a dagger into her chest right before Morres' eyes.

'What have I...'

Her body began to tremble like a leaf.

'What have I done...'

Right at that moment, Morres, noticing her presence, turned to look

at Amelia.

His bright gray eyes held only her reflection.

"Sister?"

'Morres!'

Slowly, her mind started to clear.

Didn't that child once tell her?

-Imagine him groveling before you with a nosebleed. I guarantee you won't have a moment to feel depressed.

He had guided her when she had lost all purpose in life.

-True revenge, sister, is not a process you endure just to see the results.

That carefree voice, without a fear in the world.

-Worried about his retaliation? What's there to worry about? Our father is the most powerful backing in the country.

Yes, you're right. Morres.

I sincerely, with all my heart, without a shred of doubt, for you and our entire family, fervently desire to take revenge on that man.

As she repeated those words, peace soon found its way into her heart, as if by magic.

Click, click.

Amelia slowly approached the two.

Towards the person she loved more than anyone and wished to protect no matter what.

And towards the person she hated more than anyone, desiring his destruction from the depths of her heart.

As she regained her composure, things she hadn't noticed before came into her view.

The true nature of that greasy-looking young man, frantically rolling his eyes, trying to strike up a conversation with her somehow.

'...Was he always like this?'

In the eyes of the queen who had long been immersed in the muddy social circles of Rohan, Leonard was nothing more than an immature novice.

'To think I was so easily deceived by someone like him...'

Anger surged within her.

Not at Leonard, but at herself for being so foolishly stupid.

"Excuse me..."

But just as Leonard was about to open his mouth to speak to her.

Morres, who had been looking back and forth between Amelia and Leonard, turned his back on him and extended his hand towards Amelia.

"The music has changed, sister. You promised to dance the first song with me, right?"

The way he completely blocked Leonard with his body, wasn't his intention to preemptively cut off Leonard's clinginess so clear?

Amelia blinked her eyes.

This child, who seemed carefree about everything, occasionally displayed exceptional sharpness in strange places.

"Yes, let's do that. Morres."

Anyway, that man had no choice but to seek her out, so even if she blew him off once, it wouldn't greatly impact her future revenge.

After giving a radiant smile to Leonard, who was blankly staring at

her, Amelia firmly grasped her brother's hand and headed towards the center of the banquet hall.

Soon, the two most dazzling individuals in the banquet hall began to dance, attracting the attention of the entire gathering.

Mesmerized, people couldn't take their eyes off the beautiful siblings moving like flowing water to the elegant melody.

And there was another couple that became the talk of the town in a different sense.

The sight of the young saint clinging to the arm of the strapping young man, tapping her small feet to the steps, was also too adorable for words.

However, unlike her outwardly stoic appearance like a doll, the little saintess's small mind was filled with complex thoughts.

"Is something troubling you?"

Orden softly asked the saint, who had been unable to focus at all.

Sisle let out a deep sigh and answered in a small voice.

"Yes, actually, I received some advice from Brother Morres. He suggested that instead of spending time on simple volunteer work, I should try working with the knightly order like Brother Logan. I thought it was a reasonable opinion and decided to follow it, but..."

The knightly order? What kind of out-of-the-blue suggestion was that for the saintess?

Completely unaware of the circumstances, Orden was just dumbfounded, blinking his eyes.

Sisle whispered softly into Orden's ear.

"This is a secret, Young Master Siegmund. To be honest, I'm quite scared of swords."

"Swords... you say?"

"Yes, swords are ultimately weapons that cut people. If you get slashed in a vital spot by a sword imbued with aura, wouldn't any average person die on the spot?"

Perhaps the influence of the Delcross Chronicles she had seen in her dreams wasn't insignificant either. After all, it was the Holy Emperor's beloved sword, the Nutcracker, that had taken her life with a single stroke at the end of Volume 2.

"Of course, I don't mean to disparage the members of the Holy Knights who serve the gods. But the thought of holding a sword with my own hands somehow makes me so scared."

Orden couldn't understand her concern at all.

Why did she think she had to wield a sword herself while working with the knightly order?

She must have been mistaken about something. Despite appearing mature for her age, a child was still a child after all.

Orden pondered deeply and answered.

"If using a sword is the problem, there are ways to resolve it. Aren't there some Holy Knights who are trained to avoid killing enemies with a single stroke as much as possible?"

"What? Where is that?"

As Sisle's eyes widened, Orden couldn't help but chuckle at her innocence.

"It's none other than the Order of Saint Marcias."

The Order of Saint Marcias, the arm of the Heresy Tribunal.

Unlike other paladins who practiced standard imperial swordsmanship, they mainly used blunt weapons such as maces and flails. They called themselves the "Hammer of the Gods," but that "hammer" was more than just a figure of speech.

-Every sinner has a chance for redemption, so we shall give them an

opportunity to repent!

The inquisitors of the Order of Saint Marcias would claim as they swung their hammers.

Of course, in reality, their goal was to keep the demon worshippers alive as much as possible and drag them to the Heresy Tribunal for torture.

Well, there was no need for him to tell the young saintess that much.

"The Order of Saint Marcias..."

Sisle's eyes shone with a solemn determination, as if she had made a decision.

Orden tilted his head for a moment but soon dismissed it, thinking nothing of it. Little did he know what thoughts were going through the little saint's mind.

'Right. First, I'll hit them with a hammer without killing them, and then I can heal them later!'

Perhaps it would have been better to inquire further about the details at this point.

Who could have imagined that thanks to his words today, in the distant future, a terrifying holy warrior would be born, wielding a flail with ominous spikes, literally smashing people half to death!

[What do you think? Shall we have a dance as well? Isn't the first dance important?]

Nom nom. Cardmos, who had been preoccupied with eating, asked Logan, who was standing with his arms crossed.

"Have you lost your mind?"

Of course, he could only turn his head back towards the food while receiving Logan's contemptuous glare.

[Look at that. Since you're not dancing the first dance, those young ladies over there are just waiting and watching, aren't they? Poor things.]

He was right. Not only the guests from Delcross but also those invited from foreign countries, all the young ladies were uniformly casting admiring glances at him.

It's just that since he hadn't danced the first dance with a partner yet, they couldn't rashly ask him to dance and were only sneaking glances at him.

Perhaps Logan was the one receiving the most attention at today's banquet.

He was a strong candidate for the next Holy Emperor and had been gaining favor from people all across the continent through his diligent subjugation of sea demons.

Considering that many subjugated countries basically held a negative sentiment towards the imperials, it could be considered quite an exceptional case.

However...

"Do you think I would carelessly leave my seat, knowing what kind of trouble you might cause while I'm away dancing? Just ignore it."

The problem was that his own attitude was so stubbornly unyielding.

[...Anyway, he's so inflexible.]

Cardmos clicked his tongue.

[Hey, descendant.]

"Don't arbitrarily call me your descendant."

Logan's face was extremely stiff as he gave a rigid reply. Cardmos, who had been observing him carefully for a moment, asked.

[Why are you so angry with me? Despite my appearance, I am the one who drove out the demon tribes from the continent and laid the foundation for a thousand years of the holy empire. Shouldn't you show at least a bit of respect?]

No matter how reckless Cardmos was, he couldn't help but be a little concerned about the negative sentiment Logan had been consistently showing from the beginning. He was quite a likable fellow among his descendants, too.

However, Logan's blue eyes looking at him were coldly sunken.

"Respect, you say? Your expectations are high. What have you done that's so great?"

[What have I done so wrong?]

"If you're so curious, I'll answer you. Judging by how you arbitrarily impersonate the will of the gods and create a saint, it doesn't seem like you have much faith. Why did you establish such an absurd ideology of 'fully realizing the kingdom of the gods on this land' when founding the empire? Thanks to that, the entire continent has been suffering from the empire's internal interference for a thousand years. Do you even have something called a brain?"

[Hmm...]

He had nothing to say if he was asked like that.

He had merely engraved the mark in advance to make it easier to possess a body, but what could he do if people arbitrarily started to revere it as the reincarnation of a saint?

Well, it's true that he left it as it was because it was amusing when they misunderstood.

As for the founding ideology, he had entrusted it to the subordinates who had been the main force in founding the nation.

-The more grandiose the ideology, the better!

-Let's attribute everything to the will of God! So that everyone can easily accept it!

When he left it like that, before he knew it, he had become a demigod who had liberated the continent from the demon tribes according to the will of God.

[Founding a nation is not such an easy task, descendant.]

Cardmos reproached him solemnly.

[Do you know how much suffering humans endured under the power of the demon tribes that had prevailed throughout the continent for thousands of years, from the era of the Three Ancient Dragons to the 'Primordial Pact'? In order to persuade and drive out those forces and eventually establish a proper nation, various compromises were necessary.]

"Then let's say that was unavoidable due to the circumstances at the time."

Logan continued, frowning.

"Anyway, you ruled stably without any major problems for the next 300 years, didn't you? Couldn't you have corrected the mistakes and led the empire in a better direction during that time? If that was

difficult, you should have at least handed over the imperial throne to a proper successor! Why did you have to appoint such a bloodthirsty lunatic as your successor, plunging the entire continent into turmoil?"

The 2nd Holy Emperor, Remus, was also known by the epithet 'Blood Emperor.' Both internally and externally in Delcross, wherever he went, a bloody storm always raged.

The first thing he did as soon as he took the throne was to execute all his blood relatives who had the potential to threaten his position. After that, he mercilessly slaughtered all the subjects who opposed him.

After extensively reorganizing the empire in such a way, he turned his eyes outward and launched a conquest war to subjugate various countries on the continent. In the process, he did not hesitate in the slightest, no matter how much blood was shed.

[That, too, is a misunderstanding. Remus was not originally the type to go that far.]

Cardmos answered with an embarrassed look. As his emotions fluctuated, the golden scale pattern on his forehead shimmered and faded.

[That fellow was quite smart, so I chose him as my successor. It's just that after inheriting divinity from me, he changed like that as a side effect. What can I do about it?]

"Side effect?"

[Yes. When an ordinary human tries to bear divinity beyond their capacity, they will inevitably develop problems in their body and mind, dying early or going insane. At the very least, Remus had some potential as my descendant, so he stopped at that point.]

Logan, who had become dumbfounded, asked again.

"You passed divinity to him even though you knew that would happen?"

[He desperately wanted it! And it was an unavoidable choice to

maintain the empire. Once the country stabilized like that, I thought I could slowly take back the divinity later.]

Cardmos picked up a cookie and continued his excuse that wasn't really an excuse.

[Even after that, whenever a child with slightly stronger divinity was born, most of them completely lost their emotions. You're freely criticizing that fellow Remus now, but if you had inherited divinity as strong as his, your situation would have been very different from now.]

He explained that the divinity Cardmos had been slowly reclaiming over the past hundreds of years had already become much fainter, and even that was mostly concentrated in Nate, the current Holy Emperor.

[Rather, your father's case is extremely exceptional. The unique ability his bloodline possesses can be seen as specialized in observing and regulating oneself from various angles. So, he doesn't go insane easily and doesn't lose himself over trivial matters.]

Logan had also heard about the blood of the Cornsheim family flowing through him.

Sometimes, among the elderly high-ranking clergy, there were those who still looked at the imperial family with white eyes for that reason.

[On top of that, his immense sacred power. That sacred power constantly and completely heals his brain and body that might be damaged by divinity.]

Crunch.

Cardmos paused for a moment, chewing on a cookie after saying that much.

[But you know, what about the generations of children in whom that peculiar blood has become diluted?]

Then he turned to look at Logan.

His golden glowing irises narrowed tightly, and his pupils elongated vertically.

[What do you think will happen if a child with diluted blood from that lineage and perhaps not even a shred of sacred power inherits some of that divinity?]

"....."

[Perhaps they will become a monster with not a bit of emotion left, even more vicious and cruel than Remus, who is called the 'Blood Emperor.']

The gaze of Cardmos, who had said that, fell upon the siblings who were dancing in full swing.

[So, in order to endure it, they may have to become something other than human. Or they'll have to use a unique trick like your father. In any case, the process won't be so smooth.]

"...Then what are you, the founding emperor of the empire who claims to be something other than human?"

Logan, who had been keeping silent for a while, spoke softly.

"You haven't lost your emotions like them, nor have you been consumed by that divinity. Yet you did nothing even though you knew Remus would become like that. You even did nothing despite knowing full well that he would kill your infant son. And you still claim that you, unlike your descendants, are properly handling that divinity?"

[.....]

As Cardmos closed his mouth, Logan's face contorted. He spat out at Cardmos as if chewing on the words.

"The more I know about you, the worse you truly are."

During the flow of the beautiful melody, Leonard blankly stared at

the center of the banquet hall, lost in thought.

'...This might be tougher than expected.'

The noble lady from Rohan he had brought as his partner kept giving him hints, but his gaze couldn't leave the dancing siblings.

More precisely, from Princess Amelia, who was gracefully moving across the banquet hall.

Her brightly shining cheeks and fluttering pink hair were filled with the fresh vitality befitting her age.

On the other hand, the red dress hem that smoothly unfurled like petals in sync with her movements was fatally alluring, like a femme fatale from ancient mythology.

She was a woman in whom truly contrasting charms coexisted simultaneously.

"Oh my goodness..."

He couldn't get the image of that radiant face smiling at him for a moment before leaving with Prince Morres out of his mind.

Yet, her clear gray eyes directed at him were extremely cold.

Where had that pitiful girl who had just fallen in love, whom he had met at last year's birthday banquet, gone?

"I bragged so much to Romaine before coming here, and now I'm in big trouble."

The problem was creating a point of contact with the prince, but he hadn't even thought about the princess from the beginning. It was because he was confident he could make any woman fall for him in an instant.

But that princess now...

Feeling an inexplicable thirst bubbling up from within, Leonard unknowingly tugged at his collar tightly.

Clap, clap, clap, clap.

At some point, the dance had ended, and with loud applause, the music flowing through the banquet hall gently changed.

As he was gulping down drinks one after another with a dejected face, he heard the clicking sound of high heels approaching him.

Leonard, who had absentmindedly turned his head, widened his eyes. Princess Amelia, who had approached him at some point, smiled so radiantly that it made him feel lightheaded.

"Earlier, my brother was rude to you. You are Leonard of Rohan, right?"

"Yes, that's correct."

When he replied in a slightly hoarse voice, the princess gracefully curved her lips.

"I saw you at last year's birthday banquet as well, Your Highness. I'm finally making the request I've been wanting to make since then."

A slender hand slowly approached him.

"If it's alright with you, would you please dance the next song with me?"

Although she was asking shyly, what emanated from her gestures was already the noble dignity of a queen. There was no way he could dare refuse.

Feeling a strange sensation welling up inside, Leonard kissed her hand.

"...Of course. I'll gladly be your partner. Princess Amelia."

And he couldn't help but acknowledge once again what he had been trying to deny.

The fact that he, Leonard, had fallen in love with this beautiful woman at first sight.

When several dance songs had alternated and the banquet atmosphere was at its peak.

Suddenly, the orchestra's performance stopped as the empress, who had been sitting at the head table, nodded her head.

People who had been laughing and chatting stopped their conversations and turned their gazes towards the front in unison.

In front of the brightly illuminated platform stood Archbishop Wesker. As planned, it was to widely proclaim the existence of the empire's prized saint to the people of the continent.

"A few years ago, after Saintess Gracia returned to our side once more, she traveled around the country and served the people."

Her ringing voice echoed throughout the banquet hall even without the amplification of aura.

"And not long ago, another saint came to Delcross in accordance with the will of the gods, which is nothing short of the glory of the empire and the prosperity of the continent! Now, the two saintess will bestow blessings upon all of you who have attended the birthday banquet!"

It was something that had occasionally happened at the birthday banquets of previous Holy Emperors as well.

A simple event that ended with the saint uttering words of blessing and displaying sacred power.

However, the face of Sisle, who was stepping forward to the front of the platform, was unusually stiff with tension.

[Descendant. Has your mind still not changed?]

Cardmos asked while keeping his gaze forward. Sisle nodded and answered.

"No. I'll do it as planned."

[Can you handle the repercussions? This will be the first time since

the founding of the empire, so it's unknown how the state church will receive it.]

At that, Sisle bit her lip tightly.

As Cardmos said, this would probably be an unprecedented declaration that would cause a stir.

But didn't Brother Morres clearly present a solution to her? She had agonized and agonized, but it seemed there was no clearer method than that.

"Yes. I can handle it. So please help me."

The girl, who had made up her mind, raised her head and slowly took steps forward.

Sisle, receiving everyone's attention, looked around the crowd with a slightly nervous face and repeatedly recited the words Seongjin had taught her in her mind.

And then.

"It's truly a beautiful night."

Her voice, clear and transparent like crystal, unconsciously carried by the aura she had awakened, distinctly pierced people's ears as if amplified.

"I don't want to die like that."

Last night, Sisle shared the heartfelt sentiments she had hidden for a long time.

"Hmm, then how about we try this?"

Seongjin made a suggestion to her.

It was a method she had never considered before.

"Before the events of the Chronicle unfold, you take the initiative to renounce your position as Saintess. Pass the role to Seo Yi-seo and retire gracefully. After that, why not join the Holy Knights like Logan?"

"What? Retire? Holy Knights?"

What's that about?

Sisle blinked her eyes.

She had often pondered how to overcome the slander targeting her, but never once thought about voluntarily stepping down from her position as Saintess.

In the first place, wasn't the role of Saintess a lifelong appointment once chosen?

"Big brother. The reason I'm facing this crisis is because my position as Saintess is in jeopardy. But what if I just give it up first? Wouldn't that only hasten my death?"

"Huh? Why do you think that?"

Seongjin tilted his head.

"Let's break it down one by one. In the Delcross Chronicle, your downfall began because Seo Yi-seo emerged, passed the Saintess's Trials, and even received Cardmos's blessing, right? As a result, your standing as Saintess was threatened."

"Yes. That's right."

"So you said you tried to be recognized as a Saintess and undertake the blessing of the Holy Emperor's sarcophagus before Seo Yi-seo appeared. But then you discovered that receiving the blessing meant having your body taken over by Cardmos and your soul vanishing."

"Right. That's what happened."

Sisle replied gloomily.

"Then what are you hesitating for? If it's absolutely impossible to fully satisfy the conditions of being that kind of Saintess, isn't it best to renounce it first before your enemies can exploit it? If you weren't Saint from the beginning, would such tragedies have befallen you?"

"Hmm...?"

Upon consideration, it did seem that way.

As Sisle stood there looking dumbfounded, Seongjin gazed straight into her eyes and asked,

"Let's make one thing clear. Why did you become a Saintess?"

Seongjin, who had not an iota of piety, couldn't understand it at all.

A Saintess. It was neither a salaried position nor one with any real power. Revered as a holy being, it was an honorary role where one had to serve selflessly for life without holidays, wasn't it?

"Those old geezers in the Orthodox Church are using your young age as an excuse to make you work without sharing any power. Why are you so fixated on keeping that position?"

"That's because..."

Perhaps it began when the mark of the Saintess appeared on her body.

She enjoyed the high priests of the Orthodox Church making a big fuss, proclaiming her to be the reincarnation of Gracia. It wasn't bad to be revered as "Your Holiness" by the faithful either.

She may have also felt a little defiant when the Holy Emperor expressed his opposition.

"So did you find joy in living as the Saintess?"

"..."

Honestly, she had never really thought about it. She had always believed unquestioningly that it was the right path.

Though the service was quite demanding, it was fulfilling to see the delighted faces of the faithful. But after dreaming of the Chronicle, she clung to the position as if it were a guarantee of her life.

However, if she wasn't truly the reincarnation of Gracia...

If she wasn't destined from the start to be the Saintess, then what would happen?

"Even if I'm not the Saintess... it may not matter much..."

Hearing Sisle's feeble answer, Seongjin nodded.

"Next, we need to clarify who your enemies are. Who was the first to claim you were unqualified?"

"Enemies?"

"Yes. Of course, there may be others if we look, but let's focus on the big two for now. You should do your utmost to seize power and topple them before they attack you first."

"Seize power? Why is that necessary? Can't I just stop being Saintess?"

In response to Sisle's question, Seongjin clicked his tongue inwardly.

As he always thought, their father had truly raised the kids too sheltered.

"Listen well, Sisle. Do you think it really matters to those bastards that another Saintess has appeared, that you're unqualified, or any of that nonsense? The biggest reason you met such an end in the Chronicle is that you held no power. What's important is that you appeared weak to them because you lacked strength!"

"...!"

"Even if you let it slide this time, your enemies who seek to harm you still remain. Unless you gain power, similar incidents can repeat at any time."

It's not that you become a target because you're guilty of anything.

They simply bite because you don't bite back, and the enemies feel safe to tear into you.

Locking eyes with the shocked Sisle, Seongjin lightly tapped her shoulder.

"You know, Sisle, what I've realized lately is that it's always best to live wielding authority."

And wouldn't the greatest authority in the Holy Empire be none other than the Holy Knights?

"Authority..."

"Yes. You need to become the one judging, not the one being judged. Bury your enemies with power before they can suppress you!"

"Uh..."

"Just proving your innocence won't solve anything. It only gives your enemies time and pretext to prepare other attacks. If they slander you, fight back even with incitement and fabrication! If they try to crush you with force, go to them first and shatter their skulls! That is

the true balance of power and the proper way to fight!"

The Demon King lamented.

[That's not it at all, you devil!]

Sisle swallowed her dry saliva. The nightmarish situations that unfolded in the Chronicle flashed rapidly through her mind.

-It's divine punishment! The Saintess has fallen and lost her qualifications! She must have colluded with demons!

That's right. That's how it was.

The Sisle in the Chronicle did her utmost. To prove her innocence and qualifications.

But in the end, it was all for naught. The approach had been wrong from the start.

"Do you understand, Sisle? If someone slanders you as fallen, accuse them of heresy! If someone claims you colluded with demons, insist that they are demon worshippers!"

"But big brother, isn't that deceiving people?"

"Does that matter? They're all doing it, so why can't you?"

At that moment, a thunderous realization struck Sisle.

That's right. Why can't I?

They called me the reincarnation of Saintess Gracia, but it's not true. They accused me of colluding with demons, but I did no such thing!

The old geezers willfully misconstrued and slandered my every action, but none of their claims were true at all.

For high-ranking priests, not a single one of their actions reflected the will of God.

Then why should I have to prove my innocence to them?

Why must I follow divine doctrine to counter those who don't abide by God's will?

"Truth cannot be a weapon. Only incitement and fabrication will grant you power."

"Incitement and fabrication!"

"To fight against fanaticism, you must become an even greater fanatic."

"Fanatic!"

As Sisle clenched her fists, Seongjin slyly added,

"And if that's not enough, you can borrow some power from the venue."

"Venue?"

"Yes. Since it's the birthday banquet, let me give you an example. What if you announced your retirement at an occasion like this with foreign dignitaries present? For the sake of the Empire's face, your enemies would have a hard time making a big deal out of it, don't you think?"

"That's true."

Sisle nodded.

"But a retirement announcement... I'm not sure what I should say."

"Hmm? Just say something like 'It's a beautiful night!' and casually pass it on to Seo Yi-seo. Isn't that enough?"

That's how they all do it at award ceremonies and such. Once you start with 'It's a beautiful night!', the audience naturally responds well.

"So let's think of a way gradually after the birthday banquet ends. Hurry and ditch the Saint position, then go join the Holy Knights and learn swordsmanship."

"Swordsmanship?"

"Yeah. The Order of Saint Bastian belongs to the Orthodox Church, so that's a bit tricky. Why not join the Order of Saint Aurelion instead?"

Seongjin said it like that.

However, even at that point, Seongjin never imagined in his wildest dreams that Sisle would put that idea into practice the very next day.

Big brother Morres easily told her to pass on the Saintess position, but in truth, that was because he was unfamiliar with the ways of the Orthodox Church and the teachings of the scriptures.

Passing the role of Saintess to Miss Seo Yi-seo meant passing Gracia's soul to her as well.

And that was an extremely dangerous claim. Carelessly moving a soul to another body was considered an act of demon worship.

It was the reason why the Cornsheim family was nearly wiped out a few years ago.

Moreover, even if she denied being the reincarnation of Gracia's soul, she must not deny that the Orthodox Church appointed her as a saintess. To do so, the only way would be to claim that she herself was the soul of another noble saint.

'But at least one thing big brother said is true. Incitement and fabrication. In other words, anything can be twisted to fit as needed.'

Sisle decided to craft a new narrative.

For that, all the details had to be similar to the stories in the scriptures and explainable within the scriptures. So that night, Sisle scoured the scriptures, searching for usable passages.

Surprisingly, Cardmos found it very entertaining and helped out beside her.

-There was this anecdote too. See if you can find where it's mentioned.

And she was able to uncover a few anecdotes.

An instance where five-colored lights filled the surroundings when an ancient saint received a divine oracle.

A tale of Saint Bastian protecting the soul of a child persecuted and murdered by pagans, delivering it to the parents.

-Mom, Dad. Now that I've met you, I can rest assured and enter God's embrace.

The child's soul thus went to heaven – a heartwarming conclusion. But if someone else had manipulated another's soul, they would have been labeled a heretic for defying the natural order.

Having finished her preparations overnight, Sisle now stood here with firm resolve.

She suddenly spotted big brother Morres, his eyes wide open, staring at her.

'Hey! What are you trying to do? Huh?'

Those eyes held a hint of suspicion, as if to say, "Don't tell me...?"

Seeing them, Sisle couldn't help but chuckle.

'Don't worry, big brother. I can do this well. I'll fabricate it properly, just as you said.'

Then Sisle boldly declared to the audience,

"On a day like today, I am glad to reveal the truth before you all. In fact, I am not the reincarnation of Saint Gracia."

"Your Holiness Sisle! What in the world are you saying!?"

Archbishop Wesker jumped up from his seat, his face ashen, but soon fell silent at the bright light emanating from the girl.

Immense divine power pulsed from the girl's body. And at some point, five-colored lights began to settle in various parts of the banquet hall. It was the handiwork of Cardmos, who found it amusing and started playing along.

"Until now, I have merely been safeguarding Saintess Gracia's soul from corrupt entities."

Sisle's voice carried a sacred resonance.

Though it was the unconscious result of her willpower infusing divinity, most people didn't realize this and listened to her voice in a daze.

"Fortunately, I have now found the true owner of the soul, so my mission is complete. Therefore, I will now return Gracia's soul to the Saintess!"

Safeguarding a soul? And returning it?

They were indeed statements perfect for sparking a heresy controversy, but the majority failed to recognize that fact. The five-colored, captivating light enveloping the girl appeared too sublime.

And the moment Sisle grasped Seo Yi-seo's hand...

The audience couldn't believe their eyes. Was that not the distinct mark of Gracia appearing on Saint Seo Yi-seo's hand? Of course, this too was Cardmos's mischief.

The shocking declarations didn't end there.

"I, Sisle, am actually the reincarnation of Saint Marcias, inheriting his will!"

"...!?"

"Now that the time has come to reveal this, God Himself has commanded me to lead the Heresy Tribunal and fight heresy! To that end, I intend to join the Holy Knights!"

The emblem that subsequently appeared on Sisle's hand was, without

a doubt, the emblem of the Order of Saint Marcias!

Not only the high priests but everyone in the banquet hall couldn't hide their astonishment. Cardinal Benitus's eyes seemed ready to bulge out of their sockets.

Carefully observing their reactions, Sisle declared in a calm voice,

"In one hand, the scriptures! In the other, a mace! Thus, I will continue to fight heresy for God's kingdom!"

Then Sisle smiled. A smile that was flawlessly transparent yet somehow eerie.

Now, with the power to lead the Inquisitors in this hand... I will fight you all to the very end as well.

Cardinal Benitus. Cardinal Cesare.

That night.

Late in the evening, Nate, who had just left the prayer room, heard astonishing news.

"Sisle, Saint Mar..."

...What?

For a moment, his stagger wasn't solely due to fatigue.

Sisle had stepped down from the position of Saintess. That in itself was good news.

Nate's reason for involving Seo Yi-seo was to control Cardmos, but more importantly, to lighten the heavy responsibilities placed on the child.

He had wished for his daughter to live a freer life for herself.

"...But why the sudden decision to join the Holy Knights?"

After blankly staring into the air for a while, Nate slowly held his forehead.

Sisle's declaration sent shockwaves through the Empire.

So much so that it overshadowed the main birthday banquet.

The elders of the Orthodox Church debated through the night, and an emergency council was even convened at dawn.

"What's all the fuss about? Can't they just relax a bit after the birthday banquet?"

Seongjin asked Logan, who had rushed to the Pearl Palace from the morning. Unlike the drowsy Seongjin, the guy was already impeccably dressed in his uniform for the ceremonial event.

"Well, since you have no interest in theology, you probably don't realize how big of a deal this situation is."

Logan began with a serious expression.

"Originally, the concept of reincarnation isn't clearly presented in the scriptures. I mentioned it to you before, right?"

On the night Logan revealed his secret, he had explained it to Seongjin like this.

He had never heard of anyone else being reincarnated and didn't know why it happened only to him.

"Come to think of it, you did. Why didn't you look into the Saintess back then? It could have been a clue to your condition."

When Seongjin asked with a puzzled look, a hint of exasperation flashed across Logan's face.

"Because there was a lot of controversy over whether Gracia truly

reincarnated. Don't you think investigating the Saintess would have been the first thing I did?"

For the past few centuries, women had been steadily appointed as Saintess by the Orthodox Church.

However, apart from the stigmata appearing on their bodies, there was no other way to prove that they were really the reincarnation of Saintess Gracia. None of them retained any memories of Gracia's life.

The same was true for Sisle. That's why Logan personally had doubts about the Saintess's reincarnation.

In fact, they now knew that there was no such thing as Gracia's reincarnation. It was all just Cardmoss's mischief.

"When a woman bearing Gracia's mark was first recognized as Saintess, the Empire's political situation was quite complex."

The first instance of a Saintess being acknowledged as reincarnated was during the reign of the 4th Holy Emperor, Constantine.

He was a rather moderate monarch who implemented conciliatory policies toward the various nations subjugated by Remus, the Bloody Emperor.

One day, the mark of Cardmoss appeared on the body of a sickly noble maiden in Ortona. Recognizing it as God's emblem, they consulted Delcross, and Constantine agreed to appoint her as Saintess.

The meaning behind that gesture was clear.

-Delcross's great saint reincarnates like this, regardless of country. Does this not signify that all nations on the continent belong to God's kingdom?

And that poor maiden, far from her destiny, engaged in service activities and ended her life in solitude.

"Moreover, the current scriptures have undergone a major compilation. In fact, the prevailing opinion among theologians is that

many parts have been edited."

The scriptures were also extensively organized and compiled during the reign of the 4th Holy Emperor. This is precisely the point where the Dark Cult conversely accuses the Orthodox Church of being heretical.

For example, the problematic statement known as Gracia's last words.

-Whenever danger approaches this blessed Delcross, I will be reborn again and again to serve for God's sake.

There was much debate over whether this was true or not. The concept of reincarnation itself didn't exist before then.

In reality, Gracia simply served and died quietly in the countryside, so who knows what she said on her deathbed?

Furthermore, the scriptures specify that God will surely guide good souls to heaven to enjoy eternal happiness.

But if those noble souls appointed as Saints and holy figures claim to be reborn instead of entering God's heaven, it creates a huge contradiction in the scriptures.

"The first to theoretically support the Saintess's reincarnation was a famous theologian named Granius."

He was an outstanding theologian who was active during the reign of the 5th Holy Emperor and also laid the foundation for holy barriers.

At the time, Granius alone advocated the three-soul theory among theologians where the two-soul theory was mainstream.

He said that the soul consists of Aeon, Dakion, and Bion, and when a person dies, the three elements separate, with only the Aeon entering heaven.

And he explained Saintess Gracia's condition as follows.

-The essence of Gracia's soul, the Aeon, has already been embraced by heaven, and the Bion has returned to the earth as a handful of

dust along with her body. But only the Dakion, which inherited her noble will, remains in this world and is reborn with another Aeon.

Seongjin furrowed his brows.

Why so complicated? Who cares if the soul is in 2 or 3 parts?

"Until now, the Orthodox Church had been tacitly condoning the Saint's condition for various political reasons. In the first place, since souls are invisible, there was no way to prove whether there were 2 or 3. But the situation has greatly changed due to what Sisle said yesterday."

The submerged conflict between the two-soul theory and the three-soul theory had surfaced.

Logan rubbed his forehead as if he had a headache and continued.

"To make matters worse, Sisle publicly declared herself to be the reincarnation of Saint Marcias, not Saintess Gracia. According to her claim, one soul can have two Dakions. Then couldn't there also be states with three or four Dakions?"

How is that any different from demons known to absorb and use multiple souls? You'd have no excuse if dragged to the Heresy Tribunal right away.

"And if her claim is accepted even once, won't there be a sudden surge of people claiming to be the reincarnation of other saints? Like the popular ones such as Saint Bastian or Saint Aurelion. So won't the Orthodox Church be eager to scrutinize her?"

Upon hearing that explanation, Seongjin, finally grasping the gravity of the situation, felt his mind go blank.

Hey, kiddo. What the hell have you done!?

"So, where is Sisle now?"

When Seongjin asked in a panic, Logan replied with a deep sigh.

"She was summoned by His Majesty this morning."

"Oh..."

Seongjin blinked.

Somehow, an unfounded sense of relief washed over him.

"I apologize for not informing you in advance, Your Majesty."

Standing before the Holy Emperor, Sisle blushed and apologized.

It was a shoddy plan prepared in a day, but Sisle had no choice. She was absolutely short on time.

According to the Chronicle, Cardinals Benitus and Cesare would begin attacking her within a few months. It was too pressing to wait for next year's birthday banquet.

After gazing at the girl with subdued eyes for a moment, the Holy Emperor asked,

"If you wanted to join the Holy Knights that badly, why didn't you tell me first?"

There must have been a better way.

A more moderate method that wouldn't stir up the Orthodox Church and the Holy Council.

"But I don't have much time, Your Majesty. I needed an excuse to immediately step down as Saint while simultaneously gaining entry into the Holy Knights."

Sisle protested.

There were some calculations in that little head of hers. No matter how fierce the criticism, the Holy Council would ultimately conclude their interrogation of Sisle in a way that wouldn't tarnish the Empire's reputation.

"Time..."

After pondering for a moment with his chin resting on his hand, the Holy Emperor asked in a calm voice,

"Sisle. What is it that you truly want to do? If you don't tell me, I cannot help you."

To which his daughter replied, her clear eyes shining,

"Yes, Your Majesty. I desire the authority I can immediately grasp!"

"Auth..."

"Yes. Big brother Morres said that after living a while, wielding authority is the best..."

"..."

Facing the Holy Emperor, who slowly raised his hand to his face, Sisle earnestly continued,

"Your Majesty. You know well that a Saintess cannot step down voluntarily unless she loses her qualifications and is expelled, right? Besides, I'm not a genius like big brother Logan, and I don't have the time to start from the bottom as a novice knight like others!"

There was a reason she specifically chose Saint Marcias.

Of course, the fact that the order didn't use swords was a big factor. But more importantly, unlike saints like Gracia or Bastian who merely devoted themselves to others, she wasn't that type of saint.

Marcias and Terbacchia, in particular, were saints who had actually served as Holy Knights and even held the position of Grand Master of their orders.

So she wanted to gain some prestige from her status during her lifetime, Sisle added.

Carefully examining his daughter's face, which seemed unusually unfamiliar today, the Holy Emperor asked,

"With the power you gain, what do you want to do?"

The answer to this was unwavering.

"I want to protect myself."

Facing those clear eyes filled with conviction, the Holy Emperor's gaze wavered slightly.

From what? What has this child been so terrified of all this time?

"...Alright."

In the end, he could only answer with a soft sigh.

Just as he couldn't stop the child when she insisted on becoming a Saintess, he had no choice but to grant whatever his child truly desired.

"Listen well, Sisle. Perhaps just before the ceremonial event, the Holy Council will summon you to inquire about a few matters."

"Yes."

Sisle nodded solemnly. She was prepared for it.

"If they ask about the two-soul theory or the three-soul theory, ignore it completely. Even if they ask whether what you were protecting was Saint Gracia's Dakion, don't answer."

"Huh? Shouldn't I explain it properly?"

When Sisle tilted her head, the Holy Emperor shook his head resolutely.

"Unnecessary explanations only provide grounds for rebuttal. What they want to know through you is not the truth, but whether there's room to nitpick. The moment you mention the separation of souls in any way, they may instantly denounce you as a demon worshipper."

"Yes..."

In response to Sisle's dejected reply, the Holy Emperor emphasized once more.

"Understood? You just need to maintain the stance that there is only one soul bestowed by God. Of course, you don't need to explain that verbally either. Just confidently state that you have been protecting Gracia until now. Keep in mind that any question about how souls are divided is a leading one. They may even subtly interchange 'soul' and 'Dakion' to induce a mistake."

"Yes."

"The same goes for your claim of being the reincarnation of Saint Marcias. Acknowledge that you received a revelation from God, but if they ask which part of his soul you received, keep your mouth shut."

"Yes!"

Sisle nodded in understanding. So the plan was to gloss over the controversial parts.

"And let me slap you once."

"Yes... What?"

Before Sisle could even register the oddity, the Holy Emperor's hand approached her face.

Smack!

"Ack!"

Forgetting her dignity as a Saintess, Sisle plopped down on the floor, clutching her forehead.

Oww! It hurts! It hurts so much!

Glancing at Sisle, who was rolling on the floor with tears welling up, the Holy Emperor rose from his seat and added,

"Hold your tongue like that, and leave the rest to me."

Through her tear-blurred vision, Sisle suddenly thought that his figure, striding out of the office, seemed unusually large that day.

The emergency council ended precariously just before the ceremonial event.

Waiting anxiously outside the grand conference hall, Seongjin and Logan were greeted by an exhausted Amelia and an overly excited Sisle.

Judging by the sight of the high priests filing out looking worn out, it seemed things had gone well.

"How did it go, Sister?"

Amelia, who had attended the emergency council as Sisle's guardian, answered Logan's question in a feeble voice.

"Yeah. It all worked out. For now, it's settled that Sisle has inherited Saint Marcias's will to some extent, and she'll be joining the Holy Knights not as a novice but with the position of [Apostle]."

"Apostle?"

"It's a new title given to a Saint who joins a knightly order. They say it's equivalent to a deputy commander in the chain of command, but who knows how it'll actually be."

Seongjin and Logan exchanged glances.

What? Didn't they just hand Sisle the maximum possible authority on a silver platter?

How is this possible?

"Wow! Big brother Morres! You should have seen it!"

Sisle, who followed, looked greatly impressed. With her fair cheeks flushed, the girl whispered to Seongjin,

"I didn't know he could defeat those stubborn old geezers in a verbal battle. Today, I witnessed a new horizon of incitement and fabrication. Father is truly amazing!"

"..."

It seemed the Holy Emperor's performance at the council was quite remarkable. The kid, who rarely showed any change in expression, was so excited.

But you know what?

'A father respected by his young daughter as a swindler...'

At this point, Seongjin couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt toward that poor man.

"Did you hear? Apparently, our dear Saintess was actually an apostle of God."

"What? Goodness! So what does that mean? What exactly is an apostle?"

"Well, it means the Saintess was personally sent by God Himself."

"But isn't the Saintess originally a grace bestowed by God anyway?"

"That's a bit different. She's now a Saintess belonging to the Holy Knights."

"I don't know what it is, but that sounds amazing!"

The rumors spread incredibly fast.

Since Sisle's declaration had caused such a huge stir, it was only natural for last night's events to swiftly spread throughout the Imperial Capital.

However, the fact that all the citizens of the Imperial Capital knew about the [Apostle] immediately after the emergency council ended was largely due to the Information Department's preemptive measures. They intended to capture public sentiment before even a shred of criticism could arise.

Thanks to that, the rumor reached the ears of Romaine, who was passing through Bertrand Street.

'Apostle?'

He thought as he headed to the rendezvous point.

Something must have happened at the Imperial Palace yesterday, and

Leo would probably tell him the details.

But when he actually arrived at the warehouse and faced him, Romaine realized,

'...He's out of it.'

Because Leonard was staring blankly into the air with a flushed face, his mind clearly elsewhere. And Romaine's intuition was not wrong.

"Apostle? What's that?"

"..."

What has he been doing at the Imperial Palace to be the only one unaware of a story the entire Imperial Capital is buzzing about?

Romaine shook his head. If the prince was that distracted, it must be about a woman nine times out of ten.

It seemed the princess had captured his heart more than expected. And things were developing in a rather favorable direction.

"Ah right, I have good news, Romaine. Prince Morres wants to meet you."

"Is that so? I thought he'd be more cautious, but that's unexpected."

"Really? He didn't seem to have any intention of hiding his affiliation with the Dark Cult at all. He readily agreed to set up a meeting."

Or maybe my impression was quite trustworthy.

While ignoring the prince's nonsense with one ear, Romaine rubbed his chin exposed beneath the half-mask.

Why? Was this uneasy feeling just his imagination?

"By the way, it's really strange. Why would a perfectly fine Holy Prince of the Holy Empire claim to be a member of the Dark Cult? And how did you discover that prince's secret, Romaine?"

Romaine stared at Leonard for a moment, then nodded. Well, he is a

core member of the plan, so it should be fine to tell him this much.

"Leo. He's probably not the real Prince Morres."

"...What?"

"For some reason, the real prince must be dead. Anyway, what's currently possessing his body is an evil spirit planted by the Dark Cult."

Leonard, who had been staring with his mouth agape, asked in disbelief,

"What kind of nonsense is that? Is this a joke?"

But there was not a hint of laughter in the eyes visible beyond the half-mask.

"I mentioned before that I had a chance to see his soul while channeling with an incomplete seed, didn't I? That's when I confirmed it."

What Romaine saw that day was a soul with no proper form and an extremely faint connection to the body.

Unless one had received the Baptism of Rest, a living person could never appear like that.

"To borrow Granus's explanation, it's probably because the part corresponding to the Bion is weak. Bion is gradually formed through the interaction between the soul and the body. That's the very proof that the soul suddenly entered from the outside. It's a common tactic used by the Cult of Rest."

However, despite his detailed explanation, Leonard didn't seem to understand well.

"Bion?"

"...Don't tell me, Leo. You're not familiar with the three-soul theory?"

"Ah. Is that related to theology?"

Leonard scratched his head, looking embarrassed.

"Yeah. It feels nostalgic, like a theology teacher or something."

He nagged so much that I stabbed him without hesitation. Now he's buried nicely in the palace's rear garden.

"..."

"Anyway, it's unexpected. For the Holy Emperor, that scary fellow, to leave an evil spirit in the Imperial Palace."

"It means he's a fairly useful vessel."

In fact, that fake Prince Morres successfully thwarted Romaine's planting plan on behalf of the Holy Emperor, didn't he? Even now, it was an infuriating incident.

"But he's still his son, you know?"

"In other words, it means he's cornered to the point of having to use even an evil spirit possessing his son's body."

A confident smile curved on the lips beneath the half-mask.

"A great catastrophe originally begins from such small cracks, Leo."

The ceremonial rite hosted by the Holy Emperor.

A huge crowd had already gathered in front of the Imperial Palace. It was a rare day when ordinary citizens could directly face the Holy Emperor.

People holding small bouquets could be seen here and there. With colorful petals fluttering in the air, the biggest festival in Delcros was beginning in name and reality.

"Because the birthday banquet is the only day you can directly receive His Majesty's blessing."

Sir Masain explained while guarding Seongjin's front.

The birthday banquet was the day when God's representative blessed everyone. During the day, he showed his face to the citizens of Delcros and blessed them, and in the evening banquet, he also blessed the dignitaries who had come from all over the continent.

'You mean the birthday boy doesn't get congratulated?'

That man has it tough too.

If he had known, he should have prepared a simple birthday present.

[If you cause a little less trouble, wouldn't your father be happy enough with that?]

'...Shut up!'

Although he rebuked the Demon King, Seongjin honestly had nothing to say.

Come to think of it, wasn't he the one who first lit the fuse for this kiddo situation?

That's why he was attending the unscheduled ceremonial event. He was a bit worried about how the kiddo, who had been at the center of controversy since last night, was handling it.

"Originally, this event is for the citizens. Your Highness is not obligated to attend."

As Sir Masain said, there were no separate seats for dignitaries. So Seongjin was currently blending into the crowd in plain clothes.

Instead, the security was thorough, with Sir Masain and Dame Maria flanking Seongjin's left and right, and Sir Kurt tightly guarding his back. The strongest forces among the resident knights had been deployed.

Upon closer inspection, dignitaries surrounded by security personnel could be spotted intermittently among the crowd. There seemed to be quite a few people who had come to watch secretly like Seongjin.

"It's starting, Your Highness."

Along with Sir Kurt's quiet voice, soon the majestic sound of wind instruments resounded throughout the square.

Subsequently, the five Holy Knight Orders began to line up in turn. The sight of them, each with their unique characteristics, performing impeccable military drills in ceremonial attire was a spectacular scene.

Particularly eye-catching were the Order of Saint Aurelion and the Order of Saint Bastian at the front.

Their white uniforms, emblazoned with red and blue emblems respectively, formed a rather striking contrast on either side of the main gate.

"Oh! There's Logan!"

Seongjin noticed a conspicuous figure among them and brightened.

Wow, he sure knows how to spin that sword hilt impressively.

After the Holy Knights' military drill, which provided entertainment for a while, ended, high priests and a choir stepped forward, and a brief Mass followed.

"It's Sisle!"

The kiddo, dressed in priestly robes and standing at the front with a rather dignified demeanor, caught Seongjin's eye.

But the joy was short-lived as Seongjin's expression turned serious. The hook-nosed old geezer glaring at the kiddo beside her with a sullen face caught his attention.

That old coot! Can't he open his eyes properly?

"Cardinal Benitus isn't an easy character, but he's not fundamentally evil either."

Masain, noticing Seongjin's gaze, spoke soothingly.

"Perhaps there will be some friction with the princess, who suddenly

received the position, but he's a man who adheres to principles. Won't he come to terms with it on his own soon enough?"

"Hmm, is that so?"

Seongjin looked up at Masain and thought.

Come to think of it, when he first went to the main palace for an audience with the Holy Emperor, wasn't there a strange atmosphere between the Cardinal and Sir Masain?

"Sir Masain seems to know him quite well."

At that, Masain let out a small sigh.

"Of course. Cardinal Benitus used to be my patron. That's why, even though it's been a while since I became an adult, he still can't shake off old habits and tries to nag me at every opportunity."

Come to think of it, Sir Masain was also cornered by the high priests, led by Cardinal Benitus, at yesterday's banquet.

-Sir Masain. What are you thinking! Resigning from the perfectly good position of Captain of the Imperial Guard and becoming the Commander of the Detached Palace Guards! You are the adopted son of the Imperial Family! You must never forget this fact!

Recalling the nagging he received last night, Masain looked gloomy, but Seongjin chuckled and said to him,

"I get it. He's pestering you to get married, right?"

"...Pardon?"

Masain's expression turned subtle, but Seongjin patted his back with an understanding look.

"I know it well. Isn't that the typical nagging of old geezers at this age?"

He knew that Sir Masain was approaching thirty.

The repertoire at this age was obvious. Do you have a job? Do you have a girlfriend? When are you getting married? When are you having kids?

Since Sir Masain was a respectable knight of the Imperial Guard, it was probably either a girlfriend or marriage.

"Ah!"

"Look, it's His Majesty!"

At that moment, exclamations began to resound among the people. Finally, the Holy Emperor revealed himself on the podium.

Even though it was a once-a-year event, the Holy Emperor looked not much different from usual. It's just that, befitting the occasion, he had properly fastened his judicial robes today.

"..."

It was a truly peculiar thing.

Even though he had merely appeared on the podium, it felt as if the eyes of the entire world were focused on him in an instant.

The people in the square, holding their breath in unison and concentrating on his every move. The sunlight directly shining down on his head.

Even the gentle breeze blowing seemed to revolve around him.

The Holy Emperor standing on the podium did not say much. He simply stood there quietly and exuded divine power in all directions.

However, the result of that simple action was unrivaled. The waves of divine power sweeping across the square were so fierce that even Seongjin, who had absolutely no divine power, could feel something passing by.

Whoosh.

The buds of the bouquets people were holding simultaneously

bloomed in full. Even the trampled petals on the ground were revived vividly.

"Ahhh..."

All the citizens in the square were entranced, their eyes reddening. If ordinary people were like this, how about the priests sensitive to divine power?

Sob sob!

Hearing the sound of crying here and there, Seongjin turned to see people in quite exotic priestly robes collapsed on the ground. They seemed to be priests who had come from abroad for the birthday banquet.

Their writhing figures, having completely lost self-control, definitely looked out of their minds.

The Demon King had said this could also be a kind of [Captivation].

-In a sense, it may be more dangerous because they don't think to resist like with demonic energy.

Immediately after that, the Holy Emperor disappeared beyond the Imperial Palace, but the excitement that had once swept the square did not subside for a while. Staring blankly at the people weeping with emotion, Seongjin thought,

'Is it because I don't have divine power? I can't shake off the feeling that they're like cult fanatics...'

"Quite a bizarre spectacle, isn't it?"

It seemed Seongjin wasn't the only one who felt that way, as the man standing next to him spoke.

"Having lived abroad for a long time due to work, I sometimes find these scenes in Delcros very unfamiliar."

For a moment, Seongjin thought it was Riccardo standing there. The man's tall stature and relaxed attitude were a spitting image of him.

But he soon realized that the man looked slightly older than Riccardo.

Fortunately, before Masain could say anything, the man politely bowed. His demeanor was not very respectful, but there was nothing to fault.

"Greetings to Your Highness Morres."

"And you are?"

"So the rumor about your memory loss was true. I am Domenico Scarcepino. I have often paid my respects to Your Highness at gatherings."

The coldly calm eyes beyond the greeting sparkled.

"Thank you for your concern about my sister's health. I came to express my gratitude, even at the risk of being rude."

As he said, following Amelia's advice, Seongjin had sent a letter inquiring about Isabella's well-being.

But there must have been more than one or two such letters for the sickbed of the queen who ruled the social circles. Yet he read them all and came to express his gratitude?

Seongjin narrowed his eyes and looked at him.

"Of course I'm concerned. Isabella is my fiancée. By the way, how is her condition? Is there any improvement?"

It was a bit awkward to ask like this after witnessing the scene where he tapped her head. But it was better than inquiring about Riccardo, whom he had directly beaten up.

Domenico then quietly observed Seongjin, as if appraising him.

Did this guy notice something?

"Thanks to Your Highness's concern, she will recover soon."

There was little change in emotion on the man's face as he answered. Rather than managing his expression as a seasoned businessman, he seemed to have an inherently dry lack of emotion.

'He's not an easy one...'

Seongjin felt an inexplicable unease. And that uncomfortable feeling doubled when he introduced the woman next to him as his fiancée.

"This is my fiancée, Olivie."

A pretty woman with a lively impression slightly lifted the hem of her dress.

At that moment, Seongjin was inwardly startled.

'This woman is an assassin! What the hell is this guy up to?'

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"This is my fiancée, Olivie."

At Domenico's introduction, the young woman slightly lifted the hem of her dress and said,

"Olivie Lamari, pleased to meet you."

The moment Seongjin saw her, he knew.

"This woman is an assassin! What the hell is this guy up to?"

Although her appearance was quite different, as soon as Seongjin faced the woman, he immediately thought of Dasha. The astute eyes, the sociable smile. The quiet gait.

Above all, the aura.

Though skillfully concealed, the woman was definitely hiding her aura. In reality, she must have accumulated quite a high level of it.

However, perhaps wanting to appear as having the aura activation of an ordinary person, she was currently using partial aura concealment. She probably thought that would be more suitable for the identity of a noble lady running a business.

As a result, it created a slight sense of incongruity, different from when completely erasing one's presence.

Of course, if it weren't for Seongjin, who had recently become adept at aura concealment, it would have been difficult to notice, so others probably didn't detect it at all.

"...Lamari, I've never heard of that family."

Blocking Seongjin's path, Masain interrogated. He seemed to have a

fishy feeling about it.

His stiffly hardened face looked quite intimidating even to Seongjin, but the woman showed no sign of being daunted.

"We are a viscounty of Brittany. We operate a small business."

It was a modest background for the fiancée of Delcross' wealthiest heir. Perhaps noticing that thought on Masain's face, she added,

"Dominic and I met through business and have maintained our connection ever since."

"Hmm. What business are you in?"

"A small textile business. We cultivate high-quality flax and produce fabrics. Occasionally, we also deal with wool from Carthago."

No way. She seems more likely to be in the information or assassination business.

Seongjin thought to himself, but the woman's face, with a gentle smile, was as brazen as could be.

So much so that even the Demon King was confused.

[Her blood pressure and pulse barely change? She seems to be telling the truth. Lee Seongjin, are you mistaken?]

'No. That woman is definitely a skilled assassin. Either she's extremely adept at lying, or maybe she really does run a cover business.'

I should ask Dasha to investigate Lamari later. The tasks he needed to entrust to her kept piling up.

However, at Olivie's next words, even Seongjin almost failed to maintain his composure.

"Since most of it comes through the Milo Guild, the name Lamari is probably even more unfamiliar in Delcross."

Seongjin asked back,

"Milo Guild?"

"Yes, that's right. Recently, many goods coming from Brittany pass through the Milo Guild."

"I see."

Seongjin nodded with a calm expression. He keenly sensed the woman's gaze briefly passing over him, as if appraising him.

He was pretty sure the Milo Guild distributed alcohol primarily to Aseins and Rohans, so what was she probing him for?

"So, are you now trying to trade directly with Delcross through Scarcepino?"

"Pardon?"

"I thought it must be difficult to balance the books when doing business through another guild."

"...Yes, that's correct."

"I see. Then I suppose we'll hear the name Lamari in Delcross' dressing rooms soon. I look forward to it."

"..."

Throughout this conversation, Domenico Scarcepino stood back a step, quietly observing the situation.

Then Sir Masain gently spoke up,

"Your Highness, the closing military drill will begin soon."

Seongjin brightened.

"Will Logan be there again?"

"Yes. There will probably be a solo demonstration by the Lilium Special Forces in the middle."

Oh! Can't miss that.

It would be great to have a camera. I feel like a parent coming to see a child's talent show.

"Then we'll move a bit closer to the front. What about you?"

"Yes. Your Highness. Please enjoy the viewing. I look forward to seeing you again."

Although Domenico bowed with utmost courtesy as he bid farewell...

Seongjin gave him a once-over before turning away.

You bastard!

How dare you introduce an assassin as your fiancée and even have her probe me?

No use pretending to be polite now. You're already on my suspicious list!

Watching the prince's party move away, Olivie spoke,

"Dominic, you might have misjudged this time."

If the force that infiltrated the townhouse was really the prince's men, he couldn't possibly be unaware of the Milo Guild.

Didn't they leave the Dark Cult's mark at the scene and vanish unscathed? That would mean he was at least associated with the Dark Cult or well-informed about the relationship between the Dark Cult and the Milo Guild.

However, no matter what she said, the prince, who had seemed indifferent to everything, maintained a dull expression until the end.

If that was a deliberate effort to manage his expression, the boy must be a born swindler. He could easily deceive even the leader of the organization she belonged to. It was probably an impossible feat for a prince who grew up comfortably in the Imperial Palace.

But Domenico's thoughts were slightly different.

"Well. Wasn't it after that prince attended the gathering that Riccardo ended up in that state? Besides, the prince has been close with Riccardo all along. That guy wouldn't associate with just anyone."

"That's true."

"And although there's no evidence, I strangely feel that Isabella's loss of consciousness is not unrelated to that prince."

Adjusting his glasses, Domenico added,

"That's not all. Haven't you noticed that Young Master Siegmund has been quiet lately?"

The Young Master of Orden Siegmund had noticed the events unfolding in his territory. So he had been clumsily poking around here and there, claiming to investigate in his own way.

Originally a warrior to the bone, he moved with a limited number of men behind the family head's back, leading to mishaps.

But recently, he had become docile without such reckless behavior.

"Do you know why he suddenly became quiet?"

"He gave up?"

"No way. It's not certain, but there's information that he entrusted the case to the Monster Special Task Force."

"Monster Special Task Force?"

"Yes. The very department managed by that Prince Morris."

Observing the conversation between the prince and Olivie, he was convinced.

He was definitely more skilled at concealing his true intentions than himself. It was not an ability that a boy his age could easily possess.

"Olivie."

Without taking his eyes off the prince moving away, Domenico ordered,

"From now on, investigate that prince a bit."

"An Apostle?"

At the old priest's astonishment, Clemence nodded.

"Yes. That's what they're all saying. That the youngest princess is an Apostle of God."

"And the Orthodox Church acknowledged it?"

"Yes, apparently so."

"Bethel..."

The old priest rubbed his face with a troubled expression.

After their grand endeavor for a great harvest had gone up in smoke...

The two surviving brothers of the Sowing had been hiding in a warehouse on Bertrand Street.

Originally, they intended to seek refuge with the Milo Guild, which had a connection with the cult, but the bishop strongly dissuaded them. The reason was that it was unsafe due to the increasing number of eyes watching the guild recently.

"Now of all times? What are they thinking?"

The old priest looked extremely confused. The content about [Apostle] was a part of the scriptures that the Orthodox Church had long buried together with the underground cult.

Otherwise, the saint known as St. Bastian would have originally been called Apostle Bastian.

Of course, the two had never dreamed...

That the Holy Emperor, who had to further solidify his daughter's fabrication, would inevitably bring up the concept while arguing with the strict old men of the Holy Council, citing the nooks and crannies of the scriptures as evidence.

Anyway, Priest Clemence' face was flushed with anticipation.

"If they acknowledged [Apostle], they will have no choice but to accept the doctrine of the underground cult someday, right? They won't be able to denounce us as the Dark Cult anymore!"

It wasn't unreasonable for him to show such hopeful speculation.

Originally, the brothers of the underground cult regarded the archbishops of the four sects as God's Apostles.

According to their doctrine, Passion, Sowing, Repentance, and Rest were each different gods and at the same time one god. They explained that they were all different manifestations of God.

So early in the Holy Emperor's reign, the Orthodox Church deleted most of the content related to [Apostle] from the scriptures.

The easiest way to deny the underground cult was to deny the existence of the Apostles who led them.

"Perhaps all of this is the work of Prince Morres? Maybe his preparations are finally showing tangible results!"

"...Prince Morres?"

The old priest asked suspiciously. There was circumstantial evidence that it was actually Prince Morres who ordered Priest Hayes to open the gate unexpectedly.

However, the hot-blooded young priest was excited for the first time in a while.

"Don't you know, Brother? We must not forget the prophecies of the Archbishops."

That on the day Prince Morres was born, the four Apostles of each

sect unanimously blessed him.

-Rejoice! The child is [prepared] for the glory of the cult!

-Freed from long oppression, the underground cult shall flourish once more!

Toward the apprehensive old priest, Clemens emphasized again,

"The prepared one is someone upon whom the gods of the four sects simultaneously bestowed a great mission and sent to this land. Therefore, Prince Morres is undoubtedly God's Apostle! The Apostle of Apostles!"

As he spoke with an excited voice...

"...Wait a moment, let me hear more about that."

Someone spoke to them from behind.

"Bishop?"

The two priests stood up simultaneously.

When did he enter the warehouse? The bishop, who suddenly appeared from the shadows of the wall, was slowly approaching them.

"What about Prince Morres? What did he prepare?"

"Yes, Bishop. As you know, the prepared one is God's Apostle..."

Priest Clemence, who was answering like that, suddenly stopped talking. Because the old priest grabbed his arm with a trembling hand.

"Brother Clemence."

The old priest spoke in a tense voice,

"Since when was he our Bishop?"

"...Pardon?"

"How could the brother of [Sowing] not know about the prepared one?"

Then, as if a bucket of cold water had been poured on him, Clemence' mind cleared.

Come to think of it, was the Bishop with them when they hid in Delcross years ago, following the will of the cult?

Since when did they start reporting every detail of what happened in the Heresy Tribunal to the Bishop?

'Wait a minute! Then what about the great work?'

Who first told us about that great work?

Since when have we been [sowing] for the sake of that great work?

"..."

Even facing the eyes of the two priests, widened with fear and shock, the [Bishop] remained silent. Only the lips beneath the half-mask curved into a faint smile.

Clemence asked in a heavily cracked voice,

"...Who are you? Are you not a brother of Sowing? Since when have you been acting as the Bishop?"

"That's right. What the hell was that great work you mentioned?"

"Hmm."

The man in the half-mask, Romaine, clasped his hands behind his back and spoke in a somewhat deflated voice,

"Although I've been a brother of Sowing for quite a long time and thought I had a grasp on most things... A sect that has lasted for over a thousand years is not that easy to figure out."

"...What?"

"And I was really surprised about Prince Morres. I thought the Cult of

Rest had done something to him, but to think it was all planned from his birth..."

Shaking his head, Romaine took a step toward the priests. At the same time, the two staggered back, but...

[Calm down.]

At Romaine's command that followed, they froze as if frozen, stopping their movements.

[You don't have to be afraid. Brothers of Sowing. You are still quite useful vessels to me.]

A voice with a strange, somehow uncanny power that touched the depths of the soul.

Before they knew it, the two priests were listening to Romaine's words with dazed faces.

[I am undoubtedly your brother. So tell me everything. Everything you know about Prince Morres.]

Beyond the half-mask, a faint yellow light fleetingly passed through the light brown eyes.

[What exactly is this prepared one?]

Achoo!

In the carriage heading to the banquet hall, Amelia asked worriedly to Seongjin, who suddenly sneezed violently.

"What's wrong all of a sudden, Morres? You haven't caught a cold, have you?"

"Oh, no. Of course not."

Aura users rarely fall ill. There's no way he could catch a cold, right?

However, defying that thought, Seongjin sneezed again.

"Achoo!"

The startled Amelia meticulously wrapped the shawl next to her around him and said,

"You must have overworked yourself recently with the banquet preparations. Go in and rest a bit early today."

Reduced to a tightly wrapped rice ball in a thick shawl, Seongjin sniffled with an embarrassed face.

'That's strange. Is someone constantly talking about me? I've been feeling uneasy since earlier...'

While Seongjin tried his best to smile at Amelia...

In the sky that had already darkened, large raindrops were falling one by one.

The rain that began pouring down suddenly intensified with each passing moment.

To make matters worse, an untimely gale blew in, making the banquet hall feel more cozy than home upon arrival.

Countless lights continued to sprinkle their dazzling glow, but with the excitement of the first banquet having faded, the hall exuded a calmer atmosphere compared to the previous day.

'The main banquet has a slightly more political nature, as I recall...'

It was a setting where subtle diplomatic battles could unfold, with attendees probing and keeping each other in check.

However, as it wasn't a venue for negotiations involving vested interests, there were many instances where the purpose was simply to exchange pleasantries and cultivate goodwill.

Thanks to this, the banquet hall's atmosphere flowed gently, belying its political undercurrents.

Having finished his first light dance with Amelia, Seongjin took a moment to leisurely survey his surroundings. It felt as though he had completed all his assigned tasks.

He had heard that one was expected to dance at least once with their prospective marriage partner out of courtesy.

However, little Chloe was absent, as she had yet to make her debut, while Isabella was also missing due to a head injury. Moreover, Julia Meyer was nowhere to be seen.

This meant he was free until the end of the banquet.

"It's been a while, Prince Morres."

Taking advantage of the slightly sparse atmosphere, a small boy approached and addressed him.

With a razor-sharp bob cut and rosy cheeks, it was Charles from the Ravioli family.

'Oh, this kid is old enough to attend the banquet now!'

Children from the Holy Emperor's bloodline grew tall and slender like grass saturated with water, so it was surprising in many ways that this boy, even smaller than Sisle, was already over thirteen.

However, as Charles meticulously observed Seongjin with a delighted expression, his face soon fell, appearing deeply disappointed.

"My apologies, Your Highness. Did you not like the gift I sent?"

Ah, come to think of it, this little one had gifted him a tie pin.

"I had already coordinated my attire and accessories for the dress code quite early on, so it was a bit regrettable."

The banquet outfit had been completed just before his birthday, but there was no need to mention that.

Fortunately, the boy's face brightened, seeming to accept the explanation.

"I see. By the way, please lower the way you address me. I don't know what to do with myself."

"No, that simply won't do. Aren't you an esteemed guest who has come from a foreign country to celebrate the birthday banquet?"

At this, a flicker of puzzlement crossed Charles's face.

"But then, why did you address the prince of Rohan...?"

Ah. He must have overheard me talking casually to that swallow earlier.

It's fine. By my standards, that bastard doesn't qualify as a guest.

Observing Seongjin's face, which had turned slightly grim, Charles soon nodded as if he had grasped something.

He followed Seongjin's gaze towards where Amelia stood. She happened to be facing Rohan's swallow bastard, deeply engaged in conversation.

"It would be wise to keep some distance from that prince. The rumors circulating about him are quite unsavory in many ways."

Charles whispered, looking somewhat concerned.

"Rumors are said to be insubstantial like the wind, but grass cannot sprout in a barren field without seeds being carried in."

"Hmm, well..."

Certainly, Leonard of Rohan did not give off a particularly good impression.

For a fellow who had been raised preciously as royalty, there was an uncanny scent of blood in his eyes. It reminded Seongjin of those trash back on Earth who were more enthusiastic about slaughtering fellow hunters for power than fighting monsters.

That's why, when the bastard first attempted to approach Amelia, Seongjin had tried his best to block him. His sister's demeanor in front of Leonard seemed somehow fearful.

However, at some point after she regained her emotional stability, the situation changed a bit.

While she maintained a smile that exuded charm to everyone, Seongjin could instantly tell.

The way she looked at the bastard now was like a satiated cat eyeing a plump little rat.

'Ah. She must have some interesting plan in mind for him.'

So, despite his distaste for the fellow, Seongjin decided to observe the situation for a while. He knew that, contrary to her innocent appearance, Amelia had a rather shrewd personality.

'Even if that bastard suffers some consequences, it'll all be his own doing. If he has angered our angelic sister, doesn't that make him worse than a demon?'

Of course, that didn't mean he would stop keeping a watchful eye on the bastard!

As he was glaring at Leonard with a sullen face, Charles cautiously opened his mouth.

"In contrast to that prince, the crown prince of Rohan is shrouded in excessive secrecy. Rumor has it that he has never attended a birthday banquet due to being too sickly for long-distance travel."

Right. The etiquette teacher had mentioned something along those lines.

"Rohan's officials must be quite worried. Fortunately, our Brittany is free from such concerns. Prince Philip is exceptionally robust, diligent, and impeccable, leaving no room for criticism."

Seongjin lowered his gaze to look directly at Charles.

Huh? Look at this kid.

"Quite a blunt expression of opinion, isn't it?"

He had thought the kid was the type to use roundabout, aristocratic speech like before.

At this, Charles slowly smiled.

"Before whom should I mince my words? I will say nothing more, Your Highness. In the future, Brittany will undoubtedly be the most suitable partner for the Empire's endeavors."

"..."

Seongjin turned his gaze towards Amelia and Leonard without answering.

I see. I thought he was still young, but his sister already reached that age? Well, even that Morris guy already has three prospective marriage partners.

Moreover, isn't Amelia the eldest daughter of the Holy Emperor's family? Considering the impact her marriage will have on the continent's future landscape, it's no wonder people's attention is already focused on her.

'Still, sixteen is quite young, a prime age for growth...'

Somehow, there was a slightly bitter taste in his mouth.

Meanwhile, Charles continued to stare at Seongjin with expectant, glittering eyes.

'But why is this kid approaching me like this?'

What does he expect from me? He should go to Logan, the likely successor to the Holy Emperor, instead.

Or perhaps...

Seongjin quickly glanced towards the head table.

Hmm, Father isn't here yet?

Just then, Queen Elizabeth, who was seated near the head table, caught Seongjin's gaze and flinched in surprise.

She then promptly turned her head away with a stiff expression. What on earth is troubling the 1st Queen these days?

As he was beginning to feel uncomfortable and considering leaving, he suddenly spotted a familiar face on one side of the banquet hall.

'...Dame Julia Meyer? She attended the banquet today.'

He could instantly recognize her unfamiliar face because,

surprisingly, she looked no different from her usual appearance.

Amidst the other young ladies adorned in splendid finery, she alone stood resolutely in her knight's uniform, holding a drink with a somewhat businesslike expression.

Aha, there was another stubborn one like Logan over there.

'Anyway, I should complete my task.'

His sister had repeatedly emphasized that he must ask his prospective marriage partner for a dance.

After excusing himself to Charles, Seongjin slowly approached Julia.

Come to think of it, he remembered having a good first impression of Julia Meyer. She had been quite helpful when he had attacked the capital's guard the other day. She had completely ignored the commotion he caused.

In fact, Julia had been gleefully watching the capital's guard captain, with whom she had a strained relationship, floundering in the chaos, but Seongjin was unaware of such deep underlying circumstances.

"Dame Julia. If it's alright with you, may I request the next dance?"

Upon hearing those words, Julia's eyes widened as she turned her head.

As if she couldn't believe what she had just heard, she stammered before finally blurting out a response.

"...Forgive me, Your Highness. But I am currently in my knight's uniform."

"Hmm, I see."

Will the dance moves be a bit tricky?

He vaguely recalled there being a move that involved grasping and fluttering the hem of a dress.

"So that's...!"

I'm trying to politely decline the dance request by making excuses! Julia wanted to say that, but there wasn't a shred of doubt on the prince's face. He genuinely had no idea.

"Ah, are you on duty right now? My apologies if you're currently guarding the banquet hall."

"...No, Your Highness. Today is my day off."

Then what's the problem?

With an innocent face that knew nothing, Julia sighed and took his hand.

Well, there's no rule against dancing in uniform.

'My parents will nag me again when I get home...'

Contrary to the rumors portraying her as a woman who was a knight to the bone, stubbornly rejecting all suitors while insisting on her uniform, Julia Meyer had no particular aversion to beautifying her appearance.

Regardless of how she dressed on her days off, it wouldn't change the fact that she was a knight.

It was simply that, during her academy days, her studies had been overwhelming, and after joining the knighthood, work had piled up like crazy, leaving her unwilling to waste energy on trivial matters.

That's why, despite her parents' nagging, she showed up at every birthday banquet in her uniform. It was quite troublesome to refuse the flood of dance requests one by one.

Sensing the young masters, who had been watching from afar, staring at her with startled rabbit eyes, Julia thought to herself.

'Perhaps this year marks the end of peaceful birthday banquets.'

Well, it seemed unlikely that there would be anyone else brazen

enough to ask her for a dance while she was in uniform.

"Oh my, look over there."

"Quite impressive, unexpectedly..."

The attendees in the banquet hall turned their gazes towards this unusual couple with curious eyes.

Julia Meyer was a young lady with a physique that stretched tall like a willow branch. As a result, she was much taller than Seongjin, who was still growing, so it was thought that the two would make a somewhat awkward picture when dancing together.

However, a handsome boy and a slender beauty standing side by side naturally created a picturesque scene.

The couple whispering to each other while lightly stepping in time with the music seemed quite well-matched.

Of course, if one were to hear the conversation they were having, such thoughts would have quickly dissipated. Seongjin, thinking it was a good opportunity, was currently seeking her professional advice on work-related matters.

"Are you referring to the deployment of the 7th Knighthood?"

When Julia asked for clarification, Seongjin nodded. Recently, he had been contemplating which department to involve for a large-scale seizure and search of the Milo Guild.

"Yes. The 7th Knighthood's official name is the [Imperial Capital Defense Corps], right? I understand they perform duties similar to the Capital Guard."

"That is correct, but..."

Julia then made a complicated expression.

"As Your Highness is aware, deploying troops requires a clear justification. Unless a direct order is issued by a high-ranking official of commander rank or above, usually an official request form and

supporting legal clauses must first be submitted to the administrative department, and then we wait for the executive order to be issued."

"So the Knighthood cannot be dispatched with a simple request for support?"

"In principle, that is the case. Otherwise, a cooperative relationship must be established in advance through prior consultation between departments. Of course, there are instances where the commander or deputy commander may dispatch troops at their discretion if they deem it an emergency situation."

"Hmm."

Seongjin tilted his head and asked.

"So, what you're ultimately saying is that we should arrange a prior work agreement with the Monster Special Task Force? Then what should we do? Should I formally prepare a cooperation document and send it to the 7th Knighthood?"

At this, Julia Meyer's expression rapidly soured.

"Ah, but please, anything but the cooperation document..."

Transformed in an instant into the face of an office worker worn out from overtime, Julia Meyer sighed.

"Alright, Your Highness. The various administrative procedures for troop deployment are certainly necessary, but I acknowledge that they are also excessively cumbersome. Moreover, if Your Highness is requesting support to this extent, it must be an urgent matter that is far from ordinary. In that case, I believe I can handle it somehow at my discretion."

Considering the recent incidents the prince had been involved in, such as the monster case at the Digory residence and the Heresy Tribunal Gate incident, rumors were circulating that when the prince made a move, it was no longer a typical affair.

Of course, Seongjin, unaware of the underlying reasons, merely tilted his head in puzzlement.

"Let's do it this way, Your Highness. If you can properly submit the post-action report and take full responsibility for it, I can manage an emergency dispatch at my discretion immediately upon Your Highness's request."

"Are you sure that's alright?"

As Seongjin's face brightened, Julia Meyer replied with a somewhat enlightened expression.

"Yes. Then, at least the paperwork will be reduced by half, won't it?"

Every task has an arduous and drawn-out process of application and approval, but once it's done, the cleanup is usually accomplished relatively quickly.

Fortunately, the deputy commander of the Imperial Capital Defense Corps was flexible!

"Thank you so much, Dame Julia! Should we have a departmental dinner sometime for our smooth cooperation in the future? I'll draft a budget and send an official document to the 7th Knighthood soon!"

As a newly established department, they were relatively free from budget constraints, Seongjin added proudly.

At this, Julia made an absurd face before responding in a subdued voice.

"...No, I mean, never mind the official document."

She seemed utterly fed up with paperwork.

As the dance music ended, Seongjin parted ways with Julia.

This was the first time he had conversed with her like this, but she seemed to be someone he could communicate with quite well. It was a satisfying encounter.

'By the way...'

Feeling a bit anxious, Seongjin unconsciously glanced towards the

head table once more.

And after confirming that it was still empty...

'Oh...'

He finally realized what had been bothering him for a while.

Doesn't it seem like the Holy Emperor is awfully late?

Rumble, boom!

Suddenly, Seongjin's sensitive senses faintly picked up the distant sound of thunder.

On a mountainside southwest of Delcross.

Amidst the drizzling rain, a young girl sat quietly, gazing down at the imperial capital enveloped in a faint glow.

Utterly motionless, she appeared as if she had been born as a rock, sculpted by the wind and rain over countless years in that very spot.

Her long, golden hair braided into two plaits was antiquated, and the jet-black robe enveloping her small frame was the attire once worn by wandering ascetics in the pre-imperial era.

Swoosh.

The rain intensified with each passing moment, but not a single droplet touched the girl's body. The black mana emanating from her being was repelling the rainfall entirely.

"..."

The girl was none other than the high sovereign bearing the name [Greed].

She was a demon who had been awaiting the destruction that would befall this world for an eternity.

Rustle.

Moments later, a young man emerged from the undergrowth before the girl. He had a genial appearance, with a battered mandolin slung across his back. He raised his hand in a friendly gesture towards the girl.

"Hey, [Greed]."

It was ironic how the young girl appeared like sedimentary layers accumulated over an eternity, while the young man seemed verdantly fresh, as if he had just blossomed like an annual flower.

"...Sowing."

Greed furrowed her brow.

The young man's overflowing vitality was not a mere trick of the mind. He had already replaced his contractor.

The only commonalities with his previous self were the black mana surging from his body and the occasional flicker of an eerie green glow in his eyes.

"Another new contractor? What a trivial fixation."

"Contractors are meant to be frequently harvested and cultivated anew. It's you who's strange for not changing them for over a thousand years."

Sowing retorted as he plopped down on the ground.

"Seriously. Greed, I have a warning for you. You're acquainted with that dimension's storyteller, right? Tell that irksome fellow. Why is he luring our innocent sect's children into doing pointless things?"

He was referring to Romaine manipulating Sowing's brethren to spread monster eggs throughout the capital.

At this, Greed let out a cold sneer.

"How pitiful. He is no longer the storyteller now."

"...What do you mean, no longer?"

"It means he was once Sigurd Sigurdson."

Sowing clicked his tongue.

"What? Our kids were played by a mere puppet? Why do you associate closely with someone like that?"

"Because I know what such a person ultimately yearns for."

Without taking her eyes off the imperial capital, Greed smiled crookedly.

"What do you think it could be? Surely, he desires to eliminate Sigurd Sigurdson and be reborn as the true dimensional storyteller. Among them, Romain is the only puppet who has nearly achieved success. Having obtained the key to the labyrinth, he is worth observing further."

"Ha! So that's why you keep him by your side."

The young man openly scoffed.

"The moment he becomes the sole Sigurd Sigurdson, you intend to strip him of everything."

"..."

Greed felt no need to respond. It was a truth that required neither affirmation nor denial.

He had always been that kind of being.

Either devouring immediately or savoring it for a while. Ultimately, he was one who stripped everything away.

"Anyway, so that's why [Repentance]'s sect has been quiet lately while you've been playing with him. Have you grown tired of toying with others' possessions?"

"What the master has abandoned is no different from being mine."

"In that case, you should have established your own sect long ago. Stop thinking about wielding Repentance's forces here and there. It's a hassle to move them, isn't it?"

"Nonsense."

Greed never created or cultivated anything in the first place. He merely thoroughly stripped away what existed. It wasn't a matter of

laziness, but simply his nature.

In his wake, only extreme hunger and severe deprivation remained. That's why Greed's other name was [Famine].

It was only natural for him to gradually devour the sect that [Repentance], who had been holed up somewhere regretting for the past thousand years, had built.

"By the way, honestly, this time was a bit unexpected. I never thought you'd request cooperation."

"When I recently sent a subpar subordinate as a test, he barely returned alive. The king of Delcross is too dangerous to face alone."

"Well. Are you sure you're not just afraid I'll stab you in the back?"

Sowing narrowed his eyes and glanced at the girl. This, too, was a truth that needed no denial, so Greed did not answer.

Originally, Delcross was destined to be destroyed by the descent of the five demon kings.

However, [Repentance], who had descended a thousand years ago, had crawled underground and refused to emerge. [Fervent Heat], who should have brought war, was distracted by something else entirely. And [Repose], who should have bestowed death upon all, was ironically in an eternal slumber himself.

In the end, currently, the only comrade who could properly confront the emperor of Delcross was [Sowing].

At the same time, if Greed were to suffer a blow, Sowing would be the only one who might stab him in the back. Of course, the reverse was also true.

"Well, anyway, fine. It's safer for both of us to share the risk."

The young man nodded and rose to his feet.

[Now then...]

The moment his eyes flashed with a vivid green glow, black mana surged forth, enveloping the mountainside and soaring towards the sky.

[Shall we begin?]

Rumble.

Accompanied by a earth-shaking roar.

Flash!

Blue lightning bolts struck the ground in succession.

"This gentleman is definitely too late!"

Some of the attendees in the banquet hall seemed to have sensed something amiss as well.

Murmur murmur.

Pushing through the gradually agitated crowd, Seongjin exited the banquet hall.

Perhaps it was his imagination, but the corridor felt strangely dim despite the bright illumination. Although servants should have been bustling about, the corridor was eerily silent without a soul in sight.

As he slowly walked towards the stairs leading to the second floor while surveying his surroundings, the sound of click-clacking footsteps soon followed behind him.

"Morres!"

It was Amelia, who had also sensed something unusual. Sisle, looking somewhat anxious, was with her.

"Everyone's here. Something is definitely wrong!"

Following closely, Logan approached with Seo Yi-seo or Cardmos in her body. As a result, all four siblings of the Holy Imperial family

gathered at the foot of the stairs.

"I sense a strange aura coming from the direction of the second-floor office. It's certainly not mana, but..."

As Logan had mentioned, the stairs growing darker as they ascended gave an increasingly peculiar sense of unease.

Despite the stairwell being brightly lit, the second-floor corridor, devoid of any light, appeared as if obscured by a thick, black curtain.

"How strange. I don't recall this ever happening before..."

Amelia spoke with a worried expression, quickly recalling the events prior to the regression.

"Anyway, we should go up and check, shouldn't we? Father must be there."

The dense darkness was suffocating even by simply looking at it.

However, there was not a hint of hesitation in her brother's eyes as he stared at it. Steeling her resolve, Amelia swiftly assessed the situation.

"I will inform Her Majesty the Empress of this situation. For now, Sisle and Lord Cardmos, perhaps you could hold a small event to bless the distinguished guests. Also, check if the orchestra has any impromptu performances they can showcase. That should help quell the guests' unease."

Then she entrusted Seongjin and Logan with a request.

"For now, I have no choice but to entrust Father to the two most reliable people. I will summon the Imperial Guard knights right away, so while we handle the banquet hall's atmosphere, could you two please visit the office?"

Seongjin nodded and immediately dashed up the stairs as if leaping.

"Be careful, Lee Seongjin! Something is definitely amiss."

Logan closely followed, cautioning him, but Seongjin paid no heed.

Upon arriving at the pitch-black second-floor corridor, servants could be seen collapsed here and there on the floor.

"What in the world..."

Judging by the aura detection, they all seemed to be alive, but their vitality was extremely faint. The two exchanged a glance before rushing towards the office.

The office at the end of the second-floor corridor. Collapsed in front of it was the head servant, Lewis.

Fortunately, he was breathing, but his contorted face appeared strained as if he were having a nightmare.

And...

Standing in front of the wide-open office door, as if guarding it, was the commander of the Order of Saint Aurelion.

"Commander Katrina..."

She was the only person here who had not lost consciousness. However, she also seemed to be in a poor state.

Using her long sword like a cane, propping it against the floor, Katrina spoke with difficulty, perspiring profusely.

"...Why have you come here, Your Highness?"

"Commander! What in the world is going on?"

"Father? Is Father inside?"

At this, she looked at Seongjin with a faint smile.

"Rest assured, Your Highness. [Gaps] opening in the palace is a common occurrence. It's just that this time, it was so sudden that His Majesty didn't have a moment to enter the prayer room."

Gaps?

"Those who have collapsed will be tended to by His Majesty as soon as the gap closes, so please don't worry too much."

As she answered, her complexion was extremely pale, as if she might collapse at any moment.

In any case, it meant that the Holy Emperor was also caught up in this situation. Seongjin asked her with a stern face.

"...Katrina, where is Father?"

"Although his return may be slightly delayed, there will likely be no issues. Your Highness, if you remain here for too long, you may lose consciousness like the others. Please return to the banquet hall and await His Majesty's arrival."

Indeed, since earlier, Seongjin had been experiencing an unpleasant tinnitus and a headache that felt like it was pressing down on his head.

Even so, to simply turn back after witnessing this chaos? Wasn't it implied that the gentleman was at the center of this bizarre space?

Seongjin took a step closer to her, who was blocking the entrance.

"He's inside, isn't he? Move aside at once."

"It's dangerous, Your Highness. Please return to the banquet hall...!"

"I must go in now, Commander."

As Seongjin interrupted her with a growl, Katrina stared at him intently. Her eyes trembled slightly, reflecting her extreme emotional turmoil.

"...Is that Your Highness's wish? Do you truly feel that way?"

"Yes."

With a small sigh, she began to move her steps unsteadily.

"Phew. I don't know what admonishment I will receive from His

Majesty later, but..."

Then, clank! Thud! She dropped to one knee on the floor, propping herself up with her sword. Geez, why are you being stubborn when you can barely stand?

Seongjin glanced at Katrina once before striding into the office.

Seongjin immediately spotted the Holy Emperor.

He was leaning against the office sofa with his eyes closed, not moving an inch even as Seongjin approached. It was a markedly different sight from how he would always sense Seongjin's presence and greet him first.

Indeed, as if he were at the center of this entire situation, the closer Seongjin got, the more intense the piercing headache became.

"His heart rate is abnormally slow. But he's definitely alive."

Logan, who also seemed to have a headache, spoke with a furrowed brow.

"But it's strange. Even though he's right in front of us, his presence feels distant, as if he's somewhere else. Why is that?"

Seongjin was just feeling the same way.

It was like shards of a shattered window reflecting a disjointed image, a mixture of mismatched forms.

Even though his recumbent figure was visible right before their eyes, it simultaneously felt like a distant scene viewed through a telescope or camera lens.

Just as Seongjin was about to reach out to the Holy Emperor, Logan suddenly flinched and looked out the window.

"Lee Seongjin. There's a suspicious fellow in the garden. He's sending killing intent this way."

"A suspicious fellow?"

"Yes. He's completely concealing his aura. Likely an assassin. Of all times..."

If he was using aura concealment, he was indeed an assassin.

However, with the headache and the strangely distorted senses, it wasn't easy for Seongjin to detect the fellow's presence. It also meant that the assassin had considerable skill.

In this situation, the only one who could sense him was probably Logan, a former Decaron Knight and Sword Master.

As if having the same thought, Logan alternated his worried gaze between Seongjin and the Holy Emperor for a moment before speaking.

"We can't leave him be, so I'll go out and capture the culprit first. I'll subdue him quickly and return, so don't push yourself. If you feel unwell, head back to the banquet hall immediately."

"Alright."

Drawing Arjuna, Logan leaped out of the office terrace. Then, dashing across the garden, he soon disappeared somewhere.

After watching him for a moment, Seongjin headed towards the sofa where the Holy Emperor lay. In any case, he intended to at least try shaking him awake.

Of course, he had doubts about whether it would even be possible to grab and shake him.

At the same time...

'I can reach him in the end...!'

With that inexplicable conviction, Seongjin slowly reached out towards him.

And the moment his hand touched the Holy Emperor's ceremonial robe...

Whoosh.

Suddenly, the figure before his eyes warped violently, and his vision soared upward as if his body was being sucked somewhere forcefully.

Tap tap tap.

Logan swiftly traversed the main palace garden, tracking the assassin's presence.

The fierce rain ruthlessly struck his body from the front, but it posed no hindrance to Logan, who was enveloped in a curtain of his own half-materialized aura.

Cutting through the pitch-black darkness where he couldn't see an inch ahead, he effortlessly closed the distance with the assassin.

Strangely, as he moved away from the main palace, the headache and tinnitus that had been tormenting him subsided, and his mind began to function normally once again.

Finally, he had a moment to calmly ponder the current situation. Judging by how rapidly his condition improved the moment he gained some distance, there was no doubt that the epicenter of this bizarre incident was that office.

-[Gaps] opening in the palace is a common occurrence. It's just that this time, it was so sudden that His Majesty didn't have a moment to enter the prayer room.

That's what Katrina had said.

Did that mean such things happened whenever the Holy Emperor occasionally entered the prayer room? Why had he never noticed it until now?

He would seclude himself in a remote place every time, dismissing even his escorts, so Logan had thought it was some kind of unnecessary arrogance.

Indeed, anyone who merely approached him would find it difficult to maintain their sanity. If even Commander Katrina, the Holy Emperor's sturdiest shield, was in such a state, no matter how many knights were by his side, proper escort would be impossible.

What exactly were these gaps?

What kind of effect did they have that they could disrupt a person's senses to such an extent and ultimately cause them to lose consciousness?

As he organized his thoughts, the assassin was running towards the greenhouse. It seemed he intended to pass through the second east gate.

However, the two were already in close proximity.

'Got you.'

The moment Logan nearly entered the range of his sword slash...

Swish!

As if sensing the danger, the assassin spun around and hurled throwing knives.

Clang! Clang!

Effortlessly deflecting the unexpected blades, Logan thought to himself.

'A simple deterrent? No killing intent, just trying to escape.'

To detect his range, which was far wider than that of ordinary knights, the assassin was quite skilled.

Moreover, judging by the aura carried on the throwing knives, the assassin seemed to have accurately grasped Logan's officially displayed combat prowess.

If he had to conceal his abilities as usual, he would have definitely struggled with the pursuit. He became curious about the identity of

his opponent.

Swoosh.

Simultaneously with the throwing knives, the presence emanating from the opponent nearly vanished completely. He had unleashed aura concealment to the maximum extent possible.

However, no matter how skilled an assassin was, there was no way Logan wouldn't notice the unnatural movement of the aura.

Swish.

Logan synchronized his body with the surrounding aura. An ability that could make him the ultimate assassin if he so desired. It was the aura synchronization of the Decaron Knights.

The enlightenment from his previous life never disappeared, allowing Logan to freely control his aura activity from birth.

That's how he had lived, displaying an aura activity level that appeared appropriate to others. Otherwise, he would have been suspected of having an inexplicably high aura activity from a young age.

On top of his already remarkably high aura affinity from being reborn and the leisurely environment that allowed him to devote himself to training...

Thanks to that, Logan had long ago reached the realm of a 10th-tier aura knight, a Decaron Knight, in this life as well.

Concealing his presence in such a manner, Logan swiftly overtook the assassin and released his aura synchronization right in front of him.

"...!"

The assassin was shocked and hastily drew his short sword. Then, reflexively imbuing it with his maximum aura, he swung it towards Logan!

However, Logan's reaction was even faster.

Clang!

The Henesys longsword, with its parrying hook pulled back to the limit, instantly deflected the assassin's blade far away. Losing his grip on the sword, the assassin momentarily lost his balance and staggered.

Swish.

Not missing that opening, Arjuna surged towards his neck.

The assassin reflexively raised his arm to guard, but Arjuna's blade, deftly penetrating the gap, was already pressed against his jaw.

"..."

"Reveal your identity. On whose orders did you enter the palace?"

Logan tapped the assassin's mask, which was pulled up to the tip of his nose, with the tip of his sword and asked.

If the opponent harbored no killing intent towards him, Logan had no intention of arbitrarily taking his life either. He would simply have the assassin reveal his identity and safely escort him to the Imperial Guard.

Of course, the moment he directed killing intent towards someone in the palace, his life might already be forfeit.

The assassin hesitated for a moment. However, realizing that there was absolutely no chance of escape no matter how much he contemplated, he meekly pulled down his mask.

It was a pitch-black night with a raging thunderstorm, but as a bolt of lightning struck at that moment, the assassin's face was brightly illuminated.

And...

"...!"

Upon seeing the opponent's face, Logan's eyes widened. The assassin's

face was far too familiar to him.

The face of someone he thought he would never see again.

Faced with this unbelievable sight, Logan unconsciously opened his mouth.

"...Benicio?"

Ah.

If this were a dream, it would truly be a terrible nightmare.

Barely managing to open his eyes amidst the severe dizziness, Seongjin carefully surveyed his surroundings.

'What is this now...?'

He was floating in an unidentifiable space.

As if filled with shattered mirrors or glass shards, the surroundings produced a dizzying scene, like the interior of a kaleidoscope, with various images intermingled.

A black sky with flashing lightning, a dense forest. Occasional glimpses of the office's scenery. And stars and nebulae shining as if about to pour down.

'Did my soul get separated again?'

As he could barely feel any gravity, he recalled the near-death experience he had not long ago.

However, upon closer inspection, he was still in Morres's appearance, wearing the banquet attire. Judging by the tangible sensation of his body, it seemed he hadn't been flung out as a mere soul this time.

But it was a bit ambiguous whether he had fully brought his body to this place. Among the fragmented images of the office that occasionally overlapped, there was clearly a scene of his own body

collapsed right beneath the sofa.

A strange feeling, as if he simultaneously existed in the office and here.

What kind of bizarre phenomenon was this?

'Hey, Demon King?'

He called out to the one who seemed most likely to explain this situation well, but there was no response.

It wasn't as if the Demon King's presence had disappeared from his mind, though. The Demon King's soul, frantically flailing about in confusion, could be distinctly felt.

He was probably making a fuss inside Seongjin's head. It was just that something was misaligned or the frequencies didn't match, so Seongjin couldn't properly receive the Demon King's thoughts, like a malfunctioning radio.

Rumble rumble.

Whether it was due to the thunderstorm visible in the scenery or some other cause, the entire space intermittently shook from the impact. It didn't seem like a place where one could stay for long.

'Anyway, that gentleman must be somewhere around here, right? I need to find him and quickly leave this place...'

But then, a curious thing happened.

The moment he thought of the Holy Emperor, his field of vision suddenly warped, and the distant images rushed towards him as if being pushed, in an instant.

Seongjin had a similar experience before. It was when he was sucked into the Vantra Moss caterpillar's channel and soared to the boundary between dimensions in one breath.

At that time, he thought he was simply flying somewhere faster than light, but...

'I'm not the one moving quickly...!'

Rather, the spaces surrounding him were crumpling and rapidly propelling his body beyond.

During the near-death experience, he had failed to properly perceive it, but strangely, he could now understand how the scenery warped and swiftly flung him.

How far had he flown?

Boom boom boom!

The occasional tremors gradually intensified, and their frequency also increased. Now, with each shake, a shock wave that seemed to almost shatter the surrounding space struck. Something ominous was definitely occurring here.

And after a while...

Seongjin spotted a small figure confronting something like gigantic shadows.

The fluttering white ceremonial robe and the golden crown shining above the head.

Seongjin unwittingly called out to him with all his might.

[Father!]

What burst forth was not sound but a kind of thought wave. At this, the Holy Emperor turned around with startled eyes.

[You...!]

Boom boom boom!

The world shook once more. As his vision spun wildly, Seongjin's body was instantly far away from the shadows.

And before he knew it, the Holy Emperor had approached and was vigorously shaking his shoulders.

[Why have you entered this place, my son?!]

Seongjin blinked.

Huh? He could clearly hear the Holy Emperor's voice, but his words weren't the usual 'sound'.

It was as if an entire sentence was hammered into his head, with the first and last syllables entering his mind simultaneously.

[What kind of place is this for you to say that?]

[This is a gap. It is not a place where a human body can remain for long.]

Again, 'this' and 'for long' were simultaneously driven into his head.

It was almost like the sense of time...

Suddenly, the Holy Emperor flinched and turned around.

Then...

Boom boom boom!

His body was mercilessly shaken by the impact, and his vision distorted in a dizzying manner.

When he came to his senses, Seongjin found himself dangling by the scruff of his neck, being carried somewhere by the Holy Emperor.

'...!'

Despite the tremendous speed, fortunately, his neck wasn't being strangled or anything. His gaze naturally directed backward, he could finally clearly see the identity of the enemies pursuing them.

There were two monsters.

One was a massive black beast with six legs and three tails. Its shape resembled both a dog and a wolf, but it was impossible to discern whether it was a tangible form or a mere shadow. Its body, which didn't reflect light at all, lacked any sense of volume.

The other had an even more bizarre appearance.

With something densely protruding up and down, it resembled a plant wriggling its roots and stems, or an anemone with numerous tentacles.

Ah, seeing the green luminous bodies attached to some of the tentacle tips, it might be a deformed jellyfish.

'But why does it feel familiar...?'

Seongjin leisurely critiqued them while dangling.

The malice-filled gaze piercing his body. The gaze the monsters directed at him resembled the unpleasant one he had sensed from the high-ranking demon kings at the dimensional boundary.

The only difference was that the pressure had diminished to a tolerable level.

[...To force your way into this space.]

The black beast, Greed, growled while fixing its gaze on Seongjin.

[Indeed. Who would have thought a child would interfere with the space? But why does that face look so familiar?]

The dark green tentacled monster, Sowing, responded with a puzzled tone while shaking a bundle of root-like protrusions that had risen upward. Although it was impossible to tell if it had a head, the gesture was like tilting its head in confusion.

At this, Greed let out a sneer.

[Isn't it obvious? You fail to recognize him even after directly preparing him?]

[Ah, was that so? Come to think of it, my apostle might have mentioned something like that before.]

Sowing, scratching one tentacle with another by bending a clump of tentacles, spoke in an embarrassed manner. Then, the sporadically

attached luminous bodies simultaneously emitted light.

[Well, what does it matter? We just need to eliminate the emperor anyway, right? Since it's troublesome, let's just get rid of him together here!]

As the distance was close, fragments of their thoughts reached Seongjin as well.

'Did I inadvertently become a burden to this gentleman by coming here?'

Should I ask him to flick me and send me back, even now? But before that, if I could at least land a valid hit on one of those bastards...

While gauging the distance from the monsters and fiddling with the Walnut Cracker, he felt the Holy Emperor's gaze glancing at him.

[You're unnecessarily racking your brain again, I see.]

This time, too, his words flowed into Seongjin's mind without any time lag, but Seongjin was now somewhat accustomed to this mode of communication.

[So I did end up being a hindrance, didn't I?]

[...]

The Holy Emperor fell silent for a moment but soon shook his head.

[No, it was rather timely. If not for you, the causality would have been insufficient, and it would have consumed a considerable amount of time.]

Causality?

[It's a side effect of the birthday banquet. Since I have no choice but to bestow blessings upon many people, it inevitably leads to a tremendous expenditure of causality. That's why those fellows targeted today.]

Hmm. Honestly, he didn't quite understand what he meant.

Pondering for a moment while dangling and swaying, Seongjin suddenly thought of something amusing.

When it came to causality, although he didn't know much, it meant some conditions were necessary, like with Commander Bruno, right?

[Father, I have a request!]

He felt the Holy Emperor glancing at him.

[A request.]

[Yes.]

Then, Seongjin confidently exclaimed.

[Please give those bizarre bastards over there a good beating, no, could you eliminate them entirely?]

Instantly, a strange attraction was felt enveloping both Seongjin and the Holy Emperor simultaneously.

And...

[...]

The Holy Emperor did not respond to those words, but from the conveyed atmosphere alone, Seongjin could tell that he had smiled.

[I shall show you something amusing.]

Along with the Holy Emperor's words, which somehow conveyed a sense of delight, something glowing white appeared before Seongjin's eyes.

Because the shining form with a smooth, streamlined shape followed them while flapping its tail, Seongjin initially thought it was a fish the size of a forearm.

[This is called a salt image.]

[A salt image?]

[When a concept materializes, it reaches a tangible form like this. It's also something not easily seen outside of a place like this. Perhaps it may be a good opportunity.]

That fish-like thing seemed to move entirely according to the Holy Emperor's will. Judging by how it swam close to Seongjin's left and right, allowing for easy observation.

Huh? But what about that shape?

[Do you know what it is?]

And another fish appeared at Seongjin's feet. Followed by a third, fourth...

A total of five fish, enveloped in white light, were swimming vigorously while chasing after them.

At that moment, Seongjin realized the identity of these fish.

'...True Salmon?'

Although it was difficult to discern immediately due to the bright light surrounding them, what these fish were flapping like tails were undoubtedly the guard and hilt of a proper sword!

However, when he slightly turned his head to look, the original True Salmon was properly attached to the Holy Emperor's waist.

[They clearly look identical to True Salmon, but...!]

Then, a faint vibration was transmitted from the Holy Emperor. It was as if he had let out a small laugh.

'So this is a salt image!'

Seongjin realized two things.

One was that the image of an object familiar to the Holy Emperor was directly projected onto the [salt images] swimming and following them. He was currently imagining True Salmon with aura blades forming and shining around it.

And the other was...

'They really resemble a school of salmon swimming against a fierce current...'

In other words, in this gentleman's mind, True Salmon was already a salmon.

He was absently staring at the flapping swords, dumbfounded by the absurdity, when the Holy Emperor spoke again.

[Yes. Now that you know what these are, let's see their utility.]

The moment those words ended...

The five salmon... no, the True Salmons simultaneously turned their heads and shot towards the monsters at a tremendous speed!

Swish!

They flew while slicing through all the colliding spaces. Becoming a

beam of light while passing through the office, a white thunderbolt under the stormy sky, and a comet with a long tail in the black universe.

Flash flash.

The True Salmons, swiftly traversing from one space to another, finally collided with the bodies of the startled monsters who were trying to dodge, and exploded on impact.

Boom! Bang! Bang!

Every world shook entirely, causing intense vibrations. The monsters, having been struck heavily, let out strange sounds that could have been either screams or grunts as they staggered.

Roar!

'Oh...'

All the explosions occurring here and there were this gentleman's doing!

While the monsters faltered, the Holy Emperor, who had swiftly distanced himself from them, asked.

[Do you understand the series of processes in which the salt images are created, move, and finally activate?]

[Well, roughly?]

Seongjin vaguely grasped the essence of that technique. It belonged more to the realm of intuition than reason.

[Then will you try it?]

Hmm, flying swords...

Seongjin tried to visualize the Walnut Cracker in his mind. The sturdy steel blade and the image of it flying straight like a missile.

Then, for a moment, a hazy gray stick-like object flickered before his

eyes and vanished.

Oh? It might be simpler than he thought.

'Alright. Let's go with this feeling!'

Seongjin tried to concentrate to the best of his ability. Soon, the monsters caught up to them again in a fluster, but he paid no attention to them whatsoever.

Surely this gentleman would skillfully evade them.

Swish.

The tentacled monster, having barely narrowed the distance, rapidly shot out dozens of legs.

From afar, they appeared as soft and supple as anemone tentacles submerged in seawater, but as they flew closer, the thickness and strength of each strand evoked the image of massive logs.

It was a terrifying attack that tore apart all the spaces it touched as it flew, but the Holy Emperor nimbly moved his body and dodged the numerous legs.

Roar!

At that moment, the black beast, which had been running around seeking an opportunity, seized the opening and thrust its sharp fangs.

Its teeth, dripping with jet-black mana, were nearly as tall as Seongjin, and it was clear that if his body got caught in them, he would be torn apart without a trace.

The Holy Emperor then leaped through space while carrying Seongjin. Instantly, a stormy black sky unfolded around them.

Clack!

The beast's muzzle followed, viciously snapping its jaws, but they effortlessly dodged its fangs and were already flying under a tranquil starry sky.

Close calls continued thereafter, but this entire process was merely a simple practice session for the Holy Emperor. He was silently waiting for Seongjin to realize something.

[It doesn't necessarily have to be a weapon. Just try to think of what you're most familiar with.]

As the phenomenon of hazy sticks appearing and disappearing repeated meaninglessly, the Holy Emperor gently advised him.

Hmm, something familiar...

Seongjin pondered seriously while dangling.

[Roar! That's really annoying!]

Sowing, who had lost some of his lower tentacles, flailed about and grumbled. With a body less mobile than the beast-shaped Greed, he had taken quite a heavy blow by being hit by four out of the five swords alone.

[The emperor of Delcross is indeed no easy opponent, as expected.]

Despite being confident that he hadn't let his guard down, Greed had to admit that their preparations were insufficient.

In recent years, the Holy Emperor, bound by the [Agreement], had been unable to perform even the simple act of 'directly drawing' properly due to a lack of causality. That's why they thought that just their avatars, not their main bodies, would be sufficient to confront the Holy Emperor.

However, the king of Delcross was quite adept at exploiting loopholes. Instead of doing something directly, he launched salt images to strike them indirectly yet efficiently.

The salt images themselves were in the form of small swords that weren't very lethal, but they chased after them as if possessing a will of their own, causing explosions of varying sizes. Of course, compared to the power of the avatars they had brought, it was a minor damage.

However, even if it was an attack so trivial it was laughable, if they kept getting hit without being able to land a single blow, the story would be different.

If the night passed like this, it was evident who would emerge victorious.

[Moreover, there's something bothering me...]

Greed frowned as he looked at the boy dangling from the Holy Emperor's grasp.

The boy had his eyes closed and was muttering something intently. It was an exceedingly carefree demeanor in this situation, but...

Strangely, an ominous aura was emanating from that boy.

[What on earth is he doing?]

Sowing muttered in a daze while gathering his retracted tentacles. He, too, had sensed something foreboding.

Greed shouted while forcefully kicking one of the intermingled dimensions.

[That one is the prepared one! It wouldn't be strange for him to initiate anything. Be careful!]

At that moment, a small spark appeared in front of the boy with a flash.

Something small. Something easy to imagine.

But something that could become the most lethal if it struck the enemy.

Soon, a small dark red flame flickered before Seongjin's open eyes. It resembled a small fragment of the Demon King's soul, or perhaps the flames of Gehenna.

As he was gazing at the flame, which was gradually taking on a more distinct form and burning, the Holy Emperor glanced at it and

nodded.

[Yes, it looks good.]

[Haha!]

Seongjin grinned with satisfaction. It was the first clear salt image he had created.

Delightful. From now on, he would name it Demon King No. 2!

[Then what will you do with it now?]

[I'll launch it at the enemy!]

[Alright.]

Great! Fly, Demon King No. 2!

Seongjin confidently commanded the flame.

However, perhaps because the image was too different from the missile he had initially envisioned, Seongjin's Demon King No. 2 did not fly magnificently like the Holy Emperor's salmon.

The flame, which fell limply like a poorly thrown ball, fortunately collided with the wobbling head of the tentacled monster that happened to approach closely.

It was too small to begin with, and since it wasn't the Holy Emperor's threatening sword strike in the first place, the monster had clearly let its guard down.

However, the outcome was unexpected.

The moment that small flame touched...

Whoosh!

Suddenly, fierce dark red flames erupted from that spot and rapidly spread, engulfing the monster's upper tentacles and devouring it.

As if it were the flames of Gehenna itself, instantly consuming

everything.

[Argh! What is this?!]

The startled anemone, surrounded by flames that wouldn't easily extinguish, stopped in its tracks and began headbanging!

[How pathetic. Why aren't you extinguishing it quickly?]

As Greed passed by the monster and asked in disbelief, Sowing cried out with a wronged voice.

[No! There's something strange about this! It won't go out! What the hell is this?]

He thrashed about, enveloped in flames.

The sight of the massive tentacle bundles burning away strand by strand, scattering bright embers, was truly a spectacle to behold.

As he was contentedly watching that dazzling fireworks display, the Holy Emperor uttered a word of praise.

[Well done.]

[Hahaha!]

You think so too, Father?

As Seongjin was laughing with satisfaction, the Holy Emperor glanced around and spoke.

[Let's head back now. We've delayed more than expected. I'll deal with the remaining one swiftly.]

[Swiftly?]

What was this gentleman going to show him this time?

As Seongjin's eyes sparkled with anticipation, the Holy Emperor nodded.

[Yes. Thanks to you, the causality is sufficient.]

And the moment those words ended...

'...!'

Seongjin's eyes widened as he held his breath. Hundreds, no, thousands of fish had appeared around them and begun swimming in unison, encircling them.

Seongjin gaped blankly at the majestic yet beautiful sight.

The dazzlingly shining white salmon moving in parallel yet in perfect unison appeared as if they had become a single giant creature.

Or perhaps those fish themselves were a silver-glowing wave, and they were swimming in the sea of that light.

And after a while...

[Go.]

With a brief command, that peaceful scene came to an end.

Swish!

Like hundreds of cruise missiles launched simultaneously, the silver swords changed direction and surged towards the monsters in unison.

It was a truly remarkable sight to see those white streaks of light traversing and leaping across spaces as if each possessing its own will, tracing hundreds of trajectories.

And without exception, they struck the black dog and anemone, emitting a blinding white light with a whoosh.

'...!'

Seongjin tightly closed his eyes, bracing himself for the impending impact. However, strangely, he didn't feel the anticipated shock. The surroundings were utterly silent without a single sound of an explosion.

Slowly opening his eyes, he found himself standing on a

mountainside with a drizzling rain.

The Holy Emperor, who had unleashed hundreds of missiles at the monsters, had taken refuge beyond the fragmented spaces before they even exploded.

Was it alright like this? Without confirming the fate of those monsters until the end?

[Once the result is determined upon impact, it does not change. By now, they wouldn't have even a trace of their forms remaining. We can leave this place now.]

The Holy Emperor spoke upon seeing Seongjin's dumbfounded face. Then, gently placing Seongjin on the ground, he slightly raised the corner of his mouth.

[Come to think of it, I had promised to examine your sword someday.]

After the Heresy Tribunal had been reduced to its current state, the Holy Emperor had asked Seongjin to bring his sword during an audience.

The problem was that since then, with the birthday banquet preparations and the Monster Special Task Force work, both the Holy Emperor and Seongjin had become busy, making it difficult to find an opportunity.

The Holy Emperor drew True Salmon from his waist and slowly aimed it forward as he continued.

[This, too, shall be a good opportunity. Engrave this path well in your mind.]

The blade of the salmon... no, True Salmon, held in his hand, was enveloped in light, and a beam of light began to extend forward from it.

[The path of the sword should always be the simplest. However, it does not become the same path for everyone.]

The white, glowing aura blade had elongated to about the length of the Walnut Cracker. However, Seongjin strangely felt that the tip of the sword was so long that it was out of sight.

It wouldn't be unreasonable.

If this sword was aiming at the end of the world in a space that reached there the moment one thought of it, it had already touched that boundary.

[You will eventually reach here on your own. So it wouldn't be too bad to experience it in advance once or twice.]

And then...

Without any warning...

Without even a sound of something breaking...

The world before his eyes was split in an instant.

Logan was currently in the grip of an intense sense of dissonance.

The panoramic view of the greenhouse garden amidst the raging storm receded into the distance, and the unmasked face of his opponent filled his entire field of vision.

"...Benicio?"

Slowly lowering the tip of the sword pointed at the assassin, Logan unwittingly uttered the name of his old friend aloud.

Is this truly a dream?

-I believe that by realizing the future the Republicans dream of, Ortona will move in a better direction.

The academy cadet who brilliantly shone his eyes as he envisioned the glorious future of his homeland.

-Do you also think I've betrayed the royal family just because I'm the 2nd Prince who couldn't seize the throne? Can't you also believe in my firm conviction to support the republican government for the future of the country?

The friend who, deeply frustrated by an insurmountable reality, clung to a bottle of alcohol and lamented.

"Why in the world are you here...?"

After parting ways on the Andres Plains, his fate, whether alive or dead, had been unclear.

Rumble, crash!

Lightning strikes again. In that fleeting moment, all sorts of thoughts

flooded Logan's mind.

Even after coming back to life, I kept inquiring about you. I searched for the whereabouts of my Republican comrades. I never intended to betray our homeland. It's just that if I abandon everything like this and leave for Ortona, it would result in betraying my current family as well...

"Your Highness."

Logan flinched at the cold voice calling out to him.

The chilly raindrops drenching his head slowly bring him back to his senses. He is now Logan of Delcross. Not Gale Bertrand.

"Benicio. How do you know his name?"

At that question, Logan scrutinized the assassin's face anew.

At first glance, he thought it was the spitting image of Benicio, but upon regaining his composure and taking a closer look, there were subtle differences in the facial contours. The long scar running from the corner of his mouth to his chin was also something his friend never had.

Above all, if his friend were still alive, he would have already passed his 60th birthday by now. Yet the man before him is far too young, isn't he?

Logan asked in a strained voice.

"...Do you know him?"

In response, the assassin glanced down at Arjuna, which was pointed at him, instead of answering.

"I've been wanting to ask Your Highness for a long time. Why does an imperial prince possess General Gale's sword?"

"....."

"Is that how you flaunt the Empire's power that easily sank the

peerless Sword Master? As if killing him wasn't enough, did you want to ridicule the fallen Ortona to the end?"

Logan felt a chill run down his spine at the creeping bad premonition.

A young man who instantly recognized Arjuna, knows of Gale Bertrand, and is the spitting image of his friend Benicio in his youth.

Could it be...?

'...Lord Kike[1]?'

The arm gripping Arjuna fell limply to his side. After gazing at Logan's ashen face for a moment, the young man furrowed his brow as if displeased by something.

"Please forgive my rudeness towards Your Highness."

"....."

"I was a bit flustered by your sudden pursuit. There seems to be some misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding....."

"Yes. I am His Majesty's direct intelligence agent dispatched from the guild."

Logan blinked slowly, gauging the storm-tossed air around him.

This is the truth.

"I did not enter the imperial palace with any impure intentions. So please just let me go."

This is... a lie.

When no response came, the young man took a couple of steps back, wary of Arjuna.

Even so, upon confirming that Logan remained frozen in place, he swiftly turned around and leaped over the wall, vanishing.

"....."

Though he had a mountain of questions to ask, Logan couldn't bring himself to chase after him any further.

Forgetting even to activate Aura, his fingertips gripping Arjuna tightly grew cold in the rain.

"The Lord has prepared many things for you, so grace will fill your cup to overflowing."

With the transparent voice reciting a verse from the scriptures, a sacred white light pours down upon the head. The blessed Duke of Carthago bowed his head solemnly in deep emotion.

This little saintess, wearing a white veil, was as sacred as if the Lord had personally molded her.

As a result, just by looking at her, a miracle occurred where the stiff neck joints of the dignitaries were healed on their own.

"As the Lord answers your upright faith....."

Sisle spoke thus and bestowed a blessing upon another dignitary's head.

The young saintess, seasoned through years of service and visitations, knew all too well how to make people more devout through her actions.

Thanks to that, the dignitaries were lining up to receive blessings from this little saintess.

It was extremely rare for dignitaries to simultaneously receive blessings from a saintess at a birthday banquet. Usually, saintess tended to the lowest of the low, so they seldom met royalty or dignitaries.

The other saintess, Seo Yi-seo, stood next to Sisle doing nothing, but the dignitaries were satisfied even with that. When in Cardmos Mode,

Seo Yi-seo exuded majestic air just by standing still with her golden eyes shining.

"The banquet hall's atmosphere has stabilized."

Empress Tatiana whispered to Queen Melody while fanning herself with an elegant gesture.

She had been concerned about the Holy Emperor's delay, but nevertheless maintained her composure without forgetting her position. Just by the Empress quietly holding the head seat, it would help quell the agitation of those present.

"Yes. This is all thanks to Princess Amelia."

Queen Melody responded with a gentle smile.

As she said, the one currently captivating the mood of those present was none other than Amelia.

The princess keenly grasped the overall flow of the banquet hall, sought out the agitated dignitaries, and skillfully led them to be swept back into the banquet atmosphere.

Even she, well-versed in palace life, couldn't help but admire Amelia's timely response.

"I don't know how she can be so reliable at such a young age. I thought of her as just a delicate girl, but she has already grown so dignified. Isn't this the attitude befitting the Empire's Eldest Princess?"

"It really is....."

Empress Tatiana trailed off. In her heart, she wished Logan would take on such a role.

Then, her eyes caught sight of the 1st Queen, surrounded by a crowd and smiling radiantly. An overly flashy appearance, as if she had plastered her entire body with gold accessories.

She neither holds the head seat nor shows the slightest inclination to

care for the banquet hall's atmosphere.

'Lizabeth.....'

Tatiana had been well aware of her ambitions from the beginning. If the Holy Emperor had not cracked down on factional strife and conspiracies, she would have already clashed with her numerous times.

But it was strange. When her son was notorious for being a good-for-nothing, she tried so hard to have him appointed as the Crown Prince, but now that he has transformed admirably, she doesn't even spare him a proper glance.

Just what could that arrogant woman be thinking now?

"Oh my! Princess Herna and Prince Gades look just like dolls, don't they? Look at them holding hands tightly and sitting together!"

Then, Queen Melody exclaimed beside her.

'This one is too naive, which is troublesome.'

If not for the Holy Emperor, she would have instantly fallen prey to the inner palace struggles and become a mere meal. An innocent lamb whose purity had been maintained for over a decade, attesting to how stable the palace atmosphere had been all this time.

However.

'In the end, the succession struggle will inevitably occur someday. It is too obvious a principle to be avoided forever. Yet, with grown children like this, His Majesty still hasn't appointed a Crown Prince. Just what could he be thinking...?'

Empress Tatiana raised her fan, skillfully concealing the sigh escaping her lips.

Meanwhile, Amelia, judging that the banquet hall had settled down to a certain extent, looked around with relief.

Then, her gaze suddenly fixed on a corner terrace. More precisely, on

the backs of the twins sitting in front of the closed terrace window.

Herna and Gades sat side by side in their seats like dolls carefully placed in a display case, motionless and gazing out the window.

"Are you enjoying the banquet?"

As Amelia approached, the two simultaneously turned to look at her. Then, with a rather mature expression, they politely complimented her.

"You did well, Sister Amelia."

"Good job, Sister Amelia."

"Hoho. It seems you've stopped switching clothes now."

Amelia smiled faintly and patted their shoulders. The twins, noticing a hint of shadow on her face, nodded.

"Don't worry about Emperor Daddy. He'll be back soon since Morres went."

"Daddy His Majesty will be fine. Morres will somehow resolve it if he gets involved."

Amelia inwardly marveled as she alternated her gaze between the two. Sitting quietly in this spot, they already seem to be aware of the anomaly on the 2nd floor.

'Well, these kids sometimes seem to know everything.'

With that realization, Amelia asked.

"Do you two know what happened on the 2nd floor?"

"Yeah. It's the aftermath of a gap suddenly opening up. It's hard for ordinary people to endure."

"Just getting close to it will affect you. Of course, the distance to the banquet hall is okay."

Amelia grew anxious at that answer. It dawned on her that she had

sent Logan and Morres to such a place without any countermeasures, and now she was starting to regret it.

The banquet hall situation seems roughly settled, so should I go to the office now? Just as she was thinking that and about to turn around, the twins grabbed her arms from both sides.

"It's okay. Morres will need to get used to gaps from now on."

"Don't worry. Morres might already be used to it."

"But....."

Right then, a worried-looking knight approached them.

"Your Highness. Have you seen Prince Morres by any chance? I haven't been able to find him anywhere for a while now."

"Ah! You've come at the right time, –orabeoni. I was just about to go look for him. Would you come with me to the office?"

Saying that, she glanced back at the twins, but they had already let go of Amelia's hands and were completely absorbed in gazing out the window, no longer paying attention to them.

Although feeling a bit unsettled, Amelia looked back at them one more time before leaving.

And, shortly after, the twins.

"Oh, it's Emperor Daddy!"

"Yeah, Daddy His Majesty."

They exclaimed upon spotting lightning traveling between clouds.

White bolts flashing here and there among the clouds without striking the ground.

"Suddenly, it feels like he's overflowing with energy?"

"I know, he seems to be in a good mood."

Then, they fell silent and continued to watch the stormy scene outside.

"You know. If we go through gaps like that, do you think we'll be able to return there someday?"

After a while, Herna asked, lightly tugging on the gold necklace around her neck.

"Of course we will. The traces of the world squeezing in still remain like this."

Gades replied, fiddling with the gold cufflinks adorning his sleeves.

"Now that I think about it, I kind of miss that place."

"It's just nostalgia. Honestly, I don't want to go back."

They continued their cryptic conversation for some time.

Then, as if it were a lie, the lightning suddenly subsided. The children, who had been placidly gazing up at the rain, now weaker than before, shuddered.

"Ah....."

They looked at each other and simultaneously exclaimed.

"He's back!"

Blink blink.

Upon opening his eyes, Seongjin realized he had collapsed right under the sofa. He tried to get up, but.

Ugh.

He immediately staggered and lay back down on the floor, retching.

'Why... Why am I so dizzy?'

No, it was an extreme vertigo that couldn't be described simply as dizziness. It felt as if the semicircular canals inside his head were simultaneously rotating in three directions.

The sense of time and space twisted haphazardly, as if someone had grabbed his nerve strings and was gleefully playing jump rope with them.

[Waaaah! Lee Seongjin! You bastard!]

The Demon King wailed and shouted in his head.

[Just what the hell happened? Why did you suddenly collapse and not respond at all?]

The guy was practically sobbing.

Seeing the Demon King, who usually remained silent next to the Holy Emperor, making such a fuss, it seemed he must have been extremely worried.

But I'm okay now, so could you please quiet down? My head is ringing from the noise!

[Wahhh! Hey! I thought your soul had gone somewhere again, and I was so.....]

Then, a soft voice spoke above Seongjin's head.

"Noisy....."

[Eek!]

The Demon King promptly shut his mouth.

Suppressing the urge to vomit, he looked up and saw the Holy Emperor awakening on the sofa, staggering to sit up.

"Don't worry. This is purely due to sensory disruption. It's not a physical issue....."

The Holy Emperor covered his mouth with his hand after saying that

much. It seems he also feels like vomiting just by speaking.

And the same went for Seongjin. The moment he moved his head to look at the Holy Emperor, a spinning sensation accompanied by nausea hit him.

Quietly lowering his head and waiting for it to subside, the Holy Emperor's hand came over his head, and a bright divine power poured down.

But didn't you say it's not a physical problem? What's the point of using divine power then!

However, Seongjin also couldn't utter these words aloud. Seriously. Just holding back the urge to vomit was already at his limit.

Ugh.

Every time Seongjin dryly heaved, divine power showered upon his head. It seems like a waste, but.

'Well, I guess this old man has nothing else he can do for me...'

If that provides him some emotional comfort, then whatever.

T/N:

1. Prince Benicio's son. Mentioned in Chapter 102[↔]

"It seems we overdid it with the spatial leaps."

How much time had passed? The Holy Emperor, having regained his composure first, sat Seongjin up on the sofa and spoke. By the looks of it, he was in high spirits, intent on giving his son a near-death experience.

"Rest here for a bit until you feel better."

Seeing the somewhat sullen expression on the Holy Emperor's face as he said that, Seongjin couldn't help but chuckle.

"But thanks to that, it was incredibly fun. You saw it too, right? That kraken burning up in flames... Ugh!"

"....."

As expected, a cascade of divine power pours down upon his head once more.

Then, with faltering, feeble steps, the Holy Emperor approached Katrina, who was kneeling at the entrance.

Leaning against her sword with a haggard face, Katrina instantly regained her energy the moment she received his divine power. It seemed this terrible motion sickness was an aftereffect that only affected those who had directly entered and exited the gap.

"Your Majesty!"

Katrina sprang up from her spot and supported the Holy Emperor.

Following behind, Louis awakened and tidied her disheveled clothes, and the attendants also rose one by one.

They were puzzled as to why they had suddenly collapsed, but upon receiving the rare honor of being directly healed by the Holy Emperor's miracle, they couldn't hide their delight. The attendants returned to their duties with much lighter steps.

"Emperor Daddy! You're safe!"

"Your Majesty! What happened? Where is Prince Morres?"

Just then, Amelia and the knight came running to the office, only to be dumbfounded as they too were showered with the Holy Emperor's divine power.

"Let us head to the banquet hall as is."

"Yes, I shall escort you, Your Majesty."

Katrina placed her hand on her chest and bowed her head respectfully.

As the Holy Emperor moved to step into the corridor, he suddenly halted and turned his head to gaze at the terrace. For a moment, a faint silver light flashed in his eyes.

"Did Logan happen to come here?"

"Ah, yes. He came with me but went to the garden, saying he was chasing the assassin."

At Seongjin's answer, the Holy Emperor's brows furrowed slightly.

"...He encountered that person at a bad time."

"Pardon?"

"Louis. Please prepare extra blankets and fresh warm tea in the office."

Although puzzled by the sudden order, the experienced chief chamberlain soon bowed his head and obediently replied.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"You all follow me as well. Let the children rest undisturbed."

Amelia and the knight, who were about to rush towards Seongjin, were caught by the Holy Emperor and dragged back to the banquet hall.

'Hmm.....'

Seongjin watched them for a moment before closing his eyes. A sense of relief washed over him, knowing everything had been resolved.

Even though the Holy Emperor looked a bit low on energy, the transmitted Aura movements were as calm as ever. It must be due to the motion sickness, and his actual condition wasn't that bad.

As he was lounging around in the office for a while.

[Lee Seongjin.]

The Demon King muttered.

'Yeah?'

[The 2nd Prince is outside?]

...What?

Seongjin was startled and sat up. A momentary dizziness hit him, but the nausea had subsided to a tolerable level by now.

'Seriously, I just can't sense these Decalon Knights unless I'm on high alert! If he's back, why isn't he coming in right away?'

Could it be that he's dejected after letting the assassin escape?

Grumbling like that, Seongjin walked to the terrace. Rain was pouring into the office through the slightly open window.

"Oh....."

And at the end of the terrace, Seongjin found Logan completely drenched in the rain. For some unfathomable reason, he wasn't coming inside and just stood there blankly, facing the garden while

getting soaked.

Seongjin was astonished.

"You!"

Hey, how could a former Sword Master end up looking like a drowned rat, with all that Aura!

Seongjin dashed over in a single stride and grabbed Logan by the collar. His body temperature had dropped so low that Seongjin's hand holding his lapel turned chilly.

After dragging the dripping wet Logan to the office sofa, Louis, who had just entered with blankets, was startled and rushed over. Soon, a dry blanket was draped over Logan's head, and a warm cup of tea was pushed towards him.

In that moment, both Seongjin and Louis realized.

Ah, so that seemingly random order had a reason behind it.

Once the situation was somewhat settled, the perceptive chief chamberlain quietly made himself scarce.

"What on earth happened? Did you lose the guy? No, what's the big deal about letting one assassin escape?"

"....."

Logan kept his head lowered and remained silent. His fingertips gripping the teacup had turned blue, but the shivering seemed to be due to something other than the cold.

Sensing something unusual, Seongjin waited quietly until Logan spoke in a barely audible voice a moment later.

"...Lee Seongjin."

"Yeah."

"I've remained a coward to this end. Back then, I shouldn't have

burdened my friends and comrades with everything and closed my eyes so easily."

"What?"

"I shouldn't have taken comfort in reality like this, using the excuse that it was inevitable. When I think about what state of mind that young boy must have been in to decide to walk the path of an assassin while I was doing that....."

Logan fell silent again, but from that one remark, Seongjin could infer a great deal.

It seemed the assassin was someone Logan knew in his previous life.

In that case, he must have harbored an intense antipathy towards the Empire, and Logan ended up confronting him as an imperial prince. It was the worst possible situation.

'No, but still.....'

I may not know the detailed circumstances of the Ortona Civil War, but you didn't die so easily, did you?

Finding it absurd, Seongjin picked up a nearby cushion and threw it at Logan. The cushion hit his head with a thud and fell to the floor, rolling away.

This bastard isn't even dodging?

Ah, it's infuriating.

"Hey, Logan! There's a limit to self-blame. Why are you feeling unnecessary guilt towards the people you risked your life to save? Why? What did that assassin bastard say to you? Being ungrateful has its limits too."

"...That can't be helped. To them, I'm just a prince of the enemy nation."

"Of course, you can't reveal your true identity to them. But you see, what wrong did 'Logan' of Delcros do to them? You weren't even born

at the time of the civil war, dude! Is the Ortona Civil War your fault?"

"But still....."

"On top of that, you diligently hunted Sea Demons for the sake of your compatriots! Do you think just anyone can consistently manage troops like that? It's all possible because you're an imperial prince! How many lives have you saved with your own hands? If you realize that, you should be more confident in yourself!"

As the second cushion came flying, this time Logan slightly moved his body to avoid it.

"Even if I saved their lives, their miserable situation remains unchanged."

"But you already gave your life! Then what more do you think you should have done back then?!"

"....."

Logan lifted his head and looked at the fuming Seongjin with slightly surprised eyes. Then, he soon crinkled the corners of his eyes. It was a smile that seemed somehow hazy and sorrowful.

"When we resolved to fight to the end on that plain, can you imagine the weight that was forcibly placed upon the people who were compelled to survive?"

Seongjin thought with a disgruntled expression.

I don't know about that. I've never tried to preserve myself for the sake of the future in the first place.

"As the tide of war turned irrevocably against us, Benicio and I shared many conversations over drinks. And the conclusion we finally reached together was that it would take much longer than we thought for republicanism to blossom on this continent. Without slowly changing perceptions from within the Empire over generations, there would be no future for this continent. A hundred years... No, it might even take several times that long."

"....."

"Yeah. I'll be honest with you, Lee Seongjin. When I died at the hands of Commander Silas, I was actually deeply relieved. An undertaking that could take centuries, who could easily shoulder that? I had no confidence in silently walking through that endless dark tunnel forever."

Setting the teacup down on the table with a clink, Logan rubbed his face with both hands and continued.

"I passed that heavy burden onto Benicio and died carefree. Consoling myself that I had done my best. How utterly cowardly of me, right?"

And after running away through death like that, what did he do when he gained life again?

Rationalizing that there were limits to what he could do as a prince of the enemy nation and that he couldn't betray his newfound family. He just wandered meaninglessly outside the Empire.

But now, Logan had come to a clear realization.

The reason he had been so busy hunting Sea Demons without a moment to think. The reason he hadn't searched for Benicio and his companions more actively.

"I thought I would do anything for my homeland. I was determined to help from behind the scenes, concealing my identity. But you see....."

"....."

"I was just running away. Simply afraid of the cold gazes I would receive from them, I couldn't bring myself to take the shortcut even though I knew it. I thought I could endure any stigma, but in reality, I wasn't prepared to properly face any of my former comrades."

Seongjin's eyebrows twitched.

This guy is starting to dig a hole with no end in sight.

"Oh, is that so?"

Pretending to change the blanket, Seongjin approached Logan and pulled the blanket over his head, then performed a headlock with all the brotherly love he could muster.

"Ack! Hey! Lee Seongjin!"

So, how's that? This is the technique of hunter Lee Seongjin, who could snap the legs of a Blatta Mantis in an instant!

While Logan struggled under the blanket, unable to bring himself to use Aura to break free, Seongjin's eyes gradually turned fierce as he glared towards the terrace.

What kind of bastard is he? Just who the hell touched this poor guy?

If I ever meet him, I won't let him off easy!

"Achoo!"

Guild's Capital Central Branch.

Greta, the Capital Branch Chief, clicked her tongue as she watched Enrique constantly sneezing.

"What on earth were you doing, coming back completely drenched like that? Today isn't even a regular reporting day, so why did you enter the Imperial Palace?"

"Isn't it the birthday banquet? It's a once-a-year event, so unexpected variables could arise. Fortunately, I had good luck today. There was an interesting occurrence at the main palace."

"An interesting occurrence?"

"Yes. A phenomenon similar to when he entered the prayer room appeared in the office today. The headache was so severe that it was difficult to approach recklessly. It might be a clue to finding his weakness."

"....."

Greta offered a dry towel and gazed at the young man's stubborn face for a moment.

"...Kike."

"It's No. 21."

"Right, No. 21."

Then, she quietly sighed and asked.

"Isn't it time you let go of that anger now?"

Enrique looked at her with an incredulous expression.

"How can you say that? Aren't you a compatriot who fled Ortona together?"

"Yes. That's right."

Known as a prodigy since her academy days, she had thrown herself into the Republican cause with youthful passion. As a member of the Republican faction's staff, she had strived to the end to overcome the desperate situation.

In the end, on General Gale's orders, she had been tasked with evacuating Prince Benicio and his son Kike to the Empire.

That connection of seeking refuge with the Astros Mercenary Corps led her to take on a key position in the guild.

Therefore, it wasn't that she couldn't understand Enrique's feelings.

How much had he relied on and followed the mercenary corps' 'Bart' since childhood? To the point where it seemed he regarded him as his protector even more than his father, Prince Benicio.

But later, it was revealed that he was the prince of Delcross who had brought ruin to their homeland. How could words even begin to describe the betrayal young Kike felt towards him at that time?

The problem was that the Holy Emperor, who used to kindly answer Kike's questions, became excessively tight-lipped around that time. He offered no excuses or explanations for inheriting the throne.

Thus, the relationship between the two deepened into a rift, and Kike, who started training to become an assassin, now repeatedly aimed for the Holy Emperor's life by his side.

However, those who had worked in the guild for a long time had noticed.

The Holy Emperor quietly let the intelligence agent, who occasionally couldn't hide his murderous intent, be and had him investigate this and that about the continent's situation under the guise of missions, essentially educating him.

To him, Kike was still that child who needed to be looked after, just like when they first met.

"Kike. There are some major conspiracies brewing beneath the surface of the continent right now."

Rubbing her eye wrinkles that had started to crease with the passage of time, Greta spoke.

Initially, she too had burned with immense anger towards the enemy of her homeland, but working together for such a long time naturally led to certain realizations.

"Major conspiracies?"

"Yes."

The branch chief's eyes shone with gravity as she faced the young man's defiant expression.

"Without maintaining even this irrational form of the Empire, we might not be able to handle the enormous things that could soon....."

What the eyes of the wise woman who had nurtured the guild for many years saw.

It was none other than the signs of a massive approaching storm.

[TL/N: Mindblowned. Enrique = No.21 = Kike]

After the Holy Emperor made his appearance, the main banquet of the birthday celebration came to a smooth close.

Word had it that, for some unfathomable reason, His Majesty had bestowed blessings with far more leisure and care than the previous year.

By the time the banquet dispersed, the tempest had completely subsided, so the dignitaries left immensely satisfied without sensing anything out of the ordinary.

Seongjin, who had returned to Pearl Palace slightly later than planned due to tending to Logan, instructed Dasha, who had come for an investigative report.

"Let's wrap up the investigation on the merchant guild at this point."

The Milo Trading Guild wasn't very large in scale, so the basic accounting data and personal information of key personnel had already been investigated.

As expected, nothing significant was flagged in the basic investigation. Even if they had ties to the Dark Cult, they wouldn't be foolish enough to leave evidence of it.

In that case, it would indeed be better to conduct an on-site investigation in the Sigmund Territory.

If they could catch any decisive evidence there, they could return to the Imperial Capital, report to the Heresy Tribunal, and commence a seizure and search. If they shake them down thoroughly like that, something was bound to turn up.

"Then will you be heading to the North now, Your Highness?"

"Yeah. I'm going to accompany the Grand Duke on his way back."

"I will discreetly escort you."

That would be a great help. While briefly considering it, Seongjin soon shook his head.

He had heard that the Siegmund Territory was cold and remote. Wasn't it too harsh an environment for an intelligence agent to wander alone?

Moreover, the entourage included seasoned Aura users like Sir Masain and Commander Bruno. If she tried to make contact while evading them, she might experience her nerves fraying in real-time, though he couldn't say for sure.

"Dasha is too valuable a resource to be overworked like that."

How long do you think I'll be there for you to pull all-nighters on stakeouts? The workload is excessive, and the efficiency is too low.

At those words, Dasha's expression turned into a complex and subtle mixture of joy and perplexity.

"But that is the nature of an intelligence agent's work."

"Rather, there are things I need Dasha to investigate further in the Imperial Capital."

Seongjin planned to have her focus on investigating the Republican organizations operating covertly in the Imperial Capital from now on.

Thinking of Logan, who had remained dejected until the end, he felt the need to do something quickly.

If he picked a decent organization and had Logan directly sponsor it, wouldn't that groundless sense of debt gradually fade?

And if they could at least implant the perception of him being a supporter or collaborator rather than an enemy prince to the Ortona people, that would be the icing on the cake.

Preferably, it would be good to go with that [Blue Republican Revolutionary Front] that Morres had been supporting for a long time. Since there was already a sponsorship history, there likely wouldn't be much issue even if another prince was hastily added.

[What if they don't accept?]

In response to the Demon King's question, Seongjin answered matter-of-factly.

'Then I'll have to completely cut off their funds.'

It's not just about cutting off my sponsorship. I'll investigate all their funding sources, seize them, and threaten them! Even then, would they dare not obey me and turn their backs? Heh heh heh.

At Seongjin's evil laughter, the Demon King shuddered.

[Are you even thinking of helping the 2nd Prince rebuild the country? How can you crush the hopes of those trying to revive the nation in such a way?]

What are you saying, you unnecessarily immersed Demon King?

An organization that ignores or opposes Logan couldn't possibly have such pure intentions, right?

[...This eight-armed bastard's illness is truly incurable.]

What's your problem now?

Anyway, there were quite a few other organizations that came to mind. Although he had only recently learned of it, there was surprisingly a lot of subversive activity by treasonous organizations within the Empire.

There's no way the Holy Emperor wouldn't know about it, so why is that gentleman letting them be?

"The policy is to not crack down too harshly on organizations quietly operating underground."

"Oh, is that so?"

It was truly amazing that the Empire was running so stably even with such subversive organizations running rampant under the surface.

And another thing he learned was that, surprisingly, the organizations Morres had been sponsoring were quite substantial compared to others.

Take the [Blue Republican Revolutionary Front], for example. Not only Ortona refugees but also young thinkers and writers had joined in droves, continuing their vibrant activities.

Especially among them, the achievements of the writers could be said to be unparalleled.

The young blood of Ortona, having experienced the vitality of the republic even if briefly, sublimated their passion and ideals into literature without reserve.

And the literary works born from their diligent writing activities had recently become a topic of discussion even in mainstream social gatherings.

As a result, somewhere along the way, Ortona had become an image of a fantastical or ideal country among the Imperial Capital's youth.

'And Adelheid's Plague Society is also relatively decent among plague societies.....'

In that case, it raises expectations for the remaining Golden Truth Society as well.

As Seongjin was lost in thought, Dasha observed him and cautiously spoke up.

"Your Highness, regarding the investigation of the Republican organizations, if it pleases you, how about entrusting it to my fellow intelligence agent?"

"Fellow?"

"Yes."

Seongjin blinked. This person wouldn't easily suggest delegating her work to others unless there was a good reason.

"He is a reliable and skilled colleague. Moreover, I understand he has been investigating these organizations for quite some time. I received his assistance for the results of this investigation as well."

"Is that so? Who is he?"

"As he is an exclusive intelligence agent for another Imperial Prince, I cannot disclose his identity, but....."

Something clicks.

"He's Logan's intelligence agent, isn't he?"

"...Yes, that's correct."

Dasha's eyes widened in surprise, and she soon nodded.

Right. Logan must have been separately investigating them as well. Why wouldn't he?

'Indeed, it would be more efficient to entrust it to them entirely.'

Seongjin was convinced.

However, the Dasha he knew would gather more data rather than suggest completely delegating it.

"...Dasha has something else she wants to do?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

And she looked straight at Seongjin and said.

"Please allow me to accompany Your Highness to the Siegmund Territory."

"It will be quite hard for you, Dasha."

"Forgive my presumptuousness, but that is the duty of an exclusive intelligence agent. There are also Monkey Watchtower agents in the Siegmund Territory, so I can receive assistance from them."

"....."

"I implore you. Please permit me to fulfill my role."

Seongjin gazed at the back of Dasha's head as she bowed respectfully.

She could have compromised appropriately.

-Back then, I shouldn't have burdened my friends and comrades with everything and closed my eyes so easily.

Well, there are people with a disposition that can't bear it unless they hold themselves to strict standards in everything.

"Alright. If that's the case, I don't mind. It would make things much easier if Dasha helps out, right?"

Seongjin nodded.

At those words, Dasha smiled with relief.

Little did she know that the prince intended to search the Count's family rather than investigate the Siegmund Territory.

The plans of Greed and Sowing were miserably thwarted.

It was a decisive blow targeting the weakness of the birthday banquet, but unexpectedly, the Holy Emperor showed a leisurely response against the two high-ranking Demon Lords even with lacking causality.

On top of that, with the sudden intrusion of an unexpected variable through the gap, the hundreds and thousands of near-death bombs that the two's near-death avatars were hit with were utterly torn apart without a trace.

The two Demon Kings barely escaped the gap and returned to their contractors' bodies. However, Sowing was still paying a hefty price for underestimating the situation.

"Argh!"

Black smoke rises from the young man's arm. The persistent flames that had clung to Sowing in the gap had followed him here and were now burning his contractor.

"Tsk. Can't you even handle a single near-death attack? How pathetic."

When Greed criticized, Sowing frowned and appealed his grievance.

"No, this is really strange! It won't go out!"

True to his words, Sowing had tried all night to suppress the flames with his authority.

But for some reason, the red flames that refused to be extinguished had completely devoured his contractor's right arm and were now slowly spreading beyond his shoulder.

The pain of slowly burning was one thing, but just what was the identity of these flames that even the authority of a high-ranking Demon King couldn't suppress?

'Could it be that I'll be reverse summoned like this?'

Sowing broke out in a cold sweat.

If he couldn't find another contractor right away, it was evident that Sowing would be helplessly reverse summoned from Delcros. Then, it was clear that he wouldn't be able to return to this world until the cult performed a new ritual.

Right then.

"What brings you to the contact point at this hour? Lord of Greed. And who might this person be...?"

Someone approached them and asked. It was Romaine, the man wearing a half-mask.

Although both Demon Kings were emitting an ominous black demonic energy from their entire bodies, he came close without minding and asked.

"What problem does this person have?"

Sowing glared at him fiercely.

Behind Romaine followed an old man in priestly attire, and the energy emanating from him clearly belonged to Sowing's brethren who had received his baptism.

"What have you done to a member of my cult? You wretched puppet bastard."

The old man's eyes had already lost their reason, turning hazy. Romaine glanced back at him and shrugged.

"I merely eased his mind a little since he was so frightened. Looking at it now, it seems I did the right thing. Considering what's to come, wouldn't it be cruel to demand he remain sane?"

"What?"

"Don't you happen to need him as well? There doesn't seem to be any other way."

Romaine added, his gaze fixed on Sowing's shoulder, which was burning and emitting black smoke.

"I will gladly yield my [puppet] for the sake of the great lord."

Sowing's eyes widened. How dare he say he would yield a human belonging to him!

Reflecting his discomfort, the demonic energy rising from his body also intensifies. However, even facing that overbearing gaze, Romaine didn't flinch.

After glaring at him for a moment, Sowing eventually sighed and grumbled.

"Argh. I prefer a fresh and young body... Grafting is supposed to be done with a young tree!"

Anyway, as Romaine said, he had no other choice now.

Whoosh!

The moment Sowing transferred to the old priest, the previous contractor's body was engulfed in dark red flames. It was because the authority suppressing the flames had completely disappeared.

Shortly after, Sowing's former contractor collapsed to the ground, reduced to a handful of ashes.

Greed, who had been silently watching the scene, finally lifted its expressionless gaze to meet Romaine's.

"Your timing was opportune, Romaine. You must have something you desire from us in return for this, correct?"

Then, the lips beneath the half-mask curve into a long arc.

"Yes. I have come to hear about the [Prepared One], Lord of Greed. Directly from you, the great lords who have prepared him."

The morning of the last birthday banquet.

Seongjin was at the training ground of the Order of Saint Marcias with Logan. It was because Sisle had been summoned by the Commander.

Sisle's initiation ceremony was scheduled to take place immediately after the end of the birthday banquet. It was under the pretext of a rehearsal, but what kind of rehearsal would they do with a clueless child at the training ground?

'It's obvious.'

From the knights lined up exuding an imposing aura to the squires swinging flails with exaggerated movements while shouting savagely.

Apparently, they all had the obvious intention of deflating the saint's spirit in advance. After all, a mere 12-year-old kid was going to become their superior.

Of course, Sisle, who hadn't noticed that hostile atmosphere, received the flail handed to her by a knight and had an excited expression.

As Seongjin watched an inquisitor boastfully explaining to Sisle how to swing a flail, he spoke up.

"Hey."

"Yeah?"

"You agreed to help with the demon beast squad's work while you're in the Imperial Capital, right?"

"I did."

As if yesterday's agitation had been a lie, Logan looked as upright as ever. Glancing at him, Seongjin suggested.

"Then do you want to come along to investigate the Siegmund Territory? Get some fresh air and all that."

If left alone, who knows how deep this guy would dig? He might strike oil.

But hearing that suggestion, Logan stared blankly at Seongjin and suddenly burst into laughter.

"That's impossible, Lee Seongjin. When the subjugation unit visited near the Siegmund Territory, the margrave was uncomfortable with even me staying briefly within the territory. If I get involved, the demon beast squad will probably be driven out of the territory right away."

If they were so wary of Logan, who was renowned for his strong divine power, it truly meant there were many shady dealings within

the territory.

As Seongjin fell silent, Logan turned his eyes to Sisle and continued.

"I feel ashamed for causing worry. Yesterday, I showed an inadequate side of myself as the elder."

"Who's the elder, dude?"

"I'm ten years older than you. I was in my seventies."

Seongjin gaped.

There's no one who doesn't know when General Gale died, yet this bastard is still insisting on that?

Ignoring Seongjin's dumbfounded gaze, Logan went on.

"And as you can see, it seems Sisle needs more professional help. I'll stay here and teach her. At this rate, she might end up killing someone soon."

"Yeah!"

It was as Logan said.

Clang! Crunch!

Beyond the flatly crumpled plate armor, the pale faces of the Order of Saint Marcias members could be seen.

The little saint smiled transparently at them while adjusting the flail with menacing spikes.

"Aiming at armored dummies instead of people somehow puts my mind at ease. If I hit like this, they won't die, right?"

No, they will die! They will absolutely die!

Hearing the inquisitors' internal screams of anguish, Seongjin grinned.

The rehearsal is perfect.

Now, let's see if you can properly handle a martial arts prodigy who never gets tired no matter what she does.

Inquisitor Paris.

He was a fairly competent holy knight, but he was considered to lack the years of experience to serve as the Commander.

Nevertheless, the reason he rose to the position of Commander was that the previous Commander, Sir Durand, had died in a sudden accident.

-From now on, you are the Commander of the Order of Saint Marcias.

On the unprecedented day when a gate opened in the Imperial Palace, the Holy Emperor had clearly said those words to Paris.

As he said, Paris, who had been the Commander's assistant, had no choice but to become the acting Commander and reorganize the disarrayed order. And soon after, under the leadership of Cardinal Benitus, the work of ferreting out the remnants of the Dark Cult followed.

As more and more cleanup work kept arising, he had conveniently solidified his position as the Commander. Naturally, the gazes of some senior and peer inquisitors were not favorable.

"If you know you're in a position beyond your means, you should also know to decline it yourself."

"I guess he thought it was an opportunity for promotion when the Commander passed away like that."

Those who had been hands-off during the actual cleanup were now running their mouths. As a senior, he couldn't even soothe the atmosphere, let alone incite division within the order.

But as the one who had become the Commander, it wasn't something he could confide in anyone about. As he grew weary living through such creaking days, an unexpected decision came down from the Holy Council.

-The saintess is the [Apostle] of the Lord who will carry on the legacy of Saint Marcias. As she personally wishes to join the holy knightly order, she should be treated appropriately befitting her status.

When Paris first heard that instruction, he doubted his own ears. Suddenly inserting a 12-year-old child, not even a knight, as a deputy-level position?

Of course, it wasn't nonsensical in principle.

The saint was a person promoted to a living saint. Although she had no real authority, in terms of the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, she was treated almost on par with a cardinal. Considering her lack of practical experience, she was placed at the deputy level, but originally, she was practically a superior above the Commander.

But do things really work that way? If the saintess directly joins the knightly order, the story becomes completely different.

A deputy who trains alongside new squires, how absurd is that!

"Commander, this is truly an outrageous measure, no matter how you look at it! Deputy-level? Isn't she just a little kid who has never even properly held a weapon before?"

"Isn't she receiving too much special treatment just because she's a member of the imperial family? The discipline of the knightly order will be shaken! Please do something about it, alright?"

When his subordinates suddenly clung to him, calling him Commander and complaining, Paris was a bit dumbfounded.

At the very least, this incident had definitely become an opportunity for the Order of Saint Marcias to solidify internally.

Anyway, he also thought this measure was somewhat unreasonable, so he sought out Cardinal Venitus directly to raise an objection.

But the next day, the cardinal, with a face that had become half its size, asked him this.

"You, do you happen to know that after Saint Aurelion received a divine revelation, he received various promotion benefits from the Orthodox Church to smoothly carry out his mission?"

Paris was puzzled. It was a story that didn't even take up a few lines in the actual scriptures, ending with something like 'the saintess received a divine revelation and led the people'.

"What about the incident hundreds of years ago when Priest Granus temporarily served as the Commander to engage in urgent negotiations with the Anatolian lords?"

"...Pardon?"

It was also the first time he had heard of it.

Then, Cardinal Benitus wrinkled his aged face even more gloomily and sighed.

"You don't know? I didn't know until today either! So what can we do? As of now, we have no justification to oppose His Majesty's will. I don't know where he found such historical records, but the evidence and precedents are too clear."

"....."

"The more I think about it, the more frightening he is. Surely he couldn't have memorized even the discontinued scriptures in their entirety, could he?"

If that strict old man had given up, there was truly no other way. Paris' troubles deepened.

In the midst of that, an opinion arose within the knightly order to hold an initiation ceremony for the saint. The initiation ceremony was, in fact, closer to a bad habit of harshly treating new squires and enforcing discipline.

"If she experiences the initiation ceremony, she will surely be

frightened and withdraw her admission, don't you think?"

"But even squires who have trained to a certain extent often fall ill after going through the initiation ceremony. If we make the young saint endure such a harsh ordeal alone, what will people think of us?"

"Then let's show her actual training under the pretext of a rehearsal. We'll have her directly experience some of the training that new squires go through. With that much, there won't be any significant backlash."

That seemed like a plausible opinion. Could a young girl, who had been revered as a saint, insist on joining even after witnessing the brutal training of an actual knightly order?

So, Commander Paris summoned the saintess to the training ground the very next day.

".....?"

But somehow, the situation unfolded a bit differently than he had thought.

Even after seeing the inquisitors in full plate armor with a fierce aura, not just light armor, the saintess merely expressed admiration without much change in her expression.

"This is the public authority that Brother mentioned...!"

...Public authority?

Facing the saintess's eyes that were growing unexpectedly starry, Commander Paris felt an ominous premonition for some reason.

Hyah! Take this! Hah!

On one side of the training ground, squires swinging flails with menacing spikes could be seen. As instructed by their seniors in advance, they were diligently playing the role of vicious criminals while sweating profusely.

The murderous intent was so palpable that it seemed they would beat

someone to death at any moment, but.

"That is the safe weapon that the elder brother mentioned...!"

...Safe... what?

Commander Paris broke out in a cold sweat. Something was going terribly wrong.

And his bad premonition reached its peak after placing a weapon in the saintess's hand.

The heavy flail that ordinary people struggle to swing with both hands, the saint lightly lifted with one hand and began twirling it around, imitating the squires.

For those small hands and slender arms to handle such weight, it meant she was already naturally circulating Aura through her muscles.....

'Did the saintess undergo Aura cultivation training?'

Before he could even ponder that question.

Clang! Crunch!

The flail was lightly swung, and the breastplate of the plate mail covering the dummy was instantly crumpled like paper!

".....!"

"Phew."

While the entire knightly order turned pale with shock, the saint lightly exhaled the breath she had been holding. Somehow, she seemed to instinctively know the timing to stop breathing.

"Aiming at armored dummies instead of people somehow puts my mind at ease. If I hit like this, they won't die, right?"

The members of the Order of Saint Marcias collectively flapped their mouths with ashen faces.

You just turned someone's heart and lungs into mush with a single blow!

Paris rubbed his temples, which were starting to throb. Something was getting seriously twisted.

In the midst of that, the two princes, who were present as guardians and observers, were also very grating. Especially the 3rd Prince.

The way he smiled leisurely, raising the corners of his mouth crookedly as if he had expected this, was unbearably unpleasant.

"Then, Saintess. We are about to start basic physical training, but will you be participating?"

Then, all the inquisitors began circling the training ground with solemn faces.

The saintess followed behind them without a word. Still lacking a training uniform, she grabbed the hem of her long priestly robes and trotted along, the fabric fluttering about!

'Urk, how cute.....!'

The inquisitors clutched their hearts. Of course, that sentiment didn't last long.

'Why... Why isn't she getting tired?'

Since it was endurance training, they weren't running at full speed, but it was still impressive for a young girl to keep up with the pace of grown adults without falling behind. Yet that speed didn't decrease one bit.

Not only that. The leisurely appearance of not breaking a single sweat no matter how much she ran.

'Commander. We've already exceeded our usual training volume by twice?'

'Shut up! Are you going to be humiliated in front of the saintess?'

'But at this rate, the members won't be able to endure it. We're in heavier gear than usual, aren't we? There's a limit to relying on divine power to replenish stamina!'

True to those words, soon the squires began dropping out one by one, and eventually, all the inquisitors collapsed on the training ground, gasping for breath.

Huff! Gasp!

Hah! Pant!

"You train to the point of exhaustion like this. To maintain this level of training even during the birthday celebration period, it must be impossible without truly lofty sense of duty and thorough self-discipline."

"....."

Saintess Sisle spoke in admiration, but no one responded. They were already too exhausted to even make a sound.

Originally, it was tradition for senior knights to harass and berate struggling new squires.

But now, the actual newcomer, the saintess, was the only one leisurely walking among the inquisitors sprawled on the ground, drenched in sweat, and distributing divine power to them.

The girl's appearance was both sacred and adorable, but she was also the culprit who had caused this mess in the first place. Complex emotions clouded the faces of the inquisitors as they looked at the saint.

"T-today is just a rehearsal, so let's call it a day....."

As Commander Paris began to speak to send the saintess back.

"It's troubling if you're this amazed, Sisle. This is just light physical training for holy knights."

Prince Morres, wearing a somewhat nasty-looking smile, slyly

interjected.

"The other holy knights must train at this intensity every day, right? Isn't that so, Logan?"

Then, Prince Logan solemnly nodded.

"Ceaseless training is the duty of a knight. But indeed, among the five holy knightly orders, this place might be the best? Our Liliun Special Forces also prided ourselves on conducting high-intensity training, but after seeing the Order of Saint Marcias today, I feel we were too complacent. We need to reflect on that."

"....."

Hearing that heartfelt admiration, the inquisitors exchanged glances with anxious hearts.

Hey, what do we do? Don't tell me we'll have to do this every day from now on?

However, unlike the two people who were purely admiring, Prince Morres had an evident expression of amusement on his face.

"Now, now, Sisle. Since you're now a member of the holy knightly order, how about training with them until the end before the grand mass? They called you here, after all."

For a moment, it seemed as if black devil horns overlapped above the prince's head.

'He's deliberately instigating her, isn't he?'

'Hey! You devil!'

'I'm here on my day off after being called in! Please spare me!'

As the inquisitors let out silent screams, the saintess tilted her head.

"But we've already learned weaponry and completed physical training, so what's left?"

"Swordsmanship is left."

"Swordsmanship?"

When Prince Morres pointed it out, the saint asked back, seemingly a bit confused.

"But I heard that the Order of Saint Marcias values life. So they don't deliberately wield swords....."

Then, the inquisitors looked at each other with dumbfounded faces.

Did we say that? We've heard a lot about keeping them alive to bring them to the torture chamber, though?

"What are you talking about, Sisle? Of course, it's natural for all holy knights to value life. But basically, as a knight of the Empire, one must learn the standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights. Where did you hear such a thing?"

At Logan's question, Sisle answered with a bit of hesitation.

"Ah, um. He said swords are scary because they can kill people. So....."

Sisle had wholeheartedly believed Orden's words. But she couldn't bring herself to tattle on him for telling her that.

However, Logan listened to the story seriously and soon sternly rebuked Sisle.

"What a thoughtless mindset, Sisle. Surely you didn't decide to join the holy knightly order with such a frivolous attitude? If a knight fears taking lives, who would ever think of you as a comrade and entrust their back to you?"

"Comrade....."

"Yes. Suppose, by any chance, you were facing off against a demon worshipper or a demon servant. While clearly witnessing them harming people, would you make the excuse that you couldn't stop them because you didn't learn how to kill?"

".....!"

"The sword of the person you hesitate to strike down might pierce the heart of the holy knight next to you in the next moment. Then, would you say you did your best to save lives in front of his bereaved family?"

At that strong rebuke, Sisle's eyes quivered intensely.

However, the girl who had fought against slowly approaching death alone for several years was a strong child. Gazing at Logan with trembling hands clasped together, the girl soon had a firm, resolute look in her eyes.

She turned to Commander Paris, bowed her head respectfully, and said.

"I was foolish, Commander. From now on, I will immediately participate in all the training of the knightly order."

"No, there's no need for that....."

As Commander Paris dissuaded her while breaking out in cold sweat, the saint laughed gently aloud. It was a crystal-clear laughter that resonated transparently through the air.

"Yes. Today, you all went easy on me out of consideration, right? But from now on, I am also a member of Saint Marcias. From this moment on, I will share all the moments of hardship with my comrades. I am prepared!"

"....."

The faces of the inquisitors lying on the ground instantly turned gloomy.

As everyone in the training ground turned solemn, only one person merely turned his head away with a face reddened from holding back laughter.

'Snicker snicker! Ah, this is driving me crazy!'

[...Lee Seongjin, you devil!]

On the evening of that day, the final banquet of the three-day-long birthday celebration was held.

The banquet proceeded in a rather subdued atmosphere. As most of the acquaintances had already exchanged greetings, it was now time for deeper political conversations to take place.

Seongjin formally introduced Marquis Ravioli, Charles to Amelia.

"You've sent a precious gift, Marquis Ravioli. I was so focused on the flower buds in the greenhouse that I completely missed the splendid spring news that had arrived in the garden."

"Not at all. In the presence of Her Highness, the fragrance of any flower would pale in comparison. I have only now realized how inadequate my preparations were."

The two seemed to get along quite well, engaging in a lively conversation.

Usually, when Amelia was with her siblings, she would express her true feelings in a warm and affectionate tone.

However, in formal settings, she was surprisingly adept at the aristocratic way of speaking, embellished with flowery language.

Come to think of it, she had once told Seongjin:

"People like to hide their true intentions behind flowery language and pretty words. But in most cases, they don't really want to hide it; they expect the other person to naturally understand."

Seongjin had heard that Amelia was usually quite shy and didn't engage much in social activities, but seeing her now, she seemed to

have even more social grace than Isabella, the queen of high society. It was truly remarkable.

By the way...

'That bastard is sneakily appealing to the Prince of Brittany again.'

Seongjin glared at Charles with a sullen expression. It was obvious that the cunning little brat was trying to push for a royal marriage between Delcross and Brittany, which didn't sit well with him.

[Why are you making a fuss after introducing them yourself?]

'Well, if Brittany wants something from noonim, she must also have something to gain from them.'

Just like Morres's "engagement in name only."

Besides, Seongjin had a feeling that Amelia wanted to build a wide range of connections at this birthday celebration, especially with the nobles of Rohan and Brittany. Since Charles was the only one Seongjin could introduce her to, he could overlook his slight displeasure. Apparently, the Ravioli family held quite a high position in Brittany.

'And no matter who she talks to, isn't it better than that swallow bastard from Rohan?'

[...You really don't like him, do you?]

I guess so. But why?

Strangely, whenever I see that guy, I get the urge to drag him away somewhere and bury him without anyone knowing.

Is it because his eyes look like a psychopath's?

[Who are you calling a psychopath?]

'...Shut up!'

Anyway, both Amelia and Charles seemed satisfied with this meeting.

'What a beautiful and elegant princess. She would be a perfect match for Prince Philip! When I return to Brittany, I must persuade my father to proceed with the royal marriage.'

'In the future, Philip of Brittany became a rational monarch. When the holy war broke out, he was the second to join the allied forces and confront Leonard. So it's beneficial to build a good relationship with him from now on.'

Watching the two of them, Seongjin thought:

'Should I introduce Chloe to noonim on this occasion...?'

In Seongjin's mind, Chloe was already the future head of Delcross's foreign affairs department.

Right now, she was just studying foreign languages as a hobby, but if it suited her aptitude, what better ability could there be to aid in diplomatic activities?

With her quick wit, she wouldn't come back at a loss from any negotiation table.

Seongjin didn't know what Amelia wanted to do in the future, but surely Chloe would one day become her wings.

'There's not much time left until departure, but I should still try to arrange a meeting!'

Since Amelia was immersed in her studies, they might even join forces and form a foreign language study group.

'But it's a bit disappointing when it comes to connections within Delcross...'

As it was a matter of their own country's royal marriage, foreign dignitaries were desperate to build even the slightest good relationship with Amelia.

On the other hand, the people of Delcross were rather indifferent to the princess, thinking she would soon marry and leave for another country anyway.

They flattered around the Empress and 1st Queen Elizabeth, rarely giving Amelia a chance.

'It will be difficult unless someone well-versed in high society acts as a bridge.'

Suddenly, Isabella's face flashed through his mind.

If only she hadn't fallen into the clutches of Sigurd Sigurdson, she could have been another wing for Amelia, the queen of high society.

Lost in thought, someone quietly approached Seongjin's side and whispered:

"...Bethella!"

"..."

Seongjin glared at Leonard, who was grinning obliviously beside him. Despite the rather unfriendly gaze, the annoying fellow chuckled and downed his drink, as if he was pleased about something.

"Time flies! We've barely become acquainted, and it's already time to part ways. Isn't it truly regrettable?"

Be thankful that the birthday celebration only lasts three days, you bastard.

If the days you could make advances on Noonim had increased by even one more, I would have buried you myself, diplomatic issues be damned!

"Ah, right. I'm thinking of arranging a meeting with my friend soon. When would be a good time?"

What should I do? Seongjin thought sullenly.

Actually, at first, he had planned to investigate that suspicious 'Brotherhood' or whatever, but... He was increasingly irritated by the way that guy hovered around Amelia.

"It might be difficult for a while. I have plans to go somewhere soon."

Orden Siegmund was scheduled to return to his territory immediately after the birthday celebration ended.

Since Seongjin was ostensibly visiting the territory at the invitation of the duke's heir, he had to match his schedule. And he planned to subtly include the Monster Special Task Force among his entourage.

If the Monster Special Task Force formally announced their intention to investigate the territory, they would surely go to great lengths to kick Seongjin's group out.

But upon hearing those words, Leonard replied leisurely:

"No problem. There will be banquets held here and there even after the birthday celebration. I plan to stay in Delcross for a while, attending the places I'm invited to. Just contact me whenever you have time."

And he was giving Amelia those subtle glances again!

A vein popped on Seongjin's forehead.

'Don't you have anything better to do, you swallow bastard!'

This year's birthday celebration ended that way.

And that night, news arrived that Isabella Scarcepino had regained consciousness.

Unlike Riccardo, the awakened Isabella managed to maintain her composure.

If she had been abandoned by the main body, she would have panicked with her memories tampered with.

But now, the main body was also driven into a corner. There were still ways for her to become the main body.

Although the connection was severed, she knew where the real Sigurd Sigurdson was now. She knew who the last remaining avatar

was.

'It was a crisis that would come eventually.'

Isabella... no, Sigurd thought.

Years ago, after his body was killed by the hands of the emperor, he barely managed to survive by transferring his soul from one puppet to another.

And there were side effects to parasitizing other people's bodies. Although he tried to use the bodies of puppets with weakened egos, he couldn't avoid being influenced by the puppets and gradually having his own ego blurred.

But of all things, the last remaining avatar for the main body was the one he least wanted to use.

The man whose ego was so strong that he couldn't be fully controlled even after preparing since childhood.

'I don't know how long she can maintain my ego...'

So, driven by circumstances, he had no choice but to leave her body, but if he could somehow confront that avatar, the Puppetmaster would surely return to her body.

'Let's leave Delcross as soon as preparations are made.'

From the night she woke up to the next morning.

She stayed up all night, planning her trip. Her mind was solely focused on meeting that final avatar as soon as possible.

As she steeled her resolve, an unexpected visitor came to see her in the morning. It was Prince Morres, who unusually brought a bouquet of flowers.

"Hey, Sigurd Sigurdson. You look healthier than I thought."

After setting up a simple tea table in the drawing room and dismissing all the servants, the prince sat across from Isabella with a

smile.

But the gray eyes staring at her clearly showed no hint of laughter.

Feeling a strange chill, Isabella spoke in a trembling voice:

"He has left me, Your Highness. Now, I am Isabella..."

"Don't make me laugh."

"Your Highness..."

"I had some hope that Isabella might remain, but it was in vain. You still reek of his presence. That sticky, filthy feeling unique to parasites."

"..."

Isabella, or rather Sigurd Sigurdson, fell silent.

Prince Morres was the next Oracle. The only living causality in this frozen Delcross.

Even after his sudden change in personality, that fact never changed, and his eyes that saw through the essence gleamed with a sharp silver light.

Clutching the shawl around her shoulders, she was trembling when Prince Morres, who had been quietly observing her, opened his mouth.

"Lady Isabella."

A voice pretending to be gentle, as if to soothe her.

"Normally, I don't leave things I deem dangerous as they are. I can't tolerate something like you still breathing next to Sisle. But it was Father who spared you. So, out of respect for Father's will, I'll give you one chance."

"A chance...?"

"Yes."

The prince nodded and continued:

"I'll give you a chance to become Lady Isabella."

Sigurd Sigurdson was taken aback.

Become Isabella? How?

"Why, you're good at that thing, aren't you? Casting charm or hypnosis while looking in the mirror. How about using those tricks on yourself, just like you controlled the puppets?"

"Such a preposterous..."

"I don't care what methods you use. The deadline is until I return from Siegmund Territory."

Then, the prince lifted the teacup in front of him to his mouth. He grimaced after taking a sip, as if it didn't suit his taste.

"You need to understand this clearly. Right now, you may think you can't be anything other than Sigurd Sigurdson. But originally, he was your enemy who made you lose yourself. He took everything that made you who you are, not only your body but also your mind. And yet, you still want to become him?"

"..."

"Although there's hardly any trace of her left in you now, consider it a courtesy for my fiancée, Lady Isabella. If you successfully become Isabella, I will help you take revenge on the one who made you this way."

At that, she spoke in a trembling voice:

"But... but how can that be possible?"

Beautiful turquoise eyes began to shed tears.

"I already know of that grand plan! I have seen with my own eyes that beautiful world, those intricate stories! How can I be expected to return to being a mere human?"

However, a cruelly cold answer was given to that sorrowful question.

"Obviously, because it's a matter of your survival. You should desperately cling to it, even if it's just to stay alive. What use are plans and stories then?"

Prince Morres looked straight into her wavering eyes and spoke clearly.

"Listen carefully. When you see me again after returning from the North, you should have become, at least outwardly, the perfect Isabella Scarcepino. Otherwise, I might feel the urge to take revenge on you first. To be honest, I'm quite displeased right now because I haven't been able to properly avenge our little one yet."

Then, the prince curled his lips into a smirk.

"So, keep this in mind. If you're still Sigurd Sigurdson when I return..."

For a moment, his eyes seemed to flash with a silver glow.

"You will surely die by my hand. Understood?"

"...!"

With a bone-chilling shudder, she realized.

The chance for her to become Sigurd Sigurdson again would never come a second time.

[T/N: * = MTL Chapter]

169. Warning (2)

Isabella woke up.

After hearing the news, Seongjin put aside his busy schedule and rushed to the townhouse in the morning. Since she was going to be away from the ecliptic for a while, she didn't want to leave behind even the slightest bit of danger.

However, when Seongjin met Isabella in the living room, he was a little taken aback by the unexpected turn of events.

'Is this unexpected?'

I thought she would lose her sense of self and completely collapse, but Isabella seemed to be in better shape than I thought.

Of course, it was only appearance.

[The soul is very hazy. This is absolutely not a normal state.]

According to the demon lord's assessment, it looks so unstable that it wouldn't be surprising if it fell over and dies right away.

However, even though she had empty eyes, unlike Ricardo, who showed only despair, there was a glimpse of hope in her.

'Do you really think there's still a chance for a comeback?'

On the other hand, rubbing and pulling the hem of her skirt with her left hand was clearly Isabella's habit when she was nervous, which I had seen several times at the Salon de Mercy.

Seongjin carefully observed her presence.

It wasn't the Isabella I first met, but it felt completely different from the Sigurd Sigurdson I encountered when I secretly broke into the mansion not long ago.

'... 'Father did it!'

Seongjin had no choice but to admit that it was right to keep her alive.

I don't know what the point of cutting the top of the head means, but in any case, Seonghwang really cut the puppeteer cleanly away from her.

"Hey, Sigurd Sigurdsson. "You look healthier than I thought?"

At the sudden greeting, she broke into a cold sweat and averted her gaze. Oh, look at this?

"He left me, Sir Mores. Now I am Isabella..."

[That's a lie.]

Even if it wasn't the devil's words, Seongjin realized the moment he glanced at the eyes rolling around while looking at his eyes.

'I guess I stay sane because I think of myself as Sigurd Sigurdson!'

Unlike Ricardo, who somehow managed to maintain his porous ego, but immediately collapsed when the character that supported it disappeared, Isabella's awareness of herself as Isabella is completely vague.

In that case, it was obvious what Seongjin had to do.

[What are you going to do?]

In response to the Demon King's puzzled question, Seongjin smiled, seemingly out of character. Then he started yelling at her, lowering her voice.

"Do not be ridiculous."

A rough summary of what Seongjin did after that was as follows.

First, to drive a wedge into her thinking that she is Sigurd Sigurdson.

Second, we must properly persuade and crack down on people to prevent them from doing foolish things.

[persuade? About the one who threatened to kill me?]

'shut up!'

Of course, we acknowledge that the process was not entirely comprised of peaceful and beautiful communication.

Anyway, the slightest hint made the timid Isabella tremble.

Seongjin thought as he noticed that the light of hope was slowly fading out of her eyes.

If, willingly or unwillingly, she strives for a long time to become Isabella Scarzzapino.

Surely, one day, she will be able to recover some of her imperfect self without falling apart.

Then Seongjin suddenly realized that he was relieved, and for a moment he was caught up in a strange feeling.

* * *

Preparations to leave for the North went smoothly.

The dedicated maid decided to take only Edith for now. She is also a fairly strong Auror user, so even if she goes to a cold region, she doesn't seem to have that much trouble.

I was just a little worried about the 'bile-flavored tea' she would serve during the trip. Well, I'm sure Director Bruno will take good care of it.

'Anyway, haven't I become a bit picky with my taste buds these days?'

You see, the tea I drank in Rue Scarzzapino was not spiritual.

It's probably the fault of Chamberlain Luis and Director Bruno. As I experience the exquisite taste that tea can create every day, I think I have developed a delicate sense of taste that is close to that of a sommelier, at least when it comes to tea taste. If this continues, won't I be able to drink tea anywhere?

I glanced at Director Bruno, who was standing next to me, and he looked confused and stroked his mustache.

Sir Valerie and Sir Sharon decided to accompany the monster task force.

Of course, both of them were planning to disguise themselves as resident knights to hide their identities as Inquisitor and Exorcist.

"I think I'll bring along a banned book to kill time. "If they see something like that, no one will suspect that I'm an Inquisitor, right?"

Seongjin looked at Sir Valerie, who was talking like that, with slightly pathetic eyes.

"Instead of not suspecting you, why not report it to the Heresy Tribunal right away?"

"Haha! Is that really the case?"

After Seongjin discovered his hobby of reading banned books, his attitude that he had no hesitation anymore was absurd. Is that what you're going to say in front of the Holy Empire's prince, you bastard inquisitor!

Among the task force members, only Representative Jibril decided to remain in the imperial capital. This is because it was impossible for the entire department to be absent altogether.

And above all.

"Starting next week, it will be the Lyora Plague Society's conference week, sir!"

Rep. Jibril said proudly as he handed a small booklet to Seongjin.

"For the birthday celebration, renowned teachers of the Lyora school gather from all over the continent. In addition, we present the results of one year of research and discuss rare cases. "This is an important conference that you must attend!"

This year's issue is 'Up-to-date knowledge on the effect of perfume derived from bulb plants on preventing fever.'

"A recent paper published in Anatolia caused a great stir. Traditionally, bulb plants were known to be not good for treating fever patients because they grow close to the ground and contain geothermal energy. So, for fevers, I always use perfume from plants in the rose family. It was said to be 1.5 times more effective. However, according to a recent study, the perfume of bulbous plants is similar to that of rose family plants... .."

"Oh, I know the answer. "There wasn't much difference in the effects of the two perfumes, right?"

Jibril asked with wide eyes at Seongjin's words.

"How do you know about the latest paper that was just published?"

Because both would have zero effect. No matter what you multiply by zero, it will still be zero!

Why are you conducting such useless research and churning out garbage data, you quacks!

Masain and Leader Bruno - although they were disgusted when they found out that Sir Sharon was going with them - of course they will follow Seongjin.

It was decided that Sir Maria, Sir Claudia, and Calmen would accompany the resident knights.

'Unofficially, Dasha will also be joining us... ..'

good! It was a small but meaningful group!

Seongjin smiled proudly after organizing the list.

Come to think of it, this is my first time leaving the ecliptic since I came to this world. It's not like we're going on a picnic. I feel a little excited.

-Even if it is not Delcross, there are many places worth visiting with interest.

Seonghwang once said that.

Seongjin once again looked back on his life recently.

Our interactions with our brothers and sisters are increasing, and even though it's just for research purposes, we're also planning a long-term trip, as he said. At this level, wouldn't it be okay to say that he is living his life as a more sincere person, just as he hoped?

'But now that I think about leaving, I feel a little sad.'

For some reason, Seongjin scratched his cheek as he felt a strange feeling. It seemed like I had become too accustomed to life in the imperial capital without even knowing it.

* * *

Asean branch of the guild.

A boy is swinging a wooden sword vigorously in a small training hall next to the temple accommodation. He was Aslan, who had been entrusted to the guild for some time.

"Whew. "You have completed 200 thrusts, Paula."

The boy who had just grown taller said, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

As food became plentiful while living in the guild, he suddenly began to grow rapidly, and now he is a fairly strong young man.

"Oh, good job. "Come here and get some rest."

At the words of Paula, who was muttering with a pipe in her mouth, Aslan came to the shade where she was, sharpening his wooden sword.

"Anyway, this birthday party just passed by. "I really wanted to go to the imperial capital and see His Majesty."

As the boy spoke, wiping his sweat with the hem of his top, Paula waved her pipe.

"Arthur. How long has it been since you started becoming an Auror? Have you already reached the imperial capital? "It's too late for you to aim to join next year."

"Ugh... .."

Along with the inevitable sigh, resentment toward the branch leader wells up.

Justin Astros, the head of the Guild's Asean branch, was a man with many secrets. It was hard to see what he was doing during the day.

Even on the days when he shows up at the guild, he tends to look at his half-hearted attitude and then disappear somewhere else. Isn't this a very insincere attitude towards the subject who claimed to be Aslan's swordsmanship teacher?

Aslan soon gave up learning anything from him and meekly received help from the guild members. Most of them were very skilled and did not skimp on teaching.

Except for the branch manager, everyone was good people.

Among them, Paula, who recently retired from the mercenary army, is a good teacher with quite a lot of experience teaching juniors.

While Aslan was concentrating on training alone with the help of others, he heard an amazing story from Paula. One day, when she was very drunk, her branch manager said this to her.

-Aslan That guy has quite a natural talent. If I just give him a sword, he will become a squire level someday, right? Then send it to the

imperial palace then.

Isn't it really absurd that he tried to persuade me as if he would help me pass the entrance exam!

"So at what age can I join the Imperial Knights?"

As Aslan muttered in a dejected voice, Paula turned to him in pity and tapped his shoulder.

"The branch manager is an ugly person, but he still has a sharp eye for recognition. If he says yes, that's fine. You are talented and sincere. "I'm sure he'll become an article soon."

"Yeah..."

"Stop worrying and let's go get lunch. "Please leave the wooden sword."

Aslan nodded and stood up.

As I was trudging towards the warehouse alone, I heard someone talking inside the half-open warehouse.

"This is a lot different from the first time, isn't it?"

'... Branch leader?'

What kind of change of mind is this? For the past few days, Branch Manager Justin has not disappeared somewhere, but has been sticking to the guild and meeting various people.

It looks like another guest has arrived? But why are they doing this in the warehouse and not in the guild leader's office?

"What happened? A barrier that binds the soul? "Didn't you guarantee that it would work properly this time?"

Aslan was startled by the unusually excited voice of the branch leader. He was not like the branch manager, who always spoke in a lazy and languid manner.

And what else? Bind your soul?

Aslan held his breath as he had a premonition of something unusual and listened quietly to the conversation.

"The first thing I gave him must have been a leash. "But what on earth is this?"

What was heard next was a rare low-pitched voice.

"One leash was split in half and then heat treated again. Thanks to this, the circuit was completely misaligned. "It's bound to not work properly like this."

"I couldn't help it. What you gave me was like a necklace with fancy workmanship. How dare you disguise yourself as a prisoner!"

Two people were arguing over something on the table.

I couldn't see the two of them clearly through the crack in the door, but at least the object they were holding between them was clearly visible.

"That... ... !"

Aslan immediately recognized the familiar object.

It was completely torn apart.

"Those are the handcuffs Bart was wearing!"

"I hid it in molten iron, and then covered it with thick iron again. Otherwise, he would have recognized right away that this was something from the normal world."

"You did something useless. "If you had used it in its original form as I said from the beginning, you could have simply trapped the guardian inside the homunculus."

"But I had to be careful. "The moment he finds out, it's all over!"

"I have told you many times, but the circuits of the normal world

cannot be hidden by adding something to them. "The reason he didn't recognize it this time is probably because the circuit was already damaged, rather than because you covered it with iron."

And a soft sigh follows.

"When do you think he will stay in the body of a doll this far and for such a long time again? "Because you were needlessly cautious, we missed a golden opportunity that will never come again."

"hmm... .."

Aslan turned pale and took a step back little by little.

I couldn't understand the whole conversation, but it was clear that it wasn't a very good story for Bart.

'Dear Bart... We must warn His Majesty!'

Then it creaked. Suddenly, without warning, the warehouse door opened wide.

"But wait a minute. "What have you been eavesdropping on with such interest, little Aslan?"

"... ..!"

At that moment, Aslan's feet froze due to the chilling force that flowed from the warehouse.

Although he seemed extremely light-hearted, Branch Manager Justin was a sword master. There was no way he didn't know the boy was approaching the warehouse from the beginning!

"ji... Branch manager. why... ..?"

Didn't you say you were His Majesty's old friend?

Justin is looking at the boy, barely moving his hardened mouth pressed against the aura, with a smile as if it is amusing.

A man came up behind him and asked.

"Are you going to get rid of it like this?"

Only then was Aslan able to properly check the appearance of the guest.

He was a tall man who could easily rival Justin. He is wearing luxurious robes with delicate embroidery, and on his face is an ornate half-mask that you might only see at a festival.

"no. Bart knows this kid. He sometimes asks how I am through an informant. "It would be a problem if it just disappeared."

Then Justin turned around and asked the customer.

"There is a simpler way. "You can erase this kid's memories, right?"

"Of course."

Beyond the half-masked nod, the cold walls of his eyes gave off a cold glow.

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170. Logistics Relay Station (1)

Time passed steadily, and finally the day arrived for Seongjin and his group to depart for the north.

Several carriages were lined up in front of Jinju Palace from early in the morning.

The actual number of people in Seongjin's party, including the drivers, was less than ten, but when Orden Sigismund's party gathered together, the number became quite large.

In addition, Jinju Palace was crowded with more people than ever before as people were busy moving luggage or maintaining horses and carriages.

The prince and princess had also come out in full force under the pretext of seeing Seongjin off.

"You must have thoroughly prepared for your visit to Korea, right Seongjin Lee? Of course, you can protect yourself from the cold with auras, but the Sigismund territory is a very cold place because you are an auror user."

Logan warned again.

"Oh, of course. Do you know how many times you've said that sound so far? "If I hear it one more time, my ears will bleed."

Seongjin grumbled.

But Logan's concerns were valid. In terms of actual latitude, Sigismund's territory is located south of the northern part of Ortona, but it maintained an incomparably cold climate there.

This was the influence of Magyeong, located in the northwestern part of the Sigismund Territory. In that magical forest covered in snow and ice all year round, it is said that the mythical ice monster, the Glacher Troll, still haunts the forest.

"Here, take this."

Logan said, holding something out to Seongjin.

"What is this?"

"I brought it from the imperial palace report. It is said to be a magical stone that glows when you pray for it. "I think it would be quite useful as a light source."

It was a small, round rock. The yellow sparkling thing looks like a jade stone, or like an opaque glass bead.

Seongjin thought with a sad look on his face.

'Magic stone, what is it? Isn't this a worldview where magic exists?'

But when the devil saw the stone, he was scared.

[uh? Seongjin Lee. This is something from the normal world!]

What?

Seongjin was inwardly confused, but Logan added an explanation.

"When camping, sometimes situations arise where you can't make a fire. "They say you can do something about the cold with auras, but in a dark place without any light, there is a limit to strengthening your eyesight with auras."

"hmm. okay? thank you. "I'll use it well."

Seongjin put the stone in his pocket.

Well, since he's a guy who often leads a punitive force and travels here and there, there's no harm in getting some advice. Later, he will have to take a closer look with the devil bastard.

"Brother Mores, have a nice trip."

Sisley also quietly approached him and said. Although her face still looked expressionless, Seongjin could still see a faint trace of concern in one corner of the girl's eyes.

Maybe it's because the burden on his mind has been eased a little, but it feels like the little boy's face, which used to be like a robot, has become a little more lively lately.

"And take this."

"What is this again?"

What Sisley held out was a small, flat, scarlet stone.

"They say it's a magic stone that emits heat when you pray for it. This is an item taken from the imperial palace treasury. "It's cold in the northern territory, so I think something like this will be necessary no matter how many Aurors you use."

"... .."

Looking at the size, I thought it could be used as a hand warmer.

But since it is said to be a magic stone, I have a premonition... ..

[omg! Seongjin Lee! This is the normal world... .. !]

Yeah, I thought so.

Where on earth did all these come from? Why are items from the normal world included in the imperial treasury?

While he was grumbling inside, this time Amelia came in front of him.

"Mores... .."

She looks quite anxious as she holds her hands tightly in front of her.

Logan and Sisley often left the imperial capital for 'noble man's duties', so they seemed to not consider Seongjin's trip that big of a

deal.

However, Amelia has never been outside the imperial palace since she entered it. So it was not impossible to understand that she was particularly anxious.

In fact, much of Amelia's anxiety stemmed from the fact that this trip was something she had never experienced in her previous life. There was no way Seongjin knew that fact.

Anyway, Amelia relieved that anxiety through thorough preparation.

I cleaned up the clothing room here and there to get Seongjin's winter clothes all new, and personally brought in his employees and packed his luggage one by one.

Of course, it goes without saying that the new clothes were all in gloomy colors.

"Take care, Mores. "I'm relieved that Brother Masain is going with you, but there are times when you don't take care of yourself to the point where it feels too reckless."

She asked as she hand-wrapped the newly tailored thick black cloak for me.

"Yes, don't worry. sister."

"okay. ah! and..."

Amelia smiled brightly and shyly held out the object she was holding in her hand. It was a white handkerchief.

"It is a token of hope for a safe return. "It's a poor skill, but I worked hard to embroider it for you."

"Embroidery? Why bother doing all this..."

Seongjin, who accepted the handkerchief with a shy smile, was momentarily startled.

On the white handkerchief, there were bug-like things messily

embroidered in black. It was ominous just to look at it.

What is this? Is it a curse? It's a sign of a safe return?

"I embroidered some of the verses from [Orlando's Military Merit Poem]. [Olivier, the moon nymph, raised his sword and sang, and the whole world responded and swore that they would not dare to trespass on his journey.] Isn't this a truly beautiful sentence?"

"... .."

"Ah, is it too much to read yet? You are especially weak at archaic expressions, Mores. Next time, I'll lend you more famous classic storybooks."

"... thank you."

It seemed that the reason Seongjin couldn't read that phrase was because he was simply poor at reading.

Sister, you don't know? Are these really letters?

No matter how you look at it, it looks like an evil voodoo shaman dying, his last effort to curse the whole world?

The demon lord seemed to have similar thoughts.

[I don't feel any demonic energy in particular, but is it like a curse from the civilians? Does he still care about what Mores harassed him in the past?]

Seongjin thought with a shocked face.

... Sadly, I can't say for sure.

But Amelia added with a proud face.

"Besides, don't be surprised. "The thread with which this embroidery was made is a very special item."

"Let me guess. "Is this a magic thread taken from the imperial palace treasury?"

Then she opened her eyes wide.

"Yes, that's right! "How did you know?"

"... .."

Seongjin smiled bitterly.

It was only now that I realized the meaning of the question that Chamberlain Louis had secretly asked me when I stopped by Seonghwang's office to say hello last evening.

-Do you not need to stop by the imperial palace report separately?

At the time, I thought it was strange, but it turned out that even before Seongjin, the prince and princesses had already visited Seongwang and robbed the palace reports one by one!

No, why on earth are you doing this? I'm going on a trip for a while. What's the big deal?

"Well then, Mores, have a nice trip!"

With a smile blooming as brightly as a rose in full bloom, Seongjin had no choice but to tie the uncomfortable handkerchief around the handle of the nutcracker. Of course, Orden looked at that with envious eyes.

"Mores! "Don't stay away for too long!"

"Mores! "You have to come back quickly!"

After him, Herna and Kadesh bid him farewell.

Fortunately, the twins didn't seem to have committed the atrocity of leaking the imperial palace report. Instead, unlike usual, the kids whined as if they were clinging to Seongjin.

"Otherwise we'll be looking for Mores every day!"

"I'm going to go find you and beat up the leader and Red!"

These are probably not empty words.

These two people are Arranger's psychics. You can follow Seongjin anywhere with just a soul terminal. But why would you bother the wrong person?

"Well, if you do anything to Mores, your father will definitely scold you."

"Dad, it's good that His Majesty is in trouble, but I still don't want to be scolded."

Are you ghosts? Harming a normal person?

No, wait. So you're saying that you do that to other people sometimes?

Seongjin was shocked, but Herna and Kadesh clung to his arms and looked up at him with bright eyes.

They are devils who do what they do, but just by looking at their facial expressions, there are no other angels who are this innocent.

"Finish it quickly and come back to your father's side, okay?"

"Dad, you know you shouldn't worry His Majesty too much, right?"

"... .."

hmm. I think I know a little bit about what these kids are worried about.

When I shook their heads with both hands without answering, the twins cackled and burst into laughter at the same time.

"It's unfortunate, but I'm sorry. "You must leave now."

Masain, who was looking at the scene with happy eyes, spoke vaguely to Seongjin.

"Okay, let's go."

Seongjin answered like that and got into the carriage.

When Masain gave the signal, Orden Sigismund shouted to the Wolf

Knights in the lead.

"depart!"

"depart!"

"depart!"

With loud chants, the carriage slowly begins to move.

He looked out the window and saw Amelia, Logan, Sisley, and the twins all waving at him.

"hmm... .."

Seongjin waved at them with an awkward expression.

It was an unfamiliar yet strange feeling. Because in his entire life, he could never remember seeing his family off like this.

Then, Director Bruno, who was sitting across from him, looked at him closely and smiled.

"Are you sad that we're breaking up?"

What nonsense is this guy talking about again? Where am I leaving the ecliptic forever? Why is everyone so upset?

Seongjin, dumbfounded, turned his head with a sullen expression on his face. Perhaps because she was in an unfamiliar situation, she seemed to be making what she thought was a very strange expression.

Da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da.

Meanwhile, the carriage they were riding in steadily increased its speed, eventually leaving the imperial palace and starting to run down the well-paved street.

* * *

The paved road continued for a while even after we had completely left the city.

This is because Delcross, which has been the center of the continent for the past thousand years, has already become the center of all human and logistics movement.

Of course, the road surface was not completely smooth like the Hwangdo Island, so it was inevitable that the carriage would occasionally shake.

Still, the carriage ride was more comfortable than expected. Since it was an imperial carriage, it had good cushions, and even though it was primitive, it had a proper suspension structure.

'Let's take this opportunity to meditate.'

Seongjin closed his eyes and thought.

Recently, with so many things going on, including the birthday party, I haven't had a chance to meditate leisurely like before.

So, when was the last time he got close to the 7th floor, Seongjin was still unable to form a complete Auror 7th floor?

It ran so smoothly that it wasn't long after we passed the northern gate.

Hee hee hee!

Suddenly the horses neighed for a long time, and the carriage shook violently. The commotion quickly spreads, and soon the sound of horses can be heard here and there throughout the procession.

"What's going on?"

When Masain opened the window and asked the coachman, he immediately got a carefree answer.

"It's nothing, Masain. It's because the carriage has just fallen from grace. Don't worry, it always happens when you leave the ecliptic. "These insignificant animals are rather sensitive to the grace of the Lord."

blessing?

When Seongjin opened his eyes and looked outside, Director Bruno explained.

"I also heard this from priests before. It is said that in the imperial capital, the blessings of a wide range of gods are spread around the imperial palace. People like me don't have divine power, so they don't really feel it, but priests who come from other places notice it right away."

"okay?"

"yes. Isn't this all Your Majesty's power? They say it wasn't like this when the Emperor was alive. Anyway, thanks to that, it is said that demon species can no longer go near the ecliptic."

indeed. It's a story that could happen to that person.

Sure enough, I felt like the devil was stretching out in my head.

[Whoa, the air suddenly became lighter. I think I'm finally going to buy something!]

'Is it that much?'

[of course! It's like a completely different world between here and here!]

Another world...

Come to think of it, Seonghwang, whom I met yesterday, also said something like that.

-Once you leave the ecliptic, many things will be different from before, son. You must be on guard against everything and be on guard again.

As he watched the ever-changing scenery, Seongjin quietly reflected on Seonghwang's words.

171*

171. Logistics Relay Station (2)

It is difficult for unrefined emotions or impulses to become thoughts. Also, for such thoughts to lead to actions or phenomena, more cause and effect is required than expected.

If you do, what do you do? Since you cannot control a person's mind, you have no choice but to control the driving force that generates your thoughts, right?

* * *

Seongjin and his party started camping from the first day.

We left early in the morning with plenty of time to spare, but the problem was that there were too many carriages going to and from Delcross as the birthday celebration period overlapped. It was difficult to achieve proper speed even on wide paved roads.

In addition, there was an accident in which one of the carriages ahead broke down, and the road became congested for a while.

"If things had gone as planned, we would have already arrived in Regina and unpacked. "It's all my fault."

Orden's subordinate, Herman, bowed his head to Seongjin with an expression of apology. He was currently in charge of overseeing the group's travel itinerary.

"No, how can you prepare for such an accident? are you okay."

Seongjin answered half-heartedly and waved his hand.

For now, all I wanted to do was get some rest. At that time, Seongjin was completely exhausted from mental stress.

Originally, he had decided to just meditate and take it easy, regardless of whether he was stagnant or not, but there was a completely unexpected variable. As soon as the grace disappeared, the demon lord became relaxed and went on a wild rampage all day long.

[Ahaha! Haha! Look at this, Seongjin Lee! Even though I've gone as far as I have since being away from you, it doesn't matter!]

The guy who was always going crazy in Seongjin's head and was acting wild.

[wow! Look at this, Seongjin Lee! I can control the field mouse!]

Soon, it possesses a rat and chases the carriage, making loud noises.

[ha ha ha! How are you, Seongjin Lee? This body is now flying in the sky! Hahaha!]

A crow was brought from somewhere and circled around, then landed on the roof of the carriage and started cackling without hesitation.

"Where does the crow keep croaking?" . Aren't crows said to be servants of the demon race? "It's ominous."

Masain, who was secretly sensitive to demon species, kept snooping outside the window with an anxious look on his face, making Seongjin feel uncomfortable as well.

Moreover, Director Bruno was the only person who could understand Seongjin's difficulties.

"Red, it's so noisy, please stop now... .."

[What? Who's red, you idiot! uh? Even after seeing this with your own eyes, wouldn't you know the greatness of this Demon King?]

Caw caw! Wow! Arrrrrrrrrr!

By occasionally pouring fuel on the burning devil, he actually made the situation worse.

Thanks to this, when the sun went down and he heard from Hermann about the camp, Seongjin had already decided that whatever would happen would happen.

It was an added bonus that Hermann felt even more guilty upon seeing the prince's face covered in dark circles.

[Hmm haha! Seongjin Lee! Look at this! I'm eating grass with a horse right now! Isn't that strange? It's just grass, but it's somehow delicious!]

Seongjin frowned for a moment, but got off the carriage without much nagging.

'I'll just look at it for now... ..'

Because I felt like I wanted to do something like that.

If you think about it, the devil, the devil of devils, survived for several months using a single barrier as a shield in Delcross, a place filled with divine grace like the air.

Is that all? Didn't I have to crouch down in front of the Holy Emperor from time to time?

[Lee Seong-jin! Come on, check this out! I can do tricks with this guy!]

Hee hee hee!

The driver was sweating trying to calm the horse that was suddenly jumping and shaking.

"woah! woah! Why is this guy like this all of a sudden? Wow!"

My thoughts changed. If it's like that again tomorrow, I'll run to the nearest church and have it exorcised!

Meanwhile, preparations for camping were progressing steadily.

As I approached the bonfire with Herman's guidance, I saw a cook from the Wolf Knights busy preparing dinner with Edith.

"Regina is a few hours away from here. "We'll be behind schedule, but even if we get to Regina early tomorrow, we'll have to stay there one more day."

As Seongjin and his group sat down, Orden came next to them and said.

"Regina?"

"Yes, there is a big logistics relay station there."

Regina was a city a day away from the northern gateway to Delcross.

It was originally a small suburban town, but it has grown rapidly over the past decade as the Merchants' Association began its activities in earnest. This is because all upper-tier logistics leading to the northern and eastern parts of the continent pass through there.

"Once we get to Regina, there won't be any major changes to our itinerary."

Hermann added from the side. It is said that many of these merchants are dispersed to various parts of the continent after passing through the logistics relay station, so from now on, there will be no congestion on the road to Sigismund Territory.

"Maybe that's a good thing. "Like other merchants, we naturally ended up spending a day in Regina."

"... .."

Following Orden's gaze as he spoke while gazing intently at somewhere, Seongjin also turned his head to the other side of the street.

There were many merchants around, like Seongjin and his group, who were stranded and preparing to camp.

Among them, the group lighting a bonfire right across from them is wearing the upper crest that Seongjin is familiar with. It was definitely in the data Dasha had been researching.

Sang Sang-ju, with his scary appearance and goatee, also looks familiar.

"Is it Milo Top?"

"That's right."

Seongjin clicked his tongue.

Such a simple ignorant guy. For some reason, I was rushing the schedule too much, but I guess I was planning to follow and monitor the Milo upper section as it ascends!

Meanwhile, Edith brought Seongjin some warm stew. The first thing she does is pick up her spoon, and she feels eyes glancing here and there on Seongjin. These are members of the Wolf Knights who followed Orden.

As a camper, it was unreasonable to expect a sumptuous feast, but it was actually poor quality for a meal served to a prince.

It seemed like he was curious to see how the prince, who was famous for being a bitch, would react.

'I don't know what you expect, but this is a person who has lived only on preserved foods for decades.'

Seongjin thought to himself, smiling leisurely.

Of course, the moment I took a bite, that leisure disappeared.

The prince's reaction must have been amusing, as the members of the Wolf Knights exchanged glances and giggled.

"... .."

Seongjin frowned slightly, but obediently swallowed the stew without saying anything. And he immediately asked Edith.

"Edith, did you cook anything?"

"No, sir. "I just chopped the vegetables and checked the seasoning."

Ah, somehow. I thought it was good enough to swallow even though it didn't taste good.

The moment Seongjin thinks so.

Phew! Phuoc! Wow!

Magnificent sounds of stew coming from all over the place were heard.

"do... "Is it poison?"

"It appears to be an attempt at poisoning, Archduke! "Please put down the bowl!"

"He's an assassin! "An assassin has sneaked in!"

... No, that wouldn't be it.

Seongjin tried to stop the situation as it seemed like it was going to get worse, but before he knew it, Masain, who had turned pale, snatched his bowl, threw it on the floor, and started shouting desperately.

"Priests! Priests! You have taken poison! "Hurry up and get treatment!"

"No, Sir Masaine. That's not it..."

"Ugh! This happened even though the cooking process was carefully monitored from the beginning! Of course, I should have seen the signs first! I heard earlier that a crow was strangely crowing ominously... ... !"

Seongjin grabbed his temple where he had a headache.

Meanwhile, Edith, who was tilting her head with a blank expression, inadvertently took a bite of stew and frowned.

"Yuck! "It tastes like bile!"

Is that what you're going to say now?

[Wahah! Seongjin Lee! Take a look here. Can I now temporarily possess people? I made him eat it! But why does this stew taste weirder than the grass that horses eat?]

Why are you needlessly tasting it again?

In the end, the sudden poison commotion calmed down only when the priest came.

"You are all right, Lord Masaine. "Don't worry, it's not poison."

A chubby man reaps divine power and smiles kindly. It was Priest Gustav, the exclusive healer of the Wolf Knights.

"I guess that's true, right? "There really isn't a single lie, right?"

"Yes, yes. It's okay. Rest assured. Just a little bit of stew... No, very...
"It just didn't taste good."

He was a very sociable person. What's so weird is that he even smiles like that at Lord Masain, who goes on a rampage like a real protector.

Anyway, the situation was resolved, and the bile-flavored stew was reborn as something edible thanks to the chef's hard work. Seongjin ordered it because he thought it would be a waste to discard it all.

Of course, I didn't forget to keep Edith at a distance during the recooking process.

The prince was the first to gorge on the tasteless stew, and the others reluctantly forced themselves to swallow it as well. Suddenly, there was a bit of respect in the Wolf Knights' gaze towards Seongjin.

'Prince Mores, aren't you amazing? 'You eat something like that so casually!'

'And you've managed to keep a maid like that alive!'

'He was more generous than I thought!'

I didn't want to be respected for something like that.

By the time Seongjin and his group finished their slightly late dinner, drinking parties were already taking place in the surrounding merchants who had finished their meals early.

The main force was mercenaries hired for security purposes, and it was unsightly to see them being drunk without leaving watch. Is that why you become an escort?

"We are still on a safe route and there are many merchants accompanying us. "Even the top owners turn a blind eye to this."

Priest Gustav, who noticed Seongjin's bewildered gaze, gave a tip.

"This leisurely journey will soon end once you leave Regina."

However, when alcohol starts to circulate in a crowded place, problems are bound to arise somewhere.

Sure enough, soon harsh swear words and shouting began to echo here and there. Occasionally, fist fights broke out randomly.

It is an unfamiliar sight that could not be seen at all when passing through the northern gateway. The sharp figures look as if they have thrown off a veil and revealed their bare faces.

"They say that when you leave the ecliptic, humans and animals all become rough, and that was true."

Masain said, a little embarrassed, wondering if Seongjin was the only one who felt something was wrong. Then Director Bruno shook his head.

"Perhaps it is the other way around, Sir Martha. "When people with rough temperament enter the imperial capital, they become calm."

"Becoming quiet?"

"yes. This is a story I once heard from a mercenary I knew. A troublesome subordinate who had a bad habit of drinking and causing accidents on odd days, strangely said that as soon as he entered the imperial capital, the number of times he behaved like a lie would decrease. He wondered if it was the influence of grace."

"Grace?"

"yes. People who are impatient become noticeably calmer. "I heard that the reason why the imperial capital is so good even though people from all over the continent gather there is probably due to the influence of such grace."

"That's fascinating."

Meanwhile, there was a woman who caught Seongjin's eye.

She was a waitress hired by the Milo merchant across the street, and she was busy going to and from the place where the mercenaries were gathered, carrying a tray full of drinks. She was a dark-skinned woman from the Barça region.

And the slender physique and quiet gait that were very familiar to Seongjin.

'... 'Dasha?'

Seongjin blinked.

Why is Dasha there? I expected him to be secretly following Seongjin using Auror cloaking, right?

Dasha, who must have noticed his gaze, looked back at Seongjin, narrowed her eyes, and soon disappeared into the upper carriage.

At the same time, Director Bruno's face becomes subtle. He, too, must have recognized the familiar presence he felt at Jinju Palace.

Seongjin realized Dasha's intention and stuck out his tongue.

Wow, what a talented human being!

Rather than secretly following them, are they being hired by the top and following them comfortably and proudly?

Then, food, clothing, and shelter will be taken care of, and there will be no need to overuse Auror concealment to hide one's identity.

At the same time, they are simultaneously conducting an undercover investigation into the Milo Merchant Marine! Is Dasha truly a genius?

[When you saw the Archduke earlier, didn't you criticize him for being simply ignorant?]

After completing his deviation, the demon king returned to Seongjin's mind and asked in a panic.

Well, Orden is Orden.

172*

172. Logistics Relay Station (3)

"I put you to bed in the carriage, sir."

After a somewhat hectic dinner.

As we were drinking tea after the meal provided by Director Bruno, Edith came up to Seongjin and spoke to him.

The imperial palace carriages for long-term travel that Seongjin and his party brought were structured so that the luggage boxes on the back could be fitted into the seats and used as beds.

Of course, lifting and carrying heavy boxes was quite a hassle, but for Edith, an Auror user, it was not that difficult.

The Wolf Knights, who were looking at her with wide eyes as she carried a chest heavy enough for several men to carry, were soon convinced.

'Ah, you were a guard, not a maid! so... ... !'

'I was hiding my true identity for the prince's secret security!'

It was from then on that members of the Wolf Knights began to politely call Edith 'Sir Edith.'

Of course, Edith, who was dull, just tilted her head, so the misunderstanding was not resolved for a long time.

[Hehehe. I'm drunk.]

While he was sipping tea and basking in the warm campfire, the devil came back into Seongjin's head, saying strange things again. The guy was currently walking around excitedly among the drunk people.

By the way, this guy is now possessed and drinking alcohol?

[I'm just borrowing some sense for a moment.]

The demon lord, who was in a good mood, explained as if humming.

[Even though you have left the ecliptic, it is impossible to detect souls like before because of your father's barrier. However, it is possible to possess a creature with low mental defense and temporarily affect its movements or borrow its senses.]

And now there are a lot of drunk people around. Most people have extremely weak mental defenses.

'Do you like drinking that much?'

Seongjin was dumbfounded by the happy emotions clearly conveyed in his head.

however.

[Why wouldn't it be good? It makes sense and eating grass is also delicious.]

The devil bastard who answered quickly added, looking a little sad.

[I have been living only as a soul for the past several months. I couldn't eat or feel anything. Can you even imagine what that feels like?]

'hmm... ... '

Even at first glance, Seongjin thought that starving while still alive would be extremely stressful. There is a body that can feel hunger, apart from other things.

You can see how sensitive Seo Yi-seo is becoming after losing her meal time to Cadmus recently.

Then, a thought suddenly occurred to Seongjin.

'Hey, then can you try that for me too?'

[what?]

'Borrowing that sense. Then you can feel what I taste.'

Wouldn't that be easier than running around frantically for no reason?

It was such a simple thought, but the Demon King was silent for a moment as if surprised, and then cautiously asked back.

[...] You allow that?]

Do you need permission at all?

[of course. Originally, it was only possible briefly when the target's mental defense was extremely low. If you want to do this to a sane person, you have to ask for their consent through a contract or some other method. And I don't know why, but Lee Seong-jin. Your soul is somehow strangely difficult to interfere with. Even though we are close enough to exchange thoughts with each other.]

Now that I think about it, when I first came to this world, I remember the demon king complaining that soul detection didn't work on Seongjin.

[This can be a bit of a sensitive issue. Allowing your senses ultimately means allowing them to occupy part of your body in some way. If you allow something like that to anyone without precise contract terms, you could have your body taken over by the devil in an instant.]

'well...'

Seongjin thought nothing of it.

If you think about it, aren't you already residing in my head without permission? No matter how much I think about it, it doesn't seem particularly dangerous.

'Just give it a try. I'm not sure how to give permission, but I'll try my best not to cause any objection.'

[Yes, I don't know if it's possible, but I'll give it a try.]

And I felt like something was stirring in my head. Rather than feeling like I was touching anything in particular, I just had the clear feeling that he was engrossed in something and groaning.

I had been doing this for a while, when suddenly the objects in front of my eyes began to glow and sway in strange colors.

'Hey, are you doing it right?'

[Uh, sorry. I guess I touched the wrong perspective.]

A red light flashed in Seongjin's pupils for a moment, but it was such a fleeting moment that no one noticed it.

Then, your vision soon returns to normal.

[...] It's more difficult than I thought.]

Seongjin waited patiently.

Around this time, Seongjin emptied all the tea cups and Manager Bruno poured new, warm tea.

[pew. I think it has been resolved.]

The Demon Lord just sighed and said that.

Hmm, I'm not sure what's changed?

Seongjin tilted his head and took a sip of the warm, steaming tea.

That moment.

[Wow!]

An exclamation rings out in my head.

[What on earth is it? Is it really delicious? Can grass-soaked water taste like this?]

How do you feel? Awesome, right?

Seongjin smiled in remorse and took another sip of tea. There was again intense exclamation.

[Wow! The scent is the best! That idiot was the one who created something this amazing!?]

The demon king was instantly fascinated by Melbourne tea. Because he kept begging for more, Seongjin eventually had to ask Manager Bruno for a new car one more time.

Thanks to this, it was Seongjin who was actually full.

'... Okay, I'll take care of it today.'

Seongjin decided to be generous for just one day.

For him, it will be the first delicious drink he has had in months.

As the night grew deeper, the noise around me began to subside little by little. The Wolf Knights also left watch and entered the tent one by one, and the only ones who were awake were a few who were still drinking.

As if there was a group of bards nearby, a composed song occasionally played along with the sound of string instruments.

A beautiful woman's little wind quietly passes by the stars.

Make that wish come true, silver moon, brilliant city of love.

I think the lyrics are a bit lame.

Anyway, Seongjin sat in front of the bonfire and tried sharing various sensations with the demon king.

With a little practice, intense sensations like smell and taste became easier to share. For a moment, hearing and sight could also be transmitted.

The only thing is that in the case of such sensations, there is no need to practice because they can be fully grasped even with the Demon King's soul.

What was surprising was the sense of touch and pain, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get it across to him properly. The two tried several more times before giving up completely.

'It's the same as sight and hearing. Maybe there's no need to share...
... !'

There was another achievement. After trying to convey the sensation for a while, at some point, part of the memory also began to be conveyed!

Even if it was impossible for the devil to search on his own, at least the memories that Seongjin recalled and wanted to be conveyed were possible to be conveyed as vividly as when detecting souls.

Thanks to this, Seongjin was able to convey the memories of the [gap] that occurred at Tansinyeon to the demon king more accurately.

[Wow, this is dizzying.]

The demon king caught a glimpse of part of the scene in his memory and stuck out his tongue.

[You were in a place like this, so even if I called you that, you couldn't hear me! Because time and space were so mixed, it was no wonder that you felt that your body existed in two places at the same time.]

The sense of time and space was definitely distorted. Just thinking about that space now makes me feel motion sick again.

[This probably seems like a device to minimize disruption of cause and effect. While high-ranking demon kings interfered in the Delcross dimension, they forcibly twisted and twisted the space to avoid directly moving cause and effect.]

According to the Demon King's explanation, the amount of causality imposed on each action of a high-ranking Demon King is beyond imagination.

Unless you descend to this earth directly through consciousness, you

cannot randomly touch another dimension without any cause or effect.

So, by spreading the attributes that symbolize themselves, such as [starvation], [plague], [war], and [death], they first create a causal basis for dimensional invasion.

'Then why does the father have restrictions on cause and effect? 'He's not a devil from another dimension.'

Naturally, that question arose. I think at that time, people said something like it took time because there wasn't enough cause and effect.

Then the devil bastard also hesitated as if he were puzzled.

[well. I don't understand that either? I don't know if they were forced into another dimension, but I don't know why there are such restrictions in their own dimension to simply defend against invasion? Besides, your father is definitely a monster, but he is still in the human category. Rather, it should be the most free from causality, right?]

The Demon King looked like he was thinking for a moment, but there was no way he could suddenly think of an answer that didn't exist.

He soon changed the topic.

[More than that, the problem is the people who attacked. In order to minimize causal intervention, incarnations have been created with flame images, but they are clearly the same demon lords who were targeting the Delcross dimension before.]

When Seongjin said that he looked somewhat familiar, the Demon King responded positively.

It is certain that they are the ones encountered at the border of the previous dimension. It was simply because he was wearing a flame that he didn't feel the terrible pressure he felt inside his body.

[Plus, I think I can guess what their nicknames are... ..]

'really?'

[Yes, they were probably 'famine' and 'plague.']

[Hunger], which devours everything in sight, is said to often appear in the form of a black dog. Most of the watchdogs and demon species that guard his hell are similar in appearance to dogs.

And in the case of [Plague], it often takes on an appearance reminiscent of a plant.

[There's another strange thing. How on earth do they know Mores?]

Okay, now that I think about it.

The situation was so tense at the time that I didn't think to look into it, but didn't they say this?

-But why does that face look so familiar?

-Isn't it obvious? Can you prepare for him yourself and still not recognize him?

What do you mean they have in store for Mores?

The thoughts continued no further. Suddenly, a sad cry was heard from over there.

"Hehehehe!"

The bard, who had been singing mournfully earlier, threw the lyre he was tearing with his hands to the floor and fell to the ground. He was a young man with long braided hair.

Teeing!

One of the lyre's strings breaks and makes a sharp noise.

At the sudden commotion, the mercenaries who had been happily intoxicated and dozing off stood up with frowns.

"what? what's the matter?"

"Why is that guy being treated so poorly all of a sudden?"

"Ughhhhh!"

The young man's cries also become louder to match the harsh voices of the mercenaries.

Thanks to this, the mercenaries who had fallen asleep woke up one by one and began glaring at the young man.

When the surrounding air suddenly became unsightly, another bard who sensed the atmosphere quickly blocked the young man's path.

"This guy is very drunk, so everyone please understand. Originally, in Carthage, he was quite famous for his improvisational poetry. I was invited to Bertrand Street to celebrate my birthday this year, but I was wondering if I was in bad shape or if I was completely exhausted. "I was booed for three days and didn't earn a single penny."

Then, another fellow poet sitting next to me let out a sneer.

"What are all the coins? "You should be lucky that no stones flew at you!"

"hey!"

"why? Did I say something wrong? "I always believed in my talent and insisted on only making impromptu poems, but then I ended up singing the most old-fashioned song on Bertrand Street!"

At that time, the young man who was lying on the floor got up and cried.

"Hehehe! What a brilliant city of love, freezing to death! Delcross is a dead city! "It's a cursed place!"

The atmosphere around me suddenly calmed down due to the young man's sudden profanity.

What did the author call the saints of the millennium?

"That city took away my inspiration and all my talent! "There, everything just stands still, like a still life painting!"

"Hey, calm down. "You're so drunk!"

A colleague who realized the seriousness of the situation grabbed him, but the young man continued to scream.

"You all, don't act like you don't know! Traveling artists from all over are invited at generous prices, but after a few performances, they eventually return to their home countries. "Don't you all know why?"

And the young man jumped up from his seat and shouted.

"That's because I know very well that if I stay there for too long, my artistic soul will die in an instant! "Because I know that the spark of the soul that cannot become a flame will just burn itself out and then fade away!"

"You better do your job!"

"Passion! love! craving! I couldn't feel any strong desire there! "That's why my songs left me!"

The moment he heard those words, what Sigurd Sigurdson had said not long ago flashed through Seongjin's mind.

-In this stopped world, you were the only friend who could understand me.

Meanwhile, the drunken young man continued to cry.

"Not even the most beautiful woman on the street could bring the song back from me! "The ecliptic has become the tomb of my soul!"

Then, one by one, the mercenaries began pouring out sharp criticism at him.

"Why are you blaming the emperor for my own shortcomings?"

"that's right!"

"Shame on you! If the grace of the Lord has taken away your song, it certainly does not mean that your art has been debauched and unclean!"

Then the young man also responded to the criticism by using evil words.

"My art is unclean? Then I will gladly sell my soul back to the devil! "What meaning does my life have now that I have lost those brilliant songs!"

For a moment, the air around became cold, as if ice water had been sprinkled on it.

Everyone closes their mouths at the same time and glares at the young man. In that cool atmosphere, the face of the young man who had finally sobered up a little became increasingly pale.

Behind him, someone broke the silence and shouted sharply at him.

"He's a devil worshiper!"

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173. Logistics Relay Station (4)

Once the water broke, criticism started pouring in like a torrent of criticism.

"They are devil worshipers!"

"You dirty charlatan!"

"You definitely said you would sell your soul to the devil again! "You heard me clearly!"

"Oh, no. I never did that! I'm just angry that you are criticizing my art as something unclean obtained from the devil... .."

The young man waved his hand in an attempt to make amends, but now even his fellow bard, who had been supporting him, took a step back and looked at him with eyes filled with astonishment.

"Shut up, you devil worshiper!"

"Who else are you going to corrupt with this corrupted song?"

"You damn devil worshipers! "Those people who are destroying the world must be killed right now!"

Seongjin, who had only been watching indifferently until then, was taken aback when people reacted more violently than expected.

Wait a minute, if a drunk guy gets a little upset, he might say something wrong. What are you guys so angry about?

But the situation became increasingly serious.

Drunken mercenaries gather around the young man. Some of the

dogs are spreading their energy by rolling up their sleeves, and if left like this, they have the tendency to beat people to death at any moment.

Seongjin, who realized something was unusual, stood up. Then Masain, who was guarding the campfire with him, came close to Seongjin's side and said.

"It's the personal squabbles of drunkards. If we have to, I will intervene with the knights, so don't worry, sir. "Would you really harm someone over such a trivial matter?"

However, Father Gustav, who heard the commotion and came out, shook his head.

"It is entirely possible, sir."

"Isn't it just alcohol?"

"This kind of scene may be unfamiliar to you. People who live in the ecliptic don't know much. "Because we are surrounded by His Majesty's grace and do not have to worry about demon species."

"So, it's different outside the ecliptic?"

"Why not? Although the Church and the Inquisitors are making great efforts, devil worshipers are still active in many parts of the continent. People are killed as sacrifices to summon demons, and the summoned demons kill people again. Especially among those who become mercenaries, there is probably no one who has not lost a family member or colleague to such devils or devil worshipers."

"that... .."

"For them, devil worshipers are already a real threat. So how can we just leave this alone?"

Gustav's eyes were extremely cold as he said that. I thought he was a person with a good personality, but he was still a priest. You have no mercy when it comes to matters related to the devil.

Soon ugh! With screams, the mass lynching of mercenaries began.

"Is it really necessary for you, the prince of the Holy Empire, to protect someone who committed blasphemy? Maybe they too will stop at a reasonable line. The mercenaries will relieve their anxiety, and that foolish young man will also learn a valuable lesson."

As if to dissuade Seongjin from taking a step toward them, Gustav quickly added, following behind. Seongjin let out a small sigh.

"Father Gustav. "Do you think that young man is a devil worshiper?"

"At least I don't feel any [magic energy]. "He just looks like a young, immature young man suffering from art disease."

"Then of course we have to save it, right? "In terms of real threats, what's so different about that young man being a devil worshiper and those who accuse him of being a devil worshiper?"

"Well, sir... .."

"If, by any chance, the author cannot overcome his feelings of injustice and really commits himself to the devil, who will actually be the one who gave him up to the devil?"

Then, Priest Gustav's eyes widen. As if he had been greatly shocked, the pupils looking at Seongjin began to tremble slightly.

'... 'What did I say?'

Seongjin looked at his blood-stained face in confusion for a moment, then turned around.

Accompanied by Lord Masain and other resident knights, Seongjin headed towards the place where the mercenaries were gathered.

The lynching site was already surrounded by layers of angry mercenaries, but as Seongjin and his group approached, the mercenaries were startled and cleared the way for themselves.

Seeing Masain move on his own before shouting anything means that he was secretly keeping a close eye on their actions, even though he was pretending not to be.

Why not? Seongjin and his group stood out from the beginning.

At the head was the wolf insignia, the symbol of the Wolf Knights, followed by a carriage with the imperial emblem emblazoned on it.

The choice of Sang-San, who was unintentionally accompanying the prince and his party instead of accompanying them, was to stay as far away from them as possible and not make eye contact with them.

Pow! puck!

The mercenaries, who were kicking with gritted teeth, also hurriedly lowered their gaze and bit themselves as the prince approached.

"Ugh... ..!"

The young man, who had been screaming while covering his face with his arms, closed his mouth and stuck his head out over his arms when the sudden violence subsided.

I was hit so hard in such a short period of time that my eyelids were already swollen.

"Lord Valerie."

At Seongjin's name, the red-haired inquisitor quickly ran over and began pouring divine power on the tattered bard.

Although there was no significant visible change, the pain seemed to be relieving, and the young man's frowning face began to straighten little by little.

The mercenaries, who only then realized that the prince had come to help that young man, gathered in front of Seongjin and his group and began to shout one by one.

"... "The author is a devil worshiper, prince!"

"Please punish me! "Dirty satanists killed my family!"

"Devil worshipers must pay for their sins!"

Those shiny eyes that don't care about right or wrong, but just burn with blind anger.

Seongjin suddenly remembered what Dominic Scarzapino, whom he had met not long ago, had said.

-After living abroad for a long time due to work, I sometimes feel very unfamiliar with the sights of Delcross.

I used to think that those who shed tears because they were in awe of the Holy Emperor were like pseudo-fanatics.

Well, I guess people outside the ecliptic aren't that different? In fact, aren't humans inherently a little bit crazy somewhere?

Seongjin looked around slowly for a moment and gave an order to the people.

"As you said, this person is guilty of insulting the main lord and the imperial family. "I will hand over the interest to the relevant institution and process it according to the procedures, so stop now and everyone go back to their seats!"

However, despite the prince's direct orders, the highly enraged mercenaries did not easily retreat.

"Connecting with the devil is a serious crime punishable by summary execution!"

"Prince! Please execute him right here and now! Show me the severity of the Holy Law!"

"Please set an example for the dirty devil worshipers!"

The strange fever that swept through the crowd did not disappear immediately.

In the end, Seongjin decided to take the last resort and turned to Masain.

"Sir Martha."

"Yes, sir."

"Who has the authority to judge and punish heresy?"

Then Masain, who sensed what Seongjin was trying to say, bowed his head even more politely and said.

"Only to an inquisitor with formal permission from the Orthodox Church."

"So these ruthless people are not even Inquisitors, and yet they are trying to arbitrarily exercise their right of prosecution and investigation?"

"Yes that's right."

The bewildered mercenaries began to think after hearing Seongjin's next words and only then realizing the current situation.

"Then these people just dared to call themselves Inquisitors even though they are not qualified to do so."

"... ..!"

"By making a mockery of the Holy Law and bringing down the authority of the Orthodox Church, isn't this something a devil worshiper would do? It is clear that this is a serious crime that must be dealt with severely according to the Holy Law. so... .."

Breathe!

The thoughtful mercenaries quickly step back, avoiding Seongjin's eyes.

After glaring at the mercenaries, Seongjin approached the young man lying on the floor.

"Hey, can you move?"

"Ugh! Ugh! thanks! Thank you... ..!"

As the tense atmosphere eased, the young man hugged the broken

lyre and began to sob.

Of course, he was scared and retreated, but the mercenaries' eyes as they glanced at the young man still showed an eerie, lifelike look.

If I leave it like this, don't you think I'll get stabbed without anyone knowing?

"Then get up and follow me."

"Ugh... . yes?"

Seongjin said solemnly, looking down at the young man who was a mess of tears.

"You may call it a lie, but what you have committed is blasphemy and desecration of the imperial family. "It seems like appropriate punishment and rehabilitation are needed."

Then, with a quick glance, Inquisitor Valery quickly stood up the young man.

"now. You go to our tent with us! Immediately kneel down in front of the scriptures and pray, and sincerely repent your sins before the Lord. Do you understand?"

When the knight who showed off his divine power comes out like this, the mercenaries reluctantly turn their attention to the young man.

In this way, Seongjin and his party were able to overcome the hostile atmosphere of mercenaries and finally rescue the young man.

"We will take turns watching you all night, so don't worry about the interest."

Seongjin, who left the young man in the hands of the resident knights and the monster task force, returned to the carriage late at night and closed his eyes. It was a tiring day, but he had many thoughts and couldn't sleep easily.

People who are quickly swept away by fear that has no real

substance. Suspicion and hostility that cannot even be identified. And anger.

It wasn't a very unfamiliar scene. Perhaps this is closer to the world that Seongjin originally knew.

'If you think about it, the people in the imperial palace were a bit strange...'

People who just looked on calmly, no matter what suspicious things they did. That unconditional trust and support.

Seongjin thought as he buried his head in the soft bedding.

To be honest, I never thought I would miss the air of the ecliptic so much in just one day.

* * *

The next morning.

As Seongjin sat in front of the bonfire for a meal, he met again a young man who seemed to be in better shape than he expected.

After regaining some strength after a day, he introduced himself as Laurent. There was still a black bruise on her eyelid, but her face looked relatively clean after the swelling had subsided.

With his long braid wrapped around his neck, Laurent bows his head deeply towards Seongjin.

"Yesterday I wasn't in a hurry so I couldn't say thank you properly.
"Thank you so much for saving my life, sir."

Although he was sometimes intimidated by the sharp gazes the mercenaries gave him, the young man still had a good sense of humor as an entertainer.

Before we knew it, Laurent was naturally telling his story with the group sitting around the bonfire as his audience.

"My recent motif is the biography of the wandering knight Fernand."

Fernand Braque.

He was a new and emerging playboy, following Seonghwang, who was the most famous libertine on the continent.

A young genius knight from Brittany, he is currently creating an epic story of love while traveling across the continent under the pretext of training.

Laurent is said to have been so inspired by his story that he decided to dedicate his life to writing beautiful love stories between men and women.

The first song I sang in front of the public was an impromptu poem called 'The Genius Prosecutor and the Count's Lady.'

And the biggest hit is a love song titled 'The Wandering Swordsman and the Sweet Brown-Eyed Lady.'

"So what is the most recent song you wrote?"

"yes. 'The Genius Wandering Swordsman and the Moon Maid.'"

hmm. Seongjin, who had been wondering if the Emperor's grace had really influenced Lee Ja's artistry, immediately changed his mind.

Hasn't this guy's artistic soul already died early? Why is the repertoire so clichéd?

"I had some expectations that Fernand Braque might not appear on the ecliptic during this birthday party. If that were the case, the greatest masterpiece of his life would have been born. The wandering swordsman meets a beautiful rose in the imperial palace... .."

For a moment, there was a flash of gaze and I raised my head to see Orden looking meaningfully at Seongjin.

What those eyes meant was clear.

'Should I just kill him?'

'okay. Is that so? Do you want to bury it somewhere?'

I didn't know we would agree with that guy.

Laurent, unaware that his life came and went in a split-second of gaze, spoke naturally.

"I came to the imperial capital this time because I was invited, but more than anything, it was to get inspiration."

"Inspiration?"

"yes. Isn't His Majesty the protagonist of a living story? "In my hometown, Carthage, songs about him have been steadily gaining popularity for about 10 years."

Songs like 'The Wandering Prince and the Blue-Eyed Maid' or 'The Genius Swordsman and the Blonde Princess'.

The expressions on the faces of Seongjin and his party who were listening to his story became mysterious. Because I could guess who the characters in each song were.

When I thought about it that way, I saw that this man was prosperous! Life really is a story itself!

"This is the ultimate image I pursue. "A drink to soothe a lonely prosecutor, and a beauty."

Laurent said this and held up the lyre.

Tidding!

A powerful yet short chord is struck as if the strings will break.

"A glance! That momentary thrill! A love that burns fiercely!"

Tiriring.

A soft melody follows, as if caressing a lover.

"And the lonely and fleeting wait of the girl left behind."

Next, Laurent raises his voice.

Oh, my beloved. That person is never coming back.

The golden crocuses bloom and fall, and the owl mourns all night long.

[...] It sucks.]

The demon lord recited a short comment.

As he said, the longer the song continued, the more the group's faces rotted in real time.

It's a truly sorry story for a young man with a burning artistic spirit, but to be honest, it was a truly old-fashioned sentiment.

Laurent, noticing the negative gaze from those around him, stops playing and slumps his shoulders.

"Hmm."

Director Bruno stroked his mustache as if he was embarrassed.

"If it is your art, won't the inspiration soon be restored?"

"Is that so?"

"okay. First, let's go to Regina together. If you stay there for a while, your inspiration will probably come back just fine. "Regina is a city where all kinds of debauchery gather!"

Then Laurent was greatly shocked and staggered.

"In the end, my art is just debauchery..."

"No, that's not it..."

The leader belatedly tried to comfort Laurent, but he quietly crumpled while hugging Lyra.

A vivid sense of frustration. It was like avant-garde art that literally embodied the artistic soul of a young man who had been cruelly trampled upon with no room for recovery.

Seongjin quietly glared at Director Bruno.

Anyway, you idiot! If you can't fix it, at least you shouldn't pour oil on it!

174. Logistics Relay Station (5)

Surprisingly, it was Sir Claudia who supported the frustrated Laurent.

"Cheer up, Laurent. Why do you say it's debauched? "If love is the topic, I think you've taken the right direction."

Laurent raised his head, pricking his ears.

"... "Do you think so?"

"Sure. "Isn't the image that Laurent pursues the ultimate form in which the love between a man and a woman can remain in the most beautiful way?"

Then, there was a moment of silence among the group surrounding the bonfire.

"... A brief burning love? And remembering each other for the rest of your life after breaking up?"

"That's why it can remain so beautiful. Isn't it true that the longer a relationship lasts, the more we see each other's petty and messy side? Even if it were a song, who would want to hear it?"

... is it?

Thinking that it was surprisingly persuasive, each person began to recall their own experiences.

"Now, Sir Valerie. "Would you like to say something from one of the most famous playboys in the Knights of St. Marsyas?"

Then the Inquisitor smiled weakly.

"Playboy, that's not true. "I have always been faithful to my lover."

"But that lover changes quickly, right?"

"It was a difference in personality."

Lord Valerie answered like that and rested her chin with a slightly serious expression.

"hmm. Now that I think about it, it's definitely true. The excitement is short-lived. Sometimes, without knowing why she was angry, they became increasingly estranged, and in most cases, they broke up, feeling very disappointed in each other. "The process wasn't something that could be called very beautiful."

Sir Claudia nodded, turned to the side and asked.

"Lord Maria. You were once famous as the long-term couple of the 1st Knights, right? "How did you feel about the ending?"

Sir Maria, who was suddenly called, was taken aback for a moment before answering.

"uh? Yes. We dated for such a long time, but the reason we broke up wasn't a big deal. "As soon as I became a senior knight, he suddenly wanted to break up with me."

Then, for a moment, his expression distorts as if he remembers how he felt at that time.

"... "That ugly bastard!"

"Now, do you understand, Laurent?"

Sir Claudia spoke assertively to the wide-eyed young man.

"Real love is far from beautiful. So if you're making something about love between a man and a woman, there are only two ways to go. "It's either a fantasy or a dead end!"

"... fantasy... "Madjang?"

Sir Claudia threw a dagger at Laurent, who was staring at her blankly with his mouth wide open, with a big smile.

"Laurent. "To be honest, you've never really been in a relationship, right?"

"... ..!"

"see. When someone like this writes a song, it becomes a beautiful love song. "The illusion of love remains intact, right?"

Laurent now looked like he was almost lost in shock.

Sir Claudia, stop! That guy looks like he's going to cry!

* * *

Seongjin and his party, who set out in the morning, arrived in Regina before the sun had even risen in the sky.

"... big!"

After passing the gate after a simple procedure, Seongjin honestly expressed his admiration at the magnificent sight that unfolded before his eyes.

Competitively built tall buildings and colorfully painted signs of various sizes.

You can see a huge radial road extending around the logistics relay station, and wagons moving continuously between them.

It felt like a bustling metropolis, different from the well-organized imperial capital.

"It is no coincidence that a large logistics relay station was established in Regina. "It's a flat land that makes it easy to build a road, and best of all, it's next to a big river to the north."

While listening to Lord Masain's explanation, Seongjin looked out the window.

"You mean the Breeze River?"

"Yes, sir. Most of the goods destined for eastern Ortona and Cyprus travel along the Breeze River through a logistics relay station. They say that because the flow rate is fast, freight charges are greatly reduced."

"Right. Next time you go there, it might be a good idea to take a boat... .."

Seongjin, who had said that without thinking, trailed off due to a momentary sense of discomfort.

next time?

"... Lowering?"

"Uh, it's nothing."

Seongjin scratched his cheek shyly while responding to Masain who called out to him in a puzzled manner.

It's so natural to think about the next trip. These days, I feel like I'm so used to living as a mores. Sometimes I even forget that I'm possessed.

'I knew how long I would stay in Mores' body... ..'

[Um, Lee Seong-jin?]

'huh?'

[...] no. nothing.]

Why is this guy doing this again?

Meanwhile, the carriage slowly ran toward the accommodation.

Although it is small, it is a journey that takes the prince of the empire. Through Herman's arrangement, a driver drove to Regina a day early and reserved a luxurious lodging.

And when they arrived at the lodgings, the bard Laurent approached

Seongjin's carriage, prostrated himself and said.

"Thank you again, sir. "You saved my life yesterday."

"Are we going now?"

"yes. Thanks to that, I arrived safely at my destination, Regina. "I will never forget this grace for the rest of my life."

Seongjin quietly looked around without answering.

It is said that the accommodation is famous for its good facilities, and in addition to Seongjin and his group, the large Sangeang Duot that accompanied him yesterday can be seen coming through the entrance. And even a considerable number of mercenaries who were glaring at Laurent with a fierce gaze.

Is this guy going to be okay like this?

Meanwhile, Laurent, who could not understand the atmosphere, was talking brightly.

"There are also big issues that need to be considered in the future. "I realized that the ideal picture I was aiming for might not actually be perfect."

"So you don't make love songs anymore?"

"I'm going to take my time and think about it slowly. Should I refine my ideals more perfectly, or should I change my repertoire altogether? Perhaps, as other articles have said, my inspiration could be completely revived if I stayed in this city? "This is a place full of prodigal love."

Laurent then smiled brightly with purple bruises on his eyelids.

"Do you know anything? "Maybe one day I will create an amazing love story with Ha Hae as the main character."

"... .."

Seongjin quietly looked down at Laurent for a moment.

Why? What makes you think this guy will never make something like that in the future?

"Are you okay? "I think most of the mercenaries who tried to harm you yesterday will stay in Regina for a day with the merchant."

Then Laurent's face stiffened with the corners of his mouth raised.

Although he was drunk, it was clear that the experience of being mass lynched was a strong trauma to him.

Seongjin added after studying the expression for a moment.

"How about going north at this point? We are now on our way to Sigismund. "If you want, I can take you there fairly safely."

"Sigismund?"

It was clear that it was an overflowing favor, but Laurent honestly wasn't that reluctant.

It is a place covered with snow all year round. It is a harshly cold land where even love that was about to bloom will freeze.

"okay. Since Sigismund is isolated, the people will greatly welcome the arrival of the bard."

"But will the inspiration for love arise there?"

"well. I don't know much about love, but when I see the Wolf Knights in action in the Demonic World, I might at least think of something like a martial arts poem. Do you know anything? "Will you later make a name for yourself with famous works such as [Orlando's Military Poetry]?"

Laurent blinked in confusion after hearing the unexpected words.

"Military poetry?"

"okay. Or maybe learn a little more about the 'bad guy' from Sir Claudia. "I think it would be quite fun to add makjang to love, right?"

Although he was just saying this to persuade Laurent, Seongjin was sincere to some extent.

Whatever it is, wouldn't it at least be better than today's old-fashioned love story?

"I'm the worst at military training... . hmm..."

Laurent, who was pondering, turned his head and caught the sight of Sir Claudia chatting with Sir Sharon from afar. Before he knew it, his mouth was curved.

"yes. That might be okay. "I'm not sure about the makjang yet, but I just came up with some pretty good inspiration for the Freckled Lady."

Hwiik.

For a moment, I felt a subtle force flowing around Seongjin's arm.

It was only a moment, but Seongjin remembered that familiar feeling.

It was the sense that [Cause] was moving.

* * *

"I plan to stay in Regina today without any plans."

After roughly unpacking our belongings at the accommodation, Herman spoke to Seongjin and his group.

Considering the distance to the next destination, the explanation was that even if we rushed, there was a high possibility that we would end up camping in an awkward location again anyway.

Of course, the real purpose is to track down the Milo Merchant Marine.

It is said that merchants usually stay in Regina for a day and handle various complex issues such as checking order quantities and customs at the logistics relay station at once.

"We are planning to stop by the logistics relay station first. "I'm just going to keep an eye on Giacomo, the owner of the Milo Merchant Marine."

As Orden added with a serious expression, Seongjin clicked his tongue.

Such a simple ignorant guy. If drivers who are not merchants follow you all the way to the logistics relay station, the other side will not be wary of this side. uh?

Seongjin was about to say that, but a sudden thought occurred to him and he changed his mind.

for a moment. If they openly draw attention, wouldn't me and Dasha be able to move around more comfortably?

"okay. "Then I'll hear a detailed report on the results tomorrow."

You'll come back empty-handed anyway.

After sending Orden and his party away, Seongjin locked himself in his room. First of all, if you want to make contact with Dasha, you'll have to wait for night to come, right?

Of course, I planned to quietly meditate at my dorm during the remaining time. But everyone in the group was shocked and tried to stop him.

"Are you serious, my lord? "Regina is a city with so much to see!"

"How can you possibly come to such a famous city and practice in a corner of your room?"

"Lowering! There is a very famous restaurant in Regina! "You really have to go there?"

hmm. Obviously, if you, the target of the escort, are stuck in the lodgings, the knights will also be tied up here, right?

Above all, the demon king who tasted breakfast with Seongjin was so excited that he sang loudly.

[I want to eat something delicious! Something delicious! I really, really want to go to that restaurant!]

'... ... '

good. Just endure it until today.

If it's still like this tomorrow, I'll really exorcise you!

So Seongjin went out into the streets with his companions. Except for two people with channeling abilities who seem to get crazy in places with a lot of people.

Since the accommodation was located in the center of the downtown area, the group decided to walk to see the sights. Although it is said to be a similar downtown area, the atmosphere is quite different from the streets of Bertrand and rue d'Este in the Imperial Capital.

The sight of a variety of unique shops, including many restaurants, made me feel like I was traveling abroad.

In particular, Kalmen, who was leaving the ecliptic for the first time, was busy turning his head with wide eyes. It's almost embarrassing to take him around.

'Now that I think about it, you said you were going to buy a souvenir for your father... ... '

Seongjin thought as he looked at a small antique store. I have a lot of time, so should I buy something for my sister, Logan, and the kids?

[Did you know that it is only a day's journey from here to the ecliptic? What kind of souvenirs are you buying in a place like this?]

'Then just buy it somewhere else. what's the problem?'

The more souvenirs, the better, right?

While I was having a trivial conversation with the demon lord in my head, Sir Masaine suddenly pointed somewhere and spoke.

"Lowering. "That is the logistics relay station building."

"... ... !"

Logistics relay station.

It was a huge rectangular structure that would be better described as a structure rather than a building.

Although the number of floors was quite high, the building was spread out so widely that it was hard to see.

The first floor was filled with tall pillars instead of walls, and countless carriages were passing between them.

A structure based on extreme practicality, with all roads leading straight into the building. And from there, a wide radial road extends throughout the city.

Indeed, it could be said to be a distribution center where all logistics heading to the north and east gathered.

[Lee Seong-jin.]

While I was dazed and overwhelmed by the scale beyond my imagination, the devil suddenly whispered to Seongjin in a tense voice.

[be careful. It's faint, but I can feel the demon energy inside me?]

'... 'What?'

I quickly turned around, but the Inquisitor, Sir Valery, seemed completely oblivious. He was busy looking at the cityscape, smiling.

[It's probably because it's too faint for humans to feel. It's probably hard to notice unless you're a high-ranking priest or your brothers.]

The devil explained.

Whether you are a devil worshiper or a devil contractor, it is difficult for a human being to exude demonic energy unless you directly summon the devil to this place.

The fact that such demonic energy can be felt directly means only one thing.

[Of course, Seongjin Lee. There is a devil hiding in that building.]

175*

175. List of Contracts (1)

The day Seongjin left the imperial capital.

The brothers and sisters who saw him off gathered at the unoccupied Jinju Palace at lunchtime as if they had made an appointment. Before we knew it, having lunch together had become a habit.

With Seo Yi-seo in Cadmus mode joining in, lunch at Jinju Palace became the most burdensome meal in the palace.

Even the hospitality of the prince, princess, and saint.

The workers screamed inwardly.

'I thought it would be easier for a while since Prince Mores wasn't around!'

Only the chef felt proud and secretly clenched his fists.

'My cooking skills are the best in the imperial palace!'

Even with the meal prepared in front of them, the brothers and sisters were silent for a moment. Today was the day that Mores left the palace, and I felt so empty because I couldn't see his naturally sullen face.

In particular, Amelia, who had been with him almost every day since he woke up from his fever, was completely depressed.

[Why don't you listen?]

Cadmus asked curiously, and Amelia sighed.

"Where has she gone now? "Is she safe and well?"

[Of course you will be fine. It's been a few hours since we left.]

Then Sisley said sullenly:

"You probably don't have much more than the imperial palace, but are you eating well?""

[It's probably before we even reach Regina. Do your best, descendant. Do you know that it went to some remote place?]

Cadmus looked dumbfounded, but Logan added in a calm voice.

"No matter how much I think about it, the number of escorts is too small. "There shouldn't be anything dangerous."

[...]]

Cadmus completely lost his appetite. This hasn't happened since I entered my new body, so what on earth are they doing with a feast in front of them?

Slurp.

The golden light disappears from his eyes, and soon his brown eyes return.

"... uh?"

Seo Yi-seo, who blinked her dreamy eyes for a moment, soon noticed the gorgeous multi-course meal in front of her and her eyes filled with tears.

"bar... It's rice! "It's rice!"

Ugh! How long has it been since this food!

Seo Yi-seo, who had not been able to eat a decent meal since gaining the Half-Body Advent passive skill, began to frantically shove food into her mouth, shedding tears and snot.

Upon hearing the news that the saint had emptied all of her plate, shedding tears of emotion, it was an added bonus that the chef at

Jinju Palace began to become even more determined to fight.

And then the next day came.

With an even more hearty lunch in front of them, Amelia, Logan, and Sisley were even more dispirited.

"It's somehow ominous that I haven't calmed down since morning.
"The teacups Mirabell handed me were broken three times in a row."

[Because your hands are shaking like that, you keep dropping the glass!]

"Definitely today was a bit of a strange day. "Aren't all the scarecrows in the gymnasium going to be destroyed in the morning?"

[That's because you struck me with that ignorant weapon, descendant!]

"I was short-tempered. She wasn't going to rely on an escort. At the very least, I should have completely removed the 7th standard sword technique for the Imperial Knights... .."

[...]]

Cadmus clicked his tongue.

[Ugh. I would rather see this... Tsk.]

And again at meal time, Seo Yi-seo, who returned safely, shed tears of emotion as she looked at the table.

"rice! Is this really a dream? Hehehe!"

That day, Chief Chamberlain Louis received inquiries from the prince and princess one by one.

"... "Prince Mores said he was very concerned and asked if there was any way he could take a moment to look at it."

Seonghwang, who finally finished a long political meeting and heard those words from Lewis in the afternoon, was inwardly embarrassed.

'I was planning on taking a quick look after work, but how on earth were the kids supposed to know?'

* * *

After Seongjin left the dorm with his escorts, Bruno Green, who remained in the room, momentarily regretted his choice.

The fact that he was avoiding people out of fear of being tired meant that the more annoying woman ended up staying with him. An exorcist who receives unorganized thoughts through a channel all day long and releases them without any filtering.

[Beep, beep, beep. Hehehe! When are you coming back? Charalingling. This is an important list. Piung, shooung! He's getting annoyed, he's cute! Ah! Beep beep beep. Let's chase after him! Kyaha!]

Bruno groaned, pressing the pillow down on his head. In this case, wouldn't it have been better to follow the prince?

Then, at some point, the loud ringing stopped completely.

[...]]

Bruno listened intently and eventually got up from his seat. It's nice to be quiet, but isn't it really annoying to suddenly become silent for no reason?

As he left the room, he found an exorcist walking down the hallway just in time.

"Where are you going, Sir Sharon?"

The exorcist's feet, which had been walking quietly and silently, suddenly stopped.

"Lord Sharon?"

However, what was secretly looking back at him were not Sir Sharon's characteristic jet black eyes, but rather familiar silver-grey eyes.

A huge presence that can be felt even with clumsy channeling skills. The unique, restrained movements of an Auror.

Bruno eventually had no choice but to ask this.

"... Really, Your Majesty? "What are you doing here now?"

Then the exorcist, or rather Seonghwang, sighed.

[I'm sorry for surprising you. Could you please pretend not to see me? I just came to check on the child for a moment.]

"... .."

Bruno was originally a man of great courtesy, but this time he was so outrageous that even though he knew it was blasphemous, he couldn't keep his mouth shut.

You came to check? It's only been one day since you left?

There are degrees of worry. What on earth does this person think of the grown-up prince?

"uh? Aren't you two eating? "What are you doing here?"

In the silence, a young man who was coming up carrying a lyre spotted them and asked. It was Laurent, a bard with long braided hair wrapped around his neck.

He had just been warned by the prince not to leave the residence as much as possible, as it could be dangerous today.

However, the eyes of Seonghwang, who was closely examining him with a strange glow, suddenly opened wide.

[The dead... ..]

"... yes?"

Seonghwang's expression became quite serious.

A person who should have died yesterday and today was granted an extra life. Plus, I received a unique calling.

It was impossible to know whose influence this was.

And right then.

At the sensation of prosperity, I suddenly felt a strange flow of power cut through the air. People who are inexplicably drawn by something run quickly toward a certain point.

The world watching this sudden movement murmured together.

The Emperor looked anxiously towards the north, where people were gathering.

It's only been a day since I left the imperial capital.

What on earth are you doing, son?

* * *

"... "Are you planning a visit?"

When the guard asked curiously, Seongjin nodded.

"There is no specific date and time set. I just sent a letter saying I'll be stopping by Regina soon and we can talk. "Are you sure you didn't receive it?"

"Even if you suddenly say that..."

The guard blurted out his words as if he was embarrassed.

A young boy appeared from somewhere, leading a group of wealthy knights, and requested a meeting, mentioning his promise with the branch head of the Rich Merchants Association.

It was an absurd thing to do, but the reason I couldn't resist it was because the identity presented by the other party was so clear.

The guard said to wait a moment and disappeared into the logistics relay station.

And the person who was called out right away was a middle-aged man wearing smart clothes. He must be one of the managers

employed by the Merchants' Association.

"Unfortunately, the branch manager was out on duty for a while, sir. "If it's not rude, may I listen to the business on your behalf and tell it to you?"

"okay?"

Seongjin said as if he was disappointed. Of course, he didn't really think he would be able to meet the branch manager right away.

"Then tell him. I would like to join you for dinner tonight, so please contact the accommodation. "I have a project I'm planning these days, and I really need the branch manager's help."

"... "Business?"

"huh. I'm planning to open a restaurant in the capital that specializes in salmon. Since a stable supply of materials will be needed, he wrote in 'detail' in the letter that he would like to slightly increase the quantity of salmon from Ortona through the logistics relay station. Could it be that the letter didn't arrive?"

And before hearing the answer, he tilted his head and added.

"but. I guess you didn't receive it. "Otherwise, there would be no reason for me to go out to work at this time when I arrived in Regina."

Naturally, the information that the Holy Empire's prince would pass through Regina was already widely known.

If there really was such a promise, this would be a clear disregard for a member of the Holy Family. The manager felt cold sweat running down his back.

"Well, I don't really care, so don't worry and be sure to tell me to contact the dorm."

After saying that to the manager who bowed his head in embarrassment, Seongjin turned and walked out. Then Masain followed closely behind him and asked.

"A salmon restaurant? When did you become interested in such a business? "I was always focused on swordsmanship classes, so I didn't pay attention, sir."

Then Seongjin looked at Masain with pitiful eyes.

You still don't know me that much, Lord Martha? It's obvious that I just made it up.

'How about Magi? 'Is there any change?'

[No, it's not moving from that spot.]

Hmm. Even though I pointed at the branch manager and made a fuss, there was no movement at all. First of all, you're saying it's not the branch manager or his close associates?

'If there was one devil, I assumed that it must be related to the head of the logistics relay station...'

Seongjin was deep in thought as he walked.

Deep inside, I was expecting that I would encounter a demonic species sooner or later.

A dark church that is said to worship the Demon King as a god.

A member of the Milo family who carries around the badges of this religious order.

A merchant association that condones and supports the Milo Merchant Marine's advance into the north.

So I always thought there was a possibility that there was a demonic species somewhere in that chain.

But who would have thought that they would be hiding in such a big city?

'Dasha might be sneaking in there right now. There will also be Orden and his party following Milo Sangju. 'Is it okay if I just leave the devil like that?'

[I'm still hiding and killing all traces. I probably won't make any hasty moves.]

'okay. Then, just watch a little longer.'

There was a part of me that believed in it.

Seongjin's sudden visit to the logistics relay station had the purpose of criticizing the branch manager, but more than anything, it contained the meaning of a warning not to act rashly today, no matter who it was.

Although they are currently disguising themselves as resident knights of the Jinju Palace, everyone in the know knows that some of the prince's attendants are actually paladins of the monster task force.

'Besides, I deliberately brought up dinner, so it might be a good idea to sneak in and catch him off guard before that happens.'

At that time, the wind that blew from somewhere quietly wrapped around his arm and spun around. Seongjin was so lost in his thoughts that he didn't realize it.

Seongjin led the still bewildered group into the restaurant area.

"Wow, it tasted amazing, just like I heard!"

The restaurant recommended by Sir Claudia was amazing. At first, I was taken aback when I saw the long line of people waiting to fill the inside, but perhaps because it was such a famous house, there was a separate VIP section.

Thanks to this, Seongjin and his party were able to pay an additional fee and finish their meal comfortably without waiting.

"I'm glad you found it right. "You haven't eaten this much lately, have you?"

Masain said happily. This is because Seongjin, who did not consume more than the appropriate amount of food after controlling his weight, ate a full meal on rare occasions.

Of course it was delicious, but there was another important reason.

[Is it over already? Let's take just one more bite of steak! huh? It would be a waste to leave it like this, right? ah! That cheese pie! Just a little more cheese pie!]

If Seongjin hadn't been so impatient and told him to do it in moderation, the devil would probably have tried to empty the plates of the people next to him.

And the Demon King, who had finally finished eating, muttered openly in his head.

[Ugh! This is life! I'm so happy.]

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

happiness? Is that what a devil who feeds on human misfortune would do?

[What you don't know. He is a devil because he uses unhappiness as a driving force to make himself happy. I'm not pursuing misfortune itself. Think about it, where in this world would there be a devil who would want to be unhappy?]

... That's what I heard.

[It is difficult to find such sensuous pleasure in the demon world. That's why the devils are trying to make a contract with humans. Primal desires such as appetite and lust are very attractive even to demons.]

The Demon King, who was in a good mood, was rolling around in my head.

[So, sometimes, in the case of clumsy beginner demons, they fail to control their desires and endanger their contractees. Because it instantly turns the contractor into a pig or something like a pleasure killer. You can't overcome the desire of the moment and ruin everything. [Foolishly.]

Hey, is that what you're going to say?

Earlier, he even tried to lick Lord Masaine's plate!

176*

176. List of Contracts (2)

After the noisy meal, Seongjin, who had finished various business in the shopping district, began to think about separating the group.

"I'm going back to my dorm now. "Now that they're here, they can relax and play until evening."

"Is that still okay?"

Although they pretended not to, everyone looked excited. Only the stubborn Lord Maria spoke with a worried expression.

"But our mission is to protect you."

"don't worry. "I will be with Lord Masaine."

These were not empty words. Now that Leader Bruno has not yet completely regained the Auror floor, not only among the Wolf Knights who are accompanying him but also in the entire city, there is probably no one as strong as Masain.

"We need to think about the feelings of young people. "There will be no need to leave the imperial capital, so let them play comfortably without a superior."

"young... yes?"

As Sir Maria's expression became subtle, Seongjin added, regretting it.

"I'm also glad that I'm light-hearted. "I'm just going to go to my dorm and practice."

However, when Masain heard those words, he was startled, his

expression hardened, and he began to examine Seongjin carefully.

hmm? what? Did I say something strange?

While he was wondering, he turned to Sir Maria and said,

"okay. "I will do as you say."

"But Lord Martha...""

"I will carry out the lowering, so there is no problem. Besides, I feel anxious if you don't lead those immature idiots."

surely.

Sir Maria, who glanced at the excited junior knights, was convinced.

After sending them off, Masain closed his mouth for a moment and looked down at Seongjin.

He had a complex expression, as if he had a lot to say, but before he could ask anything, he lowered his gaze and bowed his head politely.

"Then I will take you to your lodgings, sir."

... Why is this guy acting like this all of a sudden?

Seongjin returned to the dorm with an uneasy feeling, looking at Masain's somewhat stiff expression.

"Are you here, sir?"

As if he sensed they were coming, Manager Bruno came out to meet them in the hallway.

"Ah, Director Bruno. "Did you rest well?"

"Yes, sir. "But you came back early?"

"huh. "I came first because I thought I had pretty much done everything there was to see."

Then he glanced around and carefully whispered to Seongjin.

"By the way, did you happen to meet me outside?"

"meet? who?"

"... it's nothing."

Director Bruno, who gave such a vague answer, tugged at his mustache as if he was embarrassed and then quietly disappeared into his room!

'what? 'Why is everyone doing this?'

Seongjin was impressed, but had no time to pay attention to them right now. First of all, the priority was to solve the problems facing us.

Using the excuse of meditation, Seongjin went back to his room alone and changed into the casual clothes he had prepared.

Although it did not look like an assassin's clothes, it was a gloomy color that would not be noticeable at all.

[Are you going alone? Without waiting for that woman?]

'huh.'

It would probably have to be late at night for Dasha, who was undercover to work at a Milo merchant, to move freely.

But I've been having this strange feeling ever since. I feel like I have to move now.

Just like that, I unfolded my Auror cloak and opened the window wide.

"... So where are you going, sir?"

omg.

Seongjin, startled by a voice suddenly heard from next to him, almost lost his balance and fell out the window.

When I looked up, Masain was looking out at Seongjin from the

window of the next room with his arms crossed.

"Lord Martha? Did you know? "Since when?"

"It started when we separated the knights and you felt relieved."

... ah. You looked so cool.

"Well, Sir Masaine. So this is... .."

Seongjin looked at him and tried to make an excuse, but Masain shook his head and opened his mouth in a strong manner.

"Whatever you do, I won't stop you, sir. But this time you will have to take me with you."

"Uh, but... .."

"For sure!"

On his hard, straight face, only his two eyes are burning brightly like an active volcano.

To be honest, I was a little scared.

"Uh, okay. I knew. "I'm going with you."

In the end, Seongjin ended up holding up both hands and feet.

"Is that Auror concealment? "It's fascinating."

"Okay... .."

Seongjin was walking with Masain toward the logistics relay station.

And now, belatedly, he is painfully realizing why Dasha repeatedly emphasized 'faith' while teaching him.

That's because his confidence plummeted to the ground when he realized that no matter how well he concealed himself, he couldn't deceive this high-ranking knight who was staring at him right in front of him. Once you lose your composure like that, it becomes difficult to kill him without notice.

Masain, perhaps aware of Seongjin's agony, began to carefully observe and evaluate his movements.

"This is truly high-level auror operation. I can vividly feel how perfectly controlled the aurors are and how delicately they are adjusted. "I don't know when you grew up like this."

He looked proud and somewhat sad at the same time.

"It's probably a difficult skill for someone as dull as me to learn. "Now, if I want to stay by your side, I have no choice but to become a Dekaron Knight as quickly as possible."

Masain's face even looked determined as he said that.

Seongjin was dumbfounded. Faster there?

Lord Masaine was a so-called striving genius. Even before he turns 30, isn't he already a decent knight general in the imperial palace?

Considering the large number of talented people in Delcross, I think it will already be ranked on a continental level.

Along with Seonghwang and Logan, he contributed greatly to creating the perception that 'all Seonghwang family members are geniuses', but a failing student is saying something like that with the expression that he will avoid repeating a grade.

"I think it would be too much for me to sneak in with you this time. But I'll be staying nearby, so call me when you need me. "I will assist you right away."

When they arrived at the logistics relay station, Masain unexpectedly let Seongjin go without realizing it.

"What will Lord Martha do then?"

"It's embarrassing, but I'm also a member of the royal family. I have some connections in the Merchants' Union. "I might be embarrassed if you suddenly ask me to visit, but I won't turn you away."

And he smiled softly.

"Please go, sir. "I'll be waiting inside the logistics relay station, and if anything happens, I'll rush over right away."

* * *

After parting ways with Masain, Seongjin followed the Demon King's lead and quietly hid inside the building.

Even then, Magi did not move as if she were stuck on the top floor of the logistics relay center. This is where the offices of high-ranking people are concentrated.

Seongjin climbed the building smoothly.

However, once we reached the top floor, the intensity of security changed significantly. Skilled Auror users guard the door by blocking it, and sometimes assassins who kill anyone are hiding in between.

'With this level of security, it would be difficult for Dasha to infiltrate alone...'

Fortunately, Seongjin was able to approach the Magi without being detected by the assassins. This is because his current Auror concealment has reached a level that even Dasha admits.

Above all, even before Seongjin senses their presence, the Demon King discovers the souls of the assassins and tells them. Thanks to this, it was possible to largely bypass their detection range.

The place Seongjin arrived at was a spacious office in the middle of the hallway. The large swinging door has a nameplate that sparkles in gold.

-Merchant Union Northern Branch Head: Wilhelm Schmidt

I thought it had nothing to do with Seongjin's flock as there was no movement, but surprisingly, the devil was hiding in the branch manager's office.

[hmm. He's a complete low-level devil. He's killing a lot of demonic energy, but he's not that strong to begin with. It will be difficult to find him unless he is a human with quite strong divine power.]

And this is how Seongjin felt after entering the office and seeing the guy with his own eyes.

'Oh, it's the devil.'

[Then, it's the devil. Are you really expecting something different?]

No, what should I say?

The guy said, 'Wouldn't this be exactly what a devil looks like?' It was as if his imagination had been brought into reality.

It is a bipedal goat about the size of a human waist, with a goat head and goat horns.

He is wearing shabby rags, and his hairy legs and hooves can be seen underneath.

[Rather than a proper devil, he is closer to a low-ranking member of the clan.]

The guy was hugging something that looked like a small ledger, but he seemed so anxious that he was circling around the room, tapping his hooves.

And he cries and mutters something constantly.

"what? what? "Magi is approaching from somewhere."

Seongjin slightly raised his eyebrows.

Have you possibly sensed the demon lord's magical energy?

"I told you to protect this, to protect it, but now maybe it's okay?"

Seongjin approached closer while maintaining his Auror cloak, but the demon still didn't notice anything and was trembling with vague anxiety.

"Let the priest know when he comes. Even if a paladin comes, let them know. I told them to let me know when the contractor comes. But what if a human comes? What should I do? What should I do?"

"Maybe it's good?"

Then it stops in place and twitches its ears and nose. The pupil, which is torn horizontally, cannot focus and shakes toward the empty space.

"This is weird. 'I'm sure there's a Magi nearby, huh?"

hmm. Seongjin crossed her arms as she saw the insignificant demon bastard coming and going before her eyes.

Aside from the Demon King, this is the first time Seongjin actually sees the devil with his own eyes.

'How... 'It's only a fist away?'

Of course, since I don't have divine power, I don't know to what extent my power will be of use to the devil. Still, I think it would be enough to hit that guy on the back of his head and take away the book he was holding so dearly.

Somehow it seems very important.

'If I rob that, what problem will come?'

Before raising his fist, Seongjin thought for one last moment.

First of all, demons are people who have no personal rights or property rights, both under sacred and imperial law. Then, even if you beat him up and take his things, it won't be against the law.

'There's no problem, right?'

Seongjin, who judged that, took off his Auror cloak and hit the guy's head.

[omg! Wait a minute, Seongjin Lee! The lower class... ... !]

Pow!

In that sudden situation, the demon lord, who couldn't stop him, gets scared.

Kieeeeeek!

The demon screamed strangely and fell to the floor. The booklet he was holding fell to the floor and rolled in front of Seongjin.

[...] It means that there is a strong demon that controls this guy... ...
.]

'huh? what?'

[...] no. nothing.]

Seongjin picked up the booklet that had fallen on the floor.

But wow. The guy who was holding his head while screaming strangely looked at Seongjin and burst into tears.

[Meeeeeeeeee! I'm the owner!]

Jaeaeang. A strong cry that shakes the soul.

what? Does it have an owner?

Was I a little hasty?

[Lee Seong-jin! There's a huge demon somewhere...]

And before the demon lord even finished speaking.

Hehehe! Woooooow!

Suddenly, a strong wind blew and the entire office began to shake. A series of loud shouts that threaten to tear your eardrums shake the office.

[dare! Who dares touch my family? Ah!]

Uh, it seems like something big has happened.

Seongjin took a step back, hiding the booklet behind him.

Soon, a thick cloud of black smoke began to rise from the middle of the office.

It was the devil's magic energy.

Within the demonic energy that has suddenly increased in size, a daunting demon soon appears.

Red skin with black tattoos on a massive muscular body. And huge black horns reminiscent of a goat.

That textbook appearance is truly true.

'It's the devil!'

[Yes, it's the devil! What kind of stupid things are you talking about earlier?]

The devil found the booklet in Seongjin's hand and became very angry.

Even so, the red whites looked as if blood had pooled in them, and the pumpkin-yellow eyes flashed with a fierce glow as if an electric current were running through them.

As if to reflect that anger, the black magic energy rising with increasing intensity covered the man's body, so much so that it filled the large office.

[Hurry and hand it over! Do you know what that thing you are holding right now!]

"After hearing that, I can't even give it back?"

Seongjin responded by quickly pulling out a nutcracker and pointing it straight ahead.

For some reason, this guy seems quite strong, so I think he'll probably need the help of paladins with divine power.

First of all, since he is so full of demonic energy, someone will definitely notice something strange. Sir Masaine will also move, so it will only be a matter of time.

While I'm searching for loopholes in this guy, I'm also making those

calculations in my mind.

Suddenly something strange happened.

The devil's yellow eyes seemed to touch the sword that Seongjin was aiming at, and at that moment, the devil's eyes widened and his mouth opened wide.

[Why a holy relic? Now, wait! That black! west... no way? Nutcracker?]

Then, slurping. Suddenly, the demonic energy began to noticeably decrease.

Its body size becomes smaller and its horns decrease. Before he knew it, his eyes, which were once red, had become what could be called white.

"... ..?"

As Seongjin looked at him blankly, the devil scratched his protruding tusks with a embarrassed expression and asked.

[By any chance, what is your relationship with Seonghwang?]

hmm?

Is the other person suddenly showing a willingness to talk?

"It's your son?"

[What?]

"Uh, I'm the prince of the Holy Empire. So, His Majesty the Holy Emperor is our father."

[...] ... !]

The devil was astonished. Then, in the blink of an eye, it turns into a human!

The demonic energy completely disappeared and what appeared was a thin man with deep dark circles that seemed to be smeared.

The face that looks so tired has a look of disappointment, as if it had stepped on a land mine. If you didn't know he was a devil, you might have looked pitiful.

"... "Holy shit."

He looked into space and muttered helplessly.

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177. List of Contracts (3)

The devil's name is Glumgos.

He was a middle-ranking devil with no particular hierarchy, but thanks to a chance victory in an advantageous position, he has recently been rising to prominence among the devils. Coincidentally, right after Del Cross's guardian was stranded in the [Agreement], he made a contract with a human.

Considering that many of the demons he had contracted with before him were cut off to no end by the nutcracker, this could be said to be a truly lucky case.

His contractor was Wilhelm Schmidt.

At the time, he was a low-ranking manager of the Merchant Union, and for someone who had summoned a demon, he had simple dreams and poor aspirations.

Thanks to this, Glumgos easily granted his wish, and soon succeeded in completely taking over Schmidt's body and soul.

After that, it was literally a succession of victories.

He rose to the highest position possible as a merchant union manager and accumulated a lot of wealth. I got a beautiful wife and recently had a beautiful child.

At this point, he couldn't help but develop a strong attachment to life in the human world.

However, his current condition is like a wind lamp that may be extinguished at any time. There were many demons bent on harming

him and taking away everything he had.

The Merchant Union, where relatively ambitious humans gathered, had an unusually large number of demon contractors, and among them, there were sometimes humans who had made contracts with demons of extremely high rank.

In order to maintain his upper hand among them, Glumgoth decided to create his own weapon.

It is to create a list listing the devil's true name and its contractors. Perhaps that list would serve as a dagger to stab his enemies in desperate moments.

The problem was that it was an unwritten rule not to violate each other's contract, a taboo that demons must never do.

If any of the demons found out about the existence of this list, Glumgos would be immediately summoned back to the Demon World, and it might be better for him to disappear.

It was the final weapon that he risked his all to perfect.

'... Why did you happen to be away for a while?'

Glumgos felt as if he was having a nightmare.

Could it be that the Holy Empire's prince suddenly burst into the office, snatched the ledger, which could be said to be all of his power, and aimed the terrifying holy relic straight ahead!

Although he rarely kept the list off his body, he happened to have some business to do near the church, so he had no choice but to leave it in the care of a lower-ranking official for a while.

But coincidentally, this boy came at the right time!

'Should I just take it away by force? No, but...'

The prince in front of him looked like an ordinary human being without an ounce of divine power, but there was no way he would have dared to use his hands carelessly.

Because the meaning of the fact that he was holding a nutcracker in his hand was clear.

Behind that human being, there is that fearsome person.

'Even if it gets taken away... ..'

Glumgos looked at the ceiling of his office and felt depressed for a moment.

One, this is what happened. There was no other way now. I have no choice but to appease this boy and get the list back.

"... I don't want any more fuss than this. "Let's have a conversation first."

"conversation?"

Meanwhile, unfortunately for Glumgos, Seongjin felt the signs of a big hit the moment he got his hands on this booklet.

In an age where paper books have become commonplace, this is an old-fashioned book, loosely bound together with parchment with uneven edges.

In particular, no matter how you look at it, it was not an ordinary item as a peculiar black energy was flowing from the cover.

Shaking.

As I was stirring the book and observing the magic energy spreading through the air, Branch Manager Schmidt, or rather a devil in the shape of the branch leader, spoke in a trembling voice.

"Now, calm down and listen to me. Could you please, for your own sake, return that dangerous book to me? The demonic energy flowing out of that book is extremely harmful to humans. Prolonged exposure will weaken the body and eventually lead to death."

"okay?"

Seongjin stopped gesticulating the demonic energy and asked the

demon king.

'Hey, is it true what he says?'

Then the Demon King spoke with a somewhat uneasy look.

[I'm not lying. Even if you think about it based on common sense, there is no way that demon energy would have a positive effect on a living human being, but...]

'however?'

[If you think like that, it takes a while. In fact, although it is a small amount, there is demonic energy that continues to be released from my soul. In other words, you have been exposed to a certain amount of demonic energy all along.]

hmm. Seongjin turned his shoulder this way and that, but still could not feel any abnormality in his body.

'Are you okay? After all, I'm already dead, so isn't it okay?'

Because I am an evil spirit.

Then the Demon King answered in an uncertain voice.

[Well, guess what...]

In any case, the Magi didn't seem to be much of a threat to him. After making that decision, Seongjin decided to take a closer look at the book.

"female... Do not open! A powerful curse of death is placed on the magic energy surrounding the book! If a human touches it... ... !"

"huh?"

Seongjin, who opened the book to the very center page, raised his head and looked at Glumgos.

"What if a human touches it?"

"... "No, nothing."

The devil, who was looking at the boy who looked perfectly fine, broke into a cold sweat and averted his gaze.

It's bland.

Seongjin glared at the devil once and then slowly began to turn the pages. Then the branch leader demon glanced at him and spoke in a hushed voice.

"... Anyway, even if you take that list, you can't use it for anything. "Can't you just give it back?"

"Why is that so?"

"That's because it's not something that humans can read. "It's written in the language of the demon world!"

As he said, the letters written in the book were unfamiliar to Seongjin.

Strange letters are arranged crookedly, as if they were intertwined wedges, and next to them are drawn complicated patterns of unknown meaning.

hmm. It's the language of the demon world, right?

[This is crazy... ... !]

I could hear the demon lord muttering in my head.

'Can you read?'

[of course. It's a demonic language. I can't teach you the content just by reading it myself.]

'why?'

[Because the true names of the devils are written down one after another! The moment you read even one, you will summon the devil here! Is this guy sane to make something this dangerous?]

Jinmyeong?

[okay. This is a list of devil contractees and the names of the devils they have contracted with. If this is discovered, that guy will be as good as dead, right? It will be an achievement for the demon world.]

hmm. I think I know why that branch manager, the devil, is looking this way out of contemplation.

By the way, are there really that many demon contractors in Delcross?

Seongjin slurped through the pages, then made a decision and slammed the book shut.

"I'll just take this with me."

Then the branch leader demon jumped up from his place.

"What? "It's useless to take it, so why?"

"It doesn't matter if you can't read. "It looks quite old-fashioned, so I think it would be perfect to give to my father as a souvenir from my trip."

A list of devils for the Holy Emperor?

Glumgos felt his mind becoming distant for a moment.

"This is crazy! Why on earth... ... !"

It's a disaster.

As if reflecting his agitation, the black demonic energy surged up violently and quickly subsided again.

Now the devil was shaking pitifully.

"now. Calm down! "We can handle it now before it turns into a big problem!"

The branch manager devil said that in a trembling voice, but it seemed like he was the one who needed to calm down.

I was constantly wiggling my unstable hands, and my whole body

had already been wet with sweat for a long time.

'no way...'

At that moment, a thought passed through Seongjin's mind.

"I'm asking just in case, can my father read this list?"

"Wow!"

The branch manager, who was pale, spewed out demonic energy from his mouth.

That's correct.

[Wow, this is an annihilation scenario that cannot be left out or excluded. A list like this creates powerful causal effects just by its very existence. Wouldn't this be sufficient conditions for your father to move?]

Then Seongjin smiled.

"Your father will love it! Whenever I'm bored, I read one line at a time, and whenever the devil is summoned, I cut off his head on the spot..."

"ah! "No!"

The devil, who had screamed as if he were screaming, now began to complain desperately to Seongjin.

"If the devil disappears, the humans who made a contract with him will also not escape death! Moreover, the people listed there all hold important positions in the Merchant Union! "What do you think the continent's economy will be like if they disappear all at once?"

"Well, I guess your father will take care of it. "You just have to take it slowly without overdoing it, right?"

"The existence of this list will be revealed to the world! "Then I'm finished!"

"That's none of my business."

"But if I disappear, the list created with my power will also disappear along with it?"

"Hmm, that's troublesome. ah! I'll protect you, so would you like to go to the imperial capital with us? "Don't worry too much about grace."

Even the devil bastard survived just fine, so wouldn't it be a simple task to ask that nobleman to create a barrier?

Then Glumgos became desperate, sat down on the floor and shed bloody tears. Hehehehe!

"Please take a look! Even after all this, I have a wife like a rabbit and children like a fox!"

"... .."

"I will never leave you alone in the demon world! "You will tear them to pieces and kill them instead of me!"

But unexpectedly, that half-hearted complaint moved Seongjin's heart.

Seongjin, who looked down at the demon with blood pouring out of his eyes for a moment, waited for the demon to calm down a bit before opening his mouth.

"good. "I will give it back."

"... Turn... "You're giving it to me?"

Glumgos looked up at Seongjin with an expression of disbelief.

I was wondering if I should attack this boy first, even if I had to die at the hands of Seonghwang if I didn't succeed.

But how can you change your mind so easily?

"But you can't do it with bare mouth. Instead, there are some

conditions."

And Seongjin clearly conveyed what he thought to Glumgos.

* * *

The top floor of the logistics relay station.

Even after Seongjin hid in Wilhelm Schmidt's office, the building's hallways were extremely quiet.

Inside the office, demons ran rampant and magical power fluctuated as if exploding before fading away, but at least there was no shock felt from the outside. This was thanks to the barrier that Glumgos had created in advance.

The bodyguards guarded the door without knowing anything, and the assassins wandering the hallways also passed by the office without noticing what had happened.

Only one person.

Only one person sitting quietly on the roof of the relay station building was watching the entire scene from beginning to end.

He was an exorcist with raven-black hair, and he was staring endlessly at the long Breeze River flowing to the north of the building.

In her eyes, which were pitch black like her hair, a strange silver-grey glow would occasionally flicker and then disappear.

"... your majesty."

Suddenly she quietly opened her mouth.

"Is it okay if I leave it like that? "If I could just get my hands on that list, I could instantly get rid of many of the wrongdoings that are affecting the continent's economy."

Then Seonghwang, who was silent for a moment, answered.

[Sir Sharon. Do you know how many devil contractors there are within the Merchant Union?]

The exorcist shook his head. She only had a vague guess that there were many of them, but she had no way of recognizing her contractors right away.

Demon contractors are, after all, ordinary humans. Unless you summon a demon to reality or perform a direct miracle with the help of a demon, you do not emit demonic energy yourself.

Therefore, even though the entire continent is full of priests who believe in God, demons can easily sneak into the world through contractors and operate under the surface.

Only the devil's brand engraved on his soul. Only the Holy Emperor who can see it with his own eyes will know the exact number.

And his answer was shocking.

[Almost all those in key positions in the Merchants' Union should be considered contractors.]

The members and managers of the merchant union, which had been growing in power for several decades, were suffering from internal competition that was more heated than what was visible from the outside.

In order to fight against the devil contracts that are already in place, the structure is such that newcomers also have no choice but to make a contract with the devil.

"... if!"

[So, if you remove all those on the list, more people will become new devil contracts to fill the empty space.]

This time, even if we were able to eradicate some of the devils with the luck we obtained through the list, we would still be helpless against the newly appearing devil contractees.

Seonghwang will be tied to the [agreement] forever.

In that case, it would have been better for that simple mid-level demon to maintain this situation.

The wishes that people in the Merchants' Union make to the devil are usually wealth and power.

In that case, at least as long as Wilhelm Schmidt firmly maintains his position as branch leader, the day when these people will get their wish is bound to be far away.

This means that the number of demons that can gain a fully human body and move freely is naturally suppressed.

[Trust Mores' judgment. That child will definitely get the most out of that list.]

"Is that also thanks to your oracle abilities?"

When Sir Sharon tilted his head and asked, a faint sound came from inside his head. She seemed to have a soft laugh.

[It's a slightly different story. Do you know? Mores was instinctively good at counting from a young age.]

but. Sir Sharon was convinced.

Prince Mores's father was a prosperous man who managed a huge empire flawlessly, and his maternal grandfather was the Grand Duke of Asean, who was considered the most vicious person on the continent. Where would the blood inherited from his parents go?

The exorcist looked up at the sky with blank eyes, and momentarily raised the corners of his mouth with a grin as if something occurred to him.

"By the way, how fortunate is today's meeting for that devil? Following Red, this insignificant devil will now become the fourth devil allowed to exist by His Majesty."

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178. List of Contracts (4)

Director Collins, who is in charge of logistics distribution in the eastern region, was very embarrassed by the sudden request for an interview.

"Lord Martha? "Why me all of a sudden?"

Of course, there was a superficial friendship. Although it is said that he currently has no right of succession, Masain is a full-fledged member of the royal family.

Therefore, whenever they met in an official capacity, Collins did not neglect to stamp his face with him. When he had time, he did not hesitate to ask Regina to visit him as a courtesy.

But don't you usually think it's just a greeting?

Anyway, given his status, I couldn't help but treat him to a simple cup of tea.

Soon, a tall knight enters the office, guided by a secretary. With a bright smile that belies the bright blonde hair typical of the Seonghwang family.

"Director Collins. I heard that for this birthday banquet, I returned right after attending the first banquet. "I couldn't even say goodbye, but I'm glad we got to meet each other like this."

"That's because work has been so busy, Sir Martha."

It was a direct criticism as to why he was looking for someone who was busy.

However, despite Collins's shocked reaction, the driver did not lose

his sociable smile. Considering his noble origins, this is a truly down-to-earth attitude.

"Then it will get even busier from now on. "You might see me more often soon."

"What is that... .. ?"

"Prince Mores has recently been interested in the salmon business. Cham salmon from Eastern Ortona is currently transported through the Cyprus Federation. "I understand that Director Collins is in charge of all logistics and distribution in the eastern part of the country, including Cyprus, isn't that right?"

business? Is that the business that came to you?

Collins asked with a skeptical look on his face.

"Is that something that the imperial palace is officially promoting?"

"Not really. "It is still my personal idea."

"Did you bring a detailed business plan?"

"We are still preparing."

"... .."

Collins didn't hide his discomfort and glared at Masain, who was drinking his teacup.

No matter how much he was a candidate for the throne, it is all meaningless now that he has been reduced to Klanos. The fact that he is treated as a member of the royal family as a matter of courtesy must already be an undeserving treatment for him.

Moreover, it is said that he recently abandoned his position as Commander of the Knights of the Royal Guard. If that's the case, haven't we now become worthless beings who can't gain any real benefit from being polite?

In comparison, Collins himself already holds real economic power in

the East. A person with real power who belongs to the most powerful interest group on the continent and can even influence the existence of a country.

There is no need to try to please such a superficially sane young man.

'... Should I just chase him away?'

Collins twitched the finger he was lowering down the table.

'Are you here, Raum?'

[I'm listening, contractor. Kill.]

In my head, I hear the devil's voice cracking like metal scratching.

It goes without saying, but Collins was a devil's contractor. The numerous enemies he faced before reaching this position were easily defeated with the help of the devil.

[This person has inherited the blood of the beginning, even if only slightly. It would be tricky to touch.]

'So is it impossible?'

[Of course not. Kill.]

Collins' demon, Raum, was a demon who was particularly skilled at manipulating the mental world. Not only could it cause a person to hallucinate or have a nervous breakdown, but it could also cause a momentary shock to the person's mind and cause them to lose consciousness.

Collins was going to do the same thing to Massain as he had done to so many people.

It would be perfect to shock them and then brainwash them into returning quietly. There will be some aftereffects, but it will not be enough to interfere with daily life. With just a snap of a finger, the power of the devil would be unleashed.

Click, the driver quietly put down the teacup, and Collins was just

about to tighten his hand.

smart.

Suddenly someone knocked on the door.

"Lord Masaine. "If you are finished with your business, would you please visit the branch manager's office with me?"

The person who visited the office was Branch Manager Schmidt's secretary. Collins quickly put away the devil and looked at his secretary.

"That arrogant branch manager? Why a person like this all of a sudden?"

But the doubt was quickly resolved.

"Prince Mores is urgently looking for you."

"You?"

"Yes, Lord Masaine. "Thanks to you, I have successfully completed the necessary work. He told me to stop by the branch president's office and tell him that we can return together."

While Collins was still dazed, Martha stood up and straightened her clothes with one hand.

"It looks like your business talk will be carried out through the branch manager's line. "I think this is the end of our meeting."

The sight of Masain saying that somehow felt bigger than the first time, so Collins blinked.

Originally, the knight was a sturdy young man, but now it felt like he was looking down from a height well beyond his own head.

'... 'Is it an illusion?'

But soon Collins realized why. At some point, a sinister energy was radiating from Masain's entire body. Collins, who was not an Auror

user, was feeling strong pressure from him without even knowing it.

An inertial smile was still hanging on the knight's strong jaw, but his eyes were so fierce as he glared at Collins that it seemed as if they were sparkling with fire.

"Thank the branch manager's secretary, Director Collins. "The reason your hand is still attached is purely because he got in the way of what you were trying to do."

Only then did Collins realize that the knight's hand had been fixed on the handle of the sword from earlier. He was ready to draw his sword at any time.

'Holy shit... ... !'

Masain is a high-ranking knight who is expected to reach Dekaron Knight within a few years.

Even if you cannot detect the presence of the devil, you can easily detect the level of hostility of the other person who is trying to harm you.

"I'll pretend I haven't seen that disrespectful attitude toward a member of the royal family today. "You can think of it as a reward for letting me stay at the logistics relay station until now."

The knight spoke in a cold tone and turned away without saying hello.

Looking at the strong figure following the secretary out of the office, Collins became so nervous that he broke into a cold sweat. I can barely realize that if I had made a mistake, my arm would have been blown off.

It was then. The devil in my head suddenly started fussing.

[Heek?! Look at that! The sword the author has! That's a holy relic!]

'A relic?'

[okay! If I had chosen that one, we would both have been in big

trouble! Did you know?]

A chill runs down Collins' spine.

It dawned on me later that Seonghwang was so fond of his nephew that he readily gave him a relic as a graduation present from the academy.

'I... 'Who on earth am I fighting with?'

Collins, who suddenly lost strength in his legs and was staggering, barely moved his body and collapsed on a chair.

After gathering my wits for a while, I was startled when I suddenly realized that I was not the only one in the office.

For some time now, a dark new model has been leaning against the wall like a shadow.

Jet black hair covering part of her pale face.

Silver-grey eyes that occasionally shed a strange glow.

"Who, who?"

I asked incoherently, but the devil Raum screamed in my head.

[Oh, damn it! Since when?]

'Why, why are you doing that?'

[The success is here! Quickly take cover, Collins!]

Director Collins, embarrassed, stood up straight away, and Shinhyeong, who had been quietly watching, opened his mouth.

[Matthew Collins, Director, Merchants Association Northern Branch. There are dozens of counts of tax evasion, dozens of thefts, and dozens of murders. It seems like there is enough to be judged.]

'What on earth is this? Raum! Mr. Raum?'

Collins, who sensed an unusual atmosphere, called the devil in a

hurry. But Raum had no answer at all as to where he had disappeared to.

"ah... .."

Collins, who was lost in thought, hesitated and took a step back, and the woman who had been staring at him with cold eyes slowly opened her mouth.

[I'll leave it up to you for now, Sir Sharon. What should I do?]

Then the exorcist laughed like a sob.

"I accept Your Majesty's orders. "It is right for sinful devil contractees to be summarily executed."

Summary execution?

Before I could understand the meaning of those words, I gasped. Suddenly, a silver, sharp curved sword flew in front of his eyes. And that was the last thing Collins saw.

Wow!

Blood was splattered on the office wall along with a long silver line.

* * *

While waiting for Sir Martha, Seongjin was looking around Schmidt's office with curiosity.

I thought something would be different where the devil works, but instead of a summons drawn in blood, the office was filled with miscellaneous documents with all kinds of numbers.

The devil branch manager seemed to be doing his job more properly than expected.

"Anyway, why is it so quiet outside? "There was such a big tremor just a moment ago?"

"You probably didn't notice anything strange, sir. "There is a

relatively strong barrier in this office."

The branch manager politely answered Seongjin's question. In just a moment, his attitude changed to an even more polite manner.

He was in the process of organizing the materials instructed by Seongjin by hand, and occasionally entrusted the selected documents to his subordinates.

Then, the goat devil with a large lump on the back of his head glances at Seongjin with resentful eyes and piles them on one side.

"Then what about the priests? "You're so blatantly giving off demonic energy and no one notices?"

"Priests don't come and go often around here. "All the big churches in the city were relocated far away."

Seongjin slightly raised his eyebrows.

"Relocate?"

"Yes, sir. "Even if they hide their demonic energy well, priests are very annoying to us."

According to Schmidt's explanation, it was a relatively simple matter to separate the logistics relay station from the church. By donating good land and capital through the capital of the merchant association, a new church was built on that land.

Of course, it cost a lot of money, but there was no significant opposition to carrying out the work. Because it was something that no one wanted for the church to become distant. This is because there were many devil contractors in key positions in the Merchant Union.

Seongjin was shocked.

"Everyone is playing well in the devil's hands. Is the empire's economy really okay as it is?"

Then Schmidt shook his head.

"Surprisingly, the devil himself does not encourage his contractors to cause massive amounts of harm. "Unless there is a place like a dark cult hiding in the outskirts, where sacrifices are made and special rituals are performed."

"Why is that so?"

"You can only survive if you don't cross the line. "His Majesty's eyes are reaching every corner of the empire."

According to the 'Guidelines for Living a Successful Empire for Demons', as long as a few taboos are not broken, the Holy Emperor does not have much to do with what the devil does. This is because we have been bound by strange rules called [agreements] for many years.

Originally, the Emperor at the beginning of his reign had nothing to hesitate about.

The demons were driven out of the capital in the blink of an eye, and the demon contractors were busy executing everything they saw.

Although he took a friendly stance toward vassal states, he showed a firm stance in exorcising the devils hidden deep within that society.

Where is that? Not only did he frequently show miracles across the entire continent, but when the opportunity arose, he directly invaded the demon world and slaughtered demons, causing them to tremble in fear.

But he suddenly stopped a few years ago, after the [Agreement] was created. From then on, the Holy Emperor did not leave the capital, and he did not even touch the demons unless it was extremely intrusive.

"agreement? "What on earth is that?"

As Seongjin frowned, Schmidt shook his head.

"Even the devils don't know the specific details."

It is said that through various experiences accumulated over the past

years, demons also have their own standards for the allowable range.

first. Harm humans with demonic power, but do not go far beyond the scope of human capabilities.

You can easily eliminate one or two political opponents with demonic power. Anyway, if you plan well and hire an assassin, you can achieve the same effect.

However, if a demon is summoned in the public eye or if it is too obvious that it is a supernatural phenomenon and harms people, it will be restrained by the Holy Emperor.

second. Do not confuse society with the power of the devil.

It is possible to use demonic power for economic gain. However, when a demon suddenly descends and causes a large-scale massacre, or when a supernatural disaster is caused and the logistics movement on the continent is disrupted, the retribution of the Holy Emperor cannot be avoided.

'Is that why the empire operates relatively stably even though there are so many devil contractors?'

As Seongjin was thinking that, Schmidt's expression became serious.

"And lastly, and most importantly, here is the thing."

third. No matter what happens, never, ever, mess with the children of Seonghwang.

"... children?"

"Perhaps that is something you know better, right?"

Schmidt, who responded to Seongjin's question, added with a meaningful expression.

"What happened to the dark church that tried to kidnap you when you were young? "Didn't those in the Church of Rest leave behind even a single piece of bone that day?"

... kidnap?

It was when Seongjin was about to ask something more.

"Ugh! Guard! Guard!"

"It's murder! "Someone here is dead!"

"Priests! "Hurry and call the doctor and priest!"

Followed by a crash, rumble! The sound of countless footsteps echoing through the hallway.

Seongjin and Schmidt, facing each other, opened the office door at the same time and went out. Then, the panoramic view of a chaotic hallway filled with guards running around in a hurry unfolded before my eyes.

"where are you? "Where is it?"

"This is Director Collins' room!"

"Hurry up!"

Then, I saw the secretary and Masain walking in this direction, wading through the crowd of people running in one direction. Masain's face, looking at Seongjin, was full of embarrassment.

"Why suddenly? Director Collins. "His room is where I just left, sir."

179*

179. List of Contracts (5)

The commotion soon calmed down. This is because it was revealed that the murdered Director Collins was a devil contractor.

The doctors and priests who were quickly called in silently made the sign of the cross when they saw his black, rotting body in an instant.

This was an erosion phenomenon that occurred when the souls of humans who failed to properly fulfill their contracts were dragged into the demon world. There can be nothing more certain than this as evidence of a contract with the devil.

And as the erosion progressed, a relatively white, prominent pattern appeared on Collins' forehead.

A long sword raised downward and two hooks crossing diagonally. It is the stigma of Saint Terbachia, deeply pressed down by divine power.

In other words, this midday murder was actually a summary execution at the hands of an exorcist.

"I can't believe it. Director Collins is a devil contractor... . He was known to be a fairly devout believer in the Lord God. "A few days ago, at the birthday party, I even made a bold statement to Cardinal Benitus that I would increase my regular donations."

Upon hearing the results of the investigation, Masain sighed with a mixture of embarrassment and relief.

It is truly deplorable that a member of the Merchant Alliance was in cahoots with the devil. However, this also served as evidence that the deaths of Masain and Director Collins had nothing to do with each

other.

This incident happened right after I broke up with him in a difficult situation.

Schmidt's secretary may have served as an alibi, but if he had been unlucky, the charge of Collins' murder could have been covered up entirely.

"Anyway, it is truly incomprehensible how such a wrongdoer was able to infiltrate the important position of director of a logistics relay station."

In response to Masain's lament, Seongjin and Branch Manager Schmidt made eye contact for a moment.

In fact, isn't it the opposite? What is even more mysterious is how the exorcist broke through the security and carried out the execution alone in a devil's den teeming with devil contractors.

'Shall we keep quiet?'

'I keep quiet.'

He's already become more sensitive to things related to the devil.

It was obvious how Masain would react if he found out that most of the people in this building were devil contractors.

"There is another problem. "The question is who is the exorcist who executed Director Collins?"

After hearing various whispers from his secretary, Schmidt opened his mouth to Seongjin and his group.

"We have just finished tracking down the whereabouts of all exorcists staying in Regina. There are five people who were temporarily staying at a church on the outskirts, and two of them boarded a ship heading to the Union of Cyprus today. "It is confirmed that the three still remain in the church."

And he continued speaking while glancing at Seongjin.

"Besides him, there is one exorcist who is staying unofficially. However, it is said that after unpacking at the accommodation, he never came out."

Ah, Sir Sharon, who stayed at the lodge.

As expected, pretending to be a resident employee is of no use. Everyone already knows that Seongjin is accompanied by the Holy Knights of the Monster Task Force.

"Whoever it is, it's surprising that they managed to hide in the logistics relay station."

Sir Massain, who was listening, said:

"The Exorcist must have come in right after I left Director Collins' room. "If that's the case, it means he's been around here for a while, but I haven't noticed anything suspicious of him as a knight anywhere except the security guard in the hallway."

If he was able to avoid Masain's eyes, it would mean that he was already a Dekaron Knight in Auror operation, or that he was a Paladin who had mastered advanced assassination skills.

"Lord Masaine, are there any other Dekaron Knights among the Exorcists?"

"no. "The only Dekaron Knight of the Knights of St. Terbachia is the leader, Sir Leandros."

"If you do that, maybe Sir Leandros himself?"

"It won't be like that. "He recently left for the south by order of His Majesty."

"I feel like I'm possessed by something... .."

Seongjin, who was listening to their serious conversation, scratched his cheek.

Hmm, wouldn't that actually narrow the scope?

First of all, the only exorcist nearby was Sir Sharon in the dorm, right? Then again, it means that my father secretly visited Sir Sharon under the guise of her.

'But why did this guy suddenly appear in Regina?'

At the same time, Schmidt's complexion, who was deep in thought, turns pale. Although he doesn't know the exact story, he seems to have come to the same conclusion as Seongjin about who was involved in this matter.

"... Sir Masain. "Did something happen in Director Collins' room?"

In response to Schmidt's question, Masain slightly frowned.

"I don't know exactly. "I assumed he was trying to do something, so I just gave him a quick scolding and kicked out the door."

And in the explanation that followed, Schmidt declared:

"That's it!"

"yes?"

Masain was confused, but Seongjin understood what the devil branch manager was trying to say.

The third guideline for the devil. No matter what happens, never, ever, mess with the children of Seonghwang.

"I guess they made a fuss to warn those around them. "Perhaps in these matters, it would be better to set a clear example."

Seongjin also agreed with what Schmidt said.

At least the devil contractors within the logistics relay station would now be more clearly aware of the scope of application of the third guideline.

"By the way, sir."

"huh?"

"I may be presumptuous, but the scope of those 'children' is so... .."

At the devil branch leader's soft sigh, Seongjin silently nodded.

Only Masain, who did not know what was happening, looked at the two people in turn with a puzzled expression.

* * *

"The owner of the top is more of a miser than I thought."

"okay."

"Do we really need to leave the workers at the relay station behind and make them do the work for us? "If you don't camp, you have nothing to do, so you don't want to be teased even for a moment, right?"

Dasha nodded half-heartedly at the words of the woman murmuring next to her.

They were hired by the Milo Merchant Marine Company, and were currently riding a wagon into the logistics relay station.

They said it was an order from the top management to have the workers carry the luggage instead, as they did not want to pay additional fees for damage to the relay station.

'By the way, all temporarily hired personnel are included here. 'Could this be a coincidence?'

As a seasoned informant, Daasa's senses sound an ominous alarm.

The reason she was able to be hired at Milo Sangang was because there was a sudden vacancy. Several people were suddenly caught up in a fight in downtown Hwangdo and suffered serious injuries.

The owner of the top hurriedly searched for additional staff, and at that time, Dasha was hired as a kitchen assistant. All I had to do was hide until I reached Sigismund Range.

However, Giacomo Milo, the owner of the merchant, was a more

suspicious man than he seemed.

Even though we conducted a thorough background check, we always left open the possibility that this sudden personnel change was someone's conspiracy.

It was only when the cart arrived in front of a warehouse inside the logistics relay station that Dasha was able to clearly realize that fact.

'I'm thinking of weeding it out at least once!'

The place they arrived was no ordinary building.

You can feel sharp eyes focusing on the carriage from all over the place. Assassins are hiding throughout the warehouse.

In a situation like this, it's only a matter of time before you get caught. Although he is currently partially cloaked as an Auror, skilled assassins would soon begin to doubt him.

And the dry eyes of the merchant who got off the carriage and looked back at his employees.

Dasha had a hunch.

'It's over! 'I have to get out of here first!'

As Dasha traced the location of the dagger she had secretly hidden in her bosom, she began to draw in her mind the optimal course to escape without being interrupted by the assassins.

At that moment, Milo's secretary suddenly came running towards Giacomo in a huff.

"... Collins moving?"

"Yes, rumors are already spreading within the relay station that he was a devil contractor!"

It was a soft whisper, but Dasha, who had enhanced her hearing as an Auror, could hear their conversation clearly.

"What is the branch manager's reaction?"

"The policy is to be self-respecting and not to do anything that stands out. Perhaps it is impossible to differentiate personnel today... .."

"You don't seem to be paying any particular attention to our top?"

"yes. "There was no further comment."

"hmm... .."

Giacomo rested his chin and thought for a moment, then entered the building without saying a word. She seemed so absorbed in some new problem that she had completely forgotten about her employees.

"I'll be using the relay station workers today, so everyone go back to their dorms."

The secretary urgently reaches out to the people and then disappears, following Sang Sang-ju.

Dasha then sighed in relief and adjusted the hem of her skirt.

'How am I going to get over this just this once?'

And that night.

Dasha, who found Seongjin's lodgings after gathering all the information she had worked so hard to gather, was very embarrassed. This is because she held out a stack of her documents to her as if she had been waiting for her.

"... This?"

"Customs clearance records from the top of the mill and actual sales records examined by the Merchants' Association itself. "If you compare it to the reported sales, there will be quite a big difference."

Dasha couldn't hide her surprise as she quickly scanned the documents. With this much data, wouldn't we be able to search and seize the top right now?

Where on earth do you get this quality information?

"huh. "We now have a trustworthy helper within the Merchant Union."

And when Dasha heard the identity of the helper, he became the flagship.

"Director Wilhelm Schmidt? "Are you the best worker in the Merchant Union, reputed to be a devil without blood or tears?"

Oh, that's right. It must be like the devil.

That guy is a real devil who took over the body of the contractor.

"Anyway, those materials will be submitted to the court later."

"It's definitely good material. However, even if it is an excuse to detain the merchant, it may be difficult to completely tie the merchant. "I will cut off my tail and be released on bail alone."

Then Seongjin shook his head.

"Oh, don't worry about that. Dealing with the merchants will be a heresy court. "You'll never get out?"

"yes?

And at Seongjin's next words, Dasha's mouth opened wide.

"Giacomo Milo is a devil contractor. "That is also information obtained directly from the branch leader."

As the story progressed endlessly, Dasha felt dizzy.

"... Demon contract? "Do you have any proof?"

"There is circumstantial evidence. I just need to find solid physical evidence from now on. "It would be great if, while investigating what was happening in the Sigismund Territory, we could also discover its connection to the Dark Church."

"yes... .."

The information the prince obtained in just one day was extraordinary.

If this continues, won't he end up finishing the entire investigation on his own? What is the significance of her being attached as an informant?

While Dasha was in a state of self-destruction, Seongjin suddenly raised his head as if he remembered something.

"Oh! But Dasha. There are some things I need to deliver to the imperial palace right now... .."

* * *

It's a day's drive from Regina to the ecliptic.

The items, which were sent overnight through an informant, had already arrived at the imperial capital by noon the next day.

"Are you little Saint Aurelion? "You sent it as a souvenir of your trip. This is a rare gift."

Chief Chamberlain Louis stroked his chin as he looked at the small bald wooden statue on the desk in his office.

Little Saint Aurelion.

Usually, it refers to a small wooden statue of a saint that is given as a talisman by a person waiting to wish for the safe return of a person going on a trip.

It is said that Saint Aurelion was an outstanding administrator and diplomat who traveled throughout the continent throughout his life. What the saint gave as a gift in hopes of protecting his or her loved one's journey has now become a kind of custom.

Regina is a base city where all merchant ships heading to the north of the empire pass through at least once. Thanks to this, there were many places where these little statues were put up and sold to symbolize the safe return of the trip.

Perhaps the prince saw the small statues placed here and there in the shopping district and misunderstood them as Regina's specialty products.

Seonghwang stared at the small wooden statue with a numb face and then opened his mouth.

"It's funny when you think about it, Louis. I wasn't this anxious even when Sisley first went on the visit. Sisley was only ten years old at the time."

That's right, isn't Mr. Mores' range of thinking and hitting quite extraordinary?

Lewis barely swallowed the words that were rising to his throat.

"But now I have to admit it. "Mores is a child who not only knows what to do well, but at times shows results that are beyond imagination."

As he says that, something like a faint smile flashes across his face.

The chamberlain, who had served him for a long time, realized that the King was very pleased with the gift, which was rare, and quickly spoke.

"How about decorating the front of the paperweight so that the little saint can be easily seen?"

"okay. "That would be nice."

So Little Saint Aurelion was placed in the center of the desk in the office, next to the white rabbit eyepatch.

A gorgeous mansion near Bestrang Street.

Herna and Kadesh frowned secretly as they looked at the two bald old statues that looked identical.

"Is Mores an idiot? "What if someone going on a trip sends something like this?"

"Mores is Mores. "I always felt like a fool, but then again, what did you expect?"

hmm. The twins, who had been fiddling with the wooden table for a while, soon placed old men instead of pieces on either end of the chessboard and stared at it for a moment.

"... Should we go see what Mores is doing?"

"... Shall we do that? "It just takes a moment."

"I'm just curious about what Red is doing."

"huh. "I'm making sure Red is doing well."

The twins, holding their hands together like that, quietly closed their eyes as they felt the channel opening.

And the ownerless Jinju Palace.

In front of the plentiful lunch table as always, Amelia asked while gently stroking the wooden statue.

"What is this? "What is this item used for?"

"It's something that's commonly sold on the streets of Regina, sister. "They say it's like a talisman to pray for a safe return from a trip."

Logan, who often passed by Regina while leading the punitive force, told this. Then Sisley tilts his head.

"By the way, Brother Mores is also very strange. "Are you the one who went on the trip?"

The girl rolled the bald adult onto the tablecloth.

And the three people looked at their wooden table in silence, forgetting about eating.

"... Anyway, little old man, you're kind of cute."

"That's right."

"It's so delicate and cute."

Soon, a warm atmosphere arises between the brothers and sisters.

[Ugh. The food tastes bad, so please eat in moderation...]

Cadmus, who couldn't do better, eventually sighs and retreats.

"Ba, Bab!"

Thanks to this, it was natural for Seo Yi-seo to shed tears of emotion upon receiving her body back during meal time for three days in a row.

180*

180. Pavlov's Kalmen (1)

After leaving Regina, Seongjin and his party continued their smooth journey for a while.

In the meantime, I was able to stay at a proper village lodging approximately once every two days. However, the size of the village gradually became smaller, and from the seventh day of the trip, every day was camping.

Thanks to this, I couldn't get any great souvenirs other than 'Little Saint Aurelion'.

Well, it is said that Sigismund Territory is a fairly large territory, so wouldn't there be at least one thing worth keeping as a souvenir? If it doesn't work out, you can just extort it from Orden.

At that moment, Orden, who was on the other side of the campfire, trembled and looked his head left and right.

I mean, he's a good guy who has a clue about simple, ignorant topics.

The trip was now entering its tenth day.

I heard that as we move further away from the imperial capital, it is time for bandits disguised as slash-and-burn farmers and bandits made up of Ortona refugees to appear.

However, perhaps because they moved with the Wolf Knights' flag proudly displayed in front of them, no one dared to stand in the way of Seongjin and his party. Thanks to this, the extremely peaceful journey continued.

Of course, there were some people who were shaken by groundless

anxiety.

"It's been so quiet for a few days now that you're here. There's something..." ... "

"huh?"

"Ominous! "Accidents won't happen all at once, right?"

What kind of nonsense is that, Lord Martha?

Anyone who hears this will think that I get involved in incidents and accidents every day.

[Are you really going to deny it? Where did you sell your conscience?]

Shut up! You bastard devil who forgets his duty and speaks of his conscience!

Of course, there have been minor changes in the meantime.

First of all, numerous merchants moving in the same direction dispersed one by one to find their own way. And after a week of travel, Seongjin and Milo were the only ones left.

Around that time, Giacomo Milo, the owner of the merchant, came to Seongjin with a gift to say hello.

Until now, it must have been somewhat ambiguous as it was mixed with many top companies. However, since he was going to be a companion all the way to Sigismund Ridge, he seemed to feel the need to say hello to the prince properly at least once.

Through Regina's demon branch manager Schmidt, Seongjin already knew that Milo Sangjangju was a demon contractor. So, he thoroughly inspected the upper part of the state together with the Demon King.

[hmm. There is a slight trace of demonic energy left in the soul. However, I can sense this because I am the same as you. It is evidence of a contract, and it is not enough to be presented to the

Heresy Tribunal.]

It is said that once a demon contractor succeeds in summoning, he or she then communicates with the demon in the demon world through a type of mental connection called a contract.

This was a different mechanism from summoning the devil to reality, and even if he had a close conversation with the devil, it seemed that the contractor himself would not become full of demonic energy.

[Well, it's a different story if you borrow the power of the devil and make it manifest strongly, or if you summon the devil directly.]

'... 'Is it tricky?'

I felt like I wanted to just get rid of it and then present the eroded body as evidence.

However, if that happens, a slightly awkward problem arises.

If you testify that you knew the owner of the merchant was a devil and punished him, you must provide sufficient evidence to persuade the Heresy Tribunal.

Otherwise, Seongjin will also be suspected of being in league with the contractor, or accused of being a devil worshiper and investigated together.

However, if you claim that you did not know that the owner of the merchant was the devil, you would also be brought to the court for murdering a person without reason. As a result, the victim was just a devil contractor.

The best way is a scenario in which the owner of the merchant dies without Seongjin's help.

'Is there any way to kill him naturally and accidentally? Or maybe try a contract murder without getting caught?'

[Isn't there an option in your mind to just collect evidence normally?]

Well, there was an easy way for Seongjin to assassinate the owner of

the top directly using Auror concealment. I was just thinking of leaving this as a last resort.

Probably, no matter how good the Auror concealment is, it would be impossible to completely avoid the eyes of Director Bruno and Seonghwang.

Above all, didn't Seonghwang tell him something before?

-Sometimes, wouldn't it be okay to leave that burden to someone else?

At that time, Seonghwang was not angry at Seongjin for trying to kill Isabella. I think he would respect whatever choice Seongjin makes.

'So we can't make Mores a senseless murderer.'

There is a family that cares about and cares about him so much, so you can't ruin Mores' life just out of greed to take the easy path.

'Anyway, there's something that bothers me a little... ... '

Will the devil who made a contract with Milo Sang-ju recognize the devil in Seongjin's head?

In fact, didn't the devil branch leader and his subordinate, the goat, keep tilting their heads at the demonic energy they sensed from Seongjin?

[Because they are not summoned to this dimension like those guys, you won't notice them easily. If you just become deeply aligned with the contractor, wouldn't most people eventually notice? I think the demonic energy we emit is more distinct than I thought.]

Now that I think about it, I am reminded of the sharp reactions that high-ranking clergy, including Cardinal Benitus, showed toward Seongjin.

If you think about it, Seongjin is a prince who exudes a stronger magical energy than a human who made a contract with the devil. I feel like they can't help but be wary and hostile.

* * *

As the journey became longer, Seongjin's group and the Wolf Knights became increasingly close friends.

Especially during meal times, everyone spent more time mingling and chatting around the bonfire.

Among them, the most popular person is Laurent, a bard who recently joined the group unexpectedly.

At first, he was frowned upon as a useless gourmet, but thanks to his unique friendliness as an entertainer, he naturally blended in among the knights. In the sense that she creates a friendly atmosphere during her trip, she is getting her money's worth.

In particular, the knights of the Wolf Knights really liked Laurent's song.

You say you have a few hit songs, but it seems like your sensibility is completely unredeemable.

"Laurent, I can sense a spirit of courage in your songs that is not easily found elsewhere."

"You can compare the pain of a broken heart to the feeling of an arrow being pierced through the heart! "Are you truly a genius?"

"The part where a beautiful woman instantly steals Fernand Braque's heart is by far the most overwhelming. When I listen to that song, I feel like I'm vividly seeing the scene of Emperor Remus the Great leading his army through the conquered territory like a gale!"

Why do I feel brave spirit in love songs? What kind of song is that person writing?

And Sir Claudia, who decided to teach Laurent about [Makjang], gave this evaluation.

"Laurent. I don't think love songs really suit you. "How about writing something like a war epic from history or mythology?"

"War epic... .."

"Your songs are overflowing with excitement and grandeur that are sometimes out of place. On the other hand, there is no natural attraction or excitement that should come from a love song."

The young artist frowned in agony.

"Natural attraction, excitement... . It all sounds good. But aren't they actually far from the worst?"

"First, true love has to bloom, and then it's fun to get to the end."

After saying that, Sir Claudia wrinkled the bridge of her freckled nose.

"Well, if you're really going to write a love song like that, why don't Laurent try dating properly first?"

Quang.

A young man with deep internal injuries stumbles in shock.

'... 'What on earth are they doing?'

Lord Claudia, why does it look so funny, but maybe it's my imagination?

Seongjin clicked his tongue and came out to the large field next to the campsite.

It was already dark, but I still planned to take some time to practice my sword before going to bed. Because I was in the carriage all day, I didn't have time to move my body at all.

Of course, as a result of focusing only on meditation the entire time I sat, I had some gains. Finally, the 7th floor of Auror was completed.

Director Bruno was very surprised.

-Lowering. You are truly amazing. I don't know how you meditate without losing focus in a carriage where your body keeps shaking

irregularly.

When I stood in the field holding a nutcracker, Masain, who had come before Seongjin, was sweating hard and swinging his sword.

After visiting the logistics relay station together in Regina, these days, he was accelerating his personal training by sleeping less at night. As if he had decided to become a Dekaron Knight right away.

And next to him, Director Bruno was holding Sir Calmen and giving him a leadership lesson.

The longsword, swung in its sheath, skillfully avoided the guard and hit Lord Calmen's shoulder hard.

Pow!

"Kaaak!"

Sir Kalmen, who rolled on the floor, was covered in dirt and grunted.

"Mr. I won't do it! "You say you don't do it, but why do you keep hitting people under the pretext of sparring!?"

"If you do something wrong, you deserve it!"

Uh, wasn't it just a beating rather than a leadership sparring? What did I do wrong again this time?

Seongjin blinked his eyes, and Calmen noticed his gaze and turned to look at Seongjin with wide eyes.

"Ugh! What else are you looking at there... ..!"

Before the words were even finished.

Bah!

The leader's longsword strikes him in the back of the head.

"Oops!"

Calmen let out a scream of despair and fell to the floor, unable to get

up.

And then Leader Bruno, who knocked out his student with one blow, runs in front of Seongjin and prostrates himself.

"I am truly sorry, sir! "I will pay close attention from now on!"

"... .."

Seongjin sighed.

I don't know what to say, because this really seems like an anger disorder that I can't control as I want.

As I looked at Kalmen stretched out with pitiful eyes, I noticed that a large lump was bulging on his head.

"... Who did you say something rude to again this time?"

"that... I feel sorry for the vice-captain of the Wolf Knights... .."

Director Bruno's head lowers even further.

It is said that most of the group got along well with each other, but Lord Calmen often clashed with the Wolf Knights.

His personality, which is not very social, causes him to clash at every turn with the knights of the north, who have become rough-tempered while fighting against the harsh cold.

The problem is that it cannot be easily solved by Lord Calmen's will alone.

Sir Calmen was much more obedient these days than before. When I bumped into Seongjin, I politely behaved awkwardly and carefully lowered my eyes to avoid eye contact as much as possible.

Even at a glance, I could tell that he was being as careful as possible with his appearance so as not to offend etiquette.

There was only one exception: when his emotions were aroused for any reason.

Not only when I'm angry, but also when I'm extremely focused on something, such as training. In this case, Calmen's blood poured out to the top of his head and he spewed harsh words at no one at all.

Then, when the anger cools down, you fall into a sense of self-destruction and become even more despondent, and the stress from such interpersonal relationships leads to further explosions of anger, a vicious cycle.

"Maybe it's because I grew up in that environment since childhood."

It is said that Sir Carmen, when Director Bruno first met him, was a venomous little boy who did not hesitate to throw back insults at his stepfather, who was swearing and beating him up.

It turns out that Lord Calmen's house has been the house of the biggest curmudgeon in the neighborhood for generations. So, Director Bruno made an excuse that was not an excuse for his student, saying that he must have learned to swear first before babbling.

"He reflexively takes that attitude even before he can think with his head. "I warned him several times about that, but I couldn't fix it by just beating him up."

As a result, his time as a squire was also a series of hardships. He often gets beaten up or attacked by senior knights. In the end, he was unable to properly fit in with the knights and had to volunteer to work at a remote villa.

Despite his antipathy toward Mores, there was a reason why he applied to work at Jinju Palace.

"sorry... do. Lowering. I am... never..."

Sir Calmen, who came to his senses after a while, lowered his head and apologized to Seongjin.

However, as if he himself was not confident in his promise, his voice was gradually becoming quieter.

'hmm. It's really difficult like this...'

There are limits to what General Manager Bruno can do in advance to crack down and apologize.

With organizational life at this point, how can a grown-up knight really function as a human being?

How can you take someone out to a formal event without fear of something happening?

Seongjin, lost in thought, muttered without realizing it.

"This is it because I'm anxious. "Do you think you should just be a resident knight at Jinju Palace for the rest of your life?"

"... ..!"

Seongjin smiled warmly at Calmen, who opened his eyes and raised his head.

okay. What can I do? I have a big heart and should get rid of this friend.

Seongjin tapped his shoulder and asked in a casual manner.

"By the way, Lord Calmen. "Do you know who Pavlov is?"

181. Pavlov's Kalmen (2)

Thanks to your temper, you won't be able to get expelled anytime soon.

It's perfect for staying somewhere, so from now on, try to stay at Jinju Palace if possible.

* * *

It was something Calmen had only recently realized, but contrary to his fierce appearance, Prince Mores had a very tolerant personality.

Until now, I had made many big and small mistakes in front of him, but each time, I had overlooked them without paying much attention. If it had been anyone else, I probably would have beaten him a long time ago.

-I consider myself lucky to be able to serve such a good person as you, Lord Calmen.

Sir Claudia, who had already become a loyal follower of the prince, warned him several times.

-Perhaps you don't feel comfortable just because the prince is still young? What will you do if the mistakes you make are not just mistakes, but become a problem that damages your reputation? If you don't change that bad habit, I won't leave you alone again!

But Kalmen thought that couldn't be true. Among the resident knights of Jinju Palace, is there anyone who takes the prince lightly?

Anyone with the slightest sense, no, anyone who has seen the prince training even once. I couldn't help but notice how dangerous and

unusually dangerous he was at times.

However, as time passed and the same mistakes were repeated over and over again, Calmen began to feel this way.

'... 'Do I really think the prince is easy?'

As such doubts began to arise, Calmen could no longer confidently make any promises in front of the prince.

"sorry... do. Lowering. I am... never..."

The prince, who was contemplating something with a sullen look on his face, said as he listened to that shabby apology.

"This is it because I'm anxious. "Do you think you should just be a resident knight at Jinju Palace for the rest of your life?"

"... ... !"

Kalmen, who suddenly felt a strange sense of déjà vu at those words, raised his head and raised his eyes.

I don't think that's possible, though.

Didn't you once hear something similar to this from the prince?

But that thought didn't last any longer. This was because the prince was looking at himself and smiling cruelly.

The meaning of the mouth tilted up to one side and the coldly shining eyes was clear.

-You bastard. If I keep fussing over it, it will get buried?

Kalmen was completely frozen. It was truly an instinctive fear that came from deep within the soul.

And the prince, who leisurely walked in front of him, playfully tapped Calmen, who was very nervous, on the shoulder.

-Hey, don't be scared. Why are you so scared? huh?

It's as if I'm hearing auditory hallucinations that say this over and over again.

Then the prince opened his mouth as if he was amused by Calmen's reaction.

"By the way, Lord Calmen. "Do you know who Pavlov is?"

There was no way I could answer.

Pavlov?

To be honest, I don't know who that is, but it's probably someone who was rude in front of the prince and was dealt with without anyone knowing.

The message the prince wanted to convey to him was clear.

-If you don't want to quit your job right now, be careful in the future, okay?

Kalmen bowed his head and thought.

okay. That can't be possible. Who dares to look down on this person?

Meanwhile, Seongjin's face was filled with pride as he looked at the young knight staggering back to camp.

'Sir Calmen, I see you were a little touched by this brother's encouragement?'

Then the Demon King, who was silent for a moment, sighed and said.

[...] Seongjin Lee, don't go anywhere and laugh like that. Did you understand?]

why? what? why?

* * *

Pavlov's dog.

It is a model of learning theory that explains classical conditioning,

which almost no one on Earth knows about.

What goes one step further is learning through operant conditioning. In other words, it is a simple principle that actions that are rewarded increase and actions that are punished decrease.

The next morning, I caught up with Carmen and Director Bruno and explained the theory to them, and they looked dumbfounded.

"So what does the dog's drooling have to do with Calmen's behavior?"

Seongjin added a simple explanation to the leader's question.

"To put it simply, it's like this. In order to change the habit of reflexively getting upset, you can attach an aversive condition to it and have Sir Calmen learn it repeatedly. "By making it unpleasant, you gradually reduce the behavior."

"But I said earlier that it was clearly training for dogs... ..?"

Kalmen asked with a doubtful look.

Hmm, unusually sharp, huh? I've already figured out that the essence of this theory is dog training.

"But you. "I've pounded this guy hard every time he's had an accident, but it's been no use."

"Rest assured, I have no intention of doing such an inhumane act of violence. "Chief Bruno."

Seongjin responded politely.

Of course, at first, I thought about hitting Seongjin and Sir Calmen on the head every time they lost their temper.

There is an unfounded belief that if we artificially cause concussions and bleach our brains once in a while, simple repetitive learning will become more firmly embedded in our minds.

But I soon changed my mind. This is not the Pearl Palace, and Sir Calmen has some respect.

It was clear that being beaten by a superior in front of other knights would be quite humiliating for the knight. Of course, Seongjin's face will fall to the ground after being beaten.

So Seongjin needed the help of a strong helper. That was why Edith was called to this event.

"From now on, the success or failure of this matter is entirely up to you. "Please, Edith."

"Is there anything I can help you with, sir? "What on earth can I do?"

To the puzzled maid, Seongjin gave instructions in a solemn voice.

"Edith, could you please make me a cup of tea?"

"... yes?"

"I hope you can show off your skills to the fullest."

To provide an experience more intense than any other harsh violence.

Then, Director Bruno looked back at Seongjin with a look of astonishment. The meaning of those narrowed eyes is clear and obvious.

'Is this person the devil?'

Uh huh! This is all for your student, Director Bruno.

So, after a while, a cup of dark brown Melbourne tea was placed in front of Calmen.

"What can I do with this...?" ... ?"

Seongjin gave simple instructions to a confused Calmen.

"It won't be difficult, Lord Calmen. "Just say a cool curse and then drink it all down."

"... yes?"

"Come on, come on."

When Seongjin smiled softly, Kalmen, who was frozen for some reason, hesitated and brought the teacup to his mouth.

"Oh, wait. "Don't forget to swear."

"... dog... X type?"

What is that spiritless swear word?

It was ridiculous, but yeah, whatever. First of all, starting is important.

When Seongjin nodded, Sir Calmen slurped down his glass with relief.

And then.

'K^&@ (ㄱ 8y솔트에 꿀JM#T?!'

He jumped up from his seat with an expression that was difficult to describe, but soon sat down on the floor and started to turn yellow.

"Kek! "Wow!"

In the end, Kalmen, who spat out the tea in a large amount, looked at Seongjin with cold sweat and trembling eyes.

Seongjin calmly orders as he holds out the next cup of tea to him.

"Now, next curse."

"... ... !"

"Next swear word."

In the end, Calmen, unable to withstand Seongjin's pressure, timidly opened his mouth.

"... foot."

"huh? I can not hear you. "Bigger!"

"Fuck you! "What are you doing, you bastard!"

So this is all your fault. yes?

Seongjin emphasized that fact to Calmen several times.

"I'm helping you become your own person."

"... .."

"Now, if you understand, should I swear next?"

Then I felt the devil trembling in my head.

[Wow, scary guy. Are you now gaslighting your subordinates?]

'shut up!'

Seongjin waited patiently until Calmen calmed down.

Calmen then bowed his head and was silent for a moment, but then he swore in a trembling voice.

"... "You poisonous bastard."

"Hmm, is it too weak? Stronger!"

"You damn bastard!"

"There is still a long way to go, Lord Calmen! Now, fill your heart with anger!"

Then Kalmen got up from his seat, gathered up all his anger, and shouted into the air.

"Kaaaaaa! "There are XX and XX people in this world!!!"

At the same time, wow.

Calmen poured the tea down his throat in one go.

'Kyaemi&dyaep[(#)]##셔^ㄸ3io3#@솔섹뽕!!!'

He flinched as if he had been electrocuted by a high-voltage wire, and then just cooed with a pale, tired face. fell to the floor.

"Kalmen!"

Surprised, Manager Bruno runs towards him.

Edith, who was looking at that scene, said with tears in her eyes.

"ruler... "Cruel!"

Hey, did you know that you were the one in that car?

"Lowering! "Wouldn't it be better if you just hit this guy?"

Looking at Calmen, who collapsed with foam at the mouth, Director Bruno made an earnest appeal.

"Otherwise, I will punish you more severely in the future, so please at least drink that devil's drink!"

hmm. Seongjin frowned and scratched his cheek.

'Why is everyone making such a fuss? It's not like I haven't eaten it before. 'If you keep drinking that, you'll get used to it.'

In my opinion, I thought it was a humane method, but why do I keep feeling like I'm abusing Calmen?

[Maybe it's because it's not an illusion?]

'Oh, shut up!'

* * *

"No matter how you look at it, the merchant owner is a miser."

The woman who was picking up tree branches grumbled at Dasha.

She was a friendly woman who occasionally spoke to Dasha. She, along with Dasha, was also hired as a new member of Milo Top.

The woman always went around with her hair neatly wrapped in a white towel, but unusually, she shaved all of her eyebrows, giving her a strange look.

"It really is."

When Dasha responded like that, the woman wrinkled her nose and expressed her dissatisfaction.

"No, think about it. If you picked up enough firewood yesterday, wouldn't you be able to rest for a day? Why are you telling me to save up tree branches that I can't even use? 'I'm going to throw away everything that's left and say it's a burden anyway!'"

"Hehe."

Dasha was currently collecting dry firewood with the kitchen assistants at the top of the mill.

After somehow safely leaving Regina, Giacomo Milo no longer tried to vet new personnel. So for the past ten days, her schedule has been very peaceful.

But that doesn't mean the doubts have been completely resolved.

When I see them keep doing useless things that may seem a bit excessive, it feels like unspoken pressure to not pay attention and just do what they are told to do quietly.

So Dasha was careful not to arouse unnecessary suspicion.

Important data has already been roughly secured. Since I was going to stick with the prince and his party all the way up to Sigismund Ridge anyway, I decided to skip reporting unless it was urgent and had finished talking with Prince Mores.

Perhaps conclusive evidence that the merchant was a devil contractor would not appear so easily. So Dasha decided to take her time and slowly observe the top from now on.

"I think this is enough, shall we just go back?"

"Is that so?"

Dasha gladly responded to the woman's words and stood up.

And the two men walked toward the campsite carrying bundles of firewood.

"Are you from Barça? Are you from down in the South?"

The south the woman asks about probably refers to the land of the pagans.

"The South is the South, but it's not Barça. "I am from Anatolia."

"okay."

The woman frowned slightly as she answered that way. Thanks to her bald eyebrows, only her vertical wrinkles stand out, giving her an even more eccentric appearance.

"Now that I think about it, we've been so busy that we haven't been able to speak to each other properly yet."

"Oh, I see. "I'm Sabrina."

When Dasha smiled and gave her an alias, the woman smiled brightly, extending her hand to her.

"My name is Olivier. "The journey is not far away, let's take care of ourselves."

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182. Pavlov's Kalmen (3)

After leaving the Imperial Capital, Giacomo Milo was in a bad mood.

At first glance, everything seemed to be going smoothly.

The raw materials for [tea], whose supply and demand had been unstable for a while, have been secured in abundance for the first time in a long time. Archduke Sigismund, who was clumsy intruding on businesses, has also become quiet recently.

Of course, he still did not give up and showed persistence in following the top, but considering the advantage of having the Wolf Knights accompany him on the ascent, it was not so much of a nuisance.

Nevertheless, Giacomo felt an uneasy feeling as if an invisible threat was surrounding him and slowly tightening his grip. It was like a kind of feeling that had been cultivated through her long journey up the mountain.

[Summon me slowly, Giacomo. Now that we're far enough away from the ecliptic, there's nothing more to take, right?]

In that respect, Salos, the devil who made a contract with him, was not very trustworthy.

As a high-ranking devil, he possessed considerable power, but he also possessed the indifference that was the privilege of the powerful. Therefore, he was generally ignorant of human affairs.

Even now, without paying attention to the current situation, he was begging me to summon him quickly.

[You said you were suspicious of the newly hired people, right? So do I. There is definitely a smell of the Dark Church somewhere around here!]

Rather, Giacomo was doubting whether the accident involving his employees was accidental.

So, the plan was to identify new employees with the help of the devil at a logistics relay station where there was little interference from the church.

Perhaps, if it had not been for the sudden death of Director Collins, the suspicions would have been resolved long ago and the company could have continued its journey with peace of mind.

[Now, hurry up and call me! I will personally discern their souls. If there is someone hiding something, I will kill them at once! I will tear you to pieces so that not even your soul remains!]

Giacomo sighed at those harsh words.

'It's impossible now, Salos. There are paladins nearby.'

[Paradise? Why are you hanging out with those guys?]

'Didn't I already tell you? I'm moving with Prince Mores and his party.'

[Hmm? Ah, I did. Did she say that there was a 'prepared one' by her side?]

Salos referred to the 3rd prince as 'the one prepared'. One day, Giacomo asked the reason, and Salos, who usually carelessly said anything, was unusually reluctant to say anything.

-This is a matter in which high-ranking demon kings are deeply involved. We don't know the details.

How on earth could the prince of the Holy Empire have anything to do with high-ranking demon kings?

Although I thought he was causing a lot of bad rumors, he was

reluctant to be involved in many ways.

'By the way, Salos. Any news from Prince Ricardo?'

Ricardo Scarzapino.

He was the one who greatly helped Giacomo, who was ignorant of demonology, summon a high-ranking demon named Salos. Thanks to this, Giacomo Milo, who was a small and medium-sized merchant of little significance, was able to become one of the largest merchants in the North within a few years.

It's really strange to think about it now, but even though Ricardo was a high-ranking nobleman who had lived in the imperial capital, he was strangely good at demonology.

He also had deep connections with the dark sect that was prevalent in Ortona, a land he had never set foot on.

It was Ricardo who interceded to ensure that the deal with the Sigismund Order, which was under the influence of the Penitent Church, went smoothly.

In addition, he helped ensure that the Milo Merchants were constantly supplied with some items that could only be obtained through the Order.

In return, Ricardo asked for only one thing: distribution of the [Medicine Tea] that the Dark Church was manufacturing. At first, we only received and traded part of the product as an assortment, but recently the transaction volume has increased, and now we are operating a workshop by directly transporting raw materials from the upper level.

[Why him?]

Salos reacted indifferently. Unless you were the subject of the contract, it was no longer of interest to the devil.

'There is information that he was attacked by the Dark Church.'

The news was that the day before his birthday, Ricardo was attacked

by an unknown assailant and his mind has been going back and forth ever since. In addition, there were widespread rumors that his younger sister, Isabella, who often went to the top to run errands, was also sick.

According to unconfirmed information, a Dark Order medal was discovered at the scene of the attack.

Now most of the transactions are direct between Milo and the Dark Church, but since this is the work of the person who made the deal in the first place, I couldn't help but be concerned about his well-being.

Could it be that the Dark Church, which felt that his intervention was no longer needed, was trying to get rid of Ricardo cleanly?

[joy! He must have gone looking for another doll. Isn't it obvious? Rather, you probably aren't in a position to worry about him leisurely right now.]

'yes?'

Giacomo was confused and didn't understand what was happening, but Salos clicked his tongue.

[If the Dark Church really had a hand in it, they wouldn't have done it targeting just one puppeteer.]

And at Salos's next words, Giacomo couldn't believe his ears.

[The Church of Penitence has been following the Sangang since a while ago. Doesn't that mean they're after you too? I said I could smell the Dark Church somewhere around here! Even if this happens, you won't summon me?]

* * *

The bitter tea feeding plan was completely abolished. This is because Lord Calmen, who came to his senses, refused to drink tea.

"Mr. Better just hit me! yes?"

Seongjin, who saw his eyes becoming more rebellious, gave up.

'Such a patient person...'

There was one more problem.

It was originally a punishment designed to be implemented secretly to save Sir Calmen's face, but soon most of the party learned about this 'mutt training'.

This happened because they were all excellent Auror users and could not completely hide their sounds.

Anyway, Seongjin felt the need to change his training method a little. So, after much deliberation, he decided to compromise with light corporal punishment.

Quick punishment!

A blow of intensity that is not harsh!

Still, it's a shock that will definitely stick in your mind!

'After all, it's just one night!'

Seongjin slowly relaxed his shoulders and thought.

'Besides, I somehow feel like I can hit it very skillfully.'

I quickly gained confidence that I could maximize pain while reducing local tissue damage by delivering a uniform amount of impact to the entire head.

Probably because I was hit hard by someone.

"Okay, get ready."

At Seongjin's signal, Kalmen laughed lightly. Compared to getting beaten up by Leader Bruno, it seemed like it was a bit ridiculous.

"swear word!"

"Pick it? "You fucking bastard!"

And then, a loud hitting sound echoed through the campground.

Sigh!

"Gagging!"

Lord Kalmen fell backwards, screaming at the top of his lungs. Then he grabbed his forehead and started struggling like crazy.

A powerful shock that felt like my brain was bleaching white!

Seongjin, who was calmly watching Kalmen with his arms crossed, waited for him to calm down for a moment before opening his mouth.

"Now, wake up, Sir Calmen. "I have to swear next."

"... ..!"

"hurry. "We don't have much time."

Sir Calmen, who barely staggered to his feet after hearing those words, now had a clear expression of fear in his eyes.

"Okay, next."

"... X child... .."

Why have you become so timid again? Seongjin clicked his tongue and raised his hand.

At this, Sir Calmen reflexively flinched and kept stepping back.

Sigh!

Because Seongjin didn't miss a moment's timing, he once again screamed that he was going to die and rolled around on the floor.

"Kwaaaak!"

And the members of the Wolf Knights watching from the side commented.

"Didn't you just hear something very ominous?"

"No way, it's only night?"

"no. Something is unusual. As you can see, the angle of his fingers, the timing of his flick, and the snap of his wrist that absorbs the recoil! "All of those things are moving with extreme efficiency to strike one point, right?"

"It definitely feels like I'm seeing the essence of a one-point strike. It's even beautiful!"

After receiving two more hits.

Sir Calmen's forehead swelled unusually, and eventually Father Gustav was called in to treat him.

Sir Ilma, the leader of the Wolf Knights, who was watching the scene from afar, turned to Bruno and said.

"You are very enthusiastic."

"Yes, that guy is also full of will to fix things."

There was a light of compassion in Director Bruno's eyes as he said that. However, he soon controlled his emotions and bowed his head towards the knight commander.

"Thank you for generously forgiving my disciple's rudeness. Lord Ilma."

Not long ago, Kalmen quarreled with the vice-captain of the Wolf Knights, which created an unpleasant atmosphere between the prince and his party and the Wolf Knights for a while.

An incident that could have hurt the pride of the knights. If it had not been for the intervention of the leader, Lord Ilma, it would not have ended with a simple apology.

She looked at Bruno's lowered head for a moment and said.

"You think of that knight like your child."

"He is definitely a student I have looked upon for a long time as if he

were my own child."

After answering that, Bruno let out a deep sigh.

"Maybe it's just me who considers him a child. "My hair has gotten a little thicker, but now it hardly listens to me."

Then Lord Ilma smiled slightly.

"I understand. I also have a daughter of a similar age. "I know very well how many things don't go as her parents want."

Then she closed her mouth for a moment and looked at the campfire, her eyes deepening.

"With all due respect, Sir Bruno. Do you know my husband?"

"yes. I saw you about ten years ago during the subjugation of the demon species. "Aren't you Sir Sebastian, now captain of the guard?"

"yes. "It's a shame, but when we got married, my husband and I were the most famous couple in Sigismund."

Ilma and her husband Sebastian were the most promising knights of the Wolf Knights since their youth.

The two naturally began a friendly competition, and what blossomed between rivals who had been at loggerheads for such a long time was a love that was close to camaraderie.

After becoming aware of my feelings, it didn't take long for me to get married.

At that time, Ilma had already been appointed as the leader of the Wolf Knights at a young age, and Sebastian was also the commander of the guards in charge of the security of the territory and the vigilance of the Demon Guard.

In other words, the marriage was the union of the two strongest people in the Sigismund Territory.

Therefore, when the long-awaited child between the two was born,

everyone in the estate had no doubts. That the child will also become an outstanding prosecutor who will surpass the talents of his parents.

"But my daughter didn't have any talent with a sword. Even though she looked exactly like him, her grandparents even told her that she was not their granddaughter. "When she was young, she was obedient and good, but she quickly became crooked."

Parents who are always busy and grandparents who neglect them.

My daughter Louise, who had nowhere else to focus her mind, began to go outside.

"The only thing that could soothe my depressed daughter was 'Max,' the count's hunting dog. "Perhaps Max was the only true family to that child who spent a long time alone."

It was a family.

Bruno had some idea of how the story would end.

"Even when winter came and the demonic beasts frequently invaded the county, Louise still did not return home until late. He wandered around the outside with Max. "He was scolded for being dangerous and beaten several times, but he did not change in the slightest."

Then one day it happened.

One of the village watchmen reported that he thought he had seen Luise being chased by a demonic beast on a distant mountain ridge.

When the couple heard the news and rushed there in a panic, luckily Louise was safe. However, what they discovered at the same time was a blood-splattered floor and a dog's body torn to pieces by a demonic beast.

"And from that day until now, my daughter has never once broken curfew."

Sigh! Ggging!

The sound of a blow echoes through the camp again.

Ilma looked at the knight rolling on the floor for a moment, then looked back at Bruno and spoke slowly.

"I learned this from my daughter's case. "When a young person with clear opinions changes his or her own behavior, it is usually because he or she feels extreme regret after losing something precious."

183. Pavlov's Kalmen (4)

"Lord Calmen. If it's that hard, let's quit. "How about we think of a different approach?"

Seongjin asked as he watched Kalmen rolling on the floor after being hit for the fifth time.

It's because I'm worried, Lord Calmen.

Well, I don't think you're very smart. Even now, it seems like my IQ is dropping in real time, so why am I worried?

"Off, no! It's bearable!"

"really?"

"of course!"

Seongjin sighed.

This guy is being stubborn again in a strange way.

"Anyway, you're in serious trouble. "I was beaten by my father much more than this."

"... .."

Calmen also had nothing to say about that.

I wonder if this was really the kind of pain that would make me roll on the floor. It wasn't, because it was much more painful to get hit by Manager Bruno. The prince's words that he is controlling things within an appropriate range are probably true.

But it was a strange thing. If the prince hit me on the forehead, I felt an extreme sense of fear, as if I would die at any moment.

An eerie feeling, as if something like a large stone or an ax blade was being struck from above, splitting the skull in half at once.

That was the reason why Calmen kept screaming ugly without even realizing it.

At the same time, I felt a strange sense of déjà vu. A very uncomfortable feeling, like I'm forgetting something important.

"You are right, Sir Calmen. Harshing your body like this is not the answer. "Why don't you think of another way?"

Priest Gustav persuaded him by pouring divine power into his forehead, where a blue bruise was starting to appear.

"Perhaps the reason you can't control your anger is because you suddenly fell out of the Emperor's favor. "When I get back, I'll be a lot better than I am now, so take it easy."

"... .."

As he said, Calmen also wanted to stop doing this right away.

Even though it is only night time, it is strangely painful. So much so that I even thought about trying the bitter tea from the mean-spirited maid again.

The problem was that the Wolf Knights were openly watching this scene.

"How many generations will that guy last?"

"There's so much fuss that I'm going to die, but isn't that the limit?"

"That guy is a knight of the imperial palace? "Now that I look at it, it's like a kid with no blood on his head yet, chuckle."

I'm crying!

Despite Father Gustav's dissuasion, Calmen, who was completely angry, stood up and approached Seongjin.

"Please, please, one more time, sir!"

"... Ugh, yeah. okay."

In front of Seongjin, who sighed, Kalmen confidently shouted.

"You crazy bastard!"

And bam!

With a tremendous impact, the ground flipped over in an instant, and soon Calmen's mind turned completely white.

"uh? Lord Calmen!"

"Lord Calmen, are you okay?"

"knife... ... !"

His eyes close, and the sounds shouting at him become far from his ears.

And beyond my blurred consciousness, I heard someone's voice like a dream.

-Are you okay?

Calmen cried out unconsciously and answered internally.

Who actually hit you, and who are you making fun of now?

Then, a hand is stretched out in front of me along with a soft laugh. I couldn't see the other person's face clearly, but somehow it felt like the surroundings were brightening up.

-Thanks to your temper, you will never be expelled. It's perfect for staying somewhere, so from now on, try to stick to Jinju Palace as much as possible.

okay. Someone once said that to Calmen.

Who on earth was that? As I tried to scoop it up, it felt like my heart was pounding.

-I knew something like this would happen someday! If anything happens to His Royal Highness, I will never forgive you!

The scene changes before he knows it, and an angry shouting sound can be heard from next to him. A familiar voice that always nagged him.

As he rode like crazy, chasing after someone who was far ahead of him, Kalmen thought absentmindedly.

Ah, this is the same nightmare. When I open my eyes, it will quickly disappear from my memory like a mirage.

-It's all because of you! If only Lord Masaine were here!

Soon, as always, mixed scenes flashed through my mind, and complex, indefinable emotions shook Calmen one after another.

-Is it you? Last night with our Olivier...

-You fool! Whose offense have you offended now?

Then, as always, Kalmen, now much younger, was standing in the imperial palace garden.

-You are so lucky too. He's the perfect guy to live off a simple meal and then live as a guest anywhere.

yes. This reminds me of

I can never forget who I am.

- I just happened to give you the sheath in the perfect place, so you should be grateful for the rest of your life. under. under. under.

How could he forget those strangely sparkling silver-grey eyes that were looking straight at him as if he were having fun?

Damn it! Damn Prince Mores!

As I was struggling in the grip of intense anger, a cool voice suddenly rang in my head, awakening Calmen's spirit.

[Because life is so uncertain, the soul cannot settle down and wanders around the border of life and death.]

'... uh?'

At the same time as those words were said, a definite attraction was created in the floating body, and Kalmen began to sink downwards.

My heart, which was beating like crazy, gradually slows down, and my whole body is enveloped in a warm sense of relief. The sights that had been fluttering here and there, disorienting him, gradually moved out of sight one by one and disappeared completely.

Finally, the perfect silence came.

As he closed his eyes and savored the quiet peace, someone's hand touched Calmen's forehead. Soon the cool, warm warmth that started from my forehead spread throughout my entire body.

And a voice gently admonishing him.

[You will have to catch it properly this time. There is not much time left for you to be able to lean on this small wound.]

... what?

Before Kalmen could question anything, an irresistible voice commanded him.

[Open your eyes.]

"... ..!"

Flashing.

Following the command, Kalmen reflexively opened his eyes.

What came into his field of vision were the faces of several people looking down at him with concern from above.

"Kalmen! Are you okay?"

"Sir Calmen!"

"Are you awake, Lord Calmen?"

Kalmen blinked blankly.

what? Surely there was a similar situation some time ago?

When he came to, he was lying on the bare floor of the campground. Many people, including Director Bruno and Priest Gustav, are crowding around him.

And Exorcist Sir Sharon was in the middle of pouring out divine power while touching Calmen's forehead.

"Oh, thank you... .."

"... .."

"... Lord Sharon?"

Calmen, who was suddenly saying thank you, called her out with an unfamiliar feeling. This is because for an instant, a faint silver glow seemed to pass through the exorcist's eyes.

But when she closed and opened her eyes again, Sir Sharon's eyes had returned to their original black color. She smiled at him, parting the corners of her mouth.

"Hehe. Are you all right, Lord Calmen?"

"Ah yes... .."

With her support, Kalmen stood up.

I had clearly fainted and woke up, but somehow my body felt extremely refreshed.

'... 'What is it?'

It felt strangely unrealistic, to the point where I felt like I was still in

a dream.

And Kalmen's eyes met Seongjin, who was looking at him with a sullen expression from the other side.

"How are you, Lord Calmen?"

"Oh, yes. it's okay. Lowering."

Then Seongjin pouted his mouth and grumbled.

"Of course it should be okay! "Because of your stubbornness, I'm the only one who gets scolded later for no reason!"

"... yes?"

"Uh, it's nothing."

Seongjin turned around, leaving the confused Calmen behind.

After Calmen suddenly and unexpectedly fainted, a frightened Seongjin immediately went to see Sir Sharon. I was worried that the injury might be serious enough to require the man's help.

Of course, he took matters into his own hands, but didn't he have a record of eating the back of Kenneth Diggory's head before?

And at his request, Seonghwang, who came in the form of Sir Sharon, stared at Seongjin in silence for a moment.

I didn't say it out loud to Seongjin because it was in front of others, but it was clear what those cool eyes meant.

-For some reason, it has been quiet for a while.

I looked at Calmen for a moment to see if he was busy with something and then left, but it was obvious that I was going to say something to Seongjin later.

'Eight! Why is this happening because of that guy? But these days, he's becoming a pretty dependable son!'

[...] That's a joke, right?]

Of course, there was an unexpected positive effect created by this accident.

The knights of the Wolf Knights, who at first gave Kalmen a negative look, are now giggling and looking at him as if he were some kind of mischievous newcomer.

"Hey, you kid! "What is it that hurts so much?"

"This is my first time seeing someone faint after being hit so hard! Lol."

Then Kalmen got angry.

"Mr. Ui! "Why don't you try it yourself and tell me?"

"Mr. Ui? This guy hasn't come to his senses yet! "I guess I should get another hit?"

"Arthur. "If he gets hit any more, he's going to cry!"

"Sii! Who cries! Everyone, stop laughing like that! Now is this fun? yes?"

"Kkkkkkkkkkkkkk!"

Normally, the knights would have rolled their eyes and created an unpleasant atmosphere as soon as he opened his mouth, but now they giggle and move backwards whenever Sir Calmen starts saying bitter things from his mouth.

Even the vice-captain of the Wolf Knights, who had first given Calmen a double insult and almost became his bitter enemy, did the same. He was laughing heartily, wrapping his log-like arms around Lord Calmen's neck.

Sir Ilma, the leader of the Wolf Knights, looked at the scene and spoke with admiration.

"Did you really expect this outcome, sir?"

"huh?"

"You punished him to a level that was not humiliating in front of everyone, and you earned the sympathy of the other knights and at the same time induced their intimacy!"

"... ..!"

At those words, Director Bruno gave me a look filled with surprise and respect.

No, that's not it.

Seongjin scratched his cheek and looked at Calmen walking away among the knights.

Well, wouldn't this be okay as is?

For some reason, it looks a little different from the picture I expected.

* * *

Today too, Dasha, who was collecting firewood far away from the campsite, raised her head at the sight of multiple people approaching with bated breath.

'... We're getting closer today, aren't we?'

For several days now, she had been intermittently detecting the presence of dozens of people chasing the merchant.

Because they were maintaining their distance from the upper level, the actual mercenaries hired by the upper level Milo were unaware of anything and were enjoying their peaceful journey.

At first, I was suspicious that they might be targeting Prince Mores' group.

However, after observing their movements for a few days, Dasha concluded that their target was the Milo Sangdan.

Sometimes, when they camped far away from the prince and his party, they always came towards the direction where Milo Danang was located.

The guys who had been quietly following me for over 10 days were now approaching closer with no intention of hiding their presence.

'It's coming from the forest. Are you planning to attack me now?'

Dasha fumbled for the dagger hidden under her skirt in preparation for just such an emergency.

By that time, she and the other workers who had been collecting firewood had all returned to the camp, and now only Olivier, with his headkerchief wrapped around his head as always, remained next to Dasha.

'Maybe the new people are all part of a gang... ... '

At this point, I thought that the suspicion of supremacy was valid.

Over the past few days, I have seen several newly hired people secretly leaving the upper level and returning at night.

Judging by the fact that they completely fooled the mercenaries, they were fairly skilled assassins.

Assessing the approaching signs, Dasha put down the firewood and stood up.

'okay. Just in time, an incident occurred that involved a lot of employees. Somehow I thought it would be easy to infiltrate the top.'

"Hey, somehow I thought it would be easy to get in."

"... ... ?"

For a moment, Dasha thought she had spoken her thoughts out loud.

When I turned my head, the woman, Olivier, who happened to be looking toward the forest, looked at Dasha with wide eyes.

"... oh?"

She touched her hollow eyebrows and then smiled with a strange expression on her face.

"I thought about it, but maybe that one too?"

184. Penitence (1)

"Whoa, calm down!"

As Dasha quickly stepped back and pulled out her dagger, Olivier quickly raised both arms.

"Although this is just my wish, we are not enemies. yes?"

At the same time, he took a couple of steps back, as if he was fully aware of the range of Dasha's attack. At a glance, you can see that he is not an average person.

'How could you not notice someone like that right next to you?'

Dasha pointed his dagger and glared sharply at her.

"... "Since when?"

"Uh, no! Oh my! "Sabrina, I wasn't spying on you!"

Perhaps because she wanted to make him trust her, she smiled brightly at Dasha. Unfortunately, the lack of eyebrows made the face look even more bizarre.

"I threw it too, just in case! "I think they noticed the guys hiding in the forest."

"... .."

"I really had no idea until now. "Are you really good at killing people?"

It was the same for Dasha.

There were some awkward moments, but aside from the lack of eyebrows, Olivier seemed the most normal among the new recruits.

"Honestly, everyone else was suspicious, but I thought it was definitely not you!"

"why?"

"That's obvious, right? I never knew that a girl as striking as you would proudly show her face! "Barshain assassins are not common anywhere!"

iced coffee. That was the reason why Dasha quickly excluded Olivier from the boundary line.

I never would have thought that he would show up with his eyebrows shaved off when asked about being an assassin. It's sure to leave a lasting impression on anyone.

"Think about it. "All the newly hired guys are spies, wouldn't you think that at least one of them would be a proper employee?"

"... .."

In the end, all of the new employees hired by the Imperial Capital were suspicious people. The situation is so absurd that I almost laugh out loud.

At that time, Olivier, who was watching Dasha, quietly made a suggestion.

"Come on, let's compromise. "If we're going to end up here, one of us will definitely die, and the other one won't be much better."

"Then what are we going to do?"

"Let's pretend we don't see each other just this once. As you can guess, this undercover was a complete failure, right? So now let's go our separate ways!"

The group chasing the top never comes with a good purpose. If we survive this conflict, Milo Sangju will prioritize the remaining new

personnel.

The decision was quick.

"... "What is your purpose for infiltrating?"

"I want to say, 'Do you think you'll say that obediently?' But, okay, okay. "If the goals conflict, that will be difficult."

Olivier shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's be nice to each other. I was just ordered to keep a close watch on the merchant. you?"

You can't take that literally.

But Dasha thought that there was at least a high possibility that that woman was not targeting Prince Mores' personal safety.

then.

"The purpose of this side is also to monitor top-tierism."

"good. Then there won't be any problem."

With those words, the two slowly took a step back and widened the distance between them.

And when I decided that I had reached the point where memorization was out of reach, I stopped on the spot and made eye contact for a moment instead of saying goodbye.

""

""

That moment.

The two pretended to turn around and simultaneously fired weapons full of auras at each other!

Pow!

Percussion!

The stiletto passed by Dasha's eye and pierced the tree right next to it, scattering crumbs.

As expected, the sharp dagger that grazed the nape of Olivier's neck broke several tree branches and then stuck at an angle into the tree trunk behind him.

'shit!'

And as soon as the final attack failed, the two pulled out the memorized weapons that flew at each other and started running in opposite directions.

Ride, ride!

"Sabrina, you! I will never forget it! How dare you betray my trust!"

I wondered if I could hear Olivier's long shout, but it quickly became far away.

Dasha also gritted her teeth as she ran quickly between the trees.

"That's what we're going to say! 'You bare eyebrows!'

I don't know who you belong to, but I will definitely kill you next time!

* * *

Around that time, people even at the top of Milo began to notice the strange incident.

"Master Giacomo! "A mysterious group is approaching from the forest!"

The mercenary leader hired as an escort came to Giacomo's tent and reported.

"How big are they?"

"About twenty. It is said that he was not armed in any way. "It doesn't

seem like a group of thieves roaming around the area."

Of course, Giacomo already knew their identities. Because the devil Salos has been raging in my head since a while ago.

[Hurry and call me! The Dark Church is coming! The only ones who cultivate that cursed demon tree are the Dark Church! I will sweep away all of this body!]

Ignoring Salos appropriately, Giacomo gave instructions to the mercenary leader.

"I'll talk about it first. "It could just lead to an armed conflict at any time, so be as alert as possible."

The fact that so many people are coming without any message is probably not a good intention.

However, the Dark Church and the Milo Merchant Marine have an implicit business relationship. There is nothing good to come from conflict, so I thought I would try to talk as much as possible.

'Furthermore, if the matter escalates, it may draw the attention of the Wolf Knights unnecessarily.'

In the unlikely event that your relationship with the Dark Church is discovered, you will have to summon Salos to silence him. Not only the entire Wolf Knights, but even the prince accompanying them.

Praying that the worst situation would not happen, Giacomo slowly got up from his seat.

Just as he came out of the tent, a group of people appeared from the other side of the forest.

They were wearing worn-out black monastic robes, and most of them had skinny bodies that looked like they were about to die. Among the face as hard as an old tree, only the two eyes shine brightly and give off a bizarre impression.

Not only that, but their faces and arms, exposed through their clothes, were covered with countless scars and wounds.

Evidence of a long period of penance. They were the members of the Church of [Repentance].

Murmur.

While the mercenaries were agitated with their weapons drawn, they stopped only when they reached the front of the camp.

"I came to see Giacomo Sangdou."

The person who said that and took the lead in the group was, as expected, a large woman dressed in worn-out monastic robes.

She was a woman whose entire body was covered in muscles and scars, and her appearance was more apt to be described as a gangster rather than a church member.

"It's been a while, Bishop Belinda."

Giacomo opened his mouth, swallowing dry saliva.

We met several times for business purposes, but I always felt intimidated in front of her.

"What on earth is going on? So far, I thought we had a pretty good business relationship. Am I wrong?"

Then the woman snorted with a grim expression.

"Huh, good relationship? "Such bullshit!"

In that ominous atmosphere, the tension among the mercenaries heightened further.

"First, tell me your business. I don't want to make a big problem here. "The Third Prince and his group and the Wolf Knights are nearby."

"Whether it turns into a problem or not depends entirely on their response."

"What do you mean by answer?"

Then, Bishop Belinda's expression suddenly distorted.

"Hey, merchant Nari. "We are ignorant people living in the shadows, so we don't know much about mourning."

"... .."

"But at least I know one thing. "If you receive the item right away, you have to pay the full price."

Giacomo was taken aback by her words.

"As for the price of [the medicine tea], didn't you pay it last time?"

"It should have been a bill that could be used properly."

"It is clearly said that it will be handled at the logistics relay station?"

"Are you saying the money wasn't paid according to the bill?"

Bishop Belinda twitched her cheek at those words.

"They didn't bother to check my identity in detail."

"why?"

"Do I know why? You'll know right away! I heard that it was a special order from the branch manager to pay only those with certain identities! "Didn't you say something nonsense to him?"

Giacomo looked dazed in shock.

Branch Manager Schmidt? Why all of a sudden?

Of course, this happened under Seongjin's instructions, but Giacomo had no way of knowing that fact.

He tried to hide his nervousness and stroked his goatee.

"Then isn't there also the Scarzzapino family? I clearly remember that Sogongja served as a guarantor for the bill, and if that were the case, he would be happy to pay the price on my behalf!"

In the beginning, before direct trading began, both the religious order and the Milo merchants traded goods through Ricardo Sogong. Even now, some items are being relayed by a ghost merchant created by

Sogongja.

But as soon as those words were over, Belinda's mood became even harsher.

"Okay, great! I just happened to want to talk about that too! "Why on earth did you attack Ricardo?"

"what... ... ?"

For a moment, Giacomo was dumbfounded.

"What is that?"

"Are you kidding me? They said they attacked Su Gongzi and took the token of our church! "Isn't this the intention to harm him and our denomination at the same time?"

"... ... ?!"

"It was clearly a medal leaked from our workplace. Who else but you could do something like that? Thanks to that, the Inquisitors have been running rampant in our area lately!"

Of course, this was actually Seongjin's doing.

Anyway, Giacomo, who didn't know the whole story, realized that something was going on.

His face was white and his mouth was clenched, and the vicar's voice became even louder.

"What on earth are we doing? "Now that we can run our business on our own, aren't we going to bring in the church and end the difficult relationship with our denomination?"

Giacomo felt himself becoming dizzy.

Why did things suddenly become like this?

Meanwhile, the pressure from the diocese continued.

"When the Archbishop of Confession found out about this, he was

very angry. "If you don't pay right away, he told me to personally deliver that [penitent wood] to you!"

As soon as she finished speaking, several penitents came forward carrying what looked like a large jar.

It was a jar almost the size of a human torso. It looked like a flower pot because it was filled with black soil. There are colorful and ominous patterns drawn around it.

[this! Stop it from sprouting, Giacomo! That is the tree of the Demon World! It is a cursed seed that can even snatch your soul!]

At that time, he heard Salos' desperate cry in his head.

'You want to stop it from sprouting? how?'

[Blood must never touch the seeds of that Demon Tree!]

'Blood?'

When the penitents placed the jar in front of Belinda, she pulled out a small dagger from her bosom and let out a bitter laugh.

"Now then, answer me, Giacomo. "Do you want to pay right now?"

"Now, wait! I will pay! I'll pay, so just give me a moment..."

"At the end?"

"exactly. There is no way you would be taking such a large amount of money with you when you go on a business trip! As soon as this commercial trip is over, I will personally process the bill in Regina..."

"Wait until then?"

"Oh, or at least until we reach Sigismund Territory! "I will try to raise money there somehow!"

As Giacomo continued speaking, the vicar's eyes gradually grew colder.

"... .."

"Can you please understand?"

Then she twisted her lips and let out an eerie smile.

"You dirty apostate! "Of course I didn't trust you guys!"

Sigh!

Hot blood sprayed from the hand that was tightly gripping the dagger.

* * *

[Lee Seong-jin, I feel something uncomfortable nearby?]

While I was meditating before going to bed, the devil suddenly called Seongjin.

'Uneasy feeling?'

[huh. The magic energy is light, but there is something unusual about it.]

Seongjin felt depressed for a moment, but didn't feel anything unusual.

I'm tilting my head like that.

[Huh? What is this? Seongjin Lee! be careful! Suddenly Magi... ..!]

Before the words were even finished.

Coo!

Suddenly, a large shock wave occurred and the entire carriage shook.

'what?'

Surprised, Seongjin quickly opened the carriage door and jumped out, only to find Martha and Lord Valerie running towards him.

"Lowering! "Get out of the way first!"

"Lord Martha? "What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know either! "It looks like something happened at the top of the mill!"

Milo top?

Then Sir Valerie added from the side.

"Something is unusual, sir! I wonder if the sudden explosive increase in demonic energy means that a demon has been summoned... ... !"

It was right then.

Wow!

From somewhere, a sharp and strange sound rang out, shaking the cool night air.

It was like the screams of something that was clearly not a person, but something that had gone wrong, wailing from the depths of hell.

While everyone in the camp was scared and holding their breath.

Kaaaaaa!

That ominous sound was heard again. It was clearly the direction where the top of Milo was located.

"Lord... ... !"

Masain, whose mouth was open in a daze, muttered with a pale face.

"I knew it would be like this! "For some reason, it has been very quiet for a few days."

Then, he turned to Seongjin, who was listening to the sound with an expression full of curiosity, and asked this!

"So, what did you do this time, sir?"

"... "What?"

Seongjin was greatly taken aback by that sudden question.

no! I am wronged, Sir Masaine!

This time I really didn't do anything! Really!

185. Penitence (2)

The campsite, where I was just about to fall asleep, suddenly became brightly lit with torches.

Suddenly, with Seongjin's group at the center, Orden, the Wolf Knights, and even the bard Laurent were gathered together in a circle.

"Has the cause been determined, Lord Ilma?"

"The scouts just returned, Archduke. According to reports, it appears that a demon was summoned from the top of Milo."

"... devil?"

"yes. I saw a monster radiating black magical energy. It looks just like a tree, but it twitches and grabs people and horses at random. "It is said that most of the top of the mill has already been rolled up."

Orden frowned.

I was suspicious of his ties to the Dark Church, but he summoned a demon out of nowhere?

"I don't think it was what the Milo merchant intended."

Seongjin, who guessed what Orden was thinking, opened his mouth.

"No matter how much you think about it, there's no reason for that. "If a commercial transaction is canceled, the person who suffers the greatest loss is the commercial owner himself."

"Maybe he realized we were investigating him? Was it an attempt to destroy evidence and witnesses at once?"

what? Did you really think this was being investigated in secret?

Also, why are you destroying evidence like this? It's not clear if we'll get caught up in it, but you're replacing your top in this awkward position?

Seongjin was dumbfounded, but unfortunately, there was no time to give him a face. Suddenly, in the darkness outside the camp, someone staggered towards them.

"Do, help... ... !"

Seongjin immediately recognized his pale face. He was a mercenary from the Milo Sangdan side who had been with him on his recent 10-day journey and had become familiar with him, knowingly or unknowingly.

He had a lot of thick tree branch-like things wrapped around his body, and black demonic energy was constantly flowing out from there.

"Please save me... ... !"

As the mercenary fell down in front of the camp, unable to speak, Edith reflexively tried to run towards him. Although of course her Sungjin and Sir Valery caught her at the same time.

just as expected.

Wow.

The mercenary's writhing body seemed to turn black, then shriveled up in an instant. It was erosion of the body by demonic energy.

Seongjin naturally couldn't help but think of Director Collins, who died at the logistics relay station.

'Is the author also a devil contractor?'

[No, Seongjin Lee. That's just a phenomenon that occurs due to exposure to highly concentrated demonic energy.]

The devil bastard answered.

[Now do you realize how dangerous Magi is? If you are an ordinary human without divine power, you will instantly end up like that just by touching the demonic energy.]

There was a reason why Schmidt was so embarrassed when he saw Seongjin, who was still fine even after opening the list of demons emitting poisonous magical energy.

'Is Dasha going to be okay?'

Anyway, I was most worried about the safety of Dasha, who had infiltrated the Milo upper level.

Of course, since he is a capable person, I think there is a high possibility that he would have retired in time.

Considering that there has been no report to Seongjin despite such a big incident, it seems like it really was an incident that happened suddenly and without any warning.

"Grand Duke, what will you do now?"

Lord Ilmar asked Orden.

Although the Wolf Knights were skilled demon beast hunters, they were not paladins, so they were naturally vulnerable to demonic energy.

Not only has he never faced a demon species without the help of a battle priest, but the few battle priests currently remain in the Sigismund Territory.

Orden thought for a moment, but made a quick decision.

"If something was wrong and an unexpected attack was made on the upper level, then as a subject of Delcross, I couldn't just sit back and watch."

Even if it is the work of Milo, who is suspected of being in collusion with the Dark Church.

Moreover, this road is the only passage leading to Sigismund Land. If the rumor spreads that the upper class was wiped out due to an attack by a demonic species, the remote territory may become completely isolated.

He gave instructions quickly.

"We are dividing the workforce a little. "I will leave two knights to guard you and two knights to protect the non-combat personnel, and the rest will follow me with Lord Ilma."

At those words, all of the Wolf Knights begin to move in unison.

However, despite their quick movements, there was a heavy tension that could not be hidden on the faces of the knights facing an unfavorable battle.

Meanwhile, Orden came in front of Seongjin and bowed his head.

"Sir, please allow me to receive help from the Holy Knights of the Monster Task Force."

This means that instead of leaving behind two knights from the Wolf Knights, they will borrow the paladins Sir Valery and Sir Sharon.

"hmm..."

Seongjin thought for a moment.

There are only two knights, but if you add the permanent knights that Seongjin has with him, the distributed power cannot be ignored.

Above all, along with the leader, Sir Ilma, the strongest person in the group is Sir Masain. He would definitely not want to be away from Seongjin for even a moment.

"How about we all just go together?"

four?

Seongjin spoke naturally as the eyes of those around him widened.

"If something goes wrong with you, isn't it difficult to guarantee that I too will be able to escape safely? In that case, let's not spread the personnel out for no reason from the beginning."

"Well, sir... .."

"And I don't know if you know, but Lord Massaine and I have a relic. Now that there is a shortage of priests and paladins, I think the two of us are quite important forces."

Although it is a fact that I only learned relatively recently, it is said that objects carried by a saint for a long time have the status of sacred relics.

However, this does not mean that physical power becomes significantly stronger or that divine power suddenly emerges.

It's just that high-quality weapons can sometimes cut things that ordinary weapons can't.

Lord Massain's sword, Misra, was a good example.

It is said that after the 7th Holy Emperor, who was excellent at martial arts, wore it, it was given to the leader of the Holy Knights on two occasions, and was later officially recognized as a sacred relic.

According to the story, it is one of the legendary weapons made by melting down the spear of the main god that sealed the demon dragon in the beginning.

And nutcrackers. This sword is, without a doubt, the strongest relic.

Although this may seem a bit unsightly at first glance, isn't it something that the representative of a living god has carried around for half his life?

Above all, there was an important reason that Seongjin had to follow them that he could not bear to mention.

'If the devil continues to emit that kind of magical energy, I may be the only one who can come close to him.'

I don't know if it was because he was already dead or because he was an evil spirit, but in any case, Seongjin seemed to have something similar to immunity to demonic energy.

In that case, the way to minimize unnecessary damage would be to take the lead from the beginning.

"However, the safety of the ship is more important than anything else."

As Orden said that, he glanced behind Seongjin.

However, strangely enough, Masain, who seemed to be the first to object, was standing behind Seongjin with his mouth tightly shut and holding Misra.

In reality, the person who dissuaded Seongjin was the wrong person.

"Sir, just a moment... .."

Sir Sharon spoke to Seongjin with a somewhat frustrated expression.

"It's okay if it's just for a little while, so could you please wait in a safe place for a while?"

And she came closer to Seongjin and whispered softly.

"Huh, it seems like a [gap] has opened up in the imperial palace at times like this. "I cannot contact you right now, so please wait at least until His Majesty returns."

Unfortunately, it was said that it would not be possible to make a success as easily as before. That was probably why he seemed busy and left without saying anything.

Seongjin sighed.

"Lord Sharon. I appreciate your concern, but we have to deal with the task ahead of us. How long do you plan to depend on your father for everything?"

What on earth does everyone think of that guy? From where to where

does he have to look?

Seonghwang is just a human being who lives diligently, pressed for time all day, and is not really a god who transcends time.

"... .."

Sir Sharon closed her mouth in surprise at Seongjin's words.

"If it's a matter of my safety, don't worry. I won't do anything that would make my father worry. It's just that we don't have the luxury of dispersing our power. "I have no intention of going out and doing something dangerous for no reason."

And Seongjin raised his head and spoke to the people gathered around him.

"If we can't leave the devil alone anyway, let's face it with the best force we can muster. If you decide that it won't work, you can all retreat together and request support. I will not seek your own safety, nor will I force you to do something that is beyond your capabilities. "We just have to do what we can."

A slight look of relief appeared on the faces of the group, which had been stiff since the mercenary died from demonic energy.

The fact that they had to face a strong demon race did not change, but there was still something about the prince's words that put people at ease.

"Non-combat personnel remain here. As instructed by the Archduke, find a safe place with the two knights. "The rest of us are heading to the top of Milo with me."

Seongjin glanced at the people listening to him and then spoke briefly.

"Come on, let's go."

As Seongjin walks away holding the nutcracker, the group, including Sir Martha and Leader Bruno, quietly follow him.

Also, although he was not conscious of it, the Wolf Knights, led by Orden, were also naturally following in the prince's footsteps.

"I couldn't find a single doubt in his eyes. "I lift up my sword and lead it to where it should go, so who would dare oppose it?"

Laurent, who remained at the camp and watched the scene, unconsciously muttered and flicked the strings of the lyre.

* * *

Kiiiiiii!

There was a huge tree wriggling in the middle of the upper camp.

At first I thought it looked like an oak tree in the middle of winter with all its leaves falling off.

But while I was surprised and thought, "Ah," the trunk grew thicker, and the branching branches wriggled like snakes and swallowed everything living around them.

What looked like cracked tree bark from a distance were actually writhing tree trunks tangled together.

Between the twisted stems, black, ominous magic blooms in full bloom. Those touched by this terrible demonic energy instantly withered and were now swaying, tied to tree branches like fish on a string.

'Is it too late!'

Giacomo Milo, who was looking down at the Magic Tree from a hill far away, clicked his tongue when he saw the huge tree that had already filled the camp and stretched towards the sky.

It was extremely painful to watch the horses and numerous wagons that he had worked for a long time being destroyed in vain.

'In this case, I'm borrowing his power from the beginning... ... '

I regretted it, but it was already too late.

Immediately after the cedar trees began to sprout.

Only Giacomo managed to escape in time by using the power of Salos from the tree of the demon world that was quickly devouring the surrounding area.

And that was all he could do.

[It's already late. Giacomo.]

Salos lamented in his head.

[There is no way to stop it before it sprouts. That cursed tree attracts not only human life but also the demonic energy of demons and uses it as nourishment.]

In other words, there is nothing that cannot be done to deal with the Demon Beast, but Salos also cannot avoid losing some power.

And he had no intention of taking such a loss for the sake of the person with whom he had merely exchanged a contract.

"Then what should I do with that magic tree, Salos?"

If it continues to grow like this, wouldn't that tree alone be able to devour the continent?

[I will stop at an appropriate line. When it exceeds a certain size, the amount of absorption of each other by the stems of the Demon Tree also increases, so it cannot spread with the same momentum as the first time. However, it will only grow to the size of a city.]

In other words, it is inevitable that this entire area will be completely destroyed.

[Maybe the success will appear before then.]

In either case, it was out of Giacomo's hands.

As I was giving up, I saw a group of armed troops carrying torches approaching from the other side. It was the Wolf Knights and the prince's party.

'Are you planning on dealing with that terrifying figure while staring at it?'

I know that the Wolf Knights are strong, but that's only when dealing with regular armies or demon beasts.

'How can they, who are not even Holy Knights, deal with a Demonic Beast that is so full of demonic energy?'

Giacomo, who had been observing them so comfortably, was momentarily startled.

This is because it felt as if Prince Mores was looking straight in his direction for a moment.

'... ... !'

Is it an illusion?

As the prince turned his gaze towards the Demon Count again, Giacomo tilted his head in silence.

[Hoo?]

At that time, Salos opened his mouth as if he was amused.

[I didn't expect this. Maybe they too have a chance of victory.]

'What are the odds?'

[They have a holy relic!]

At that time, the demon tree seemed to sense the vitality of the creature, and quickly stretched out a thick branch towards the prince and his group.

And the next moment.

Hiss!

A faint golden aura seemed to emerge from the prince's group.

Kuaang!

It cut off all the branches extending out and caused a strong explosion on one side of the Demon Tree's body.

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186. Penitence (3)

Although Seongjin managed to persuade the group to move, he couldn't hide his embarrassment as he walked.

Thinking about it again, it wasn't a very smooth incitement, and the statement that he wouldn't do anything dangerous was also a lie that would soon be discovered.

The reason he decided to follow the Wolf Knights in the first place was because he judged that it would be most efficient for him, who was fine even after being exposed to demonic energy, to step forward.

It was probably the same for the demon lord, who scolded Seongjin in various ways throughout the trip.

[Who do you mean you don't depend on? When your subordinate went over earlier, you were shocked and looked for your father.]

Uh, okay. There was that too.

'... No, but at the time, I really thought I had killed Sir Calmen!'

Seongjin scratched his cheek, recalling the strange sensation he felt earlier. Strangely, at that time, I had a strong feeling that Lord Calmen was going to die at any moment.

I was clearly thinking that the amount of impact had been carefully controlled, but it was a bit creepy that he suddenly rolled his eyes over an insignificant blow.

'Still, it doesn't change the fact that we do what we can on our own.'

Seongjin thought as he habitually stroked the characteristic metal

grooves on the nutcracker.

Although we cannot save people who are dying like Seonghwang did.

At least Seongjin was confident that he could fight the enemy in front of him until he died. Just doing it on his own would save his father a little bit of work.

And that guy is now in the [gap]? Then, even if you come out, you will still get severe motion sickness, so I tell you not to worry about this place and just get some rest.

Then the demon king sighed as if the earth was falling apart.

[Ugh. Doesn't your father become more anxious because you act like that every time? What do you mean, fighting until death?]

'Oh, it's noisy!'

Seongjin and his group quickly arrived at their destination.

There wasn't much to look for. No matter how small it was, the huge tree was at least 15 meters tall and had already covered the entire campsite where the top was, spreading out its thick roots in all directions.

Kyaaa!

Caw!

The screaming sound that I thought was the scream of something was actually the noise made by living, wriggling tree branches rubbing against each other.

Above all, that strong magic energy.

The black magical energy emitted from the tree was so thick that the pitch-black haze was clearly visible even under the dark night sky.

"Where are all the people at the top...""

The group first looked to see if there were any survivors, but were

soon horrified to realize that the things hanging and shaking from the tree were not fruits but shriveled corpses.

"Ouch!"

Several young knights are disgusted.

It has to be that way. At that grotesque scene, even Lord Ilma, who was quite experienced in subjugating demonic beasts, felt completely appalled for a moment.

It was ironic that Prince Mores, the youngest of the group, was the one who maintained the calmest attitude.

'How can someone who grew up in the imperial palace be so calm?'

Even Sir Martha has a grumpy look on his face.

Looking at the gray eyes that showed no signs of agitation, Sir Ilma was quite impressed.

'Are you really trying to avoid showing that you have lost your composure as a superior? As expected, he is very different from the rumors!'

Of course, contrary to her illusion, Seongjin was actually busy looking for Dasha among the corpses.

'... First of all, I don't think there are any of these.'

Seongjin quickly scanned the area around the tree and was relieved to see that there was no body that looked like Dasha among them.

and.

'There is another survivor.'

It seems like everyone was so caught up in that strange tree that they didn't notice it. Far away on a hill, an ordinary person who had no Auror training was hiding and watching.

Seongjin strengthened his eyesight with aura and confirmed his

appearance with his own eyes.

'Giacomo Milo.'

Did he survive alone? In this situation, you didn't manage to summon the devil you had contracted with.

Should I call this cautious or timid?

In order to find out what happened, we need to catch that guy and kill him, but the priority would be to do something about the tree that is growing so well in front of us.

"Does anyone know anything about that demon species?"

In response to Seongjin's question, everyone in the group focuses their attention on Sir Sharon and Sir Valerie.

"To be honest, I've never seen anything like that, not even in 'Apocalypse Now.' "It looks exactly like a plant, but I doubt it's a devil species."

Sir Valerie answered with a perplexed expression.

"Of course, there is no doubt that that terrible energy is the devil's energy."

At that time, Sir Sharon looked into space with blank eyes and began to mutter.

"... Tree of the Demon World... . A weapon hidden by the remnants of Penance... . The essence of penance..."

At first glance, rather than explaining the tree, it looks closer to being driven out of one's mind by a terrible sight.

While the group was paying attention to her with worried eyes, Director Bruno secretly pursed his lips at Seongjin.

'I'm channeling Arenja.'

aha. You're requesting data from the server.

And after a while, Sir Sharon regained focus in her eyes and opened her mouth.

"... after. Since history, there have been two sighting reports of that tree. It is said that of these, only one subjugation record remains."

Sir Sharon quickly poured out an explanation in her characteristic thin voice.

The official name of the tree is [Demon Tree].

However, because both times the trees were released into Delcross were the actions of the Church of Penitence, the name [Penitence Tree] is added in the records.

According to the classification standards of the Orthodox Church, in principle, it corresponds to type 4 of other devil species, but the rules of engagement are said to be similar to type 1 devil species. This is because although it is slow, it moves similar to type 1.

"It is said that at that time, His Majesty the 5th Holy Emperor, 18 Holy Knights, 20 Knights of the Royal Guard, and 16 Battle Priests participated and fought in a Granus type 1 defensive formation. They react sensitively even to weak divine power, so if they receive the blessing properly, even ordinary knights..."

It was then.

The tree that was just writhing in place suddenly began to move towards Seongjin and his group.

Even though the distance was quite wide, the tree, which gradually grew in size, had already reached a distance where it could detect the group.

Squirt!

Seongjin raised his hand to the nutcracker as he saw the thick tree branch flying from the front. The intention was to wait for it to reach the front and cut it down at once.

Hiss!

The golden sword that was pulled out from the side first swung wide, shooting out a long trail of moonlight. It was Lord Masaine.

'... 'Auror explosion?'

The faint lingering moon violently split the flying branches and reached the tree trunk.

and.

Kuaang!

It causes a very strong explosion, shaking the entire tree trunk strongly. A strong wind blew around the campsite.

Hwiiiiii-

The impact was so strong that the part of the corpse that was hanging fell helplessly to the floor and broke apart with a crunching sound.

The tree suddenly stopped moving, as if it had been electrocuted, and made an unpleasant grinding noise.

"... ..!"

The entire group looks at him with wide eyes, and Masain, who has overpowered the ship with a strong preemptive attack, asks with a determined look on his face, as if he has decided on something.

"... "Are you going to hold it like this, sir?"

"... .."

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

Since it was impossible to control this gentleman, probably Seongjin, he seemed to have decided to take the initiative himself.

Seongjin nodded, thinking that this was truly his attitude.

"okay. Lord Masaine."

Compared to the previous record that Sir Sharon had mentioned, the

current power seemed to be completely insufficient.

Seongjin and Masain. 15 members of the Wolf Knights including Orden, leader Bruno and 3 resident knights. And two holy knights from the monster task force.

But still.

'... Somehow I feel like I can do it.'

Seongjin looked around at the group with such a strong premonition.

Even when I was on Earth, in the early days of the Gate incident, it was common to encounter monsters I had never seen before. And every time, Seongjin's intuition was always accurate.

When they felt like they had to retreat, they suffered damage that was close to annihilation, and when they decided that something would work out, many of them survived even after the struggle.

And in this guy's case.

'Perhaps without much damage... ... !'

Has Seongjin's confidence been conveyed?

Orden, who stared at him for a moment, soon turned his head and gave instructions to Sir Ilma.

"leader. We cannot carry out the divine design with our full power now. But the fact that there are no other records means that there may be numerous separate solutions."

"Yes, Grand Duke. "First, let's search for him by hitting and running."

Sir Ilma, who answered like that, shouted to all of the Wolf Knights.

"Everyone spread out and surround him! Everyone, think about dealing with the Glatzer Troll! "This demon may be huge, but it's definitely not faster than that damn ice monster!"

As soon as familiar instructions are given, anxiety disappears in an

instant.

Even so, the eyes of the knights, highly exalted by Masaine's aura explosion, sparkled with faint excitement.

"The trick to blocking demonic energy is the same as its coldness! "It's not harmful as long as it doesn't touch the body, so hold on and block it with your aura as much as possible!"

Then Sir Valerie waved from behind.

"Now, if you're anxious, I'll bless you one more time, so come over here!"

Then the knights scattered in all directions, laughing loudly.

"The Inquisitor is also very talkative."

"... yes? What?"

"So, who are you telling me to scare?"

"Huh?"

"They must have made fun of me because I was a coward who couldn't take a single step without a blessing! "I guess this should be seen as a challenge to the Wolf Knights, right?"

"... no?"

As they gradually recovered from the shock and dodged and cut down the tree trunk that began to squirm, the knights even showed the leisure to make lame jokes.

Among all of this, the one that stood out was definitely Sir Ilma.

Unlike the knights who stepped back from a distance and cut down branches step by step to avoid the magical energy from reaching them, she fearlessly ran close to the tree trunk, creating a sword screen wide enough to cover half of her body.

Of course, there was nothing to lightly trim the tree trunks that flew

in from time to time. and.

Whick!

She easily rode over the huge root flying in front of her on her back as if performing a trick, and used the momentum to cut into the exact center of the tree trunk.

Pow!

From the deep wound, black magic energy pours out like blood.

Sir Ilma, who quickly backed away from the explosive eruption of demonic energy, kicked a knight who had lost his balance on the violently shaking ground and sent him flying far away. At the same time, he cuts off the tree branch chasing him.

Wow.

Seongjin was impressed as he brandished the nutcracker.

'Lord Ilma. 'Somehow, you've gone too far in fighting while taking care of your junior knights?'

Orden Sigismund's performance also stood out.

The beautiful movement of a sword that swings, bends at a strange angle, and extends forward. Seongjin recognized that movement right away.

A variation of the Banajas 3 formula that Sisley once admired and imitated. And the power was just as the little boy said.

Boom!

A thick tree root, almost as thick as the pillars of the Bastian Church, exploded at once, scattering hundreds or thousands of pieces of wood.

Seongjin suddenly thought that one day he would like to see with his own eyes the scene where the Wolf Knights take on the Glacher Troll.

"You must not look away, sir! "The demon energy is getting stronger."

Sigh!

Masaan warned, cutting down two flying branches at once.

As the saying goes, just cutting down trees wasn't the end. The tree, which had wounds here and there, began to wriggle and ooze even stronger magical energy than before.

Kiyi!

Meanwhile, new branches growing from below were filling up the wounds more tightly, making an unpleasant friction sound.

'... 'There's no end to this, right?'

Seongjin thought as he took a step back with Masain.

The tree seemed to have stopped rapidly expanding its territory, but it was still growing little by little by adding new branches.

On the other hand, the movement of the knights was increasingly restricted. The more trees were cut down, the more polluted the air became with the released demonic energy.

'Besides, this place will become more and more tiring. If we don't think of another way before that... ... '

At that time, the Demon King called Seongjin.

[Lee Seong-jin.]

'huh?'

[I remember once hearing that in order to eliminate the ever-growing Demon Tree, the growth core, its source, must be completely separated.]

... what?

Seongjin asked, rolling to the side to avoid a branch falling from above.

'Is that a similar concept to the monster's core?'

[Well, it might be similar in function.]

Quaaaang! The tree branch that barely grazed Seongjin returned to its trunk, clawing deeply on the dirt floor.

Seongjin asked, getting up and running backwards.

'But why are you telling me that important thing now?'

[I wasn't sure because I had only heard about it through hearsay! I've never actually seen the Demon Tree!]

The Demon King protested as if it were unfair.

[So, just in case, I have carefully looked at the entire Demon Tree. I was wondering if growth nuclei could be seen.]

So, what I mean is that we're talking about that now.

'So you found that core?'

[Yes, probably. Inside the tree, there is a part where the demon energy is particularly pulsating and shining brightly.]

'So where is it?'

Then the Demon King hesitated for a moment and answered.

[At the very top of the Demon Tree...]

'uh...'

Seongjin looked blank for a moment, looking up at the distant Demon World tree, which was now well over 20 meters away.

No, how on earth do you get up there?

'... Are you sure?'

[I'm not sure. But no matter how much I look, there's nothing special about other places, so it's probably right.]

Okay.

Seongjin let out a low groan, but there was no time to think about it any more. Meanwhile, the height of the tree was soaring upward in real time!

'Let's try something first!'

Nettle -

Just then, a branch as thick as a log came flying from the front, and Seongjin concentrated his concentration as he gathered auras on his legs.

And before Sir Masaine could even cut it down.

Paang!

He kicked off the ground and jumped up as high up the branch as possible.

"... Lowering!"

Leaving behind Masain's cry of astonishment.

Crash!

Seongjin began to run without hesitation over the branches full of black magic energy.

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187. Penitence (4)

"... Lowering!"

Suddenly, at the sound of Sir Masaine crying out, the knights who were struggling with the branches all turned their heads in the direction of the sound.

"... .. ?!"

And they saw a sight they had never dreamed of.

Prince Mores was running on the magic tree.

Cutting and dodging branches flying from here and there. Occasionally, when a branch at an appropriate height flies in, it jumps up and jumps across the branch to show off its skills.

The sight was extremely unrealistic, like watching a squirrel climbing a tree at high speed.

That wasn't the only surprise. Isn't the prince fearlessly wandering through the fog of black demonic energy that is reluctant to even touch his body for a moment?

"That crazy... .. !"

Kalmen, whose mouth was wide open, unconsciously let out a rude curse, but this time no one blamed him.

Because no one had any disagreement that what the prince was doing was truly crazy.

"What on earth is that!"

Lord Ilma, who had become thoughtful, hurriedly tried to chase after the prince.

However, she could only move from branch to branch a couple of times at most. Even though she was able to jump a much higher distance than the prince in one go, thanks to her Auror skills that were close to those of Dekaron Knight.

And it was the same for Masain, who immediately ran under the tree trunk.

Not only was it difficult to move on a tree that was shaking violently, but there was not always a branch in the right position to be the next stepping stone.

Is that all? I had to avoid attacks coming at me randomly from all directions, and I had to pay close attention not to be exposed to magic energy for too long.

In the end, the two gave up climbing any further and had no choice but to look worriedly at the prince, who had already climbed halfway up the tree.

Sir Ilma mutters.

"How can you move like that? Should I call that amazing... .."

I couldn't even think of making a harsh attack like an Aura explosion, in case I lost my footing due to the shock. Masain neatly cut off the flying branch with his Misra, and looked anxiously at the sight of the prince who was now far away.

"Lowering... .."

Meanwhile, in Seongjin's head, the devil was freaking out and going crazy.

[Hey, Seongjin Lee! What should I do if they keep doing this!]

'Well then, what should I do? 'There's nothing you can do from far away, right?'

Seongjin responded with a sullen expression and jumped onto a branch flying from the side at just the right time.

Tuk.

Then the branch shook like a wave and tried to shake off Seongjin.

Although the ground beneath my feet shook violently. After sliding down for a while, splitting his branch with a nutcracker, Seongjin kicked his feet and jumped onto the next branch before he completely lost his balance.

Paang.

And the moment I landed, I reflexively lowered my head due to an eerie feeling.

Squirt!

A branch flew at incredible speed from behind and passed by my head. Not only are the attacks coming from the tree, but the branches that are returned to the main body are also targeting Seongjin.

"... Phew."

Seongjin let out the breath he had been holding.

It's a situation where you really can't relax even for a moment.

Cold sweat is running down my back, dopamine and adrenaline are pouring out of my body, and the corners of my mouth slowly turn up even though I'm not very happy.

but.

'... It's worth it.'

Branches were constantly flying in all directions, but in the end, each and every one of them was just the movement of an extremely instinctive creature.

Without using fakes or looking ahead like a human would, just

straight-up physical force aimed at the target.

There are no situations where the timing and damage range must be varied, such as chemicals spewed out by monsters or sonic attacks.

If so, the movement route that needs to be calculated becomes even simpler. Of course, if we had to take into account the magical energy emitted by the tree, it would have been a little more difficult.

Kiyi!

The movement of the demon beast becomes faster and rougher. However, Seongjin also gradually expanded his vision and awareness, and his forgotten sense of the past began to revive little by little.

A branch that passes by like a sword, a branch that strikes from above like a hammer, and a branch that flies by scratching the air like a whip.

Seongjin continued to run upward, upward, without missing the short gap and momentary connection that these things created as they intertwined and intersected.

However, after a while, the smooth climb finally reached a crisis when it reached the halfway point of the Magic Tree.

Unlike the lower branches that move actively up and down, the branches that move relatively downwards from above did not give Seongjin time to move up.

As a result, the speed gradually slowed down, and the number of times exposure to attacks inevitably increased.

'If I had known something like this would happen, would I have learned archery a long time ago?'

For a moment, I felt that kind of regret.

Well, even if I had learned it, I doubt I would have been able to hit an invisible target.

'There is no other way. All I can do is get as close as possible and cut

it down!'

Kwasik!

Seongjin, who hit a nutcracker with all his might into a tree branch that came flying by, hung on to his sword and floated upwards along with the branch.

And it's good. It fell off the twisting branch, making a strange sound, and began free falling for a while.

"Lowering!"

A frightened cry can be heard from below.

Oh, I'm sorry for worrying you, Lord Masaine.

It won't take long though.

Phew.

Seongjin, who managed to get his sword into a branch that was hitting from the side, concentrated a lot of aura on his arms to hang on to the shaking branch.

Crunchy.

Suddenly, an eerie sound came out of my overused arm.

'... If I do this just a little bit wrong, my joints will hurt, right?'

Seongjin gritted his teeth and held on, pulling out the nutcracker just as the branch bounced diagonally and rising into the air again.

"Tsk!"

While he was floating defenseless in the air, a branch struck him.

However, Seongjin, who prepared for the impact and concentrated his aura, swung his sword against the branch and used the force of the blow to lift his body even further.

And before his body was completely thrown off, he managed to

pierce the nutcracker into another branch.

The result was a more intense rodeo. As it was pushed to the periphery, a terrifying fall occurred every time the branch shook.

'I can't last long here. 'We have to get up there as quickly as possible.'

After performing such breathtaking acrobatics several times in succession.

After passing 3/4 of the magic tree, Seongjin was able to see the branches extending upward again.

Seongjin was relieved as he put his legs down on a branch that, although precarious, could barely stand on. Although my overworked legs were still painful, it was true that I felt much more comfortable than when I had to endure all the impact with both arms.

However, as the movement of the body became easier, the black magic energy blooming from the top of the Demon Tree also became more dense, so Seongjin had to be a little more careful in moving from branch to branch.

'Where is that growth nucleus?'

Seongjin, who had barely reached what could be called the top, asked the Demon King.

[It's the eggplant in the exact center. The top of the branch growing upwards!]

A branch in the exact center.

Seongjin was impressed when he heard the answer. An unexpected problem arose.

'Even if it's the central branch, it's not visible to the eye?'

So, the top center of the Demon Tree was surrounded by a black cloud made of dark demonic energy, so nothing could be distinguished.

[Magic energy seems to come out concentrated in the center of the growth core. So wouldn't it be a good idea to aim for the center of the Magi?]

'What is the size of the nucleus?'

[It looks like it's about the size of your fist.]

Seongjin looked at the clouds, which were at least 2 meters in radius, with a slightly embarrassed face.

No matter where you aim and stab, there seems to be a higher chance of missing.

'I have no choice but to keep swinging the sword at random until I cut out the core...'

As we got closer to the center, the attacks from the tree branches became less frequent, probably because the tree's structure made it easy to extend branches outward.

Seongjin moved his body more leisurely and approached the center in a circle.

and.

Wedge!

Seizing the opportunity, he flew into the clouds and unleashed Banajas Type 2, which boasts the widest horizontal slash range.

Huh.

The air in the area where the nutcracker touches becomes extremely thin, and a temporary disconnection of magical energy occurs.

[this! It's a little lower than there!]

As we came out of the cloud, the demon lord cried out as if he was disappointed.

Seongjin asked as he cut down a branch that was flying towards him.

'How far off did we miss?'

[The location is somewhat close. But you have to go at least one head further down from there!]

Something is ambiguous.

Seongjin moved from branch to branch and measured the location of the core once again.

If possible, wouldn't it be better to aim a bit downwards?

And the second time he dived towards the center.

Seongjin came out of the cloud with a disappointed look on his face, feeling a slightly dull taste in his hands.

[...] ah! Slightly wrong! The wind brushed at a slight diagonal, so I missed the branch!]

The Demon King sighed.

And that moment.

Pow!

A branch that flew through the clouds without his knowledge hit Seongjin violently. The failure was that I was so busy trying to get out of the cloud that I couldn't find the branch.

He reflexively blocked the attack with a nutcracker, but Seongjin's body had already bounced a long way from the tree.

[Lee Seong-jin!]

The body falls at an incredible speed.

Seongjin quickly opened his eyes and looked for a tree branch nearby that he could stand on, but he couldn't find it at all.

'Uh... ... !'

The problem was that the attacks of the tree branches became less

frequent, perhaps because they realized that Seongjin, who had been thrown away, had been completely defeated.

Since there is no attack, there is no foothold to stand on!

'If you're unlucky, you could die?'

Seongjin fell headfirst and clicked his tongue.

From a height of more than an 8-story building, it wasn't even a free fall, but a powerful downward fall!

Seongjin tried to protect his head and neck with Aura as much as possible, and looked at the floor during the short time he fell.

If there was a technique like Aura Burst, it would have been possible to reduce the speed a little just by throwing a downward attack.

Seongjin, who was thinking like that, suddenly discovered something below and was frightened.

It was Lord Masain who ran towards Seongjin without even thinking about avoiding the demon.

"Uh oh, get out of the way! Sir Masaine!"

If we collide at this speed, we'll both die!

Wouldn't it be better to try a failed method, whether it works or not?

However, that stubborn knight did not even pretend to listen, but settled down at the landing spot and opened his arms towards Seongjin.

'... 'Holy shit!'

Seongjin had no choice but to load the nutcracker with Auror and violently throw it to the floor. Hoping that the recoil from throwing the sword would reduce the speed a little.

Quang!

The sword loaded with aura was deeply embedded in the dirt floor.

"this!"

From over there, Director Bruno extends his hand toward Seongjin.

Whiing.

A small wind blowing from the leader wrapped around Seongjin's body.

Dekaron Knight's Aura materialization. However, the aura was too weak to slow down the falling boy.

'... Crash!'

Seongjin closed his eyes tightly, anticipating Masain's gruesome injury.

But at that moment.

Phew!

For some reason, Seongjin's body suddenly felt like it was rising upward.

'... ... ?'

However, the surprise was short-lived as Seongjin and Masain fell to the floor with a great shock.

Craddangtangtang!

"Lowering!"

"Lord Martha!"

Leader Bruno and the Wolf Knights came running in fright.

"Are you okay, sir?"

"Lowering!"

sparkle. As soon as Seongjin opened her eyes, she immediately stood up.

"Lord Martha!"

I was a little dizzy from the shock, but even though I fell from that high up, there wasn't a single broken spot.

Surprisingly, Lord Masain received the Holy Spirit just right!

Even Lord Masaine seemed to have no special injuries. It seemed like she got a mild concussion from falling behind her and hitting her head on the floor.

Seongjin inwardly clicked his tongue at this miraculous situation.

"Okay."

Masain, who got up fine, rubbed the back of his head and groaned.

"I never thought practicing booming as a child would help in times like this... .."

Buong practice? What is it?

Anyway, Seongjin quickly got up and started nagging Masain.

"Have you decided to die now, Lord Martha? Assuming you got caught up in the fall! Also, why are you treating Magi so carelessly? "Are you out of your mind now?"

Then Masain's face suddenly distorted.

Seongjin is startled by his increasing ferocity, and for the first time in a long time, Masain yells at Seongjin! He shouted.

"Now that you know that, are you rushing into a place full of demonic energy!? "Why on earth did you suddenly do something like that?"

"No, I..." .."

"I won't do anything dangerous! "Didn't you definitely say that?!"

Seongjin, slightly surprised by the unusual atmosphere, averted his gaze.

This time, Seongjin realized that he was angry to the core and made an excuse.

"I'm sorry for causing you worry. But Sir Masain! "There is the core of the Demon Tree at the top!"

"... "Nuclear?"

"Yes, I guess it's the driving force that keeps that tree growing."

Masain, who had already caught monsters with Seongjin on two occasions, quickly understood.

"So if you destroy it, you can catch the Demon Tree?"

Seeing his slightly softened attitude, Seongjin nodded enthusiastically.

"that's right. I almost cut it, but I narrowly missed it. I'm not like that for nothing! Really!"

"... .."

"We didn't have time to discuss it earlier. I won't do that arbitrarily anymore! Really sorry!"

When Seongjin came out in a completely low posture, Masain closed his eyes tightly and touched his forehead for a moment.

Then he took a deep sigh and asked:

"... "Then, how can I destroy that thing, sir?"

Oh, good. My anger is cooling down quickly.

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188. Penitence (5)

An extraordinary emergency meeting was held.

While the knights were keeping the roots of the Demon Tree in check, Seongjin discussed the strategy of conquering the Demon Tree with Masain, Leader Brno, Orden, and Lord Ilma.

"You didn't say anything like that before, did you?"

"You suddenly found out during the battle? How on earth... .."

When talking about the growth core, Orden and Sir Ilma ask, unable to hide their doubts.

Well, this is a common reaction.

Seongjin says, 'Ah, I see.' There was something strange about the palace people following me.

"His Majesty Mores has the ability to immediately see the weaknesses of something wrong. "That's why we had to recruit Hae Hae to the monster task force."

Masain spoke confidently, but the embarrassment did not disappear from the faces of the two people.

It's natural. There was no way they could trust the two people who had extensive experience in subjugating demonic beasts and said, 'The prince knows the weaknesses of evil when he looks at them.'

"I'm also concerned about the top of the tree. Isn't it strange that the magic energy is particularly dense at the top? This probably means that it is the center where demon energy is created, the most important part of the Demon Tree."

When Director Bruno, a former Dekaron Knight, also helped out from the side, the two men reluctantly agreed.

"Lord Masaine. What do you think of Kyeong's auror explosion? "Will it reach me?"

Seongjin asked, looking at the tree that now seemed to be nearly 30 meters tall.

"If you aim well, you will reach it. Of course, the vibration will be greatly weakened, making it difficult to demonstrate its power properly. only... .."

Masain explained that there are too many obstacles to overcome along the way.

The probability that an Aura blast fired from the ground would avoid all those countless tree branches flying at random would be almost zero.

"What about firing multiple shots?"

"It is possible a few times, but it is not a technique that can be performed in such a quick succession. I haven't fully mastered it yet, and I also need time to overlap sword names. "Maybe more branches will grow in the meantime."

I thought about taking turns firing them with Lord Ilma, but in the first place, Aura bombing was a popular technique in the imperial palace. Sir Ilma looked embarrassed, saying that he wouldn't be able to learn it all at once.

"The Wolf Knights also have knights who are skilled with bows. But no matter how much aura you put on the arrow, it would be impossible to pierce through so many branches at once."

"Of course, it's best to get as close to the top as possible and cut it down."

Masain frowned after coming to that conclusion.

"But for us, stunts like lowering were impossible. Sir Ilma and I have

tried many times... .."

"Right."

Seongjin answered like that and looked back at the tree.

'Of course, there would be a sure way for me to go up and cut it myself.'

But opportunities were limited. When I first climbed the tree, I felt like I was overdoing things by turning my Aura around too much.

You can try one more time, but if you don't get to the top and cut down another branch, you're in trouble.

If only I could have seen what the demon lord sees.

'... uh? for a moment.'

Seongjin blinked as a flash of thought passed through his mind.

I am definitely lending my sense of smell and taste to the devil bastard. But is this sharing of sensations truly one-sided?

When the Demon King first tried to connect his senses of taste, didn't I see something strange in my field of vision for a moment?

'Hey, devil!'

[huh?]

'Can you possibly connect the visuals with me?'

[What?]

'Wouldn't it be possible to share your perspective with me, like you do when eating, and show me what you see?'

Then the Demon King looked embarrassed and answered.

[...] Wait a minute, Seongjin Lee. That may be too sudden, but it will probably be difficult.]

'why?'

[First of all, there is no way for humans to experience the senses of a demon without being completely possessed. The dominant relationship between the senses is so clear. Moreover, this is a special case, so it is even more impossible. Because I do not have a body, there is no sense to share.]

'Then what are these things you see?'

[Strictly speaking, it is not 'seeing'. It's just something I can sense because I'm in a soul state. Maybe you will know when you die and become a soul? It is a 'spiritual eye' that living humans do not have.]

'hmm.'

I fully understood what the demon lord said.

But then, what was all that haze that Seongjin had seen before?

[It's probably because you're touching your senses and stimulating them incorrectly. Was it not temporary sensory confusion?]

The Demon King seemed to think nothing of it, but strangely enough, Seongjin was strangely confident that it was not just confusion.

Although it was only a brief glimpse, I felt like I was seeing something closer to the essence of things.

'If it's impossible for him, can't we try the reverse on my part?'

Somehow it seems possible...

Seongjin closed his mouth and tried to vividly recall the momentary sensation he felt at the time.

Strange lines carried by the wind, and a green haze shimmering over the swaying grass. The yellow and blue shadows that overlapped with people.

[uh? Seongjin Lee, what are you doing now? ... ?]

The demon king asked as if he was embarrassed, but Seongjin concentrated his consciousness even more and sank within himself. Then, the memories of that time begin to come back vividly, as if they were lies.

A tea cup that glowed blue and blue steam rising from it. A pink haze coming from the cold ground.

And, the bright shadows of the priests and paladins glowed exceptionally white.

Seongjin didn't realize it, but before he knew it, a faint red light that had never existed before was blinking in the center of his pupil.

[Lee Seong-jin?! What did you do now?]

While the Demon King was shocked, Seongjin raised his head and slowly looked around.

Then, a new scene filled with colorful and brilliant light, completely different from before, unfolded before my eyes.

Aside from the deep blue torches held by the knights, the dark night sky, devoid of any light, was covered in a soft red light.

Even in the air that was thought to be empty, there was a faint light.

There are only demons covering the Demon Tree. The evil energy was just writhing in an ominous black color without any color.

Seongjin remained in that state and observed the tree carefully.

Strangely, in the middle of the trunk of the magic tree, faint shadows that appeared to be human shapes were seen gathered together.

Although it was hard to tell from the outside, there was clearly an empty space at the bottom of the tree, and there must have been a living person left there. Of course, it was fading as if I would die soon.

The yellow light that gathered and spread out from them turned into one long line along the tree trunk and continued all the way to the

top.

And the exact center of the tree where the line of light ends. In the middle of black magic energy.

A round lump of light is visible, emitting bright light as if pulsating. Perhaps that is the growth core that the Demon King spoke of.

[this! How could this happen! A human without spiritual eyes can steal the devil's spiritual eyes so easily?]

The Demon Lord shouted in an almost panicked state.

However, there was no time to seriously explore this condition with him. My eyes were already tingling badly, and I was starting to get a strong headache from the back of my head.

'I don't think I can keep this up for long?'

Seongjin decided that way and declared to the Dajjagojja group.

"I'll go up this time too."

"yes?"

"Lowering! What on earth is that... ... !"

Masain, who was about to shout loudly, was shocked and stopped talking.

In the eyes of the prince, who was staring at the tree as if fascinated, a light that now felt very familiar was seen.

Silver-grey eyes that emit a strange light in the dark of night, as if they themselves are a light source. And an ominous red pupil that occasionally blinks within it.

"I don't have time to explain at length now. But if I go up this time, I will definitely be able to cut it down. So, I need you guys to help me so I can go up quickly."

Seongjin's confident words made the group look at him, speechless

for a moment.

The young prince was enveloped in a strange aura that was somehow different from usual. He was so overwhelmed by the atmosphere that he did not even dare to raise a different opinion, but the prince ordered his companions without any discomfort.

"Lord Masaine. Knock on the tree first with an Auror blast. Since the light's attack is very strong, it will probably be able to minimize the movement of the demon beast for a while."

"... .."

Masain did not answer readily, but Seongjin, who faced her slightly trembling eyes, was convinced. If he insists on doing it, he can never say no.

"Lord Ilma. If the Aura blast stops the tree, will you be able to raise me as high as possible? "In the beginning, I want to conserve Auror use as much as possible."

"... "Yes, sir."

Lord Ilma looked like he was struggling and answered reluctantly.

Originally, it was natural that the prince's safety should be prioritized above all else, but for some reason, it occurred to him that there would be no way to get rid of that demonic beast other than the method suggested by the prince.

"Grand Duke. leader. You two, along with the Wolf Knights, cover me from below. If the sword energy doesn't reach you, it would be okay to use arrows. "It's just that if I climb more than halfway up the tree, his attack itself becomes a stepping stone, so I don't need to provide any more cover than that."

"All right."

Orden nodded with a dull face.

After catching a glimpse of Manager Bruno, who was looking at him with meaningful eyes, Seongjin turned towards the Demon Lord.

"Okay then, shall we begin?"

My legs are heavy when I walk. My overworked shoulders and arms are feeling tingly and even mildly numb.

Above all, my whole body throbs from the shock I received from falling earlier.

Nevertheless.

Despite all these adverse conditions, Seongjin somehow felt confident that he would be able to move up more easily than before.

Because now before his eyes, previously unseen paths and new possibilities he could not even imagine were wide open.

Kuaaaaang!

An intense explosion caused by the explosion of all Auras.

The magic tree, whose base had burst open, trembled as if it had been electrocuted, and then stopped moving with a squeak sound.

"Now, sir! Lord Ilma!"

At Lord Masain's shout, Lord Ilma started jumping onto the magic tree while supporting Seongjin.

Whisper, thump!

Auror users on the 9th floor, close to Dekaron Knight.

Indeed, the difference in power was something that could not be ignored, and even with Seongjin in tow, she leapt to a position much higher than the distance Seongjin could run alone.

In that way, they broke through the bottom of the Demon Tree quite smoothly.

However, when he had just passed the first third of the tree, Sir Ilma's gallop faltered for the first time.

Although the movement of the demonic tree has not yet fully

recovered, the demonic energy that has been accumulating since before is surrounding it like a thick fog.

Seongjin glanced up and ordered her.

"Go back now, Sir Ilma."

"yes? Lowering! but... .."

"I'm fine, don't worry."

"... .."

Lord Ilma was a little hesitant, but soon agreed and lowered Seongjin onto the branch.

For some reason, I started thinking that it would be strangely difficult to refuse the prince's orders.

"Well then! Good luck!"

Sir Ilma shouted and fell down. Of course, he didn't forget to cut one of the thick branches into pieces as he went down.

Chiaaaa! Squeak!

The magic beast awakens from shock and begins to wriggle again. However, after tapping her foot a couple of times, Seongjin looked at the path clearly laid out before her in a relaxed manner.

okay. It's a path.

The movement of branches shooting up randomly, and the movement of branches bending like whips in all directions.

The possibilities implied by the countless movements become several distinct solid lines that are intertwined and unraveled, emitting a sparkling light.

After blinking his now burning eyes a couple of times, Seongjin started running along the path without hesitation.

Peeing! Hiss!

Every now and then, an arrow flies past the side and gets stuck violently in the branch attacking Seongjin. The branch was shocked, flinched, and then flew back, making the prediction even more difficult.

Seongjin's eyes were already following the arrow's entire path and the resulting consequences without missing a single detail.

When you step into a space where you think you can see branches like an illusion, new branches sprout up and fill the space without fail.

If you jump in thinking that the path is slightly different from the actual branch that flies, the arrows that were covering you will soon hit the branch and fit the path.

Running along the path in a trance, Seongjin couldn't tell whether he was predicting the path or deciding.

"... "How is such movement possible?"

The knights who were shooting arrows under the tree looked at the prince in fascination without realizing it.

It was amazing when he first climbed the tree. The movements the prince was making right now were so surprising that they were almost bizarre.

When he hangs on a wildly shaking branch and rises and falls, a new branch flies in its place as if waiting and pushes the prince upward and upward.

It literally felt like a ray of wind flowing naturally through the trees.

In that way, the prince instantly gained altitude and set foot on the top of the ever-growing Demon Tree.

[Lee Seong-jin! It's no longer possible!]

Seongjin, who had been following the path as if possessed, came to his senses when he heard the devil's desperate cries.

'huh?'

[Do you know? You're a little weird right now! My eyes are getting damaged!]

'uh... ... '

Only then did Seongjin sense the warm liquid flowing down his cheek.

'He said his vision had become a bit blurry for some reason.'

I thought it was because the magic energy had become darker, but maybe it was just the eyes themselves that were getting cold.

Not only that, but my mind wasn't normal either. The headache, which was not only painful but also hot, felt as if the nerves in the back of my head were gathered together and lit on fire.

'But it's almost over!'

Without losing his last concentration, Seongjin raised the nutcracker towards the round sphere shining in front of him.

Boom, boom, boom!

The growth core of the magic tree that emits light as if pulsating.

As if sensing the approaching danger, the demonic energy emanating from it became even stronger.

Whick!

With one light slash, the immovable target fell from the stem so vainly that it rose into the air.

Passsss.

The core instantly loses its light and breaks into pieces.

Kiiiiiii...

The branches that had lost their cores also twitched and twisted, then

shrunk and fell helplessly to the ground.

The ground under my feet suddenly became empty and I felt my body floating.

'Oh! yes!'

Come to think of it, I only thought about cutting this down and forgot about the escape route. If this guy doesn't attack, there won't be any foothold to stand on.

The air became empty for a moment.

I tried to turn my blurry vision and look down, but my nerves, overworked to the limit, clicked shut my consciousness as if flipping a switch.

Closing his blood-filled eyes, Seongjin fell helplessly 30 meters below.

189*

189. Method of Penitence (1)

After the prince climbed up the Demon Tree like the wind and disappeared above the treetops with lush branches.

Kiiiiiii...

When the magic beast suddenly stopped moving and began to shrink, Bruno realized that the prince's plan had succeeded.

"... Did you finish it?"

But the joy was short-lived.

The group was shocked as they watched the remains of the Demon Tree sinking faster than expected.

The tree was shrinking in size until it completely crumbled and disappeared into thin air. Like most dead demons, they are quickly being summoned back to the demon world.

Oh wait! if it goes like this... ... !

"Your Majesty Mores!"

just as expected.

The prince's body, which floated in the space left behind after the demonic count disappeared, soon began to fall downward at a rapid pace. As if something had happened above, he was drooping down as if he had completely lost consciousness.

"Lowering!"

Sir Masain, who had become thoughtful, threw his sword on the floor

and ran towards the prince.

"this... ..!"

Bruno also tried to raise a small amount of aura and stretched out his hand towards the falling prince.

However, it was not enough to support the boy's body as he began to accelerate. Bruno gritted his teeth and thought.

'It would be better if the consciousness of the lower level was still awake!'

When the first prince fell from the Demonic Water.

It was Sir Martha who safely caught the falling prince, but at the last moment, it was a large number of auras that suddenly materialized that decisively slowed the prince down.

And Bruno definitely knew that familiar Auror. A unique rough yet delicate aura that appears and disappears every time the prince meditates.

It was clear that the prince, who was inexplicably skilled in using Aurors, had unconsciously materialized Aurors when a crisis arose.

But now that I am unconscious, I can no longer hope for such a fluke.

'... If only His Majesty came here now!'

However, Bruno, who glanced back at Sir Sharon with such a glimmer of hope, was soon unable to hide his look of disappointment.

This was because she was staring blankly into space and muttering non-stop as if she had completely lost her mind.

Even without that, the uncontrollable channeling was running wild.

"Have you come? Have you finally come?"

"But why are you doing this to me...?""

"Wind, blow! Faster, faster, faster, faster, faster... .."

"Mores, wait! Slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly, more slowly..."

"Ah, I see! We are waiting!"

But, is it just a coincidence?

Immediately after Sir Sharon started muttering, somehow the wind around them felt like it was slightly speeding up.

A wind that blows naturally, slightly different from the materialization of an auror, blows fiercely towards the prince from bottom to top.

At the same time, the speed at which the prince was falling was decreasing slightly. As if something was pulling him out of thin air.

'... 'How on earth did this happen?'

While the embarrassed Bruno glanced at Sir Sharon, her incoherent muttering continued.

"Ahh, I didn't want to disappear like this!"

"Wake! Seongjin Lee! Seongjin Lee!"

"We are waiting for you forever."

"Quickly, quickly, quickly..."

"Slowly, slowly, slowly..."

"You have answered our prayers, now just command!"

That moment.

An amazing thing happened right in front of the group's eyes.

As the demonic tree disappeared, the demonic energy that had lost focus and scattered suddenly began to come together as if they had their own will.

And the demons soon flocked around the prince. As if countless hands were holding him.

Little by little, the speed of the falling prince is slowing down.

"Good luck dad! Hurry up! hurry! hurry!"

"Dad, Your Majesty! Daddy, Your Majesty! "Dad, Your Majesty!"

"Lee Seong-jin! Seongjin Lee!"

"I am waiting. Only if you come to us and command us... .."

Now Sir Sharon was shedding tears incessantly.

Unable to control channeling, she ends up deeply sympathizing with even the faintest emotions that come with her thoughts.

It was the channeling of a sensitive psychic who could pick up even the faintest thoughts that Bruno could not even detect.

"we are... Just be quiet... .."

Stumbling.

With those words, Sir Sharon lost consciousness and fell to the floor. Her flagship, Bruno, quickly supported her and shouted.

"Lord Sharon!"

We hurriedly checked Sir Sharon's condition, but fortunately she was breathing evenly. It seemed like it was probably a temporary side effect from excessive channeling.

Meanwhile, Prince Mores, whose speed had slowed further, was now slowly descending as if he were a feather fluttering in the wind.

"... How could this... .."

The entire group stared blankly at the incredible sight, feeling entranced by something.

And finally.

The prince easily rested on Lord Martha's arm, wrapped in the magic energy that surrounded him like a cradle.

* * *

Slurp and clatter.

Nate slowly opened his eyes on the rippling water.

I always got extremely sick when I came out of the crevice, but every time, the artificial pond in the prayer room did its job well.

It is about eliminating the sense of disconnection from other spaces.

If you exclude the force you feel in your body as much as possible, you will be able to adapt to reality much faster when you return from a gap.

As I was leaving my body in the gently swaying waves, I naturally remembered the command my son had given me not long ago.

-Father, I have a favor to ask.

The day before he left the imperial capital, his son came to see him and boldly opened his mouth.

-ask.

-yes. I won't be here for a while, and I feel really uneasy about just leaving.

Nate was dumbfounded.

Who is anxious about whom now?

-okay. What did you ask for?

-It's very simple. If there is someone who opens a gap again while I am away, please give them a hard time. If there are people invading Delcross, put an end to them... . No, if you get rid of them before they invade... ..

-... ..

- Isn't this it? Even if you only have the intention of breaking in, it's better to do everything from the beginning... ..

Nate, who was watching his son diligently remembering everything that came to mind, couldn't help but chuckle.

Even though it was never properly explained, the child seemed to have thought about his own role and wanted to somehow create cause and effect.

-It's a waste of mental energy, Mores. In order to move cause and effect, you need a specific object that you perceive, whatever it may be.

Sigurd Sigurdsson, for example.

As long as he was hidden in the doll's body, he was treated as a full-fledged human being according to the [Agreement].

Therefore, as long as he did not break the rules of this world or commit an act that was beyond the scope of humans, cause and effect did not occur, and therefore the Holy Emperor could not touch him first.

That is the limitation of success required by the [agreement].

My son's will was the only exception. The only condition here was that the son had to recognize exactly who his doll was and request it.

However, Nate cannot be the first to tell us about the identity of the doll. Because it violates the [agreement].

This was also the reason why Sigurd Sigurdsson had to throw away the doll immediately after his son discovered his identity.

As long as the son knows the identity of the doll, he can die at the hands of the Holy Emperor at any time at the son's request.

-Do you mean that anything is useless unless it is a specific target? Hmm, then... ah! How about this?

The son pondered for a moment and said.

-If you get caught in a gap, always come back safely. father.

Hwiik.

A weak wind enveloped me and my son for a moment.

Nate was blinking blankly, and his son, who astutely noticed this, smiled brightly.

-haha. There was definitely a response this time! It worked, right?

okay. Perhaps the cause and effect created by that child was at work. Nate thought as he slowly rose from the surface.

The intruder this time was a rare, powerful alien monarch, but it was resolved relatively more easily than expected.

'But I was away for quite a while.'

Beep-

As I impatiently open the channel, my head is filled with loud tinnitus. Because the gap had severely distorted the space, it seemed that channeling was not yet working properly in this area.

'First, you have to get out of here and listen to the night report from Sir Sharon... ... '

Although the motion sickness had not completely gone away, Nate walked out the door of the prayer room, his feet dragging wetly.

However, the expression on Katrina's face, who was waiting outside the door with a blanket, was somehow unusual.

"This is a message from Arenja, Your Majesty!"

Nate frowned at those words.

If something is urgent, wouldn't it be okay to send a message directly?

It's Kornsei.

It's like a group of shrewd people who don't even come near when a gap opens.

But at her next words, Nate's face hardened.

"Prince Mores and his party are said to have encountered a demonic species called [Demon Beast]. The subjugation was successfully carried out under the leadership of the prince, but your Majesty was seriously injured... .."

Nate didn't listen anymore and expanded the channel.

However, Sir Sharon failed to respond to his call. It looks like he's either unconscious or so severely overloaded that he can't receive Nate's thoughts.

Instead, he heard his children crying and desperately looking for him from somewhere.

[Good luck dad! Hurry up! hurry! hurry!]

[Dad, Your Majesty! Daddy, Your Majesty! Dad, Your Majesty!]

Without even having time to say anything to Katrina, Nate suddenly threw himself away and became a spirit.

-Faha!

Hearing Katrina's cries in the distance, he began to fly towards the place where he last saw his son.

* * *

"Lowering! Lowering! Are you okay?"

Masain shouted urgently as he laid Prince Mores on the floor.

At first glance, the prince didn't seem to have any major injuries, but for some reason, the fact that his eyes were continuously bleeding was unusual.

In addition, he never regained consciousness, and his forehead was as hot as a fireball.

"Call the priest! "Hurry up and treat me!"

However, no one was willing to approach them. It was because of the demon energy that surrounded the prince.

Masain, who noticed this, tried to disperse the demonic energy by stirring it with his hands, but strangely, the demonic energy that had gathered around the prince did not fall easily and only continued to circle around him.

"Lord Masaine! For now, avoid Gyeongdo!"

"Erosion is already happening!"

As he said, numerous black stains were already forming on Masain's face and arms.

Although he was a member of the Seonghwang family that was relatively strong in demonic energy, he had no choice but to continue to be exposed to dense demonic energy. It was the result of not caring for the prince earlier.

Even in this terrible demonic energy, is it fortunate that the prince still shows no signs of erosion?

But at this rate, it was only a matter of time.

"Let's purify the demon energy first!"

Not only Sir Valery, but also the hastily summoned priest Gustav was mobilized and began to pray to purify the demonic energy.

However, as the car was stamping its feet without any significant results, there was a sharp voice scolding Manager Bruno.

[You idiot! What are you doing if you don't shout out loud?]

'... 'Red?'

Bruno asked in surprise.

'How did this happen? 'What on earth happened up there?'

[That's not important now! What is that crazy paladin doing? Quickly

tell him to call his father!]

Then Bruno answered with a disappointed look on his face.

'As you can see, Sir Sharon is unconscious right now. 'It's impossible right now.'

[what? But are you letting go like this? Then shouldn't you call him quickly?]

'But Red. With my poor channeling, I cannot convey my thoughts all the way to the ecliptic. Moreover, I am not even a vessel worthy of containing Your Majesty.'

[Then wake up the crazy paladin quickly! Without borrowing his body, it will be difficult for him to do anything even if he comes here. It will have a big impact on causality!]

The Demon King, who was furiously scolding Bruno, suddenly shouted in surprise.

[uh? what?]

'Why are you doing this, Red?'

However, General Manager Bruno also immediately noticed the abnormality. Dekaron Knight's keen senses detected the subtly heavier density of the air.

"What is this?"

Priest Gustav and Sir Valery, who were in the middle of praying, looked up in confusion.

Suddenly, I felt like the whole place was filled with divine power.

A sacred feeling, like when you enter the ecliptic and encounter grace for the first time. An aura that ranged from reverential to frightening filled the air around them.

and.

Coo!

With a strange pressure pressing down on the area.

It's a disaster.

The demonic energy surrounding Prince Mores evaporated all at once and soon disappeared without a trace.

190*

190. Method of Penitence (2)

[Repent. Repent.]

Seongjin was listening to a sound coming from somewhere.

It was a man's voice, humming a tune as if singing. Although it was hoarse and cracked, the voice still had the power to dig deep into a person's inner self.

Bethelah.

As if responding to the voice, several people join in and chant a short slogan.

'... What does this mean?'

Once Seongjin paid attention, surprisingly, the voice gradually got closer.

[We are all sinners.]

Bethelah.

[So kneel down here and repent for all your sins.]

Bethelah.

'Bethelah... ... '

Seongjin absentmindedly repeated that slogan.

It's not unfamiliar at all. I'm sure I heard this from someone a while ago.

So, maybe it was Rohan's bastard?

While Seongjin was thinking about this, the man continued talking.

[Listen. We were born on this earth by tearing our mother's belly, drinking our father's blood and trampling on this land. That's all! I would not hesitate to give up an equal life in order to breathe a few more days. They bring harm to the world just by existing, and what atrocious sinners they are!]

Bethelah.

[Even a handful of breath or a word we exhale will be nothing more than mere filth that pollutes the world. Ah, so how can I just watch this quietly? How can one endure this without repenting?]

Then, many voices in agreement chant a soft song.

Ah, Lord. We are all sinners. Please punish us for our sins.

[Then, brothers, brothers of penitence! How will you repent for that deep sin?]

People answered the man's question.

I will punish myself by throwing myself into penance.

I will constantly confess my sins through pain.

With their blood we will wash away all evil.

Now Seongjin was not only seeing their sounds, but also seeing their appearance right in front of his eyes.

The sight of hundreds of people kneeling on the cold stone floor in a huge cavity and praying.

'... 'Is this a dream?'

However, these scenes are too vivid to be dismissed as mere dreams.

They were all pitifully thin, their faces visible through their shabby monastic robes, and their limbs were covered with countless scars

and wounds.

And in the center, where people are looking up, there is a man standing on the podium.

He, like the believers, was thin, and his body was full of new wounds.

However, despite this, the appearance that looked down on the people was extremely imposing and imposing. His bushy beard and unkempt hair flutter here and there like a lion's mane.

[That's right! Everything becomes clear only through our suffering. Only endless penance will make us aware of our sins!]

The man's loud voice echoes through the pupils and shakes the souls of the believers.

People repeated after the man as if they were fascinated.

Bethelah.

Only endless asceticism.

[Only utter suffering will help you repent!]

Bethelah.

Only utter pain.

[Pain, suffering is the only way to truly repent.]

Seongjin, who was watching the scene, thought in bewilderment.

Hey, they say if you believe, they will give you wealth and fame. Or say that you will be given eternal life in heaven.

'No matter how fake it may be, how does this kind of evangelism work for people?'

Okay, let's give in and say that all humans are sinners.

Then you can repent in a more productive way.

Putting yourself in pain is just self-satisfaction that is of no help to the world, right? In the end, you are just consuming a lot of oxygen and emitting carbon dioxide.

'If you have the stamina to punish yourself, you should at least cultivate a field and be of help to the world! Still, if you can't forgive yourself, don't be a nuisance and just sleep in a corner.'

Seongjin snorted and thought so.

But as if he had heard his thoughts, the man on the podium suddenly turned to Seongjin.

'... ... ?!'

The moment their eyes met, a light of astonishment appeared in the man's eyes.

[■■■■ ■■?!]

'what?'

[What are you doing there now... ... ?]

What are you? Are you talking to me?

How are you looking at me?

What did you just call me?

At that time, someone's familiar voice echoed in my mind.

[Go back, [Mores].]

... father?

Whisper for a moment.

The scene before his eyes became distant, and Seongjin's consciousness quickly soared somewhere.

* * *

Tap, tap, tap.

Seongjin opened his eyes, feeling his body shaking occasionally.

Familiar cushioning and vibration. Perhaps he was now lying in a moving carriage.

"Are you awake, sir?"

"... Sir Masaine?"

Seongjin turned his head toward the sound, but couldn't see him.

"... .. ?"

For some reason, my vision was strangely dark, and something seemed to be closing my eyes.

I looked puzzled and tried to touch it, but there was a hand blocking my movement.

"Leave it as it is, sir. "I don't know if you remember, but he suffered a serious injury to his eye."

"injury... .."

Only then did the memories of the previous day quickly pass by in Seongjin's mind.

The appearance of a gigantic demon tree, the annihilated upper level of Milo, and the colorful and brilliant scenes that unfolded before my eyes as I borrowed the demon king's senses.

And the headache that was eating away at the back of my head, and my eyes that were burning brightly.

Strong.

Just thinking about it makes me feel like the headache from back then is coming back. Seongjin gave up thinking any more and relaxed her entire body.

"How long do I have to do this?"

"Father Gustav's judgment is that it would be better to not see the light of day for a while. Since Sigismund is not far away, it would be a good idea to show it to the council member there and then remove it."

"hmm."

I felt over the bandages, but I couldn't feel any pain in my eyes.

'I think I'm fine...'

However, Seongjin decided to listen to Masain.

I wanted to quickly check if my eyesight was okay, but it would still be better to listen to the priest's advice. There is no harm in being careful.

'Besides, Lord Martha, the atmosphere is somehow unusual.'

As if he was trying hard to suppress something, I could sense an air of danger coming from him.

Is this unsettling?

If Seongjin tried to do something on his own, it seemed as if the seal would be lifted at any moment and an angry command would pour out of his mouth.

"Lord Masaine. How much did I sleep? Now..."

I cautiously opened my mouth, but just then the carriage clattered to a halt.

"You slept all morning. "It's almost time for lunch."

Masain stood up and spoke in a low voice.

"Well, now that I've confirmed that you've woken up safely, I'll just go. "A dedicated maid will come and serve the meal, so please don't skip it and eat it, Your Majesty."

Masain then opened the carriage door and went out.

Without even giving me the chance to ask questions about what happened yesterday or about the Demon Tree.

'No, wait a minute!'

At the very least, I wanted to ask how I was unharmed after cutting the growth core and falling from such a high place!

Seongjin, who was lying blankly, immediately shook his head and spoke to the demon king.

'Wow, Sir Martha, I think he's really angry.'

[...]]

'... 'Demon King?'

But there was no answer from him.

It definitely feels like something is stuck in a corner of my head, right?

'Hey, what's wrong with you again? Why aren't you saying anything? What's going on?'

Then I felt a small vibration stirring in my head.

[Sniff...]

uh?

Hey, are you crying? why?

[...] Who cries? I'm tired and need to rest, so don't talk to me for a while!]

The demon lord who fired like that soon fell into silence.

'... Huh? 'Why is everyone doing this?'

It was so absurd that Seongjin sat in his seat with his mouth open and dumbfounded until Edith brought the meal.

Meanwhile, Bruno, who had just sensed the prince moving, asked Sir Martha when he came out of the carriage.

"Lord Masaine. "Did you wake up safely?"

"yes."

"That's a good thing."

Bruno breathed a sigh of relief.

There was a time when I really wondered what would happen, but luckily everything worked out smoothly.

yesternight.

The sacred energy that suddenly landed where the party was, instantly blew away the demonic energy surrounding Prince Mores and completely purified the remaining remains of the Demon Tree.

The prince's body was then enveloped in sacred white light. The bleeding from his eyes stopped immediately, and even the minor scratches on his body completely recovered.

It was literally a miracle that appeared suddenly.

-Lord!

Lord Masain, who gently flipped his eyelids to see that the prince's eyes were fine, sat down with an expression that made him look ten years older.

The miracle did not stop there. Even some articles that showed signs of gradual erosion were completely restored.

Even Lord Masain, who had black spots all over his body due to the severity of the erosion, was cured without a trace.

Thanks to that, the Wolf Knights, who had been whispering about the demonic energy surrounding the prince, were immediately taken aback.

The sacred energy disappeared immediately after that, but the group, including Priest Gustav, spent some time voluntarily praying in gratitude to the Lord for a while afterwards.

-Perhaps His Majesty's spirit came to you.

Sir Sharon, who came to his senses later, said so.

Certainly, the prosperous person that Bruno is familiar with would be more than capable of performing such a miracle.

Bruno was still a little dazed, as he had never before performed such a miracle with just his soul.

"Then I have work to do, so I'll stop."

Sir Masaine said that in a quiet voice, and walked towards the field, tightly grasping his sword. It looks like he plans to take a short break and practice again.

'Don't be in a hurry, you should take your time...'

Bruno stroked his mustache while looking at the back of the knight, who looked somewhat nervous.

I knew that he had been accelerating his training recently.

Especially today, my eyes are literally half-closed, and I've been swinging my sword at every opportunity since dawn.

It's not that I can't imagine the terrible helplessness that Sir Martha must have felt last night.

One, it is now time for him to aim for the 10th floor as an Auror. It is time for him to look at his inner self in a somewhat relaxed manner, rather than just practicing blindly.

"Captain Bruno!"

At that time, an exorcist came running calling him from over there.

Last night, while channeling, I suffered from overload and collapsed,

but now I seemed to have fully recovered and seemed to be fine.

"Ah, Sir Sharon. "Are you feeling okay?"

"Fine... No, that's not important now!"

To Bruno's question, she answered with a straight face.

"Somehow, something is strange. The channel is closed until now! So please tell me in more detail what happened yesterday!"

"yes? "What is that all of a sudden?"

As Bruno asked in bewilderment, Sir Sharon exclaimed with a rare expression of nervousness.

"Your Majesty's channel! No matter how much I called, there was no answer at all!"

* * *

Nate was currently in a kind of [gap] with his soul.

Because someone used power to directly summon his soul here.

Of course, this place was different from the unstable [gap] that otherworldly monarchs usually forcibly open to invade.

A place where the owner of space is determined and the structure of space and time is relatively stable. It was a place where the [Meeting of the Six] that protects the dimension would sometimes be held.

'Tatiana will probably lead the morning business meeting well, and Katrina will take care of my personal affairs. There is still room.'

A vast space where time and space have completely stopped, colored in faded gray and frozen here and there.

Nate, who was swimming in the middle of it and worrying about various things, soon felt a little irritated.

'I feel like I want to cut it down right now... ... '

Breaking it down with force and returning was not a task, but dealing with it afterwards becomes difficult in many ways.

That was why he was waiting for the owner of the space, mustering up all his patience.

[How long are you going to make me wait like this? Could you please hurry up and hold a meeting, a hearing, or something else?]

Nate finally ran out of patience and opened his mouth.

As his voice spread out, creating a gentle vibration, the frozen space vibrated and made a crackling friction sound.

[Or are you protesting like this? Don't make me waste your time if you're not going to help me anyway. As you know, I am a very busy person.]

In the end, it was around this time that Nate started stroking the salmon around his waist and seriously considering splitting it.

[...] The meeting will not be held.]

He heard a heavy voice that was quite familiar to him.

Suddenly, a tall old man appeared behind Nate and was staring at him. He is an old man wearing a simple gray robe.

His face was very clear and sharp, and if he had been younger, it would have seemed like he had quite a sensitive look.

The outline, which had gradually become rounder over time, combined with the shapely eyes, made the viewer feel a strange sense of brilliance.

[I persuaded them well. What is it like? Have you cooled off now?]

In the golden eyes of the old man staring at Nate, only the pupil is slit vertically and narrows.

[...] Elderly.]

Nate took his hands off his waist and sighed softly.

191*

191. Method of Penitence (3)

The old man has protected this dimension of Delcross since the distant past.

He saw with his own eyes the era of the three ancient dragons come to an end, and after the 'Initial Agreement' was concluded, he played an active role as a guardian of the dimension, and after the founding of the Holy Empire of Delcross, he personally created and led the 'Council of Six'.

He was an old man who had lived for such a long time and had seen many things, but even to him, the young man in front of him was a very mysterious being.

An extraordinary boy left behind by the Sentai Oracle, who risked his life. He is a boy born with infinite talents, as if he had God's love all to himself.

At first, all I wanted to do was get a little help from such a boy. But when he came to his senses, he had suddenly become a huge pillar that could support the dimension alone.

Aren't we reaching the edge of God's power that even the elderly have yet to glimpse?

'... Nevertheless, this child is human.'

Unfortunately, the young man's human limitations were clear. He was unable to maintain the neutral attitude that a transcendental person should display, and did not have the slightest hesitation in using his power for personal purposes.

It would have been natural for the 'meeting of six', which had not

seen several accidents, to ultimately decide to give him rein in the form of an [agreement].

But this incident may have made everything clear.

The fact is that if this dangerous young man puts his mind to it, he can easily crumple the [Agreement] like a piece of paper, even if he easily endures the disadvantages that will come.

In the end, the wise old man had no choice but to maintain the status quo by appeasing both the 'council of six' and the young people.

[What on earth is this? Berseus is on the rampage. I'm saying we need to call a meeting and take all authority away from you right away.]

However, despite the old man's gentle scolding, Nate's expression remained sullen.

[He is a person who, if he could, would have committed it without saying a word. Isn't that impossible, so you're borrowing the authority of the conference?]

[It's not just Berseus. All members are anxious about your unexpected behavior.]

[Is that so?]

[okay. There are many opinions that we need to decide on your successor even now. They say that even if you cannot exercise the power of a king, it will be better than causing accidents on your own. It would have been great if we had understood their anxiety earlier.]

The long, slitted pupils of the old man who said those words came to rest on the brightly shining golden tube above Nate's head.

Then, a faint sneer appeared on his face as he noticed my gaze.

[That's interesting. Why not give it a try? This is something we cannot hope for.]

[...] Hey, Nate.]

[Convene a meeting and decide on a successor. Then I will immediately hand over the position of Guardian, take his wife and children, and remove myself from this dimension. If you wish, I will also release [Disaster] into the world as is.]

[...]]

[Just like last time, everyone will gather here again and just watch helplessly as another dimension fades away. How about we all toast together? It would be perfect to crack open the moonshine that Mithra is proud of.]

The old man sighed quietly at that sharp reaction.

When meeting face to face, Nate had a somewhat calm and detached aura. She has a callous attitude that does not reveal her true feelings about most things and does not show even the slightest agitation.

Even an old man who had lived for a long time was a person whose true intentions were difficult to guess.

However, when he becomes a soul, the story is different. Because it was impossible for the soul to hide its emotions and thoughts in the first place.

That was why the old man tried to face him in spirit as much as possible. Of course, along with expressing my honest feelings, I had to endure the occasional cynicism and sarcasm.

[I'll tell you this, old man.]

Nate raised the corners of his mouth and smiled crookedly.

[The reason I waited quietly in response to the elder's summons was nothing more or less than a sign of respect for the elder who has worked hard for the world.]

Perhaps by summoning Nate here, the old man was trying to show the members of the 'Council of Six' that his influence over him was still intact.

After reassuring the members, I tried to make a nice picture by giving

a little warning to Nate as well.

If it had been my true self, I could have just pretended that I couldn't win. But now, Nate was neither able nor willing to hide the repulsion he felt.

[The reason I accepted the [agreement] full of unreasonable restrictions was also because the elder said that it would be somewhat advantageous for the Delcross dimension for the 'Council of Six' to continue. But what was the result? When [the disaster] occurred, what did the 'Council of Six' decide and do?]

[...]]

[If I had known that everything would be held back like this...]

Seeing the young man expressing pure anger about the 'Meeting of Six', the old man thought that he should calm him down.

[Wasn't the matter too heavy at that time? Now everyone knows that your judgment was right.]

What the old man said was true.

When the [Disaster] exploded, Nate was the only one who insisted on forcibly separating the two resonating dimensions, and this argument aroused the ire of the members at the time.

Naturally, he faced strong opposition, but this young man said he had no time to persuade him and instead pushed through with force.

In this way, Delcross barely escaped total destruction and survived with a flimsy half-wall.

Now everyone realizes that there was no other way, but the problem at the time was that Nate was able to easily suppress the members' opposition with his strong power.

That memory remained a great threat to the members of the 'Council of Six'.

[But then and now are different. You are currently falling for the

tricks of evildoers and are obviously walking down the wrong path. So, aren't all the members worried about your unexpected behavior?]

The old man patiently and calmly encouraged him.

[You must also know how to let go of what is already gone. But what about the 'that' you cherish now? Anyone can see that going against nature is nothing more than harm to this world.]

[...] I will not tolerate any more than that, no matter how old I am.]

[Please cool down a little and see the results of what you have done. What is happening to 'it' that has been freely released into the world! I heard that they even opened a door to the demon world in the ecliptic?]

[...]]

[It's the same in this case. Where does the magic tree often appear? How do you not know that one of the upper sections was accidentally caught in this accident!]

Then, in the eyes of Nate, who was glaring at the old man fearfully, a strange silver glow appears.

[Are you discussing the cause and effect of something in front of me? If I do, I will tell you clearly. If it had not sprouted early because of that child, where would the tree of the demon world have taken root and how many lives would it have taken?]

[that...]

[Unlike all of you who remain silent in the face of impending disaster, at least the steps the child takes are contributing a little to the world.]

The old man kept his mouth shut.

The opponent is an oracle who is said to have dared to steal the eyes of the gods. There will be no mistake in those words.

[...] It's all consequential talk. Just because more people survived, we

cannot ignore the sacrifices of others. You can't play numbers with your life, right? Moreover, the fact that 'it' still distorts countless causes and effects in the world does not change.]

In the end, all the old man could say was such a trivial, fundamental protest. But Nate's reaction was cold.

[If you are going to say such useless things, please send me away. There is nothing to worry about. Same as back then. In the end, no matter what I do for that child, the causality of the world has no choice but to tolerate it. Don't you know?]

The eyes that met the old man's gaze gave off a cool glow.

[Anyway, a world without that child breathing cannot exist.]

The old man immediately understood the eerie meaning of his words.

That was truly a consequential story.

* * *

It was late in the afternoon when Seonghwang opened his eyes.

"your majesty!"

"your majesty! Are you out of your mind?"

Empress Melody, who was anxiously guarding the side of the bed, smiled happily and took the Emperor's hand.

"... melody?"

Seonghwang blinked blankly and looked around.

Then, behind her, we see Luis, full of deep emotions, and Francis, his lieutenant, who looks somewhat dissatisfied.

Francis narrowed his eyes and stared at the Emperor, then presented his report in a businesslike manner.

"Have you finally arrived, Your Majesty? Thanks to oversleeping, Captain Katrina is doing the useless work of guarding the front of the

prayer room with the knights. "Officially, His Majesty is still in the prayer room."

It wasn't just for a day or two that the adjutant complained that he couldn't see the leader suffering even the slightest bit. Seonghwang sighed slightly.

"okay. "Tell Katrina that you had a hard time."

"yes. "Okay then, I'm going to go see the leader to end this useless play."

The adjutant, who pushed up his glasses, simply bowed and left the room without any worries. Now that the Emperor has regained consciousness, further escorting is virtually meaningless.

"The Empress concluded the political meeting successfully. "The official audience is taking a little longer, but he said he will soon finish all his schedule and come here."

Seonghwang closed his eyes without any response to Lewis' report. However, Melody, who had been seeing him for a long time, did not miss the slight look of relief that flashed across Seonghwang's face.

And there was silence between them for a moment.

I don't know for sure, but as always, she is probably receiving various reports and giving instructions through some unknown method.

While he was putting out the fire in such a hurry, Melody reached out and touched the head of the lying Seonghwang. It's like her habit of being nice to her daughter when they're together.

"What happened? "I was very worried."

Melody cautiously asked Seonghwang, who eventually opened his eyes and got up.

"Everything was resolved safely. "It wasn't like I was tied up next to you."

"You've rarely been away for this long without saying anything,

right? "Everyone was worried about Your Majesty."

Perhaps sensing something in her voice, one of Seonghwang's arms slowly comes up and wraps around Melody's shoulder.

From the time she first met him, the arm that had firmly supported her in every moment of crisis. Melody quietly rested her head on one of Seonghwang's shoulders, feeling even the slightest hint of anxiety disappearing like the melting of her eyes.

"Was it trouble because of the wrong things again? "You really are creating problems without getting tired."

"... .."

"Even though Your Majesty is suffering like this, there is no end in sight. I always get nervous every time Sisley goes on the road. If this is the case, I wonder if the day will come when I can escape the ecliptic and travel to my heart's content... .."

Seonghwang did not answer. However, Melody was able to realize her answer as she felt her arm around her shoulder gain a little more strength.

"Hehe. Don't worry. "It's not Your Majesty's fault."

"... "It was a promise to show you the canal city someday."

"Never mind. That's all fine too."

That was Melody's sincerity.

The Emerald Palace where she lived had a huge garden that was maintained with more care than any other villa. The largest greenhouse in the imperial palace was built, and there is a beautiful pond with small waterways flowing through a maze of twists and turns.

The beautiful garden that has been gradually expanded is proof that the Emperor has not forgotten his old promise. Melody thought that was enough to make her happy for now.

"I must say this now, but back then I actually liked the promise of a canal city and a vineyard."

Melody, who confessed such a small confession, burst into laughter.

In some ways, it was a smile that was very similar to Sisley.

"Actually, I fell in love with Your Majesty's face, not the promise."

"... .."

And the thing about hitting the back of the head out of nowhere was the same as my daughter's.

Melody smiled brightly and lightly stroked the hair of Seonghwang, who looked somewhat lethargic.

* * *

At that time, a small untimely commotion occurred in the Ruby Palace.

For some reason, Empress Lizabeth left the room with her hands severely burned.

"Mama Lizabeth! "How can this be!"

"Are you okay?"

"I'll call the doctor right away!"

However, the Empress shook her head with an expressionless face.

"Don't tell His Majesty, but quietly call a doctor from outside the imperial palace."

"Haona... .."

"Do you understand? "I don't want to worry him."

In response to her extremely firm words, the head maid quietly bows her head.

While the chief maid left and the dedicated maid went to get cold water, the empress returned to the room and stared at the table in the room in silence for a while.

There, 'Little Saint Aurelion', with half his head burned, was rolling around. Not long ago, that unknown thing was a small statue sent to Lizabeth.

Lizabeth, who had been glaring at the unsightly tanned statue, soon looked away and quietly closed her eyes.

If something is already irreversible, it must at least come to an end.

Perhaps that will be the only penance she can make.

192*

192. Sigismund Order (1)

After coming to his senses in the carriage, Seongjin felt frustrated because he could not properly understand the situation of the group for a while.

His eyes are completely covered with bandages, making it difficult to move, and for some reason the devil bastard is all sulky and stuck in his head.

As for Lord Masain, he just checked Seongjin's condition and quickly left, and now he's swinging his sword near the carriage as if he's protesting.

'I guess I'm really angry this time... ... '

It was so uncomfortable that the chaotic flow of auras that was not well controlled could be felt even to Seongjin.

I feel like I want to punch him, but I'm holding back because he's the prince, right?

'No, isn't this all too much? I did my best in that situation!'

puck!

Seongjin, feeling aggrieved, kicked the carriage seat hard.

Fortunately, after a while, Seongjin was able to hear a brief story from Edith, who had brought lunch.

"We decided to split the group in half. Archduke Sigismund left for the county first with us, and most of the Wolf Knights, including Commander Ilma, remained on the scene."

"Split it in half? why?"

"I heard that the Archduke suggested that it would be a good idea to show you to the councilor in Sigismund as soon as possible? "The others probably haven't left yet because they're busy cleaning up after themselves."

I thought it was strange that the group's popularity had decreased drastically.

I wonder if there were any casualties.

"Oh my goodness! "I heard that you played a big role in cutting down that demon species?"

Edith continued as she poured stew for Seongjin, who was blindfolded.

"The drivers were all in an uproar over that story, weren't they? "Prince Mores created an Auror blade and cut down the trunk of a huge Demon Tree with a single sword!"

Seongjin mumbled and thought shakily.

'... No, I just climbed the tree hard.'

How on earth does a story become so exaggerated? Suddenly an Auror Blade?

By the way, Edith, you watch me practice every day and still believe that?

"Sir Claudia was especially proud. I am so proud of you, saying that you are truly a genius... Now, please do it, my Majesty."

The stew is in my mouth without any time to reply. Seongjin thought as she chewed her food, feeling utterly bewildered.

Lord Claudia, why would someone who should know get caught up in such nonsense?

"And that Mr. Laurent, he seemed very impressed after hearing your

performance. "I've been holed up since last night just holding the lyre because I'm reminded of the evil spirit of martial arts poetry!"

"... ..!"

Seongjin was shocked.

what? Now you're telling me to turn that nonsense into a song and stuff it forever? Why, with Laurent's lame sensibilities?

"Hehe. Aren't you looking forward to what kind of masterpiece will be created, aren't you? Ego!"

"... .."

The prince, who had just become an Auror, cut down a demon species that even the leader of the Wolf Knights could not cut with a single blow with an Auror blade?

Is it possible for such a ridiculous song to resonate throughout the ecliptic?

'No matter who hears it, wouldn't they laugh excitedly because it's an exaggerated propaganda praising the prince?'

Such a shame! Isn't this too cruel for a price paid to reduce damage to this side as much as possible?

Dejected, Seongjin completely lost his appetite.

After that, Edith continued to offer stew to Seongjin and chatted about various things without him ordering it.

It is said that right after Seongjin cut off the growth core, fortunately, the demonic tree was summoned back to the demonic world without any unusual events.

Aside from Seongjin, who suffered a serious eye injury, no one was seriously injured or contaminated with demonic energy, so the hard work was worth it.

"Unfortunately, they said the Milo upper tier seems to have been

wiped out. So, I heard that the knights stayed behind to collect their remains and retrieve some of the preserved items from the top. "Inquisitor Sir Valery stayed with them just in case something happened."

"hmm... .."

I clearly saw that the owner of the merchant was still alive.

Giacomo Milo seemed to have taken advantage of the battle to hide somewhere.

Anyway, I guess I heard the general story. Seongjin was about to eat lunch when he heard a knock on the carriage door from outside.

"Lowering. This is Orden. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine. what's the matter?"

"If you don't mind, I have something to discuss."

"Oh, come in."

Then Orden and his subordinate Herman opened the door and came in. As they each sat down in the seats across from Seongjin, Edith put down her dishes and went out without notice.

As soon as the carriage door closed, Orden first greeted Seongjin politely.

"First of all, I would like to thank you. It would have been difficult for our Wolf Knights alone to take on the Demon Beast, and even if we had taken down them, we would have had to endure great damage. "I owe you again."

hmm. I didn't even think about this because we were all caught up in it, but it looks like this simple guy is creating debt on his own and accumulating interest.

It was truly a desirable phenomenon.

"Okay, what do you have to say?"

"It's about the subsequent investigation."

This is what Orden first reported to the monster task force. The reason was that the Milo clan was distributing unidentified tea into the territory through connivance with the dark church, and that they were asking for action to be taken against this.

However, due to this incident, the case has become a bit ambiguous.

The Milo Sangdan, the culprit behind everything, was wiped out by the Demon Tree. In that case, Orden thought that this was the end of the situation.

But Seongjin shook his head.

"Not yet, Grand Duke. Yesterday evening, I definitely saw Giacomo Milo, the owner of the merchant. "I didn't have time to talk because the Demon Counter was in a hurry."

"... Is that really true?"

"Yes, it looks like he escaped safely. "If he's alive, nothing is over yet."

Orden seemed a little surprised, but he didn't seem to doubt Seongjin's words.

"If that is true, it is highly likely that Milo Sanjangju has returned to Regina."

Hermann said as he clattered the dishes next to him.

"Going that far alone? Is it possible?"

"It won't be impossible. "Didn't you say before that you suspect he may be a devil pact?"

It was like that.

This is a fact that was discovered through Branch Manager Schmidt of the logistics relay station. The devil himself even checked the list of devils, so it's probably certain.

So Seongjin had hinted about this to several people involved in the investigation, including Dasha.

"Until now, he has been wary of us, but now that he has lost all of his top tier, he will have less trouble. "I heard that if a demonic contractor starts to use its power properly, it can do things that ordinary people can't even imagine."

Seongjin nodded and asked.

"Then what is the basis for the merchant's return to Regina?"

"That's because there is a logistics relay station there. All customs records are kept, and temporary help may be obtained from the funds of the Merchants' Union. Since it is the place where all logistics in the northern part of the continent gather, it would not be impossible to obtain necessary supplies in an urgent manner and organize a temporary business."

Although it suffered great losses due to this incident, Milo Sangang will remain as long as the owner of the Sangdan is alive. It was also a sturdy top that could not be shaken once rolled up.

Therefore, the Milo Merchant Marine Company had an obligation to supply daily necessities in a timely manner to the Sigismund Order with which it had an exclusive contract.

Moreover, Hermann explained that no matter what he was planning against Sigismund, he was not going to give up on a plan he had been working on for years.

"That means that if we wait in the territory and conduct various investigations, Giacomo Milo will come looking for Sigismund on his own. "There is no need for us to intentionally inquire about his whereabouts."

"yes. "Maybe not."

hmm. Seongjin was lost in thought, and without thinking, he took the stew held out in front of his mouth and asked.

Mumbling.

"And sir, actually, I have something more important to discuss with you."

Orden had kept his mouth shut until then. He seemed to sense the presence around him for a moment, and then he opened his mouth softly towards Seongjin.

And when Seongjin heard his words, he flinched and asked.

"Are there any survivors?"

"yes. Surprisingly, some people were found alive under the magic tree."

In a place where erosion occurs immediately when an ordinary person touches it? How?

'... Oh, come to think of it!'

When Seongjin first shared the Demon King's spiritual eye, he remembered taking a quick glance at the structure of the Demon Tree as a whole.

At that time, I clearly saw shadows at the bottom of the tree that I assumed were the souls of living people.

After that, I was so out of it that I completely forgot about it.

"The reason the Wolf Knights stayed behind is not only to collect the remains and retrieve the items from the upper chamber, but also to properly arrest the survivors."

"... .."

Judging by their cautious attitude, they probably aren't the top survivors.

Since it was discovered right under the Demon Tree, it may be the culprit that summoned the Demon Tree.

According to Sir Sharon, the Demon Counter is also called the [Confession Tree], and it is also the Church of Penitence that is

suspected of being in collusion with the Milo Sangang.

then.

"Are they perhaps remnants of the Penitent Church?"

Then, Hermann next to him spoke in admiration.

"Yes, you are correct, sir! Looking at their behavior and circumstances, I suspect they are also a penitential sect!"

And sook. A spoonful of stew enters my mouth as if complimenting me.

Mumbling.

what? Something strange from earlier?

But without even thinking about it, Orden spoke next to me.

"That is exactly what I would like to discuss with you. "It is right to interrogate them and investigate the connection between the summoning of the Demon Beast and the Milo Merchant Marine, but taking them straight to the Sigismund Territory like this will inevitably involve many risks."

"Are you willing to risk it?"

"yes. Someone in the territory... Either intercept them midway, or let them escape... There is a risk of... .."

Orden suddenly stuttered, but Seongjin understood exactly what he was concerned about.

They are even considering a situation where the Margrave interferes with their interrogation, or even acquits them of charges.

Moreover, if such an unfortunate incident occurs after openly allowing them into the territory, the Heresy Tribunal may be suspicious of their relationship with the Dark Church.

"... That is why Inquisitor Sir Valery remained with us."

At least on the surface, they are under the control of the Inquisitor, but they are probably considering ways to detain them outside the territory or bring them into the territory privately.

"You are truly brilliant. "When discussing anything with me, I don't know how convenient it is because I don't have to explain anything in detail."

Along with Hermann's smiling compliment, something pops into my mouth again.

Mumbling.

"... huh?"

Seongjin suddenly realized the identity of the sense of discomfort he had been feeling earlier and unconsciously stopped the chewing exercise he was doing.

At that time, I heard the sound of dishes being clattered next to me. And soon after, Seongjin realized that something had been pushed right in front of her face.

"... But Hermann, what is this doing?"

"Oh, did you notice, sir?"

Hahaha, Hermann continued with a friendly laugh.

"This is shameless. Because you almost had food left. It's an old habit that I don't even know... .."

Then he explained awkwardly.

"Actually, since I was young, I fed my younger siblings a lot on behalf of my busy parents. The most obvious thing to do is to distract the kids with other topics and secretly spoon-feed them. "I don't even know how to do it, and before I know it, I've finished the whole bowl."

"... Hermann? "What on earth is this to me?!"

Orden's panicked voice is heard from next to him. He seemed to be so focused on the conversation that he didn't notice anything strange at all.

Does this guy know how dangerous it is to put anything into the mouth of the royal family?

Seongjin was so dumbfounded that he was about to open his mouth when he heard the sound of clattering and scraping the bottom of the stew.

"Now, just have one more drink and you'll be done, sir."

You never give up until the end.

Hermann. He was quite a strange guy.

193. Sigismund Order (2)

That afternoon, the imperial palace.

Chloe Mia de Valois got off the carriage and crossed the Silver Rose Labyrinth garden with a little excitement. There was a formal invitation from Princess Amelia.

Recently, she was frequently visiting the imperial palace under the pretext of studying with Prince Mores, and even so, she was receiving a lot of envy from the ladies her age.

However, as the prince was leaving on a business trip, he personally introduced himself to Princess Amelia. She promised to have tea time with the princess on a regular basis, and this was her third visit.

'If this continues, becoming the next social queen is not my dream!'

An exchange with the beautiful princess, who is said to be the Emperor's favorite.

Even if the princess marries a foreign royal and leaves Delcross, the deep friendship she developed will be a great help to Chloe in her future social activities.

'Besides, the princess is such a wonderful person!'

On the first day she was invited, Princess Amelia unexpectedly made this request to Chloe. I want to study Breton and other foreign languages properly, so I ask for regular help in the future.

And surprisingly, the princess spoke Breton and Lohan at a fairly high level.

Since Chloe also did not yet have a deep knowledge of the Lohan

language, she happily decided to hold a study group of sorts to exchange help with the princess.

It has already been a thousand years since the imperial language became the official language of the continent.

There was a prevailing perception that wasting time learning a foreign language was inefficient.

Nevertheless, Chloe had a lot of fun learning foreign languages.

What words are derived from one etymology, and what differences do they currently have in each country?

What difference in nuance occurs if the sentence is translated literally? How are small grammars different?

Chloe loved the moment of realizing those minor differences and the process of adjusting the misalignments to fit together.

And recently, when she began studying with Princess Amelia, Chloe had the amazing experience of broadening her horizons of knowledge.

The conversation with the princess, who had a lot of knowledge about various countries on the continent, gave me a vivid feeling of being connected to the culture and history of that country, which was just a simple foreign language.

As a result, rather than building good connections, I found myself truly looking forward to meeting the princess.

On the contrary, it was clear that Chloe also left a good impression on the princess. After having her first tea time, the princess smiled brightly and said this to Chloe.

-What Mores said was true. He was said to be a talented person who will lead the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the future...

Ministry of Foreign Affairs? I just want to be the queen of society and live a wonderful life that everyone can see?

However, from that day on, Chloe sometimes imagined herself becoming a competent government official and achieving success.

'Did you arrive a little early...?'

In front of the quaint drawing room, Chloe thought as she adjusted the hem of her pretty purple skirt. Since the feast day of St. Grazier was just around the corner, she was deliberately dressed in a color reminiscent of the uniforms of the knights of St. Grazier.

Chloe's curly hair is also decorated with a lot of purple flower grass, whose flower language is [sacrifice]. This is also the virtue that the Knights of St. Grazier considers most important.

There are times when others would give her a glare, saying she was giving it too much meaning, but still, the princess immediately recognized the things Chloe had carefully prepared the other day.

'So this time too...'

Chloe was led into the living room, her cheeks flushed with anticipation.

"Lady Chloe! Welcome. Ah, it's already getting closer to Saint Grazier's feast day."

Princess Amelia greeted her with a smile as bright as a rose.

Look, I thought the princess would properly recognize this.

"I guess I came too early. But what is all this?"

As I sat down on the sofa and looked around, there were a lot of small pieces of cloth scattered on the tea table, along with a belt ring.

'... Sewing it yourself?'

As expected, the princess's pretty fingers were full of puncture wounds here and there.

What on earth can the princess do while hurting herself like that?

While I was wondering that, I saw a few small, crinkled pockets on one side of the table.

"pocket... Did you make it, sir? "What is it for?"

Then, in an instant, a dark expression crossed the princess's face.

"It's no big deal, Lady Chloe. Actually, I had a nightmare last night. It was a scary dream where the cute little Saint Aurelion fell down, down, and was torn to pieces. "When I woke up in the morning, I felt so anxious that I felt like I had to do something to this little statue."

So, he was making a pocket for the little saint by hand.

"If that's the case, you have a dedicated maid, right? "Will you make a pretty pocket for me?"

"I don't know how to explain this, Chloe. "Somehow, I feel like this will only be meaningful if I touch it myself."

Chloe looked at the princess's desk with a bewildered expression.

There, a bald old man wrapped in colorful silk is smiling with a kind face. A statue of Saint Aurelion that Princess Amelia proudly showed off when they last met, saying she had received it from Prince Mores.

This is what Chloe thought at the time.

'Prince Mores really has no interest in the detailed meaning of the gift...'

In any case, it seemed that the brotherly love between the brothers in the thriving family was not usually very deep, as they treated such a trivial gift with so much care.

Thinking about her brothers who went on business trips abroad and didn't have any gifts, Chloe felt a little envy towards the princess.

"It looks simple when you think about it, but I have no idea why it shriveled up like this after I finished sewing it."

Amelia looked at several failed projects and sighed.

The pocket she pictured in her head actually had a separate model. It was the white lace pocket that Sisley showed at Jinju Palace during lunch.

-Last night, I had a nightmare about the bald old man being engulfed in flames. So this morning, Seo Yi-seo and I made a pocket for the old man to fit into. Since several layers of consecrated silt cloth were sewn together, it will definitely be a small blessing on Mores' journey.

This was why Amelia, who was already tormented by nightmares, decided to make the pouch herself with great care.

"I also want to bless that child's journey. I wanted to give at least a little help like this..."

Because the princess looked very discouraged, Chloe couldn't help but roll up her sleeves.

"So, wouldn't it be okay to get a little help? "I'm not confident in sewing, but if we do it together, we can make prettier pockets."

So the two put aside their foreign language studies and devoted hours to sewing.

It was ironic that Chloe, who picked up a needle and thread for the first time, actually sewed much more skillfully than Amelia.

After struggling for a while, the two were eventually able to create a clumsy pouch that fit the little saint.

It was a bonus that a small flower pattern was embroidered on the end of the pocket, and a cute cone-shaped hat suitable for a bald old man was created.

'... There's something satisfying about it.'

The textbooks that I worked so hard to prepare were put aside, and the flower grass that decorated my hair was disorganized and a mess.

'But isn't this good as is?'

Chloe, who was looking at the princess with a bright smile that

brightened up the living room, had been smiling happily along with her for some time.

* * *

Aside from being sensitive to presence, being blind is extremely uncomfortable.

It was a natural fact, but Seongjin was feeling that fact to his core after only half a day in the carriage.

Time passed quite quickly as I meditated, but as I closed my eyes, small problems that I had not even thought of continued to arise. Even though Edith was there to help and support him closely.

In the end, out of frustration, I tried to secretly lift the bandage while no one was around.

[I'm watching everything, Seongjin Lee.]

In my head, the demon lord warned me in a gloomy voice.

[I will tell everyone. Then he will tell everything to your guardian.]

'... ... '

Who is the protector, who!

Seongjin, who was momentarily speechless, belatedly protested to the demon king, but his hand was secretly lowered from the bandage without his knowledge.

This is because it immediately reminded me of Lord Masain's face with a hard expression.

[joy!]

The devil bastard snorts, then sinks into his head again and begins to ramble on about something.

What on earth has that guy been doing since a while ago?

And when dinner was over, Manager Bruno, who had not been seen

all day, visited Seongjin. For some reason, he seemed very tired.

"There was a little problem at the imperial palace today. "His Majesty was unable to regain consciousness until the afternoon, and Arranger was put on complete alert."

what? By afternoon? That long?

Seongjin jumped up from his seat without even realizing it.

Sir Sharon had already heard that a gap had opened in the imperial palace last night.

However, I thought that if it was a success, it would have been completed on its own. Didn't he prepare cause and effect in advance to prepare for such a time?

"Ah, you have now returned safely and returned to work. Rest assured."

The leader said this as he caught Seongjin, who was about to run out of the carriage.

Although Seongjin sat down again after those words, he couldn't completely relax his mind. Because he remembered the terrible motion sickness he experienced last time.

It was so hard when I was there for a short time, is he okay now?

"According to Arendja's information, the period of time that [the gap] was open was not very long. "There is probably another reason why Your Majesty was unconscious."

Director Bruno was one of the few people who really knew about [Gap].

Even when he was originally a close associate of Seonghwang, he knew that strange things that were difficult to explain would sometimes happen around him.

And now that he has become Arenja's salary thief, most of the restrictions on information have disappeared.

Thanks to this, Seongjin was able to hear a more detailed explanation of what happened last night from Manager Bruno.

Strange phenomena surrounding Seongjin, who fell after cutting down the magic tree.

About the demonic energy that flocked to Seongjin and the holy energy that suddenly appeared and purified everything.

"okay. Lord Masaine..."

Seongjin became solemn for a moment when he heard that Masain Gyeong, who had not been able to properly take care of his body because he was busy protecting himself, had suffered from erosion so severe that it was almost impossible to recover.

Sir Martha, you have reason to be angry.

If you say you want to hit someone, I think you should be willing to give them at least one hit.

"But fortunately, the same energy that drove out demonic energy and restored my body also completely cured Lord Masain's erosion."

It wasn't just Lord Masain who suffered erosion. No matter how much you protect your body with aura, it is impossible to completely block magical energy like smoke floating in the air.

Most of the knights who participated in the battle experienced large or small erosion.

However, the erosion, which should have been suffering for a while while being treated by priests, was swept away by the holy energy and completely disappeared.

Even the materials held by the top are the same.

A significant number of items that would have been completely unusable due to contamination by demonic energy were purified and preserved. Thanks to this, we were able to somehow supplement the daily necessities that were lacking until the mill returned to the top.

"Archduke Sigismund and the Wolf Knights seemed to believe that the divine blessing bestowed on the Holy Family had caused a miracle... .."

However, not only Director Bruno but also Seongjin could easily tell who had caused the miracle.

While they were unconscious, that gentleman must have come to visit them.

"So, is your father okay now?"

"Yes, sir. "I heard that you also received a regular report from Sir Sharon earlier."

"okay."

And there was silence in the carriage for a while.

"... "I can't just ignore this?"

Seongjin, who was contemplating something with his mouth closed, eventually opened his mouth in a slightly calm voice.

"Who is saying that they can use those materials as they please? "The person who completely purified the unusable items was the wrong person?"

I don't know, but the fact that Mr. Seonghwang couldn't wake up for over half a day may not be completely unrelated to this incident. So, you can't just ignore that effort, right?

"I will make the Lord Milo and the Margrave pay for it."

"yes? "How?"

When Manager Bruno asked again in confusion, Seongjin twisted the corner of his mouth to the side and gave a mischievous smile.

"I have to sell it to the Margrave for money. "Isn't it obvious?"

194. Sigismund Order (3)

The next morning, Seongjin called Orden and Hermann and unilaterally informed them of the following matters.

-The recovered goods are definitely the property of the merchant, so the County of Sigismund must pay the entire price for the goods to the merchant.

-Of course, the cost of the knights' hard work in collecting and recovering the items and the transportation costs of transporting them to the county must be properly deducted.

Orden, who had been listening quietly, nodded silently.

"That seems to make sense. "I will do so."

Then, Hermann next to me cleared his throat slightly.

Hey, no way. Did you think that the top tier was wiped out and plan to eat them all raw?

"I beg your pardon, sir. Milo's whereabouts are still unknown, so who should he pay the money to? In addition, Giacomo Milo is currently suspected of being a devil pact. "As soon as we have evidence, we will arrest you right in our territory."

In other words, if he was arrested in the County of Sigismund, his property would also naturally be confiscated from the territory.

There was a church that ostensibly performed the function of a heresy court, and most of the church's property belonged to the lords who ran it with their own money.

"Tsk tsk, Hermann. "That means that one person knows one thing and

the other does not."

Seongjin clicked his tongue and explained everything to the young administrator.

"first. Giacomo Milo was formally reported to the Monster Task Force by the Archduke. The Inquisitor and Exorcist of the task force with investigative authority have already begun the investigation. Therefore, he is clearly under the jurisdiction of the imperial capital."

"yes? But didn't we start the simple investigation first? Arresting him and trying him is also in the territory... .."

"No, his trial will be held in the imperial capital. A complaint has already been prepared to be submitted to both the court and the Heresy Tribunal. So that we can file a complaint as soon as he arrives at Sigismund's estate."

"... four?"

Surely you guys can't prepare for trial faster than that? We're still having a hard time finding any solid evidence, and the investigation will begin in earnest only when the merchant owner shows up, right?

"So he is a prisoner under the jurisdiction of the imperial capital. Your property will also be confiscated by the imperial capital. Accordingly, the Sigismund Order has an obligation to transport him to the imperial capital immediately after arresting him."

In what gap?

Hermann muttered in bewilderment.

Seongjin twitched the corner of his mouth confidently. Even before departure, they were ready to summon the owner of the merchant, using as evidence the minor corruption that Dasha had investigated and the medal that Orden had submitted.

Crucially, we obtained information from Branch Manager Schmidt and created the basis for the search and seizure of the court.

All that was needed was proof that he was a demon contractor, and

thanks to the demonic beast that appeared this time, that problem was also solved.

Even if it was not the owner of the sangang who summoned the Demon Count, the testimony of the paladins who accompanied him was enough for the Heresy Tribunal to arrest and investigate him.

"And there's one more thing to keep in mind. Giacomo Milo belongs to the Merchants' Union. "I don't know if you are familiar with the terms of membership, but from what I heard, much of his wealth was already pledged to the Merchants' Union from the start."

"Merchant Association... .."

"After he is arrested, he will probably have to pay a huge penalty, but who do you think the Merchants' Association will charge that to? No matter how much they seize your property, will it all be taken away by them?"

"... .."

You probably didn't even think about this part.

This is what Seongjin also heard from Branch Manager Schmidt at the logistics relay station.

Of course, the branch manager said that he would do his best to avoid problems with penalties and collateral, but this would be enough to scare that naive young administrator.

"And there is one more important problem than anything else."

In the silent carriage, only Seongjin's voice rang out clearly.

"He was involved in a scandal and put a member of the Holy Family in great danger. "I should also receive generous compensation for that."

So the conclusion is.

"Give me the money."

"... yes?"

"You just have to give it all to me. "I will deal with the Merchant Association, so don't worry too much about what happens next."

Then I heard Hermann taking a breath.

"Some kind of big guy is charging a penalty from Seonghwangga..." ...
."

"what?"

"No, no. "You are right."

The administrator, who quickly weighed the profits and losses in his head, eventually surrendered and cried.

He must have been happy all day long, saying that he had saved a lot of money on the territory's budget thanks to his efforts. Feeling a bit sorry for Hermann, who was looking sullen, Seongjin decided to show some kindness.

"Since we exterminated the Demon Tree with the help of the Wolf Knights, we will also deduct the appropriate cost. "Bring the rest of the payment to me as soon as it's ready."

"Wow, it turns out that I'm a total thief..."

"what?"

"No, it's nothing, sir."

Then, Seongjin suddenly felt strange eyes staring at him.

As I perked up, I saw that not only Herman, but also Orden, Sir Martha, and even Captain Bruno were staring at Seongjin in silence.

Seongjin, who sensed their anxious feelings just by looking at them, pouted his mouth.

What did I say wrong?

what? why? what?

* * *

Anyway, that day and the next day. Seongjin's smooth yet frustrating journey continued.

When you try to secretly take off your eye patch, the quiet Demon King suddenly becomes agitated, and when you try to get out of the carriage to relax, Masain appears from somewhere and whines.

It makes you wonder if the condition was that serious before recovery.

'I really... . There are things I have done, so I will endure it just this once...'

But I could only sit and meditate for a day or two, and staying in the carriage all day made me feel sick to the point of death. With the aura accumulating day by day, my patience also gradually increased.

And around that time, the surrounding temperature began to drop rapidly.

Sometimes, when the carriage door was opened, snowflakes would blow in with the cold wind and land on Seongjin's cheek.

"It's because I'm slowly falling under the influence of the Demonic Sutra."

Masain said as he wrapped me in a thick cloak prepared for cold weather. Next to him, Edith is putting thick gloves on Seongjin's hands.

"Are Sir Martha and Edith all right?"

Judging from the presence next to them, both of them were still wearing their usual light clothes.

"Yes, sir. it's okay. "Because we are using aurors to block the chill."

Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows at Edith's answer.

'In terms of Auror level, I am now slowly surpassing Edith. 'Why am I

treated like a child?'

As if he sensed Seongjin's thoughts, Masain added an explanation.

"It's because you built up your Auror levels too rapidly. "Usually, you naturally acquire 'Auror homeostasis' by going through a cycle of seasons before and after entering the initiation."

"hmm..."

"It's about distributing the aura evenly throughout the body, so when the amount of aura you use is small, you slowly build up the layers to adapt. But I haven't taught you how to use it yet, have I?"

It's not that difficult, so just get used to it slowly from now on. Masain reassured Seongjin like that.

However, Seongjin was not the kind of person who would sit still after hearing those words.

Seongjin, who listened to the detailed explanation while guiding the two people, soon succeeded in spreading the aura throughout the body and generating heat without any special demonstration.

But the problem was exactly what happened next.

'... 'Is it too easy?'

Seongjin lost interest in an instant.

It was so easy that I couldn't even practice it!

'Continuously warming your body by using aurors is not much different from continuously moving your body and generating heat in cold weather, right?'

There is a sense of accomplishment in concentrating and building up layers, but it is not fun and annoying to just blindly consume auras.

Seongjin, who grumbled internally, put on his thick cloak and immediately stopped using the Aurors.

'Is it because I keep covering my eyes? For some reason, everything is bothering me and I just end up sleeping.'

Of course, the biting cold was still there, but Seongjin had an alternative.

A small, flat stone placed inside a glove. It was a magic stone that Sisley gave me before leaving.

Warm.

Seongjin smiled happily, savoring the warmth that was conveyed appropriately.

'The little boy has quite a bit of foresight. 'This is quite warm.'

It was while I was lazing around in the carriage for a while, rolling stones.

"... ... ?"

Suddenly, Seongjin raised his head, feeling an unfamiliar gaze as if someone was observing him from afar.

Although it was only for a split second, the gaze was quickly withdrawn. It was a very intense yet dry gaze that swept over everything from head to toe.

'... Hey, devil? 'Didn't you feel it?'

Seongjin called the devil with an uncomfortable feeling.

but.

[what? What gaze? If you're tired, don't talk nonsense and go to sleep. I'm busy right now!]

Once again, I heard a harsh scolding from the Demon King.

That's really strange.

Anyway, what is this guy doing so busy?

"The gaze? "I didn't feel anything unusual."

Manager Bruno, who was next to him, was also embarrassed and answered Seongjin's question.

'... 'Is this really an illusion?'

If even the former Dekaron Knight leader couldn't sense it, it was probably Seongjin's mistake.

Wow.

From somewhere in the distance, you can hear the long howl of a wolf.

Seongjin, who had been feeling anxious for a moment over the carriage, soon felt drowsy and buried himself under his warm cloak.

On the fourth day of having his eyes bandaged, Seongjin was finally able to be free from the frustrating bandages.

When the messenger who left for the territory first arrived, the Count Sigismund family hurriedly sent the family doctor.

"The territory is only a day away, but I decided that I needed to check on my condition as soon as possible, so I asked the attending physician to come here."

Certainly, if something were to happen to the royal family who were visiting the estate at the invitation of the Archduke, it would be Margrave Sigismund who would be in real trouble.

Seongjin also had no intention of telling Orden that he had worked hard for no reason. Because he wanted to take off the bandages as quickly as possible.

And as was natural, the condition of Seongjin's eyes that the doctor saw was completely normal.

"You may take off the bandages now, sir. Of course, you should not look at the light that is too bright or stare at the snowy mountain for too long just yet."

"Okay, thank you."

Seongjin took off the bandage and sighed in relief.

In fact, since the success came and went, I assumed that he had probably recovered well. It's just that the Demon King and Lord Masain's behavior has been a bit odd recently, so I just tried to please them.

And for the first time in a few days, Seongjin stepped onto the ground outside the carriage alone, without anyone else's support. Meanwhile, the landscape had completely changed, and now the surroundings were all snow-covered fields and snowy mountains.

after.

I exhaled without thinking, and white breath appeared in the air.

"Lowering! Are your eyes okay now?"

Sir Claudia, who was guarding the bonfire, came running in with joy.

"huh. "They say it's okay."

"I was worried! I was really worried! You can't ever run off alone like that, leaving us alone again! yes?"

"uh..."

Seongjin absentmindedly nodded, looking into her eyes where joy and rebuke were mixed.

Come to think of it, over the past few days, Sir Claudia has been constantly snooping around the carriage and looking around.

It is a loyalty that can feel a little blind. Sir Claudia, why on earth can I care so much?

"Uh, Mr... "Can I take off the bandage now?"

Soon after, Kalmen appeared holding firewood and asked that question with his mouth wide open.

you bastard Did you just try to swear again?

"... "No, no."

"..."

"Seed... "It's not really!"

It was when he was subtly disparaging Calmen.

'... 'Again!'

An unfamiliar sensation running down the back of my head.

Seongjin turned his head and looked at the snowy mountain in the distance.

There is definitely someone watching you from up there on that mountain. This time it was definitely no illusion.

'Hey, devil? 'Can't you feel that?'

[why? What is it?]

The demon lord still seems to have no idea.

After all, you have no choice but to check it with your own eyes.

Seongjin, who was carelessly trying to take a step towards the snowy mountain, suddenly realized that Masain was watching his every move with his eyes, and sighed.

Oh right. Maybe you like that guy who is in complete overprotective mode?

Awww.

A little closer than yesterday, the long howl of a wolf was heard.

195. Sigismund Order (4)

"... "Would you like to take a walk?"

Seongjin nodded to Masain's question.

"huh. walk. "I just want to go up to that area."

Seongjin decided not to get on the nerves of this sensitive knight for the time being. Wherever we go, we will talk first and follow him around as much as possible.

If he sneaks out one more time, he won't sleep and will be monitored. Of course, to deceive the eyes of the senior knight who was closely guarding him, Seongjin still lacked that 'faith'.

"I want to take a good look around the snow-covered scenery. "I've been feeling frustrated because I've been stuck in the carriage these days."

Masain's eyebrows twitch and raise for a moment. I could clearly see her thinking, 'What kind of trick is this?'

"It's still dangerous to walk around. Because the demonic realm is close, you never know when the demonic spirit will appear. "For the past few days, I've been hearing wolves howl nearby."

"All I have to do is have you escort me, right?"

"That is... I also don't have any experience dealing with magical beasts, so I don't know what kind of unexpected situation might arise... .."

However, Herman, who was listening from the side, helped Seongjin without notice.

"You don't have to worry about that, Sir Martha. Wolves spend the summer near the Sigismund Territory and move up to northern Ortona before fall. "The sound of the wolf you heard was probably a straggler from the pack."

"... .."

"Since we've stopped on the way, we'll have an early lunch here. It will take some time to prepare, so it would be a good idea to have a moment of refreshment with the prince... uh? "Why are you doing this?"

Hermann, who belatedly realized Masain's sinister expression, trailed off. Then, Director Bruno silently taps his shoulder, filled with condolences.

"uh? uh?"

Seongjin smiled happily at Hermann, who was sweating coldly as he felt the unusual atmosphere.

Hermann. I will not forget your sacrifice.

Are you really amazing at making me feel like I want to voluntarily reduce the price of an item?

* * *

Knock knock knock.

Footprints are engraved in the white paper-like snow field.

A sight of tall coniferous trees standing silently, covered in clean ice flowers. Seongjin looked around, once again filled with emotion.

'Snow, how long has it been since this?'

After Gehenna's invasion, the Earth experienced an abnormal climate and suffered from high temperatures like midsummer all year round. Thanks to this, there has been no snow for decades.

Seongjin, who had been truly appreciating the surrounding scenery

without realizing it, soon came to his senses and focused his senses on the purpose of coming here.

'That gaze... ... '

The gaze that had been following Seongjin as if it were going to be cut off was now moving away from him at a certain distance as the distance reached a certain distance.

And it was only around that time that the demon lord noticed something unusual.

[I think I know what you're talking about, but I'm not sure. It's too blurry.]

'okay?'

[But how did you know? Is it still so far away that I can't even see your soul?]

Well, that's fine. What is this?

Anyway, is there any way to catch up with the owner of that gaze? Even if you try to chase after them, it is not easy to run because your knees are deeply buried in the snow.

Seongjin turned his head and looked at Masain and Orden following him a few steps behind.

Masain, who was opposed to taking a long walk, only reluctantly gave up his stubbornness when Orden, who had a lot of experience subduing demonic beasts, offered to accompany him. Of course, he still had a dissatisfied face.

On the other hand, Orden looked relaxed, as if he had just gone for a walk.

'No, wait. 'Your steps are really light, aren't you?'

Unlike Masain, who pushes the snow away with each step and creates a long ditch, Orden moves easily, treading lightly on the snow.

The snow was thin and wide around his footprints, leaving faint traces like snowshoe tracks.

Wow, it looks really amazing and comfortable. Is it something like the 'answer' that I've only heard about?

"Grand Duke. "How do you do that?"

Then Orden paused for a moment and looked down at his feet.

"Ah, this is called 'Schunischhe', an old Auror practice that is only passed down to the Sigismund Territory. "You can't take your snowshoes on and off every time the road changes."

In short, to quickly navigate the frozen landscape, you have to alternate between dirt roads, icy roads, and snowy roads.

That's why the knights of the Sigismund Territory learn how to use Aurors like shoes at the right time.

In the snow, the footprints are spread widely by using the soft aura, and on the ice, the rough and unrefined use creates friction like spikes.

"How on earth do you do that? "Can I learn too?"

"well. It is not a skill that can be learned in a short period of time. If we were to look at the tips of how to use it, it is similar to 'opening a small sword screen' in Banajas Type 4 and Type 5. Just put it on your feet and not your hands."

"hmm."

Seongjin tried to use the auror while recalling Banahas Type 4 step by step. However, it was not easy for him to immediately apply the Banahas method of holding and unfolding the sword to his feet.

As he was frowning and taking pictures of the snowy field, something like a slight smile appeared on Orden's face.

"I can't help it now, sir. Unlike just emitting external energy from the sword, you need to create a circuit that circulates the aura from the

outside and returns it to the body. "It takes quite a long period of training to be able to do it unconsciously while walking in the snow."

"okay?"

Seongjin was disappointed for a moment, but then a thought occurred to him.

wait for a sec. Is it really necessary to follow the Banahas exercise from the beginning? Doesn't it seem like operation is just getting more complicated?

All you have to do is spread the aura out to the sides of your feet, that's rather simple, right?

If the idea occurred to you, there was no need to hesitate to take the test. Didn't Seonghwang say that in [Gap] a while ago?

-When an idea becomes concrete, it reaches reality like this.

Seongjin tried to recall the sensations of that time as vividly as possible. Focus all the aura in your body on your feet and move as if you are wearing wide, light snowshoes.

The auror will spin along the round snowshoes and return to the body through the tangled web of auras.

width. width. width.

Orden watched with amusement as the prince fluttered in the snow with his eyes closed.

But that lasts only for a while. His eyes, which were rarely surprised, gradually widened.

"... .. ?!"

As time passed, the depth of the prince's feet became shallower, and after a while, he was running without hesitation across the snow field. It was a sight that was hard to believe even when you saw it with your own eyes.

"Haha, look at this! Sir Masaine!"

Now the footprints the prince left behind were paler and wider than those made by Orden. With the aura wrapped around his feet, the prince excitedly ran up the hill.

"Lowering!"

Sir Martha, who was frightened, quickly moved through the snow, but the prince was already far away.

And Orden, who was staring blankly at the two, muttered softly.

"... genius?"

He, who has been praised as a genius swordsman since he was young, never thought the day would come when he would say something like this to someone else.

'No, but...''

Something was subtly different.

External energy is clearly emitted in a certain pattern, but it does not seem to follow a very specific method. Judging by the marks left in the eyes, the starting positions of the eruptions were different.

In addition, even though an external circulation circuit is not created or operated, the aurors circulate on their own and return to the body.

Is this something that can be explained simply by the term 'genius'?

"Lowering!"

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who was happily running for a while after leaving Masain's call behind, suddenly had a good idea.

What would happen if we operated this more smoothly, reduced friction, and narrowed the width extremely?

The image that came to mind in detail was soon realized as an aura. Masain was horrified to see the prince, who had climbed so high,

quickly gliding down his gaze.

"Hey?"

"Ahahaha!"

Shuung!

Seongjin easily passed Masain and Orden, but when he reached the middle of the hill, he couldn't slow down and rolled around in the snow.

The image reminded me of something similar to skiing, but when I tried to ride it like skiing, it wasn't easy to control.

"omg? Lowering?"

"Are you okay?"

The two people, who were thinking about running down toward Seongjin, stopped for a moment. This is because the prince suddenly got up and ran back toward the top of the hill, scattering snow powder.

Wow.

A wolf's howl could be heard from somewhere, but no one was paying attention to it anymore.

Do do do do.

While Masain was wondering whether he should chase this way or that way, Seongjin, who quickly overtook him, had already reached the end of a fairly high hill.

"I... .."

And before Masain could even call.

Sigh!

Seongjin quickly slid down the hill on his auror skis, which accelerated even more than before.

The speed was so fast that it was difficult to open my eyes due to the force hitting my face.

And Seongjin passed by Masain and Orden and disappeared in an instant beyond the coniferous trees in the distance!

"... ..?"

"... .."

The two people, who were completely dumbfounded and looked in the direction where the prince had disappeared, were shocked when they realized the situation only later.

"Oh my, you!?"

"Hey!!"

With bloodshot faces, the two hurriedly started running toward the forest, chasing after Seongjin.

* * *

Surprisingly, Seongjin's run did not last long.

I slipped into the forest and found that the coniferous trees were lined up quite tightly, blocking the path.

I tried hard to avoid the collision, but the acceleration was so fast that I couldn't control it properly.

Quang!

In the end, Seongjin crashed into a huge tree trunk and rolled around on the floor for a while, unable to control himself due to the shock.

To make matters worse, a bunch of snowballs fell from the tree, and Seongjin, who suddenly looked like a snowman, was lying on the ground comfortably buried in the snow.

"Okay... .."

I guess I was too absorbed in my newly acquired skills.

Squeaky.

While he was rubbing his shaking head with his hand, the Demon King suddenly called him in a very nervous voice.

[...] Hey, Seongjin Lee.]

'huh?'

[Come to your senses and look ahead.]

'... what?'

Seongjin asked that question, but soon he sensed that something unusual was right in front of him and opened his eyes wide.

Crrrrr... ..

just as expected. A large animal was standing next to the bedside of Seongjin, who was lying down. It was a huge gray wolf that looked almost the size of a calf.

Seongjin was convinced as he faced the dry gaze of the guy who was examining him as if searching.

'... 'This is him!'

The guy who was circling around Seongjin and his group and howling recently.

This is the guy who was constantly watching Seongjin from afar.

Beat, beat, beat.

As the wolf slowly approached, Seongjin reflexively fumbled with the nutcracker tied to his belt.

But first, he decided not to draw his sword and just watch what the guy did. This is because in his pitch-black eyes, which did not resemble a wolf, there was a clear light of reason that was difficult to dismiss as an animal.

Eventually, the wolf's breath came so close that it almost touched the

tip of my nose.

[Who are you and are you following me?]

A clear train of thought spoke directly to Seongjin's mind.

"... ... ?"

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

Wolves can talk?

Then I felt embarrassed for a moment. Once the other person was willing to talk, there was no need to refuse.

Seongjin, who tried to hide his surprise, asked the guy back.

"Then who are you and have been looking over here since a while ago?"

[I came to see it because I felt the energy of my people nearby...]

"cognition?"

Then, black eyes without a single ray of light stared at Seongjin for a moment.

[Looking closer, the energy is lighter than I thought. I guess not.]

"..."

[But when I looked at it again, it seemed similar again...]

What man?

Seongjin, who didn't hear anything, suddenly got angry.

"So you're saying we're of the same race or not?"

Then the bridge of the wolf's nose wrinkled, revealing its hidden upper teeth.

Crrrrr.

[Why do you blame me for being weird? This is all your fault.]

"It's my fault?"

[That's right. If we mixed up hay and straw bales and asked you to guess whether it was feed or filler, would you be able to answer easily? It depends entirely on the will of the person who mixed it.]

Well, the example is strangely specific, isn't it?

While Seongjin was thinking that, he suddenly felt a chill spread throughout his body.

As the temporary excitement subsides, the snow surrounding the body is quickly losing body heat.

As I was shaking slightly, the wolf tilted its head and asked.

[Are you still cold even though you're wearing so many layers of fur? Even with that level of aura?]

Wow, I thought it wasn't an ordinary wolf, but could it be that they can also sense auror activity?

"But think about it. The idea of using auras to continuously warm your body is an ignorant way to overcome cold weather through exercise... .."

No, let's stop.

What am I doing against the wolves now?

196. Sigismund Order (5)

Seongjin staggered out of the snow, controlling his body temperature with his aura.

It was quite uncomfortable to lie down and face the wolf upside down.

Fortunately, while Seongjin was relatively defenseless, the wolf took a step back and sat calmly on the floor. This means that they have no intention of attacking right now.

Seongjin, who made that judgment, diligently searched for the bastard along with the Demon King while trying to shake off the snow that had stuck to his cloak.

'Hey, what on earth is that guy? 'Why is the wolf talking?'

[I'm not saying it directly. I am sending strong thoughts.]

'Yeah, whatever it is. Is it the demonic beast of the devil? Or maybe he's the devil?'

[hmm. well? I don't particularly feel any magical energy...]

The demon lord also seems somewhat puzzled.

Well, the only way to start is to ask him directly.

"good. Talking Wolf. Should I say I'm glad to meet you like this?

"Let's make a statement first."

After adjusting his clothes to some extent, Seongjin opened his mouth to the wolf.

"I am Mores Klein, the prince of the Holy Empire Delcross. you?"

Then the wolf looked at Seongjin and tilted its head.

[Are you saying you are the third prince who was invited by the Grand Duke? But according to the rumor, Prince Mores is a pig... excuse. I heard that you are relatively overweight.]

Well, he's a very polite wolf.

[Furthermore, I sense that you are very similar to my people. Are you really a simple human being?]

"... okay."

Seongjin admitted a beat late.

Strictly speaking, he was an evil spirit possessing Mores' body, but after all, Mores himself was human. He couldn't possibly be of the same kin as a wolf or something.

Then the guy looked closely at Seongjin's face and nodded.

[All right. It seems that it was purely my mistake to think that they were of the same race. Considering that the Archduke is accompanying him, the identity you revealed must be true.]

What the hell is this guy?

Not only do you know people's rumors, but you recognize Orden's face and even know that he invited Mores?

[I have felt your presence coming here a few days ago. I was just trying to keep an eye on you because I thought you were my compatriot, but I had no idea that I would end up talking to you alone.]

The fact that he walked away when Seongjin approached him must have meant that this situation was unexpected even for him.

[Now that things have come to this, I have something to ask you. Are you the one who summoned the Demon Beast?]

... what?

Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows, and the wolf asked again.

[And one more thing, why only you? Where are the Wolf Knights who should be with the Archduke now?]

Do you know about the Demon Tree and the Wolf Knights?

Around that time, Seongjin thought of another possibility about this guy's identity.

It is neither a witch nor a devil. So, is this perhaps another soul that was taken away by a normal wolf?

What does it mean to say that I felt a kinship with Seongjin? In other words, I felt a sense of kinship as a fellow evil spirit, or something like that?

"hey. I'm sure I would have asked for a full statement, right? "You know what the hell you are, and I have to tell you everything, right?"

When Seongjin growled without hiding his displeasure, the wolf flinched and lowered his head as if caught off guard.

Round eyes and slightly open lower jaw. It was amazing that you could clearly see the guy's embarrassed expression even though it wasn't a human face.

[okay. I was rude because I was in a hurry. 'His' name is Max.]

"Okay, Max. and?"

[This is an ordinary wolfdog that lives in this area.]

"... what? common? "Wolf dog?"

In the end, Seongjin couldn't stand it anymore and got angry.

"Hey, dude! Are you really going to say that you mistook me for a wolf dog? "Don't you think this is a very poor explanation?"

Then the wolf dropped its tail and whined.

[I am very sorry about that. However, if you are from the Seonghwang family, I cannot give you a detailed explanation about myself. This is an inevitable choice for all of us, so can you please understand?]

"What understanding! You bastard, tell me the truth right now! "Are you an evil spirit who was killed by a wolf dog?"

[It's an evil spirit, I can't stand it!]

"Otherwise, how do you know about the Demon Tree? How far is it from here to there? Are you a member of the Dark Church? "Are you an evil spirit from the Penitent Church?"

[This is a pointless speculation. I am not a member of the Dark Church!]

"Then what is it?"

[So this is Max! I can't give you a detailed explanation, but at least I didn't lie to you!]

Then the Demon King whispered to Seongjin.

[That's true, Seongjin Lee. Although there are some parts that are a bit questionable.]

"Okay..."

Seongjin wiped away his anger by touching his throbbing forehead.

If he's not a witch, a devil, or even an evil spirit, then what on earth is this guy?

At that time, the wolf turns its head to the side and sniffs the air.

[...] Wow, it looks like we don't have much time left now.]

At the same time, Seongjin also detected a presence. I saw the signs of Masain and Orden rushing towards us.

The two looked at each other as if they had made a promise.

"If you can never tell me what you are, let me ask you this: "Are you the one who is causing harm to the Sigismund Territory?"

When Seongjin asked that question, his hand had already reached the nutcracker.

Then the wolf stared at Seongjin. The eyes are dry with little emotion, and even seem somewhat detached.

[At least in my subjective judgment, I am not a harmful being here.]

The devil bastard whispered.

It's true.

Seongjin, relieved, lowered his hand from the sword and sighed. Then the wolf asks Seongjin.

[Please give me one clear answer as well. Did you summon the Demon Beast?]

"No, I'm not. "I have no idea who did it."

[...]]

The wolf stared at Seongjin for a moment with spotless black eyes and then nodded.

[all right. I will trust you.]

Lightly. After wagging its tail a couple of times, the wolf turned away from Seongjin. It looks like the two are probably planning to leave before they arrive here.

At that time, Seongjin suddenly became curious and asked.

"Hey, Max. "What would you have done if you said I was the one who summoned the Demon Beast?"

[...]]

Then the wolf, who had been taking a couple of steps, turned his head and answered.

[Isn't it the same as you? I tried to make sure you never do something like that again.]

"... .."

On the outside, they seemed to be talking calmly to each other, but in reality, they were both ready to fight to the death.

At that time, a voice was heard from over there desperately looking for Seongjin.

"Lowering!"

"Hey!"

Taking that as a signal, the wolf lightly kicked its eyes.

When Seongjin confirmed the location of the two people and turned his head again, the wolf had already completely disappeared beyond the forest.

* * *

"Whoa... .."

A small sigh echoes softly through the training hall.

The paladins of Lilium stopped training all at once and looked back at the stage.

There, Prince Logan, their idol and spiritual leader, was touching Arjuna's handle with a gloomy face. It was like a habit that appeared whenever she was upset.

And this was Lilium's impression as she looked at it.

'Ah, that look full of worry! This too is like a sacred painting!'

The prince's deep blue eyes were filled with a high-dimensional depth that a criminal could not even fathom.

Why is that great prince, who always thinks only of the subjects of the empire, so troubled this time?

"He is clearly thinking of his subjects who are suffering from Hae-soo."

"No, you always worry about your subjects. Haven't you been taking the lead in helping the monster task force lately? He must be honoring the subjects of the imperial capital who sacrificed their lives in the terrible plague."

"With such short-sighted thinking, can you even follow his toes? "The prince is clearly distressed as he thinks about the distant future of the empire!"

Of course, none of them had any idea that Logan was thinking these thoughts with such a sad face.

'I want to make it too. Little Saint Aurelion's Pocket... . An adult's bald head has never felt so cold... ... '

'Amelia's flower petal embroidery was really cute. It would look pretty even if you used lace silk like Sisley. But how do I make that?'

'The more I think about it, the more embarrassed I feel. At this age, I have no experience with sewing or knitting... ... '

Amelia has always been a person with good intuition. And Sisley even has excellent foresight.

If those two people said there was nothing out of the ordinary, there must be something there. So, it would be a good idea for Logan to also put a little bit of effort into this little statue like they did.

Above all, Logan couldn't help but worry that his little saint was being treated poorly compared to the two others.

He took out the wooden statue he had kept in his arms and looked at the saint's warm, smiling face without saying a word.

'I am truly sorry, old man. I am a worthless person who has no special skills and cannot even make a small cone for your head.'

It was a lament about the situation of the youngest sword master on the continent.

And the Paladins of Liliun who were watching this were whispering loudly.

"Does this mean that not only will we continue the legacy of Saint Bastian, but now we will also imitate the virtues of Saint Aurelion?"

"How can you be so wonderful! Isn't this really the right idea? Although we are divided into several holy knights for convenience, aren't we originally knights of the main god who must follow the will of the main god and pursue all his virtues?"

After the Liliun Knights' training session was over.

The knights were finally able to hear from Logan the full story of his worries.

And they were deeply moved again.

'Perhaps he is such a warm-hearted person! 'You can't believe you show such deep affection even for the brother who has been tormenting you for years!'

"It's so shameless to cause you these unnecessary worries."

All the Liliun knights shouted at Logan, who spoke with embarrassment.

"No, sir! "Of course it's something we should help with!"

"I know the best place to place the little saint. "Would you please leave the saint to us?"

"Best place?"

When Logan tilted his head, the knights responded by raising their hands over their brief armor.

"I swear to the Lord that I will place little Saint Aurelion in the safest, most sacred place!"

"There is no place on the ecliptic more blessed than that!"

Toward the trustworthy knights of Lilium, Logan smiled brightly, something rare.

"Thank you everyone! "Thanks to you, I can take a breather thanks to you."

Ah, to the followers, it will be a sacred smile like a ray of glory from the Lord.

That evening, St. Bastian Church.

Archbishop Wesker, who visited the prayer room to pray to wrap up the day, was startled by the view of the prayer room that was somehow different from usual, and looked around with harsh eyes.

And soon it was the flagship.

In the place where the beautiful statue of St. Bastian should have been, a little bald old man was standing and laughing!

"... ... ?!"

What is that?

One of the high-ranking priests spoke with a perplexed face at her absurd muttering.

"So, what is it? I guess it's Saint Aurelion..."

"okay. Why on earth is Saint Aurelion here? "Isn't this the most blessed place in the church, honoring the will of St. Bastian?"

"That was the earnest request of the Lilium knights. "Please keep the little saint here at least until Prince Mores returns."

"Lilium?"

"Yes, I heard it was for Prince Logan..."

Those idiots who can't communicate!

Wesker held his throbbing forehead and let out a low groan.

At the same time, the office of the main palace.

As usual, Seonghwang, who had received a report on his children's status from Lewis, quietly pondered as he looked at the small adult lying on the desk.

'Is it not enough to offer blessings every day? I can't believe my sincerity for my child isn't enough, I still have a long way to go... ... '

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197. Sigismund Order (6)

The place where the giant type 4 demon species swept over was extremely cruel.

The ground was layered with scratches from the roots of the magic tree, and the black, eroded corpses of people and horses were lying everywhere. Despite extensive purification, the bodies were shriveled to the point where identification was impossible.

The Wolf Knights roughly collected them, buried them in the ground, and began the task of salvaging useful items from the broken wreckage.

Fortunately, unlike the creatures whose lives were completely stolen, most of the items on top were intact other than physical damage.

The work of the Wolf Knights accelerated as they additionally rescued some of the horses that had escaped to the outskirts and a couple of unbroken wagons.

Thanks to this, they were able to complete all settlements and depart for Sigismund Range two days after Seongjin's group left.

"Lord Valerie."

Sir Ilma, who had been organizing the ranks by going back and forth between the knights and carts, slowed down his horse and approached the Inquisitor once he had finished organizing things to a certain extent.

"I will tell the drivers to take turns watching. So, how about taking a little rest?"

Currently, Valerie was keeping an eye on one of the wagons.

There were about a dozen prisoners crumpled up there, most likely remnants of the Penitent Church.

"As soon as we arrive at Sigismund Territory, the knights will take care of handing them over to the church."

Then the Inquisitor shook his head.

"Thank you, Sir Ilma. They will be transported to the Imperial Heresy Tribunal. "It would be a little troubling if a hasty summary judgment occurred in the church there."

"... .."

"I will personally hand them over to the guards and take them back when I return."

A firm expression of intention not to hand over disposal authority to the Margrave.

Lord Ilma did not question him further. This is because I assumed that there was something complicated going on.

Although she did not receive a separate explanation from Orden, she, too, had recently sensed the subtle aura of discord flowing between the head of the family and the archduke.

"Anyway, it's surprising that they survived in the middle of that demonic energy. "The area around the campsite was completely withered, with not a single blade of grass left."

"Isn't the fact that they remain unharmed even amidst the demon race's rampage strong evidence that they are devil worshipers?"

"okay. But is this level of restraint okay? If you even try to commit suicide... .."

Although they were close to death, they might do something extreme if they realized that they were being dragged to the Inquisition.

Then the red-haired Inquisitor smiled.

"The Church of Penitence does not fear the torture of the Inquisition. Rather, they will be willing to endure the pain. "This is the only advantage of the Penitent Order."

Valerie explained that they believe that suffering is the only way to repent and the ultimate path to being embraced by the Lord.

As he said, Lord Ilma looked a little tired as he looked at the prisoners whose bodies were covered in scars and wounds.

"It's a doctrine that no one in their right mind can follow."

"Aren't they the ones who serve the devil, who loves human sin and misfortune, as a god? So, it's not something I can understand why they do such crazy things."

It was right then.

"... You dirty apostates! "Who does Ethan dare to frame?"

Flashing.

One of the prisoners opened his eyes wide and scolded. It was Belinda, the parish president.

Even though she had lost a lot of her life force from the Demon Tree and was becoming extremely thin, her eyes were burning brightly as she glared at Valerie.

"Shame on you, you evil things! Heretics! "You are sinners who betrayed the Lord who sacrificed everything for this world!"

Due to the sudden commotion, everyone in the group unconsciously listens to Belinda's voice.

Ethan, who are you calling a heresy now?

"Look at the evidence of that ugly sin! You have forgotten the main lord, and according to your own taste, you have elevated a worthless human being into a new god named saint! They also made their

images into sculptures and scattered them across the continent, praising and worshipping them instead of the gods. But how can this not be called heresy?"

Even though the prisoner was shouting that he would be punished right in front of him, Sir Valerie was just smiling with an at ease look on his face.

In the end, Lord Ilma came forward and scolded him in a stern voice.

"Be careful with your words and actions! Adults receive only the courtesy and respect they deserve as adults. He is not held up as a god."

Then Belinda glared at her with glossy eyes and gritted her teeth.

"Can you be sure? Can you swear that you have never once made a wish to the demons named saint? Are you sure deep down that you are not looking for an easy name to call on behalf of the Lord?"

"I've never... .."

"Do not lie! Know your sins, you apostate!"

It was so reckless that I couldn't communicate at all.

Who on earth do devil worshipers call the devil?

Sir Ilma hoped that this blasphemous and unscrupulous man would quickly shut up, but for some reason, Sir Valery listened quietly and then quietly asked a question.

"Then the reason you summoned the Demon Beast to this land was to punish us apostates?"

Then Belinda glared at him with a laughable expression and then snorted.

"I can clearly see your shallowness. But there's nothing we can't deal with! Yes!"

He admitted that it was the Church of Repentance that summoned

the Demon Beast.

"But why was it a campground at the top of Milo? "Thanks to you, your friend wasn't caught up in the unfortunate event?"

"what?"

"I mean Milo Sangju. "Isn't he also your brother who worships the same god?"

"What? "Aaaah!"

At Sir Valerie's words, Belinda began to scream, almost in a fit, with sparks flying in her eyes.

"dare! dare! "How dare you bring that apostate who deserves to be torn to death against our brothers!"

"Isn't it?"

"That makes sense! From the beginning his contribution to our plan was only a small part! He couldn't even do that properly, so he ended up being executed by our hands! Do you understand?"

And from her mouth, words of unpleasant curses towards Milo Sangju poured out for a long time.

"You're the one who will do shit even if you die! How could that filthy apostate even guess our noble [preparation]! "A great cause for which brothers of all denominations have prepared with all their heart for many years!"

"... Spare?"

When Sir Ilma, who was listening, unconsciously asked a question, Belinda stretched her back towards her and shouted proudly.

"Yes. Now, listen carefully! In order to reclaim the name of the main god, our brothers... ..!"

Right then.

"Oh my gosh!"

Pow!

At the sudden blow of the Inquisitor's fist, the vicar rolled his eyes and fell back.

In his weakened state, a light blow to the face was enough to cause him to lose consciousness. As the attention of the entire Wolf Knights, including Sir Ilma, was focused, Sir Valery shrugged his shoulders as if he were embarrassed.

"We didn't try to get them to open their mouths after being tortured, but we tried to listen to what they had to say. "But it's all just nonsense."

It's a lot noisier than I thought. ha ha ha.

With everyone quiet, only the Inquisitor's empty laughter echoed in the air.

* * *

After a skiing skirmish on a snowy mountain.

Seongjin, whose feet were numb, calmly returned to the carriage with the two people.

"This was truly unintentional, Lord Martha. "It's just an unfortunate accident that happened because I'm not very good at 'Shunishuhe'."

Seongjin carefully made an excuse while watching Masain's thoughts. But surprisingly, Masain didn't nag Seongjin much.

I simply straighten the winter clothes that have become disheveled from rolling around in the snow, and shake off the snow that has settled on the winter clothes on their heads.

But if he looked alright, to be honest, his face looked as if it had been shaved for at least ten years.

-I don't expect much from you anymore. Just please don't die

suddenly like before.

Come to think of it, did he ever say that to Seongjin?

It seems like he has decided to give up on what he has to give up, but that part made Seongjin feel even more uncomfortable.

Rather, it was Orden who gave Seongjin a stern warning.

"Lowering! The influence of the Demonic Sutra is very strong in this area. No one knows when and what kind of accident will occur. Please consider Sigismund's position in inviting you here!"

"hmm... .."

Seongjin reflected deeply in his heart.

Sheesh, I can't believe I'm getting nagged by someone like Orden. Even though I'm angry, I have to be more self-respecting from now on.

"Oh! "But I saw a very big wolf in the forest."

Masain looked surprised next to me, but I guess that's all over now.

Seongjin decided to prioritize his curiosity.

"Actually, I'm not sure if it's a wolf. "In some ways, it seems like he was a wolf dog."

Seongjin spread his arms wide open to Orden, assessing the size of 'Max'.

"So, roughly speaking, this is it? "Are there many big wolves like that nearby?"

Then Orden's expression became strange.

"The wolf... "You mean?"

"It was that big, how could it possibly be? "I'm sure you saw it wrong."

Hermann, who was listening to their conversation from the side, intervened.

"Unless it is something like the Lycan Slope of the Demon Lord, it is an absolutely impossible size."

"Then what about wolf dogs?"

"It's not that different from a wolf dog. "Wolf dogs are often used as hunting dogs in the Sigismund Territory, but I have never seen a dog of that size in all my years."

Hey Max. You say you don't lie, you bastard?

How on earth did this happen? uh?

"Then, other than the dogs raised on the estate, are there any dogs that found their home in the wild?"

When Seongjin asked with a shocked expression, Hermann shook his head resolutely.

"Sometimes wolfdogs are created through self-breeding, but such cases are extremely rare. Even if they do exist, in most cases they become completely wild and join a wolf pack. By now, it would have moved to northern Ortona with other wolves."

hmm. That's right.

Seongjin thought for a moment and then asked the last and most important question.

"By the way, Hermann. "How different are Sigismund's wolf-dogs from ordinary dogs?"

"yes?"

"So, just in case, just in case... .."

"... ..?"

"hmm. How smart are you? For example, just talking to the owner...

... ."

Then Hermann smiled warmly at Seongjin, like a grandfather looking down on his immature grandchild.

"Talk to your dog. It's a very romantic story. "You truly love animals."

"... .."

"Haha, everyone imagines something like that at least once when they're young."

... An ordinary wolf dog is a piece of shit.

Max, you cheater!

Before the next afternoon, Seongjin and his party were finally able to arrive at Sigismund Range. It was a territory formed in a huge basin surrounded by low mountains.

When they arrived in front of the gate, the security forces were mobilized to greet Seongjin and his group. They recognized Orden, who was in the lead, and let the group in right away without any further confirmation procedures.

'... 'The territory is bigger than I thought?'

When the carriage stopped just inside the gate, Seongjin stuck his head out the window and looked around.

I thought it was a completely rural village, but the entire basin was a fairly large estate filled with houses.

Due to the nature of the climate, there were not many rice fields within the territory, giving it a slightly urban atmosphere.

'And it's cold...''

Even though it is late summer, the weather in Yeongji is already winter.

The heavily trafficked floor had already melted snow and was all

muddy, but the roof of the building was still covered in white snow.

"Lord Sebastian!"

Orden got off his horse first and quickly walked towards the man who seemed to be in charge.

"Have you had any trouble, Grand Duke?"

The man greeted Orden with a gentle smile.

Guard Captain, Sebastian Battel.

Even at a glance, it was clear that he was as strong as Sir Ilma, the leader of the Wolf Knights.

If Lord Ilma had the force of sharp fangs that could bite at any moment, the guard captain was giving off a heavy and static force as if he were a huge mountain.

"okay. Ah, the Wolf Knights stayed behind because they had some business to take care of."

"I heard the news. "I will take you straight to the Count's residence so that you can relieve the fatigue of your long journey."

After saying that, the guard captain led all the guards and approached Seongjin's carriage.

He then placed his hand on his chest and showed impeccable manners.

"I meet the Third Prince of the Holy Empire. "It is an infinite honor to be able to serve you like this."

"Oh, nice to meet you."

But the moment his eyes met, Seongjin felt a strange sense of déjà vu.

Have I ever seen this person?

Why does it feel so familiar?

198. Louise (1)

The captain of the guard, Sir Sebastian Battel, was a remarkable man in many ways.

He is as tall as Sir Francis and has a sturdy, well-trained body.

Although he has a gentle appearance, not like a warrior, the powerful force that comes from him is truly as strong as a castle wall.

'There's no way you wouldn't remember such an impressive person?'

Seongjin was tilting his head, and Manager Bruno gave him a quick reminder from the side.

"Lowering. "Sir Sebastian is Sir Ilma's wife."

what? really?

Seongjin looked at him with new eyes.

Just like Lord Ilma, this guard captain also possessed a force similar to that of Lord Masain.

That means they are both preparing for Dekaron Night, and aren't they truly the strongest couple on the continent?

If a fight were to break out between the two, the whole estate would be shaken.

While I was thinking such nonsense, the guard captain, who had no way of knowing this, politely bowed his head again.

"I contacted the count's residence in advance. "I will meet you right away, sir."

In this way, Seongjin and his party arrived at Count Sigismund's residence under the guidance of Sir Sebastian.

The mansion was located on a low hill to the northeast of the estate. It was a huge building with uneven lines, as if it had been repeatedly expanded over a long period of time.

'... 'Is this the count's mansion?'

A rough wall with exposed stones, or a small window that doesn't look like it would be damaged.

To Seongjin, who was accustomed to imperial buildings with large terraces and clean plaster walls, the count's residence felt more like an old castle or fortress than a mansion.

"I heard it's an older building than St. Bastian's Church. Indeed, it is the mansion of a famous family that has firmly protected the continent from the demonic realm for over half a century. "It is truly majestic."

As Masain exclaimed his admiration, a strange look appeared in the guard captain's eyes.

"I'm glad you see it that way. "Sometimes customers who come here for the first time from other regions are disappointed because of the unfamiliar food."

There have been several renovation attempts so far, but most of them are canceled in the planning stage due to the large scale. Moreover, the insulation problem cannot be solved with the architectural styles popular on the continent.

Only the wide garden in front of the mansion was decorated in a style similar to the imperial capital. Because of the weather, all the rose leaves withered and fell off, and only the dull branches remained.

As we passed the dried-up garden and got off the carriage, a group of people waiting for Seongjin bowed their heads and shouted.

"God's blessing on Delcross, a thousand-year-old kingdom!"

It seemed that not only the people of Count Sigismund's family but also the employees had come out in full force.

While I was bewildered by the warmer-than-expected hospitality, the elegant middle-aged woman in the lead took a step forward and gently lifted the hem of her skirt.

"I meet the glorious Prince Mores. "It is a great honor for our family to serve you like this."

It was Countess Sigismund, who had been married from Anatolia, far south of the continent.

Her beautiful face with fine wrinkles is filled with pure joy for Seongjin and his group.

"Thank you for your hospitality, Countess. "I wonder if I'm causing trouble for no reason during a busy time for the estate."

I thought you would be reluctant to visit Seongjin to some extent.

When I said hello to her, thinking it was unexpected, a soft smile appeared on her face.

"no. Originally, I should have greeted you at the imperial capital. This year, I was unable to attend the birthday party because my mother was sick. "It always brings me great joy to have guests from warm regions visit us."

At that time, Orden looked around and asked.

"But, mother. "What about the head of the family?"

"iced coffee. She went out to the defense of Magyeong with her grandfather. "The temperature is low this year, so the lycan slope is moving south earlier than usual."

"... "Even your grandfather?"

"Isn't Lord Ilma out of the territory? So, in case of an emergency, he said he would personally inspect the border."

Vincent Sigismund, who made a name for himself as a great general of the empire, seemed to continue his activities in an orderly manner even after transferring his title to his son. Well, seeing as he is also a Dekaron Knight, it is unlikely that his strength will decline.

"Recently, he always went around singing and saying that he felt an unusual energy in the magic scene. "Now that I have a legitimate excuse to go to the Demon Lord, wouldn't it be good for him?"

After adding that, the Countess looked back at Seongjin and said.

"It is the time when Lycan Slopes, who spent the summer in Magyeong, are slowly moving to the vicinity of the county. "Because of this, the head of the family has to be absent, but in return, I will do my best to ensure that you are not neglected in your hospitality."

Seongjin nods and holds out his arms, and his wife lightly folds her arms. And the two naturally walked into the mansion in unison, as if they were old friends.

"I have already received great help from you. "Didn't you deliberately send the family doctor to me?"

"Ah, I was very worried because I heard that you were seriously injured during the journey. Are you okay now?"

"I'm fine. "Everyone is just overly concerned."

"Isn't that how noble your body is? Actually, I was very surprised earlier. "You looked much healthier than when I saw you last year."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, looking at you, you look a lot like His Majesty the Holy Emperor and Empress Elizabeth."

Then Seongjin burst out laughing.

"I feel relieved to see you like that. "Even now, it's not enough to be an escort for a beautiful lady."

"Oh my, you too! Ho ho ho. "You make the heart of an old villager so

excited!"

Behind them, the count's people and servants walk one after another.

Only Seongjin's group, including Orden, was looking at the scene with their mouths wide open and bewildered faces.

what? What about that natural conversation?

Is that person really the brazen prince who was running around in the snow until yesterday?

"You are, after all, a great person. "Look at that smooth handjob!"

"Lord Claudia! "What a manipulative act!"

"... Is it blood? "Do you have the qualities of a born libertine?"

"Shh! Lord Calmen! "Such blasphemous words!"

Masain, who reflexively thought of his uncle and Prince Logan in turn as he heard the resident knights whispering, immediately turned pale and shook his head.

"No, no way. Even I can't do that..."

* * *

Seongjin was treated very warmly.

A luxurious bedroom filled with warmth, as if a fireplace had been lit long before the group arrived, was waiting for him.

In addition, Seongjin was even provided with a dedicated user.

"He is the most outstanding child among the servants. "He is currently taking butler classes, so you can ask him to do most of the work."

The butler brought a boy neatly dressed in uniform and introduced him as such.

"This is Louise Battel, sir. "I will serve you with all my heart."

He looked exactly the same age as Mores, and seemed very calm and serious for his age. The way he bows his head to Seongjin is a boy befitting a knight rather than a servant.

Seongjin, who was worried that the inflexible Edith might cause an accident at the count's house, was relieved of his worries thanks to this.

"Yes, please take care of me too for a while."

Seongjin, who greeted him like that, looked at the boy closely, feeling a strange sense of déjà vu.

therefore...

"Hmm, didn't we see you somewhere?"

"... yes?"

The boy looked embarrassed for a moment, but quickly adjusted his expression and shook his head.

"I haven't left the territory yet. "I understand this is my first time greeting you here."

Well, I guess so.

Seongjin, who inadvertently asked a question, looked puzzled and tilted his head.

That's really strange. It's clear that this is my first meeting, but I feel this way many times today.

"... By the way, Battel?"

When Seongjin asked a question, Louise nodded as if she understood.

"Oh, I guess you met your father on the way here. "My father is Sebastian Vattel, commander of the guards of the County of Sigismund."

"what?"

Seongjin, who blinked for a moment at the unexpected information, asked again.

"wait for a sec. Then you can't help but respect me... .."

"Yes, it is. "I am Ilma Batel's wife."

... Women's food?

Seongjin was astonished.

'I thought you were really a boy?'

Then the devil bastard snorted.

[What is he saying now? At first glance, she looks like a girl, right? A guy with good eyes is strangely dull.]

Well, I thought the lanky thing was just because he was a young boy, but maybe Luise is older than he looks.

"Lunch is ready. "Can we take you to the restaurant right away?"

As I was looking at her blankly, Louise calmly informed me of the next schedule.

Daughter of Sir Ilma and Captain of the Guard, Sir Sebastian.

Indeed, I can't help but feel familiar, as if I've seen it somewhere before. Because the girl resembled both her parents.

The cool features and disciplined posture were exactly the same as Sir Ilma, and the light flaxen hair and calm eyes were exactly the same as Sir Sebastian.

"Or I'll run you a warm bath so you can relax."

"Uh, no. "Let's go to the restaurant now."

Seongjin took off his thick winter clothing and handed it to Louise.

However, at the moment she handed over the clothes, Seongjin's sharp eyes noticed something unusual on her hands.

'... Learn swordsmanship?'

The girl's long, long hands had calluses characteristic of someone who had held a sword for a long time.

Considering her parents, this wouldn't be strange. Didn't she say she's taking deacon classes now though?

Seongjin was puzzled, but he didn't ask any further questions and followed Louise out of the room.

Wong wong wong!

As I was walking along the first floor hallway with Louise, I heard several dogs barking from somewhere.

"Do you have a dog?"

Then Louise glanced out the window and explained.

"These are the hunting dogs that the Count keeps. "It's time to return from training."

"okay?"

Come to think of it, Hermann was like that too. In Sigismund Territory, which is in contact with the Demon World, a lot of it is said to depend on the abilities of hunting dogs.

It is said that hunting dogs are raised and trained professionally at the count's residence. They manage the bloodlines of excellent hunting dogs, and some breed them with wolves to obtain wolf dogs.

Wong wong!

Wow.

A long howl as if looking for someone.

Seongjin, who had been quietly listening to the sound, had a strange premonition and turned to Louise and asked.

"Perhaps we can take a look at the hunting dogs now?"

For a moment, a faint look of embarrassment flashed across her face. But then she takes out her pocket watch, takes a moment to gauge the time, and nods.

"There is a shortcut to the main building through sponsorship. Since the kennel is close by, I think it would be enough to take a look around. "I'll bring some winter clothes, so could you wait a moment?"

"no it's okay. "You can just use an auror."

There's nothing that can't be done, even if it's just for a little while.

But it was when Seongjin took a step forward with cold support.

Doo doo doo doo.

Suddenly, a large dog ran across the garden at breakneck speed and rushed at Seongjin.

"... ... ?"

Huh?

Seongjin, who was caught off guard because there was no hostility at all, stumbled under the weight of the heavy dog and fell to the floor.

"Lowering!?"

Before he could come to his senses, something wet touched Seongjin's face. The dog that aggressively crushed Seongjin started licking his face.

Startled, Louise quickly waves her hand and knocks the dog away from Seongjin.

'What is this again?'

I woke up with an absurd feeling, but what was so good about this dog? Now it started jumping around Seongjin, wagging its tail.

"Max, Max!"

Soon, an old man who appeared to be a zookeeper hurriedly ran

towards them.

"Max! You bastard! "What are you going to do if you suddenly run away like that?"

... Max?

Then the dog called Max barked lowly at the old man as if saying something. It looked like she was scolding him.

Wong wong!

'Max, is this a coincidence?'

But perhaps because of my mood, the dog's appearance really looked familiar.

Overall, it resembles a wolf. A dark gray back and sides that fade to grayish brown. And the hair on both cheeks and stomach shines white.

... no way?

"... Max?"

Seongjin called the dog in a trembling voice.

OK.

Wong!

As if in response, the dog barked loudly and sat down on the floor, wagging its tail.

"Max? really? But why don't you say anything..."

Seongjin trailed off. Then, the dog tilted its head and licked Seongjin's nose and cheek with its wet tongue.

Even if you wash your eyes and look for Izzy, you can't see it, it's just an active puppy.

Seongjin was in great shock.

"Unbelievable..."

Max! What on earth happened in the meantime?

How did you end up like this?

199*

199. Louise (2)

"Max! Anything is fine, so please just say something."

Wong wong!

"What the hell is going on? Have you ever suffered a serious head injury within a day? Amnesia?"

licking.

"Oh, stop licking and be quiet. sit down!"

Kiing.

"Oh, good job. Are you smart? hand! Hey, that's nice!"

Seongjin, who was gently scratching behind the ears of Max, who was whining cutely, and giving him a ton of praise, suddenly noticed the strange gaze and raised his head.

Sure enough, Louise had a strange and mysterious look in her eyes, and the old zookeeper literally said, 'What kind of crazy person is this?' He was looking at Seongjin with that expression.

what? What's wrong with you?

[Lee Seong-jin, come to your senses.]

The devil bastard sighed.

[No matter how you look at it, that dog is not the same as before. First of all, the size itself is so different, right?]

'is it?'

Seongjin stroked the bridge of Max's nose and between his eyebrows and looked at the dog closely.

but. The Max I met on the snowy mountain looked to be about the size of a pony or calf. However, although this thing is large, it is not much different from the size of a normal wolf.

'More than anything, your eyes are different...'

In the eyes of Max, who was looking up at Seongjin, the pumpkin-colored irises unique to wolf blood were shining.

On the other hand, how was Max in the snowy mountains? Weren't they horribly pitch-black eyes whose true nature was unknown?

'Common sense suggests that linking the two is a ridiculous idea...'

But yeah.

"Max."

At Seongjin's call, Wong! A strong answer comes back right away.

See, after all, this guy is Max.

* * *

Seongjin arrived at the restaurant a little late.

This was because Max and Huwon had been rolling around for a while unexpectedly, and their clothes were all messed up with dirt and dog hair.

After asking for understanding and taking a seat, the Countess smiled kindly and asked.

"I guess you like animals very much. "Do you have a dog?"

Well, Seongjin's every move is being reported to her in real time.

However, rather than blaming him for his rudeness, my reaction was that I just thought it was cute. Since there are many children of the

same age, they seem to be tolerant of these issues.

"I think I would like to raise one. "This is my first time seeing a wolfdog, but it's very impressive."

"Ho Ho. is it so. "They are certainly elegant dogs that retain the majesty of beasts of prey."

The woman who answered like that raised her wine glass and continued speaking.

"But despite their cool appearance, wolf dogs are unfortunately not suited to being raised like regular dogs. "They rarely rely on humans."

"Is that so?"

"yes. Wolf dogs have strong self-esteem and do not particularly crave affection from humans. "Because they are so independent and aloof, training is also very difficult."

Seongjin chewed his appetizer and listened quietly to her explanation.

"They don't think of humans as their masters. That's probably the biggest difference from regular dogs. When fighting against demonic beasts, they clearly stand on the side of humans, but they only recognize that they are protecting the same group. They have no loyalty to their owners or a desire to be loved by their owners. "No matter how much you want to keep them by your side and pet them, they are indifferent children who do not show any affection to their owners."

... There was a lot of cuteness, right?

Seongjin, who remembered Max rolling over on his stomach and rolling on the floor, immediately shook his head and thought.

'Well, he's a guy who speaks with thoughts, so he's probably no different from an ordinary wolfdog.'

From then on, the meal proceeded in a friendly manner.

The Count's children, including Orden, and Sir Martha were sitting there together. However, most of them were engrossed in their meal and were quietly listening to the conversation between Seongjin and the Countess.

Mostly, the wife would talk about the characteristics of the estate or its unique cuisine, and Seongjin would enthusiastically chime in with her comments.

"You can't tell me how surprised I was when I first got married and tried bear meat."

The main dish was bear meat steak, which the countess explained was also a dish rarely seen except in the Sigismund region and the northern part of Ortona.

"It's embarrassing, but at that time, I cried in secret, thinking that all northerners only eat scary food. But when I actually tried it, I realized it was lighter and more delicious than deer meat."

"It certainly is. "The flavor is amazing."

The meat, covered in strong spices and grilled to a crisp, was just edible, but Seongjin let out a sigh as if he had just encountered an unprecedented delicacy.

It was clearly a service for the countess.

'I think my gastronomic standards have increased while living in the Imperial Capital.'

Of course, there were some who were truly moved.

[ah! This is so delicious! After all, meat has a strong fiery taste! Seongjin Lee, let's ask for more of this, okay?]

Well, anyway, since the demon lord is satisfied, I guess that's it.

But that peaceful time ended the moment tea with dessert was served. This is because Orden, who saw the contents of the tray, became thoughtful and shouted at the Countess.

"mother!"

"Oh my, it's a surprise! Why are you doing this all of a sudden, Orden?"

While everyone was startled by the sudden shout, Orden jumped up from his seat and shouted in an angry voice.

"Didn't I tell you this clearly before? This tea is not good for your health, so stay away from it! "Have you forgotten my warning?"

It is said that they were secretly investigating the car without the head of the family knowing, but it seems they couldn't just sit back and watch other family members drink it.

Then the Countess looked around with a very embarrassed face.

"No, dear! Orden! If you say that, what does that make me a host? "Wouldn't your Majesty greatly misunderstand?"

"So why are you doing this here?"

"I just wanted to introduce the unique foods of the Sigismund Territory to Prince Mores, who is visiting after a long time. "Everyone has been drinking well for years, so why are you so special?"

As her face suffered in front of a member of the imperial family, the countess's voice began to raise her voice little by little.

"Orden! It's such a shame! "Where on earth do you leave all your etiquette behind and do something like this in front of such an important guest?"

"The real shame is me! It is I, the prince, who personally visited your estate at my invitation! "What kind of disrespect is this to serve something like this whose origin is unknown?"

"You don't know the source! Isn't this the product that the head of the family personally inspected and signed a contract to supply? "I must tell the matriarch about this matter!"

What should I do now?

The Countess, whose pride has been hurt, does not seem to back down easily, and Orden, who must move without the head of the family, is now expressing his suspicions to make the entire Count's house buzz.

The guest, Masaine, was naturally embarrassed and couldn't say anything, and the rest of the Count's children were just watching without even thinking about stopping the two people's argument.

At first glance, they appeared to be quiet and reserved, but Seongjin did not miss the faint mockery and hope that passed through their eyes.

Orden's younger brothers were secretly hoping that the heir's strong position might be shaken by this incident.

Seongjin smiled bitterly.

'Brothers who compete for succession usually have this kind of atmosphere. I don't really like Orden, but I still feel a bit sorry for this situation.'

Anyway, there is only one thing for Seongjin to do here.

I quietly looked down at the teacup in front of me, and there was a light pinkish liquid flowing with a gentle scent of wild flowers.

'This is the same medicine as that drug...' ... '

The first few times it just gave me a mild sense of uplift and happiness.

After thinking this to himself, Seongjin picked up the teacup and slowly brought it to his mouth.

[...] Seongjin Lee? Hey, what are you doing now...]

The Demon King is greatly embarrassed and asks in a trembling voice.

Because everyone was preoccupied with the noisy argument, only one person noticed Seongjin's unexpected behavior.

'countess... ... !'

Yes, just her.

Even while arguing with Orden, the wife's eyes were extremely calm as she glanced at me.

Did he view his son's well-intentioned warning as simply a sign of rebellion against the family and the head of the household?

Anyway, what is certain is that she is the perfect ally of the matriarch.

And she is currently strongly suspecting that this car may not be the reason Seongjin and his group came here.

[Hey, stop! What are you doing now? This is made from Loferum eggs! This is the water that creates the gray plague!]

Hehe. Demon King, please know. The human stomach is stronger than you think.

Having experienced the end of the world, there are not many foods in this world that cannot be eaten.

Horok.

Soon, the sweet scent of flowers passes into my throat along with the faint scent of earth.

"... ... !"

The Countess' eyes, who were watching Seongjin, widened. I guess I never expected that he would drink tea without hesitation during such an intense argument.

As she closed her mouth and stared at Seongjin, the eyes of everyone in the restaurant naturally followed her and focused on Seongjin.

"Lowering? "What is this now!"

A frightened Orden runs towards Seongjin, and in the meantime,

Seongjin pours all the tea into his mouth and puts down the teacup with a percussion.

"The scent is very unique. It's not a bad tea, as it's smooth on the throat and doesn't have a strong bitter taste. "Can I know your name?"

To Seongjin's calm question, the Countess answered with a slightly trembling voice.

"... "It is said to be good for health, so we just call it [Yakcha]."

"is it so. Is tea good for your health? "I'm probably used to Melbourne for my taste, but sometimes I like a unique tea like this."

Seongjin, who nodded and responded, gently reprimanded Orden, who was now staring at him with a hard face.

"It's a good-tasting tea, so why? Archduke, there is definitely something unusual about you. "The Countess will take care of it."

"... .."

"Stop bothering your mother for caring so much about dinner, and now let's talk about something else. Actually, I'm most looking forward to seeing Demon Lord here. "Does the legendary Glatzer Troll really appear in the Demonic World?"

And at the same time, Seongjin quietly winked at Masain, who was looking pale.

'Lord Masaine, take care of your expression. I didn't drink poison, but our purpose will be revealed.'

Anyway, it seems like both of them are secretly clueless about what's going on in the world. What would have happened to both of us if I hadn't taken care of it, yeah.

Even after the meal was over, refreshments and chatting continued for a while.

The atmosphere was not as cordial as at first, but as the topic shifted

to the Demonic Lord, the Count's children also began to add a word or two.

Seongjin listened quietly to their conversation, occasionally rubbing his temples with his hands.

'I'm dizzy... ... '

weird. This is not the reaction I expected at all.

Why are my eyes spinning as if I drank such strong alcohol?

[Hey, Seongjin Lee. are you okay?]

The devil's voice that occasionally asks questions feels far away, as if it is echoing from far away.

'Is it also the medicine truck's fault?'

But I haven't heard of any symptoms like this. The Countess and the other children drank tea together, but they all seemed fine.

Besides, there was another problem.

[Even the prince of the Holy Empire is still a child. I can't come to my senses because of the story about fighting against demonic beasts. It's laughable.]

I was so dizzy that I started hearing strange auditory hallucinations.

[it's a shame. Let's fight a little more. How great it would have been if it had gone out of favor with the matriarch like this.]

[Orden, that bastard, it's so disgusting to see him pretending to be so arrogant without knowing the end. I wish I went somewhere and died quickly.]

[If you become friends with the prince, will you invite him to the imperial palace? I want to leave this village quickly.]

Seongjin blinked his eyes and thought blankly.

Orden, you bastard. You may be simply ignorant, but you are still the

best among your brothers.

[Ah, now that Orden has stepped forward, his face has been completely ruined. Was it really just my suspicion? Did the prince really just come to have fun?]

countess.

I thought she was a warm person like my mother, but I was disappointed. From now on you are my enemy.

"... Lowering."

Masain, who had been looking closely at Seongjin earlier, stood up and spoke as if sensing that his condition was unusual.

"countess. If you don't mind, I will take you to my room. "My recent injury hasn't fully recovered yet, so I think I need to rest a bit now."

Only then did the Countess notice Seongjin, who was blinking sleepily, and made a fuss.

"Oh my, look at my mind! "I enjoyed the conversation so much that I was able to keep the guests, who were tired from the long journey, for this long!"

In that way, Seongjin walked toward the room, supported by Masain.

Meanwhile, my body felt strangely floating, and the auditory hallucinations ringing in my ears were getting worse.

[Hey, Seongjin Lee. Can you hear me?]

[...] What is this all about? What is it all about? Why am I here?]

[Repent! Repent!]

[Hey, come to your senses! What are you doing now? ... !]

[Ugh! A monster, a monster! Save people! Wow!]

It's so noisy it's killing me. Where on earth are you talking like this?

It was as if everyone was shouting at him through loudspeakers.

I don't even know how far I walked on my own feet. When I came to my senses, Seongjin had already returned to the room and was lying on a warm bed.

Masain asked while holding his sword next to him and removing the uncomfortable outer clothes.

"What makes you uncomfortable, sir? Was there a problem with that car earlier? Reply right away... .."

"Uh, no. What to do with a cup "Lord Masaine knows very well that that's not the cause, right?"

I think that was the cause, but I couldn't say it straight because I didn't know how Masain would react.

"I just suddenly feel really sleepy. "I'm just going to sleep quietly."

Seongjin pulled up the bedding and quickly closed his eyes.

"Now Louise will take care of me, so don't worry. "Lord Masaine, take a break."

Masain, who stayed by the bed for a while, finally left after seeing that Seongjin's breathing had become even.

And as soon as he left the door.

sparkle.

Seongjin opened his eyes and gestured to Louise, who was standing in the corner.

"... ..?"

Louise came closer to the bed with a nervous expression. Then, as if he sensed something, he sniffed, his nose twitched slightly, and his eyebrows furrowed slightly.

"... Medicine tea?"

"huh? "Oh, right."

Even while his head was spinning, Seongjin thought it was amazing.

How do you know that smell? There wasn't a very strong scent? Plus, I ate bear meat cooked with strong spices earlier.

"Why on earth... .."

Louise's expression as she looked down at Seongjin seemed a little absurd.

Does he know anything about medicine trucks?

I was curious at first, but there was something else urgent to do first.

"Louise, let me ask you a favor. now... .."

As Seongjin opened his mouth like that, something suddenly flowed from his nose along with a spinning sensation.

Louise, startled by the smell of blood, shouted.

"Lowering! Reply right now... ..!"

"no!"

Seongjin, who shouted sharply, let out a small groan as he held his head, which was pounding despite his own voice.

"... Okay. If you make a fuss now, you'll be in trouble. "For now, keep it a secret from everyone."

"but... .."

"And among my companions... Sir Sharon, there is an exorcist. Just keep quiet... .."

Seongjin, who spoke up to that point, trailed off.

The auditory hallucinations that had been getting louder since a while ago went beyond ringing in my head and were now resonating so loudly that they shook the whole world.

[Repent! Repent! Repent!]

"Lowering... ... !"

With Louise's voice receding far away, everything suddenly became dark.

200

200. Louise (3)

A junior who came to visit me bowed his head with an apologetic look on his face.

-I'm really sorry, senior. Still, I'm so glad you're safe.

Hearing that shameless guy's words, my fists naturally tighten.

However, Seongjin, who realized that even the slightest movement would cause a catastrophe, gave up on immediate punishment and rested his head quietly on the hospital bed.

I really can't kill that bastard.

-Anyway, you are really great. Who would have imagined walking back from there?

The junior who brought a chair and sat down next to him was waving with an expression that seemed extremely harmless.

-개새끼야. Cough!

When I answered without thinking, I coughed and small droplets of blood spattered out.

Cluck cluck.

Still, he is in good condition considering he suffered from severe airway burns. Without the help of a respirator, I was able to survive to some extent with just a small oxygen line in my nose.

-This is not all because of you! Cough! How can a guy who served in the control tower confuse LIMA and ROMEO? Crazy bastard.

Thanks to a wrong order, Seongjin left the operational area alone and became stranded in the middle of the Fire Caterpillar nest.

The Fire Caterpillar was a monster that spewed deadly poison. I barely escaped the situation with a moment of wit and extreme concentration, but originally, as soon as I was isolated, I would have been engulfed in poisonous smoke and turned into a handful of blood.

The junior was well aware of this fact, so he stayed by Seongjin's side for a while and obediently pretended to take care of himself.

-I've thought about it sometimes before. My senior acts so noble even when he only eats Jjambap. Haven't you been able to drink a sip of water for the past two days?

While I was diligently eating my long-awaited patient food, a junior who was carrying water next to me suddenly said something unexpected.

Seongjin's eyebrows twitched.

What kind of bullshit is this?

-That senior's arrogant attitude in everything. Is that some kind of compensation mentality to hide low self-esteem?

-what?

-Extreme hunger can ruin a person, but I think you eat while observing all manners. How did you get into that habit?

Seongjin felt his appetite drop.

What did this guy eat wrong? You've been reciting instructions out of your mind, and now you're making a fuss about people eating?

Originally, I would have just slapped myself on the back of the head and finished it off, but unfortunately, my physical condition was not right now.

-Do not make noise when chewing. Use chopsticks properly. Isn't this

just ordinary home education? What's the problem?

-... yes?

As if he had heard an unexpected answer, the junior looked at Seongjin dumbly for a moment. Then she asks again with a suspicious expression.

-Are you serious about that?

-What if you don't mean it?

what? why? what?

I moved my chopsticks and glared at him with a sullen expression on my face, and my junior suddenly burst out laughing so loudly that the entire hospital room was gone.

-ha ha ha! Are you a senior? Home education? Ahahaha!

The guy who was holding his stomach and bursting into laughter eventually fell off the chair and slumped down on the floor. He laughed so hard that he now had tears in his eyes.

Is this bastard here to visit the hospital or to give someone medicine?

-ha ha ha. This was the funniest joke I've heard recently. Thank you very much, senior, for leaving us with a pleasant memory at the end. I'm serious about this.

"I must have laughed so much," said the junior who had barely recovered himself.

-last?

-yes. I have to say hello to you soon. I should have made this move myself a long time ago, but I was too complacent because I was just hoping for a fluke.

He adjusted the laces of his combat boots, tidied up his clothes, and spoke calmly.

-Senior, do you know that? This world will soon be destroyed anyway. Sooner or later everyone will die, it's an inevitable fact.

Then, the junior blinked his right eye busily and stared intently at me with his remaining eye.

-Then why are you still persistently alive? It's all pointless now, so why are you waiting so desperately?

Seongjin knew very well when that guy's habit came out.

Left amblyopia. Jinx looking at his prey.

You bastard, close your eyes right now.

Who is it looking at like that now?

Seongjin, who was reflexively tracing the position of the familiar sword, suddenly realized that his waist was empty and was shocked as if he had been hit hard on the head.

... uh?

No nutcracker? why?

* * *

omg!

Seongjin suddenly opened his eyes and took a deep breath, breaking into a cold sweat.

'... 'Nutcracker!'

As soon as he came to his senses, he hurriedly groped his waist. And as always, Seongjin checked the sword belt and hilt in the familiar location and then heaved a sigh of relief.

'Oh, what is it? 'You were surprised.'

Thump thump thump.

As my heart beats faster, a sense of reality slowly comes to me.

'Was it all a dream...?'

The moment I realized it, the pain in my entire body that I had felt so vividly before quickly subsided. I no longer feel the burning sensation of my airways that used to sizzle every time I take a breath.

Well, it was already over ten years ago. I thought I had completely forgotten about it by now.

Sungjin, feeling relaxed, lay down and blinked for a moment.

'But where on earth is this?'

When I look up, I see a very unfamiliar ceiling. The place where Seongjin was lying was a room as small as the palm of your hand.

'... Was there a place like this in Delcross?'

Bright lights of unknown origin pour in, and the plain pastel-toned wallpaper covering the ceiling and walls gives it a modern feel.

As I stood up in confusion, someone spoke to me next to me.

[Did you even have a dream? Just lie there.]

A calm voice that now feels very familiar.

When Seongjin, startled, turns his head, he sees a familiar figure.

[...] father?]

The only furniture in the room was a small bed that Seongjin was lying on and a desk so small that it could be considered a side table.

And there was Seonghwang standing in front of the desk.

He was dressed in light casual clothes, without the robes he usually wore, and spoke in a casual manner while leafing through the few books he had.

[Or would you like to read a book? It seems that it will still take more time for the effect of the tea to completely wear off.]

... Medicine tea!

Only then did memories from before he lost consciousness flash through Seongjin's mind one after another.

After drinking the medicinal tea given by Countess Sigismund, Seongjin felt that something was unusual and immediately tried to call Seonghwang.

The fact that he is here now probably means that Louise has properly listened to Seongjin's request.

However, I thought that if the success came, I would definitely borrow Sir Sharon's body, but how did this come about?

'Hey, devil? Are you listening? 'What on earth happened in the meantime?'

I quickly called the demon lord, but there was no answer.

Instead, Seonghwang chose a book and approached Seongjin at a leisurely pace.

[No matter how much you call it, you won't hear it now.]

[...] yes?]

[This is a space where all external thoughts are cut off. Therefore, the thoughts here also cannot flow out.]

A space where even the devil's thoughts are cut off. A powerful voice that is transmitted directly as if it were ringing in your head, not in your ears.

After thinking over and over again, Seongjin came to one conclusion.

[This is not the real world.]

Then Seonghwang slightly tilted his head and answered.

[I don't know. It is a bit absurd to say that it is not reality.]

Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and quietly focused his gaze

on Seongjin.

[However, given that this is not the Delcross dimension, it may not be reality. This is the newly created Flame Dimension.]

[Flame injury... ..]

[okay. There was no other way to completely block the thoughts pouring in from all directions.]

Seongjin slowly pondered the meaning and was astonished.

Wait a minute, are you saying that this guy created a small dimension to block thoughts?

'Are you saying that if you become God's representative, creating dimensions one by one is not a task? no way... No matter how much you think about it, it's not normal, so can there really be no consequences?'

Come to think of it, Seonghwang's complexion seems paler than usual, perhaps due to his mood.

[Are you okay? Isn't it because of me that you were overexerting yourself?]

When Seongjin asked worriedly, Seonghwang asked back as if he was puzzled.

[swarm? Why did you think that?]

[Your complexion looks a little bad?]

[...]]

Seonghwang then blinked his eyes as if he was a little embarrassed, and then let out a small sigh as if he realized something. A slightly bitter smile appears on his face as he looks down at the book in his hand.

[no. I guess it's just because this isn't a place I have very good memories of. It's all in the past anyway, so don't worry about it.]

Well, in order to create such a specific and realistic image, the caster's memory would have to be the foundation.

And those memories may not always be good ones.

[I'm sorry, father.]

Seongjin bowed his head obediently and said.

No matter what my initial intention was, it is true that I drank the medicinal tea with my own hands.

At the time, I thought I had found the best way to smoothly overcome the situation, but who would have guessed that I would suddenly experience auditory hallucinations coming from all directions.

As expected, Seonghwang, who seemed to have guessed the situation to some extent, raised his head and looked at Seongjin.

[It's worth knowing. You probably never expected this result.]

[Yes, that is actually true. I thought one drink was nothing.]

Even though Loferum eggs are part of the raw material, according to the process obtained by Orden, the content is extremely small.

Although medicinal teas have been circulating in Sigismund's territory for several years now, only a small number of them have begun to show clear abnormal symptoms. After all, these are all recent events.

I never thought I would suffer from such terrible auditory hallucinations just because I drank one drink.

'wait for a sec! Now that I think about it, I saw that a new dimension was created to block the evil spirits... ... !'

So does that mean that what I heard earlier wasn't an auditory hallucination?

Are you saying that they are all real thoughts?

At that moment, Seongjin's head began to spin.

Medicine tea and Loferum eggs. An organ that receives gray plague and death. People of Sigismund's territory who talk nonsense and slowly go crazy.

'I have a rough idea of how medicinal tea affects people. But, then, the reason why such a change happened so quickly only to me... ... '

Somehow, a bad feeling creeps in.

Seonghwang, who was quietly observing Seongjin's complex expression, gave a hint at the right time.

[I'm sure you have guessed it to some extent by now. The medicinal tea distributed in the Sigismund Territory clearly creates flame crystals with an extremely low probability in the minds of those who have taken it for a long time.]

If you take it for a long time, there is a low probability.

And in Seonghwang's next words, Seongjin's anxiety turned out to be true.

[But a small amount of medicinal tea may be enough to stimulate what is already there.]

Seongjin's eyes shook violently.

That means only one thing.

[So, I was originally...]

No, it's not me.

Seongjin looked at the familiar combat uniform he was wearing and the tattered bandages wrapped around both fists, biting his lip and shaking his head vigorously.

The sword belt and nutcracker that I thought were tied to my waist had also disappeared without a trace.

It's natural. This is a world of flames.

It is a space where strong thoughts create substance.

[Mores is-]

Seongjin continued speaking in a trembling voice.

[That child had an innate ability to burn. Was he originally a psychic like the twins?]

Suddenly, the fact that Seonghwang's gaze was at a height not that different from his own struck Seongjin deeply.

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201. Louise (4)

Did Mores have a decision to burn from the beginning?

In response to that question, Seonghwang looked at Seongjin with unreadable eyes for a moment and then blurted out something strange.

[You're thinking useless thoughts again with that small head.]

[...] yes?]

[Yes, son. You guessed right. You were born with a decision to pray from the beginning. For some reason, it wasn't activated every time, but sometimes, when I was playing around with Herna or Gades, I used channeling well.]

what? son?

At that moment, Seongjin felt something welling up inside him.

This guy is really... .. !

Seongjin jumped out of bed and shouted at Seonghwang, who was staring at him without even moving a muscle.

[How long are you going to pretend like you don't know?]

A question that had been hanging around my throat for the past few months as if it had been gripped tightly, and I couldn't bring myself to say it out loud.

When it finally opened up, the anxiety, doubts, and sadness I had been feeling all burst out at once.

[Why do you still call me son? Successful Majesty. Can't you even see me now?]

Even without looking in the mirror, Seongjin knew very well what he looked like. Because I was able to draw the detailed outline of the face just by feeling the air touching my skin.

This is because he has lived without changing a single inch for decades since he became a hunter and began absorbing the energy of monsters.

[Do you know what? Even after all this, I am very old! You probably can't even imagine!]

In fact, I believe that you are my son.

No, it's the same even if you don't know your age.

Just looking at it at face value, I'm not your older brother now!

[why... ... !]

And finally, the question I wanted to ask the most came out of Seongjin's mouth.

[Why aren't you looking for your real son?]

Excited.

With each word uttered, the tightly closed bolts open one by one.

[You can do that! Didn't you find me even at the border of the dimension? But why do you pretend not to notice that an evil spirit like me has taken over your son's body?]

Excited.

My heart began to beat harder and louder, as if I was knocking on a door.

It felt as if the blood had drained from Seonghwang's seemingly insensitive face, but once the words were poured out, he could never

take them back.

[Is that by any chance? Is there no way to keep this body alive until the real Mores' soul is found? Then you just have to tell me the truth! I will give it back to you as you wish!]

okay. Right now, I can still, not yet, give it back.

As long as you don't make me regret this body anymore.

My heart is pounding.

Is this just my own pulse, or is it the struggle of something else that I don't know?

Seongjin couldn't decide whether he should just pour it out or suppress it and lock it up again, as it would burst out at once as soon as there was even the slightest gap.

[No matter how evil I am, I am not shameless enough to steal the body of a young child! So, it would be better for both of us if we stop doing unnecessary family games at this point! Are you really okay with this? What are the sins of Sister, Logan, and Sir Martha who know nothing!]

Emotions are heightened and thinking is rapidly accelerated.

It's a disaster.

My consciousness expanded and I began to reach every corner of the narrow room.

Now Seongjin was looking at Seonghwang, who had his mouth shut with a stern expression, and at the same time was contemplating himself screaming at him from afar.

Ah, I know what this is.

I'm sure I'll feel this way someday... ..

[Calm down.]

Tuk.

Seongjin, startled by a light hand suddenly touching his head, stopped thinking for a moment.

Oh, wait, wait! Something is happening now.

Tuk.

Before he could catch his senses, Seonghwang knocked on Seongjin's head again. As if pouring cold water on her, her head slowly begins to clear.

Tap, tap, tap.

The pats that continued at regular intervals gave Seongjin a strange sense of stability and at the same time served to prevent his thoughts from running wild.

In an instant, my vision returns to normal and my heartbeat calms down.

[You shouldn't doubt yourself like that. There is no need for you to get there yet.]

When I came to, Seongjin was breathing heavily as if he had been sprinting for a long time.

And to Seongjin, Seonghwang called in a soft voice.

[Mores.]

This guy is still... ... !

Seongjin, who was trying to push away Seonghwang's hand in a surge of defiance, was dumbfounded when he realized that his field of vision had been far below his.

... what?

Seongjin opened his eyes wide and looked at his hands.

Although there are calluses here and there, the hands are clearly

smaller and younger than the ones in memory.

Clearly, Mores'... ? What is this?

[Mores.]

[...]]

Seongjin stubbornly kept his mouth shut and shook his head.

How did this happen?

okay. This is a world of flames. I wonder if this guy can even change my appearance at will...

[Son.]

[...] yes.]

I reluctantly answered the voice that kept urging me, and Seonghwang sighed softly.

[okay. With that personality, I must have endured it for a very long time. I don't know that you must have been very frustrated because you didn't know the English language. But have you thought about this? Why didn't you ask me this a long time ago?]

Why did you do that?

Well, at first I didn't want to get kicked out for no reason, and later on, it was bothersome to think about it in a complicated way.

Moreover, when I thought about the people in Seonghwang who were worried about Mores' whereabouts, I couldn't stop talking.

But at the same time.

'... Is that really all it is?'

On the other side of my mind, these doubts were creeping in.

[Then, why is it only now that I can finally say that question out loud?]

[...]]

As I looked up at Seonghwang with complicated feelings, he shook Seongjin's hair one last time and withdrew his hand.

[That's because you have now, however clumsily, escaped the dimension of Delcross. Perhaps you were instinctively aware of the conditions and restrictions for fully belonging to a world.]

[...] Conditions and restrictions?]

After confirming that Seongjin had completely calmed down, Seonghwang slowly sat down on the bed and picked up the book he had put down.

[okay. It worked out just fine. Let me explain to you about this flame dimension that I just created.]

It was a random story that was suddenly taken out of context, but Seongjin listened quietly.

As a result, I had a feeling that the end of the explanation would be in line with Seongjin's question.

[Once upon a time, there was a [disaster] that led to the destruction of a world. It was an uncontrollable force that cut off and destroyed everything, and also broke down the boundaries of everything and mixed them up. The disaster even made all the strong thoughts that sometimes crossed dimensions useless.]

Whirling.

Seonghwang's eyes were dark and sunken as he half-heartedly turned the pages and continued talking.

[So an arrogant person came up with this idea. If he completely covers the border with a disaster, wouldn't he be able to completely isolate those with spiritual abilities who stand in his way?]

[Psychic people?]

[okay. And surprisingly, the plan succeeded. No matter how strong

the thought was, it was impossible to overcome the barrier of [disaster]. Many psychics met such vain ends at his hands.]

widely.

Seonghwang closed the book loudly and quietly faced Seongjin.

[This place is nothing more than a shadow imitating that place. It's a clumsy dimension where there is only a small space and the disaster surrounding it. There are no consistent physical laws or even proper entities. So, you and I, who exist here now, have unstable bodies that reflect the state of our souls. Since the vocal cords that produce sound and the atmosphere that transmits it are clumsy, conversation can only be achieved through thought.]

Seongjin, who was pondering his explanation, suddenly thought.

How did such a place remain so specifically in Seonghwang's memory?

[By the way, Mores. I, the king of this dimension who created this dimension, suddenly had this thought.]

Seonghwang slowly lifted the book upward and continued speaking.

[Actually, there is no paper in this dimension. Since there is no civilization that makes paper, perhaps this book is actually made of stone tablets.]

At that moment, the book slipped out of his hand.

Coo!

It hit the floor hard, making a heavy sound.

[...] ... !]

Did the book just turn to stone?

[But now that I think about it, that book is a history book of 387 pages. So the stone tablets that make up that book must be exactly 387 pages.]

Kiyi.

Suddenly, the book starts shaking violently on the floor.

Seongjin looked at the scene in astonishment. The sight of 387 stone slabs being broken, broken, and constantly compressed to fit into one small book.

[But then again, this suspicion arose.]

Seonghwang's face looked extremely inorganic as he looked down at the book that was shaking as if it was going to explode at any moment, and for a moment, Seongjin wondered if he had turned into a piece of stone like that book.

[Is there history to be recorded in this dimension? Is there a proper stone to engrave this on? Maybe that book never existed from the beginning?]

shaking.

The book, which had begun to shrink rapidly, was now unable to overcome the compressing force and was floating in the air about a span from the floor. The volume changes so rapidly that the entire small room begins to shake as if it will collapse.

'... Dangerous!'

Seongjin was able to foresee the consequences of this scary prank.

[now stop... ... !]

at that time.

Pow!

The book suddenly disappeared, causing a small explosion.

At the right time, Seonghwang's hand, which was holding the book, also took the same shape.

Sigh!

The right arm flies off, and blood-red purple scatters throughout the room.

[father!]

Seongjin, who was frightened, ran over and helped the stumbling man.

However, Seonghwang was barely supporting himself by leaning on Seongjin's shoulder, and was muttering something like this with a calm expression on his face.

[Did you see it? The king of the dimension's hasty words have unintentionally completely twisted the fate of this great history book.]

Quick.

Blood spurted out from Seongjin's forehead.

[Is now the time to say such absurd things? Quickly try to do something about this with divine power!]

Seongjin hurriedly dragged the bedding and wrapped it around Seonghwang's arms, trying his best to stop the bleeding. However, the effort was not worth it, and in an instant, the blanket became soaked with blood.

[...] But suddenly this question arises again.]

No, what else are you curious about?

Stop talking nonsense and tell me to do something about this right now!

[In this place where there are no laws of physics or any power that governs the world, does a power called divine power really exist?]

This guy... .. !

Seongjin became thoughtful and shouted.

[stop! How can I say something like that in this situation? there is! Of course there is divine power! Wherever the Father is, the strength is always there! No matter what, doubt what you have to doubt!]

However, the nobleman, who had turned pale due to a large amount of blood loss, began to say strange things again in a weak voice.

[okay. As you say, there is no doubt that I am God's representative. God's representative is someone who proves the existence of divine power, which is God's blessing to the world. So I thought about it. So what am I? Can I really exist in a place where there is no divine power?]

... no way?

Seongjin couldn't believe it. Is this guy even aware of what he is talking about?

And Seongjin's ominous premonition soon became true. Seonghwang's body gradually became fainter, and it began to slowly disappear from his feet, as if he had erased it with an eraser!

Seongjin, who was completely distraught and worried that he might disappear completely, grabbed his remaining arm and shouted frantically.

[sorry! I did everything wrong! Now I won't doubt anything! I am my father's son! It's true!]

[...]]

[Feel free to call me your son! Call me Mores! No, I'm just Mores from the beginning! yes It's okay!]

[...]]

[I did everything wrong! So please!]

Tuk.

Suddenly, I felt a hand patting my head as if comforting me.

Tap, tap, tap.

'... right hand?'

I was startled and raised my head, but before I knew it, Seonghwang was looking down at Seongjin with a normal face.

His body, including his right hand, had already been completely regenerated, and not even a single drop of blood splattered on the wallpaper remained.

And the same angry yet calm voice as always.

[Yes, it is truly a desirable attitude.]

[uh...]

Seongjin's face distorted.

No, this guy really said, let's see!

202

202. Louise (5)

'... 'I'm pissed!'

In order to suppress his boiling anger, Seongjin exercised extreme patience.

The reason he did not grab the Emperor by the collar right away was purely because of the idea of filial piety that was deeply engraved in his bones as the benefactor of the country of courtesy in the East.

After all, you can't be a bastard who wields violence against the man you call father!

[Do you understand now?]

Seonghwang, perhaps aware of Seongjin's feelings, patted his head quite affectionately and continued speaking.

[You must fully understand how dangerous the words you just said were. Such hasty definitions, doubts, and negativity can sometimes lead to dire and irreversible consequences.]

But his explanation didn't even reach Seongjin's ears anymore.

No, he called me his son!

At one point did you treat me like a child who was thrown into the water, and now you threaten me with bloodshed under the guise of discipline?

[Above all, son. You are an oracle of unprecedented potential. It has infinite potential to overcome the boundaries of the world.]

Didn't they say that it will help me avoid making heartless choices in

the future?

You reassured me that you would always be my strong support, but now you are acting like a self-harming blackmailer!

[So you should not be defined carelessly in any world or in anyone's mouth. Even by yourself.]

I was able to keep Isabella alive because you were there.

This means that instead of immediately turning over Milo and Scarzzapino, I was able to take my time and let things proceed as they should!

[so... Mores, are you listening?]

Why does this guy think I was put in charge of this annoying monster task force in the first place?

Isn't this all to help you and protect Delcross, where you and the people of the Seonghwang family live?

But what is the meaning of Delcross without you?

[why...]

Seonghwang, who only then noticed Seongjin's irreverent gaze, pulled his hand away with a slightly embarrassed expression.

[Why are you doing that? What is uncomfortable? I tried to block him, but he got hurt in the explosion earlier...]

Soon, a hand filled with divine power approached, but Seongjin struck the hand away in a defiant manner and opened his mouth with a sullen face.

[Did you burst your arm so loudly just to give that explanation?]

Then Seonghwang blinked for a moment, then nodded hesitantly.

[...] okay. An example of how it can lead to such drastic results...]

[So, you committed such a ridiculous self-harm just to set an example?]

Seongjin's voice when he asked that was very calm.

However, Seonghwang, who noticed the unusual anger hidden within him, quietly kept his mouth shut while secretly observing Seongjin's feelings.

[Do you know? I just thought my father was really dying.]

[...]]

[I thought you would completely disappear from this world! You said I was your son? But what on earth are you doing in front of your child? yes?]

Seongjin gritted his teeth as he realized that his voice was trembling at the end of his words.

Oh, I'm so pissed I'm going to die.

[...] But Mores. You know, I can't do that anyway...]

Does that mean you won't die?

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

[no! If you don't die anyway, isn't that kind of injury nothing? Do you think that makes sense? Then me too! Any wound will be fine if my father heals it, so why are you cracking down on me not to cause accidents?]

[...]]

[Why is your father like that in everything? Didn't you actually evacuate the guard knights before and confront Cadmus alone, but this time you're using yourself as a teaching aid? How could I be so anxious that I could take my eyes off even for a moment? yes?]

Seonghwang's eyes tremble slightly as if he is shocked. He stared at Seongjin like that for a moment, then lowered his eyes and sighed

softly.

[...] okay. I'm sorry if I surprised you.]

He raised one hand and slowly washed his face dry.

[There might have been a simpler way, but my thoughts were short. I was trying to convince him by just showing him the results. I guess I've been spending too much time with him recently. I was being influenced by that way of thinking whether I knew it or not.]

... That kid?

[Sorry, Mores.]

Seonghwang apologized again with a slightly downcast expression.

Although Seongjin was furious, he felt his anger quickly cool down as he looked at this gentleman's sullen face.

Ah, it can't go on like this. I need to say something more to this guy.

[Mores. This is what I really wanted to say.]

Seongjin, who was unable to properly control his anger, listened with a slightly softened face.

[Do you know what happens if I, the king of the dimension, call something by the wrong name here?]

[...] why? Will it explode again?]

Seongjin asked back with a sullen expression.

It was a sarcastic remark filled with some dissatisfaction, but Seonghwang let out a soft laugh and said, "Haha."

[Yes, that is correct. Mores, do you see that pen?]

Seongjin reflexively turned his head in the direction he was pointing, then tilted his head and asked.

[Pen? Father, there are only books over there... ..]

Even before the words were finished.

Pow!

The book lying on the desk suddenly exploded. The impact was so great that the desk caved in and shredded paper flew everywhere.

[...] ... !]

Fortunately, there was no major shock thanks to Seonghwang opening the Auror curtain at the right time, but Seongjin quietly broke into a cold sweat as he finally realized the seriousness of what Seonghwang had said.

The words he warned Seongjin several times were not empty words.

'Really, if I just call it wrong, it explodes? 'The king of the dimension is quite scary when you know it.'

While I was looking at the pieces of paper flying like snow with a bewildered face, Seonghwang called out to Seongjin in a low voice.

[...] Mores.]

[yes?]

[Son.]

[yes... . uh?]

Come to think of it. Why am I so fine even when this guy calls me random things?

I looked up at the Holy Emperor with wide eyes, and his mouth slightly curved.

[...] ... !]

wait for a sec.

So what this gentleman is saying is that I am really his son and Mores?

So you want to tell me that it's okay for you to call me that?

'But can't that be? I'm Seongjin Lee from Earth! I am Mores, that is absolutely impossible... ... '

Tuk.

Before he could continue his thoughts, Seonghwang, who didn't know how he knew, lightly tapped his forehead and warned him.

[You have to be careful. Didn't you clearly say with your own mouth earlier that you wouldn't be suspicious?]

That's because the situation was urgent at the time.

No, but how on earth can that be?

Seonghwang, who was looking at Seongjin's confused expression, quietly added an explanation.

[There is almost no precedent for two oracles to coexist in one era. Above all, Oracle cannot be hastily defined. Even the slightest difference in perception can lead to irreversible consequences just by recognizing the distortion.]

[...]]

[Do you understand? If you find it hard to believe now, at least don't close that possibility completely. That will suffice for now.]

Seongjin quietly considered his words.

At least don't close the possibility that I am this man's son.

'uh... ... '

So really?

However, while I felt a deep sense of relief when I thought of that, I suddenly became embarrassed to look at the Holy Emperor's face.

It was because I remembered all the times I had gotten angry and shouted at him when I came here.

'Oh, I'm so embarrassed... .. '

To be honest, who would have known that I would end up acting like a rebellious adolescent brat at this age.

Until now, I was confident that I was somewhat of an adult.

'Even when I was in middle school and high school, when darkness instead of blood flowed through my veins, I never once shouted at my parents.'

At that time, Seonghwang tilted his head and muttered.

[What flows through your veins... .. ?]

what?

Seongjin asked, feeling anxious.

[Father, are you even reading my thoughts right now?]

[...]]

'Are you reading?'

Seonghwang then averted his gaze as if he was embarrassed and began to give a lengthy explanation.

[Didn't I explain the laws of this world earlier? All conversations take place through thoughts, so a thought that is strong enough to become a thought is not much different from muttering out loud. I didn't just read your thoughts... ..]

... You're reading.

But Seongjin thought of another possibility there.

good. If a man with a grandiose status, like the king of some dimension, can't open his mouth hastily, shouldn't I just read his thoughts?

Seongjin concentrated his mind and glared at Seonghwang's mouth.

'Now, stop by! 'Listen!'

Then, after looking at Seongjin blankly for a moment, he raised one corner of his mouth as if he understood.

[You are far away, son. At least it is still 650 years early.]

'... ... !'

Seongjin sighed, feeling his motivation disappearing at once.

By the way, it's been 650 years. Well, it's a strangely specific period of time, isn't it?

While the effect of the medicinal tea remained, Seongjin stayed in the newly created dimension for a while, talking about various things with Seonghwang.

[...] So, does your father listen to those thoughts every day?]

Seongjin asked a little worriedly.

After experiencing the power of the flame crystal, I couldn't help but be very worried about him, who had strong psychic powers.

It didn't take long for Seongjin to receive the thoughts in earnest, but even in that short period of time, he felt like he was going to go crazy.

[For psychics, this is no big deal. As time goes by, you will develop your own tricks. The reason you had such a hard time is because you faced a new sensation unprepared and defenseless.]

Therefore, Seonghwang warned that it is best to avoid drinking medicinal tea carelessly in the future if possible.

[Ah, but why don't you come here often these days? What's going on in the imperial palace?]

It may have sounded like a complaint, but honestly, I was curious.

Isn't it a bit strange that the man who had been possessing Sir Sharon

for a long time stopped walking after the incident at the Demon Tree?

Then Seonghwang sighed with a confused look on his face.

[I ended up touching too many causes and effects with my soul state. So, for the time being, I am being a bit cautious about interfering with the north.]

[As expected, it was my father who healed my eye at that time. [He also treated knights who suffered from erosion.]

[okay. What the old man said was right. Although she shouted loudly in front of her, it is also true that she needed to cool down a bit.]

At that time, he saved so many people from a state of incorporeal souls. In addition, the entire area contaminated by the Demon World was completely purified.

And Seonghwang told Seongjin many other stories.

About the existence of the 'Council of Six' that protects the border of the Delcross dimension, and the 'agreement' made with them.

About what is currently happening in Sigismund Territory and about the people we need to pay close attention to in the future.

Seongjin suddenly became curious and asked.

[But why are you telling me all this?]

Even though we have moved beyond Delcross, the restrictions have become relatively lighter.

Then Seonghwang smiled slightly.

[Don't you know, Mores? Now that you have activated the channel, you are no different from a complete oracle. Even if I didn't tell you, you would have gotten all the answers just by asking questions. It's just that the process must have been very difficult.]

So, Seonghwang creates an entirely different dimension and seals off

all of Seongjin's channels, while at the same time giving him the answers he would have come up with through pain.

[uh...]

[Of course, when I think about the results you would have achieved by struggling alone, I feel like I am getting a little for nothing. So what can you do? Even if you do this, you have to strike a balance.]

yes? how?

Seongjin tilted his head, but soon sighed in resignation as Seonghwang's hand approached him.

Holy shit. I knew it would be like this in the end.

Seongjin closed his eyes tightly.

[It's almost time for the medicine to take effect. It will be difficult for you to look at me often for a while, so please take care of yourself from now on.]

Sigh!

* * *

"Kkuek!"

I screamed and opened my eyes to find myself on a warm bed.

This is the exact place where he lost consciousness, leaving a request to Louise to call Sir Sharon.

[...] Seongjin Lee?]

'Uh, okay. 'Did anything happen?'

[Nooooooooooo! Hey, Lee Seong-ji!]

The devil suddenly sensed that Seongjin had returned and started whining to leave the room.

[hey! What happened to you? Why was there still no answer? Do you

know how worried I was?]

'Oh, please be quiet. 'My head is still pounding.'

Seongjin, who was frowning and getting up, came face to face with the absurd face of Louise, who was still sitting next to the bed.

"... Kuek?"

Seongjin, who was embarrassed, secretly avoided her gaze.

Uh, Louise. Just forget about that.

203. Louise (6)

"How are you feeling? "Are you feeling dizzy or something?"

Louise asked, supporting Seongjin from the side.

"huh."

Of course he was fine. Because my father, who possessed Lord Sharon, completely cured me.

However, Louise, who did not know this, still looked worried.

"You lost a lot of blood. After all, wouldn't it be better to be seen by a member of the National Assembly?"

"are you okay. "Didn't the paladin come and go earlier?"

"Of course, as you commanded, I only called the exorcist quietly. Haonde, my dear. While I was treating Hae-jeong, I noticed her presence a little... .."

"huh?"

"... "No, it's nothing."

Louise shook her head and stood up.

Even the slightest worry was erased from his face, and only the cool-headed expression typical of a competent user remained.

"It's been a while since we ate. "You're going to be hungry, so I'll prepare some snacks for you."

Seongjin scratched his cheek as he watched her leave the room with a

measured pace.

'No way, Louise. Did you find out that his father was possessed by Sir Sharon?

The more you look at it, the more it becomes apparent. Even though the royal family is shedding a lot of blood, they don't panic and handle things quietly.

He seems bold and quite quick-witted.

[What happened to you?]

After Louise left the room, the devil came to question Seongjin as if he had been waiting for her.

[Your father came here by borrowing the body of that crazy knight. But when I thought about getting treatment, the presence of your soul suddenly disappeared. She said the woman left the room without her too. What on earth happened?]

'okay?'

Seongjin's soul went to the flame dimension created by Seonghwang. However, the soul did not completely leave the body and the body did not die.

'Does it feel similar to that? Even when the [gap] opened in the imperial palace, I felt as if my body existed in two places at the same time... ... '

Perhaps dimensional movement is not simply a concept of moving from one neighborhood to another over a long distance.

While I was deep in thought, the demon lord added excitedly.

[really. Don't be surprised, Seongjin Lee! I discovered something amazing in that time! Do you know exactly what happened after you drank the medicinal tea earlier?]

It is said that at that time, the demon king was in his cozy nest in Seongjin's head as usual.

'Your nest?'

[okay. There's a perfect place for your soul in your head. I like to sit there, rest my chin and look outside.]

Sit down? Are you holding your chin?

Aren't you a soul without a body?

[But after you drank that tea, oh my! I wonder if something happened to my nest, and the area under my butt suddenly started to glow brightly.]

... Regardless of whether such body parts exist in the soul, such expressions are somehow unpleasant.

But my mind is shining, is that really true?

[Voila! It turned out that the place I had been making my home until now was Yeomsangjeong-an, right?]

The demon king, energized by the new discovery, was now stretching out his soul to the fullest in Seongjin's head.

[Isn't it huge? Mores also had a decision to burn! She's never shined before, so I didn't notice! For some reason, I thought it was a very cozy space for the soul to stay!]

'... ... '

[Same as those twins. Unlike ordinary humans, it is located exactly in the center of the back of the head! With this, one thing becomes clear. That flame crystal that resembles a monster is clearly inherited from your father's bloodline!]

iced coffee. Perhaps that is a characteristic of the Kornsim clan.

Earlier, Seonghwang briefly explained about their clan. From what I heard, it seems that the entire clan forms one huge mental network through soul terminals.

It makes me wonder if that's a characteristic of group monsters.

[But you know what? My nest was a much more delicate and wonderful organ than the twins! In the core of the icosahedron, which had no flaws at all, seven elegantly rising arches were exactly symmetrical and extended in all directions! I honestly have never seen such intricate and beautiful flame crystals before... ..]

The Demon King, who was talking excitedly as if he had a supercar in front of him, became puzzled when he realized Seongjin's shocked reaction.

[...] Isn't it surprising?]

'No, whatever.'

Because I heard this from Seonghwang a long time ago.

Moreover, the success and events that took place at the funeral level were too dramatic to be surprised by every single thing. For a short period of time, the emotional exhaustion was extreme.

[Tch!]

When Seongjin didn't show the expected reaction, the sarcastic devil bastard grumbled.

[It's no fun like this! The things I have prepared for you over the past few days have been completed through this decision, but if you keep doing this, you won't show it!]

'Have you prepared something? what is that?'

Seongjin asked, feeling his interest suddenly pique.

Somehow, I had a feeling that the 'preparation' that the demon lord was talking about was not usually important.

I heard you often spend time alone in your head and procrastinating. Have you been doing that?

[Tch! it's okay. It's obvious it won't be that surprising to you anyway. Just forget it. Don't be disappointed after finding out.]

The Demon King was pouting and grumbling as if he was indifferent, but the emotions conveyed in Seongjin's head were not like that at all.

Please ask. Ask me more.

My heart is pounding.

As if it were a heartbeat, a vibration full of excitement was coming from him without any filtering.

'... It looks like you've really prepared something great?'

But this guy. Does he know that his feelings are clearly conveyed to Seongjin like this?

Seongjin, who felt somewhat sad, smiled bitterly.

'What is that, huh? say it. I'm dying of curiosity.'

After coaxing and coaxing him for a while, the devil finally calmed down and confided in Seongjin, pretending that he couldn't win.

[Do you remember when you robbed me of my spiritual eyes not long ago?]

How could you forget that?

As a result, my optic nerves burned out and I almost lost the use of my eyes forever.

[After that happened, I thought about it carefully. Regardless of the method, the fact that you were able to share my spiritual vision means that you also clearly have a corresponding sense.]

When Seongjin first came up with the idea of sharing the Demon King's senses, the guy said that his senses were different from 'vision' and that it would be impossible.

However, contrary to expectations, Seongjin easily took the man's spiritual eye and used it well to kill the Demon Lord. Although the results were quite disastrous.

[So, in the meantime, I have been touching various senses in your head from time to time and closely examining whether there is any part that agrees with me.]

Indeed, it seems that the reason he has been mulling over and over in his head for the past few days was because he was working on that kind of work.

'I was giving up, but you were able to do that on your own?'

I guess it must have been quite a bit of work?

Then the Demon King responded as if it were absurd.

[What are you giving up? I know very well that that's not the case, so I thought I should prepare in advance when I have some free time.]

'preparation?'

[okay. I'm sure your personality is such that you won't hesitate to do it again if you feel it's necessary, right? But I am the Fire Demon Lord, who owns the sword of Gehenna. If you blindly rob me of my senses like you did last time, this time I might really burn your brain completely. In that case, wouldn't it be much better for me to find a safer way?]

'... ... '

Seongjin could not deny the devil's words.

And on the other hand, I felt a little grateful to the demon lord who had deliberately taken such trouble for me. It's a feeling he never thought he'd feel from a bastard just a few months ago.

'So, saying this now means that there has been some level of success?'

[of course. Now, look carefully.]

The demon lord, who was fiddling around with things in his head, finally shouted confidently.

[Voila!]

At that moment, a new scene truly unfolded before Seongjin's eyes.

The world I saw just moments ago, covered in multi-colored, brilliant light.

'This... ..'

The fire in the fireplace glowing blue, and the warm blue air emanating from it.

Pink chills seeping in from the windows and walls.

I could even see people beyond the wall.

Judging from his presence, the yellow shadow standing outside the room clearly belongs to Lord Calmen.

And the shadows of many people moving between the upper and lower floors... ..

'Is this amazing? Hey, devil! You've really accomplished something amazing!'

When Seongjin let out pure admiration, the devil bastard said, "Hahaha!" He burst into laughter.

[How do you feel? The power of this Demon King! Do you finally understand the greatness of this body even a little?]

Seongjin felt curious and looked around.

The faint shadows moving diligently through the hallways were probably ordinary people, such as servants or maids.

On the other hand, people with bright blue or yellow colors are clearly knights with strong auras.

In the case of the yellow shadow moving vigorously in the back, it was a person with such strong aura that it glowed so brightly that it almost looked like gold.

Looking at the presence, it was clearly Lord Masaine. As expected, I

am busy practicing whenever I have time.

[Actually, I was thinking it was a little strange that I had not achieved any results over the past few days. No matter how much I searched, I couldn't find any sense of 'spiritual vision' from you. At least until this morning.]

The Demon King added an explanation to Seongjin, who was frantically looking around.

'But how did you succeed?'

[It's a medicine car.]

'Medicine tea?'

[Yes, Seongjin Lee. Everything became clear because you drank it! The truth is that you don't actually have spiritual eyes.]

'... what?'

Seongjin was taken aback by the unexpected answer.

Do you have no spiritual eyesight?

So what was the feeling that day? And what happened to all the things I'm seeing right now?

[I also became aware of this clearly after your flame crystal was activated. The fact that it was not your spiritual eyes that were in tune with my spiritual eyes, but your decision to think about it itself!]

The demon lord continued his explanation in an excited tone.

It turned out that what he sensed was being received in the form of thoughts into the flame crystal, where it was transformed into visual information that Seongjin could sense.

[Actually, I thought it was strange from the beginning. Originally, the sight I see was a five-colored scene surrounded by spiritual light. But what I experienced while sharing your senses was completely

different. It seemed as if all the possibilities of things in the world were unfolding in the form of light at once!]

'Light of possibility... .. '

I felt like I knew what he was talking about.

When dealing with the Demon Tree, Seongjin experienced the sensation of seeing in advance the branches of the tree, each arrow, and even the flow of air.

[What I was robbed of at that time was not my spiritual eyes. I was simply robbed of the leadership of my vision and forced to share my vision with you.]

'hmm.'

[That's how I see what you see, and my spiritual eyes also follow your gaze. The thoughts created by that sense are received by the meditation crystal and converted into visual information, and that information is then repeatedly transmitted to me through your vision!]

He continued speaking so quickly without stopping that the guy who didn't even need to breathe was panting.

[That complex, overlapping, inefficient information movement occurred simultaneously for every single object in the vicinity! So, how could the eyes and optic nerves have been intact to handle that? It is inevitable that everything will be ruined and necrotic!]

'... .. '

Seongjin looked around, half-listening to the Demon King's complex explanation.

Certainly, even though it had been quite a while since I received sensation from him, unlike before, I felt no pain at all other than a slight burning sensation.

'I guess I finally found a way to solve it.'

[huh. Once I knew the principle, it was a pretty simple problem.]

The Demon King, having calmed his excitement a little, shrugged.

[This happened because you and I were forced to be tied to one narrow sense called 'vision' in the first place. So, before that happens, all I have to do is convey my thoughts and that's it. Then, the flame crystal will automatically change your senses according to your perspective.]

'The decision to burn... ..'

[okay. Your flame crystal is normally inactive, so it cannot receive external thoughts, but it seems to perform its own function as long as it transmits internal thoughts like this. Of course, if this goes on for too long, it will strain your nerves a bit.]

no. But this alone will be of great help.

Seongjin suddenly had a premonition.

Seonghwang had warned me earlier as a precaution. If possible, it is best to avoid drinking medicinal tea carelessly.

That means there is a possibility that there will be several situations in the future where Seongjin would consider drinking medicinal tea.

After thinking that far, Seongjin praised the demon king with a pure heart.

'good job! Next time bear meat steak comes out, I'll gladly eat two plates despite my reputation!'

[Mhahahaha!]

It was right then.

Tap, tap, tap.

From across the hallway, I saw a very unique shadow approaching the room.

A slim new figure that alone emits a soft purple light among the yellow and blue shadows. Although the Aura activity is hidden in some way, there is a bright shadow that clearly indicates that the person is a strong Aura user.

Knock knock.

After knocking politely, Louise came into the room, pushing a tray with dinner in it.

"I brought you dinner, sir."

Then, she was startled and looked straight into Seongjin's eyes.

"My goodness, your eyes... .."

After sharing his thoughts with the Demon King, the inside of Seongjin's pupil was blinking with a faint red light that was difficult for an ordinary person to discern.

"Haha, Louise has really good eyes."

Seongjin lifted his eyebrows at her and praised her.

The nose is really nice too. No matter how you look at it, this is not an ordinary servant.

"Oh, and Lord Calmen?"

At the sudden call of the prince, Kalmen stuck out his face through the open door.

"Yes, sir?"

"Looking again, you still lack training. What is brightness? Be more diligent."

"... yes?"

At Seongjin's sudden beating, Carmen alone had a puzzled look on his face, not knowing what was going on.

204. Louise (7)

First morning at Sigismund Range. Seongjin opened his eyes at the same time without fail.

But instead of jumping up and starting to meditate like he usually did, he lay still, looking at the faint rays of light coming through the small window.

It was a strange feeling that is difficult to describe. A disturbing and breathtaking feeling that will disappear even if you turn your head slightly.

'Why do I feel so strange? 'Is it because I'm not used to sleeping there?'

Or maybe I overexerted myself and stayed up too late last night.

With that thought in mind, Seongjin raised his hand to block the sunlight, and suddenly his eyes fell on the small hand of a familiar yet unfamiliar boy.

'... ah!'

I thought I knew.

From now on, he really has to live a proper life as Mores. He may be feeling the burden unconsciously.

It will definitely be different from my previous life, which was filled with one goal: revenge. It's not an extra vacation at the end of life, and it's certainly not a life that you keep for a while before giving it back to someone else.

This is the full life of a young boy with brilliant potential, a family

who loves and is loved, and who must never fail.

'That's too much for an old man like me.'

Everything that seemed so clear until now suddenly felt so vague and uneasy.

But it also felt exciting, so it wasn't such a bad feeling.

'Well, I guess I'll have to try something.'

That's how I make up my mind.

smart.

With a knock on the door, Edith comes in carrying a water bottle as always.

"Did you cough, sir?"

Ah, Edith.

My dedicated maid who is shameful no matter where I put her.

Please don't cause any trouble while staying at the count's house.

When Seongjin stared at her unusually, Edith was a little embarrassed and hurriedly made an excuse.

"Ah, I'm sorry, sir. Yesterday, I neglected my work as I was following the butler and receiving necessary training at the count's residence. Fortunately, Louise took care of most of the work, but did you find it very inconvenient?"

"no. "It was okay."

okay. Maybe the number of times you gave me gall tea is much more than I know.

I'll remember this, so let's do better in the future.

Then Edith trembled and muttered.

"what? Why do I suddenly have chills... .."

While she was working hard to activate the aura inside her body, Masaine also came to Seongjin's room as usual.

"Sir, did you have any trouble last night? "How are you feeling?"

"Oh, welcome. Lord Masaine."

Seongjin responded by getting up and looking at Masain's face once again.

Now that I think about it, that guy has been consistently kind to Mores since I first met him.

Normally, I would just say, 'You have such a loyal personality.' I probably would have done it, but as soon as the possibility that the target might actually be me arises, the feeling becomes more subtle.

Did I really know his faithfulness?

Also, have you responded sufficiently so far?

"... "What do you think, sir?"

Masain, sensing that Seongjin's mood was a little different from usual, asked curiously.

"no. Nothing."

Seongjin rubbed his eyes and sighed.

It's a big deal. If this continues, how will we see the faces of the successful people in the future?

'Amelia is Sister Amelia, Logan is Logan, and the little boy is... ..'

And that's not all.

What about the bad karma that Mores has committed so far? Does that mean there is a possibility that it was actually all my doing?!

Seongjin suddenly felt dizzy.

"Lowering?"

Hearing Masain's worried voice, Seongjin shook his head to shake off his wild thoughts.

No, what can I do if I think about it here and now? First, you have to bump into something.

First of all, there is only one thing to do now.

'I need to finish work here quickly and return to the imperial capital!'

Let's get everything done quickly.

As a side note, I also looked for some travel souvenirs.

* * *

"I am going to meet the Margrave Sigismund."

After a light breakfast.

Orden and Herman, who were suddenly called by Seongjin, were stunned by the remarks made by Prince Dajjagojja.

So suddenly?

"I beg your pardon, sir. "Shouldn't this investigation be conducted without the knowledge of the head of the family?"

"That's right. "There is a high possibility that he will be displeased, so shouldn't we first look for conclusive evidence to exclude Milo Dandan?"

The two people were very embarrassed and tried to dissuade Seongjin. It seemed like he was worried that the young prince's impulsive actions might lead to something wrong.

"hmm."

"Besides, sir, if at all possible, the head of the family...""

Orden, who had said that far, could not bear to say anything and

trailed off.

A token of the Dark Church discovered while investigating despite the opposition of the head of the family.

You might not want to believe it, but you couldn't completely rule out the possibility that the head of the family was directly involved with the corrupt group.

But Seongjin shook his head resolutely.

"Oh, don't worry about that. According to my independent investigation so far, although the Margrave may have been aware of and tolerated the atrocities committed by the Milo clan, there were no circumstances to suspect any particular relationship with the Dark Church."

"... yes?"

An expression of relief and confusion flashed across Orden's face at the same time.

It would be nice if it were true, but the sudden assertion seemed very suspicious.

"Is this an independent investigation? What on earth... .."

"These are the territory operation records from the past several years. The financial condition of the estate. Records of transactions with the top. Number of births, deaths, and disappearances of Young Ji-min. "Records of the demonic beast's large and small migrations south, number of subjugations, etc."

Sigh.

Orden and Hermann were at a loss for words after seeing the high-quality documents spread out on the table.

Only one day has passed since the prince came here. When on earth did you get such detailed information?!

While the group looked at the documents and couldn't help but

admire them, Seongjin smiled happily inwardly.

'good. 'It'll be over sooner than expected, right?'

It may have been a surprise to them, but in fact, Seongjin had assumed from the beginning that there would be a number of cases where he would meet the Margrave and negotiate.

Before coming here, Seongjin conducted research with two major possibilities in mind.

first. There is a possibility that Sigismund has already fallen into the hands of the Dark Church, or that the Margrave himself is deeply involved in something that has been wronged.

In this case, it would have been inevitable to carry out a large-scale operation by involving the Holy Knights of the Imperial Capital.

The people of the Sigismund family, including Orden, would have had no way to survive, and the territory would have also suffered irreparable damage.

'But when I actually got here, I couldn't sense the involvement of anything evil, let alone the devil.'

This was confirmed through the demon lord's spiritual eyes.

In addition, the territory's finances, as seen on paper, are not bad, and it has been stably preventing the invasion of magical beasts for several years.

Is there any reason for the Margrave to join hands with the Dark Church?

Here the second case arises.

It is possible that the Margrave, who judged that the distribution of medicinal tea was not actually harmful to the territory, decided to completely ignore it.

And for this case, Seongjin was considering peaceful negotiation through appeasement or threats.

"You are amazing, sir. "This is really carefully researched material!"

Meanwhile, Hermann was reviewing the documents and constantly expressing admiration.

"There is nothing wrong with it. Additionally, some of these contain confidential information that only insiders can access. "How did you get all these?"

"hmm. "I can't reveal his identity, but I have a very capable informant attached to me."

"Huh, such a great source of information...""

Everyone could not help but admire the resourcefulness.

"uh? But wait..."

At that time, Hermann found something in the documents and muttered in surprise.

"This handwriting definitely belongs to the head deacon? Moreover, the payment section really has the head of the household's signature..."

Patter.

Seongjin quickly gathered up the documents and hurriedly made an excuse.

"Hmm, so I have a very capable informant attached to me."

"..."

"... "It's like handwriting forgery."

Seeing the two people staring blankly in disbelief, Seongjin cleared his throat and turned his head.

[Hey, why don't you just tell the truth before it escalates?]

'Are you crazy? I'm a guest now!'

You have the dignity of a prince of the Holy Empire.

How could I possibly say that I confidently robbed the matriarch's study on the first night I came to the estate?

'It's a shame. If Dasha had been with us as planned, she might have been able to easily copy and return them... ..'

For now, let's leave all the research to Dasha. Since the head of the house was away at the time, the theft would not be discovered for a while.

Anyway, Seongjin decided to play it cool until the end.

"... "I understand what you are saying, sir."

Orden, who was looking at Seongjin with strange eyes, soon smoothed his chin and sighed.

"I will not ask any more about the source of these materials. "What do you plan to do when you meet him?"

"I will persuade you well. "Just cut off the deal with the Milo merchant."

"It won't be that easy. "If the Dark Church has not discovered a weakness but is voluntarily tolerating it, then the head of the family must have a legitimate reason of its own."

There was even a faint hint of frustration in Orden's eyes as he said that, as if he were facing a huge wall that he could not overcome.

'It's so difficult even though it's your father... ..'

I also heard this from Dasha.

Although he stands between a father and son who are praised as geniuses in swordsmanship, the Margrave is said to be a man who stands out as much as he does with the management of his territory.

He probably doesn't have special charisma.

"But rest assured. There are ways to think about it all. "As for the medicine truck, I will meet him in person and make a clear deal."

Seongjin had the materials that Dasha had scraped, as well as many records accumulated by exorcists and inquisitors over the past decades.

If you combine them well, you can turn a single territory into a den of the Dark Church in an instant. That's algebra.

He threatens to bring in the Heresy Tribunal to his territory, but would he have the wit to pretend to be the Margrave?

As they were thinking that and smiling happily, Orden and Hermann's faces suddenly turned white.

huh? What's wrong with you?

The devil bastard sighed.

[So you said it? Go somewhere and stop laughing like that.]

No, why are people not allowed to laugh as they please?

* * *

That evening, Dasha, who had sneaked into the count's residence, was thinking on a tree.

Count Sigismund's residence was a very difficult place for an assassin to break into.

First of all, it was quite difficult to climb up the terrace, as well as the rough walls without any irregularities. Even the building structure is extremely simple, so it is not possible to use other geographical features.

Above all, since the windows were all the size of my palm, I was worried that I might get caught.

'As expected, I saw an opportunity and sneakily approached the hallway... ... '

At that time she was startled.

Suddenly, the prince peeked his head out through the small window and began gesturing in the exact direction where Dasha was.

'Dasha! Come in, come in.'

'... ... ?'

Are there still traces of people around the prince?

Dasha hesitated for a moment, but was unable to disobey the prince's order to call him again and eventually climbed through the small window.

And waiting for her there with the prince were two former knight commanders with conflicting expressions.

They are Captain Bruno, who is smiling politely, and Sir Martha, who has a grim expression on his face.

Surprisingly, Dasha was embarrassed by the situation and just blinked, and the prince apologized as if he was embarrassed.

"I'm sorry for confronting you so suddenly, Dasha. But I was thinking that I should create a place like this someday."

"Lowering..."

"Of course, I know that hiding your identity from Dasha is more important than anything else. But we are now a community destined to be together forever. So let's be as efficient as possible. huh?"

Then, former Dekaron Knight and General Manager Bruno pulled his mustache and nodded.

"I was wondering how long I should pretend not to know you. I feel relieved to be able to open up like this now. "My name is Bruno."

He is a man known as a legend among commoners.

As Dasha bowed her head, the leader added with a happy expression.

"So, as soon as you arrived at Sigismund Territory, you found that much information in one day, right? "The prince speaks so highly of you."

"... yes?"

"I always thought he was a great person when I visited Jinju Palace, but I never thought he would be so good at information. "I saw it again."

Dasha looked back with a face full of doubts, but Seongjin secretly avoided her eyes.

The next person to speak was Sir Masain, who looked somewhat dissatisfied.

"Are you the source of information? "It was Iza who taught me the wrong trick called 'Auror Concealment.'"

Hiccup.

What is coming has come.

I was hiccuping with a tired face without realizing it, but Sir Masaine momentarily relaxed his frozen face and nodded.

"But I can't help but acknowledge your resourcefulness in finding such confidential information in a short period of time. From now on, please be more careful to make up for the decline so that there are no mistakes."

In response to the unexpected reactions of the knight commanders in succession, Dasha looked back at Seongjin with a bewildered expression.

"... Lowering?"

Oh, I'm sorry, Dasha.

Good things are good things, so why not just ignore them?

205. Louise (8)

"I'm glad you're safe, Dasha."

After sending Masain and Manager Bruno back to the room, Seongjin spoke to her with joy.

"I know Dasha's skills well, but it was an accident that happened so suddenly, right? "She was worried that she might have been caught up in the Demon World with the top."

It was true that I was worried. One of the first things I asked Seonghwang out of concern for was her well-being.

Then Dasha, who had been busy copying documents, looked back at Seongjin and raised her eyes.

"Thank you for your words, sir. But you must have firmly believed that I would come back safely and take care of these things, right? If it weren't for you, there's no way you would have caused an accident like this."

Ugh.

"How dare you think of stealing the Margrave's papers from Sigismund? "The expenses must not have been that high."

No, I suddenly became anxious. Also, compared to the imperial palace, the boundaries were more lax than expected.

The guards patrolled at regular intervals, but the doors, safes, and locks were all old-fashioned.

When I said that, Dasha made a chewed-up face and lamented into space.

"oh my god! I guess I messed up my situation. "Who are you blaming for this?"

It has to be that way.

At least lock picking is a skill I learned from Dasha when I came here.

"Consider yourself lucky. "If Sir Vincent, the Dekaron Knight, was here, I wouldn't have even dared to do this."

"okay?"

"yes. If I were to compare it, it would be the same as sneaking into His Majesty's office and stealing documents without His Majesty's knowledge."

"... .."

Feeling like his forehead was getting sore for no reason, Seongjin silently rubbed his forehead.

After that, Dasha continued to transcribe at a rapid pace and gave a brief explanation of what had happened so far.

It is said that after hiding in the forest to avoid the Demon Tree, and confirming that Seongjin was safe, she briefly chased after the fleeing remnants of the Penitent Church.

"Remnants of the Penitent Church?"

"Yes, sir. "They were hiding at the top, disguising themselves as workers."

Dasha took advantage of the opportunity to infiltrate Milo when the company was hiring a large number of new personnel.

But it turns out that the people he was hired with were all spies with a sinister purpose. There is a suspicion that the commotion that injured the top workers from the beginning may have been caused by the Penitent Church.

"They were trained to assassinate, but they didn't feel professional. "I

think they may have been trained by the Dark Church itself for external activities."

They continued to maintain awkward contact with the Penitent Church during their journey, but just before the Demon Beast was summoned, they all escaped and fled to their home base.

Some went towards the Black Forest, and the rest all headed towards Ortona.

"... Ortona?"

"Yes, the Penitent Church has been secretly gaining ground there for a long time. "I heard that there are areas where they are openly active because there is no force to control them after the fall of the country."

As the chase seemed to take longer than expected, he asked a trusted colleague to follow him and followed him through Sigismund's command.

Then a story came out about Olivier, the eyebrowless assassin.

"Olivier? "Where have I heard this name before?"

When Seongjin tilted his head, Dasha shrugged her shoulders as if it was no big deal.

"Why not? Olivier is the most common girl's name in Delcross. It is the name of the moon spirit who is said to have fallen in love with the first emperor and blessed him. "It is said that at a time when those romantic stories were popular, there was a girl named Olivier in every other house."

"okay?"

"yes. I guess that's why I shamelessly gave it that name. I proudly announced that it was a pseudonym. "I don't know where you belong, but the next time we meet, I won't let you run away so easily."

Dasha wheezed for a moment as if she was upset, but Seongjin had a strange feeling that it wasn't for such a simple reason.

"Oh, and the Wolf Knights that are left behind. "We'll probably arrive here tomorrow evening."

Crack.

Dasha said, organizing the documents neatly. With his characteristic quick movements, he copied down all the necessary information.

Where is that? They are chasing the remnants to the vicinity of the Black Forest, and are also fully aware of the movements of the Wolf Knights in the opposite direction.

Well, the more you look at it, the more capable you become.

"Your hands are really fast. amazing."

"you're welcome. Then I will quickly bring these back. "Did you take it from the safe in the study?"

"uh? no. "I just picked it up from here and there."

"is it so? "I usually keep important documents in one place, but this is unusual."

Sure.

Seongjin, who briefly looked into the Margrave's study, had a strong feeling that this man was not an easy person.

From the books on the shelves to an ordinary-looking paperweight on the desk. It seemed like they were just randomly placed here and there, but there was a certain consistent flow and complex regularity of its own.

Somehow, I think it would be troublesome if I scattered it.

"Wouldn't it be better if I went with you?"

"Is it even necessary to do that? "Just tell me the location and I will put it there."

"Hmm, this is a bit tricky to explain..."

After contemplating for a moment, Seongjin eventually began to give her a detailed explanation.

"Then listen carefully, Dasha. Famifasol, Dorare, Solmirara. In this order, there is a desk, a bookshelf, and a safe."

"... ..?"

"The order in which the documents were located. And the bookshelves were in numbers 3 and 7, in that order, 'dung ta-ta-dong, thud-thud, thud-thud, and the desks were in numbers 1 and 2 all at once. It was beautifully knotted with a red string. And lastly, the safe is a bit complicated. It's 'tap-tap-tap-tap-tap...' ... '."

"... ..!?"

Dasha, who had been listening to Seongjin's explanation for a while, ended up putting up both hands and feet.

That's how we infiltrated the Margrave's study together.

Seongjin started inserting documents in the dark without a moment of hesitation.

"Is that my position?"

"Yeah, I told you earlier, right? "Pamifasol in that order, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom."

"... .."

Dasha, who was looking at Seongjin as if she were fascinated by something, soon lowered her head and muttered in a low voice.

"No matter how you look at it, the place of birth is wrong. A born assassin after all... .."

"what?"

"No, it's nothing."

* * *

The next morning.

"Tell the Countess that I am sorry. I need to practice some sword fighting in Huwon today. "The journey to get here was so tiring that I haven't had time to practice at all recently."

The head deacon, who had come to personally announce the meal time, looked embarrassed upon hearing Seongjin's answer.

Recently, there was a dangerous atmosphere in the count's residence.

That's because the prince who visited the estate did not show up at the restaurant until the third day after the first day's lunch.

At this point, it is impossible for anyone to not know. That the prince is indirectly expressing his dissatisfaction with the count's hospitality to guests.

Thanks to this, the Countess's mood became increasingly uncomfortable day by day, and her servants had to pay attention to their behavior as if walking on thin ice.

"Your Majesty, what is your lunch schedule...""

"Ah, I'm planning to grab a quick lunch from my room and go to the aviary. I recently made a great friend, a wolfdog named Max, and I'm going to go see him. "Please tell your wife well."

Depending on how you listen to it, it may sound like a rude remark, saying that a wolf dog is more important than a countess. There is no way I can convey these words as they are.

In the end, the head deacon had no choice but to ejaculate while sweating profusely.

"Your Majesty Mores, if you have any discomfort with the Count's treatment, please let me know..."

Then Seongjin looked at the grizzled head deacon for a moment.

"You're probably not asking because you really don't know, right?"

How dare you test the prince of the Holy Empire like that?

Well, it was only then that I saw Orden and saved face with my generosity. So wouldn't it be natural that there should at least be some gratitude or apology for that incident?

But if you pretend not to know and keep your mouth shut, who am I to be nice to you? huh?

"I didn't do anything wrong, so there's no apology."

"... .."

The prince has a more reserved personality than you might think.

However, it is unlikely that the countess will readily apologize to the prince who is younger than her children.

The butler closed his eyes tightly as he felt his vision becoming dark.

[To be honest, Seongjin Lee. You actually have other plans, right?]

At that time, the devil bastard quietly opened his mouth.

'What am I?'

[Didn't you like it when you first discovered the new efficacy of medicinal tea?]

'That's just a coincidence. It's true that they're rude.'

[With your personality, I won't cause a hassle over that. Is there any need to refuse delicious food? Ah, are you really trying to find fault with the Margrave with this?]

Well, the more cards you can use, the better.

Anyway, after eating lightly for a few days, the devil's dissatisfaction seems to be piling up.

Seongjin stood up and added a word to the dejected butler.

"Anyway, tell him not to worry about this. Oh. "If possible, could you

bring me some bear meat steak for lunch?"

Then the demon lord ran wild in joy in my head.

[Bear meat! Bear meat! Bear meat with a fiery taste!]

Okay, I'll give you bear meat, so shut up.

You devil bastard who knows too much!

Seongjin headed to the breeding farm accompanied by Louise and Sir Claudia.

Going to see Max was not an empty phrase. This is because I was strangely convinced that the huge wolfdog 'Max' at that time was definitely this guy.

'If I had known this would happen, I would have asked my father when he was there.'

I felt that kind of regret later, but whatever.

I've heard many other important stories, so I'll be satisfied with that.

'If you think about it, Oracle is really like a cheat key.'

It is understandable that Chamberlain Louis subconsciously thinks of his father as omnipotent. From what I've heard, even if it takes a little time, you can eventually find the answer to everything you want to know.

If it was so bad, I would have even thought about carrying a medicine tea with me from now on and taking it from time to time.

There is only one reason why Seongjin is refraining from doing so.

The moment he drank the medicinal tea and opened the channel, it was obvious that Seonghwang's father would come running here right away. What a nuisance this is to an already busy man.

"We have arrived, sir."

At that time, Louise, who was ahead, opened the entrance to the

aviary.

Wong wong!

When Seongjin appears, Max runs over excitedly to greet him.

Panting panting.

Despite the majesty of a wolf dog, the sight of it running around with its long tongue out was like that of a poop puppy.

"Yes, yes. Max. How have you been?"

Seongjin looked around, helping the guy who was running wild.

Then, I noticed a strange air current flowing through the kennel, and the dogs were all huddled together in the corner, leaving the wide cage behind.

Kiingkiing.

It was truly a sight to see him with his tail curled up between his legs, as if he was scared.

They all appear to be large, imposing wolf dogs, but why on earth are they acting like that?

"Why are they like that? Are you sick?"

Then Louise answered in a calm voice.

"It looks like you're a little tired after morning training."

"okay?"

"That's right."

"hmm... .."

I glanced at Louise's face, but there was not the slightest sign of agitation in her calm, dark eyes.

Well, does it matter? Because I just came to see Max.

"okay. Now that we've seen your face, shall we have some fun, Max?"

After saying that, Seongjin took off one of the gloves he was wearing, threw it away, and shouted.

"Come on, Max! "Ask me!"

OK.

Wong!

Max barked loudly in reply and stared at the gloves falling in a parabolic curve along with Seongjin with eyes filled with anticipation.

Tuk.

A glove that falls into a corner without any protection.

"Max?"

Wong!

Max's bright eyes looking at Seongjin seemed to be saying this.

Yes, I told you to watch it.

It flies well. But is that the end?

"... "I guess I'm stupid."

Sir Claudia whispered from behind.

No, I heard that training a wolf dog is difficult, but I wonder if even basic play like this can't be done.

"We don't know that wolf dogs can relate to people in that way."

"I don't know?"

"Yes, they are fundamentally different from dogs who instinctively want to interact with humans. That's why they say it's difficult to teach."

Sir Claudia tilted her head at Louise's dry explanation.

"Doesn't that mean you're stupid?"

"It's a completely different thing."

"Hmm?"

Max, who was just excited, whether aware of people's evaluation of him or not, wagged his tail and nuzzled into Seongjin's bare hand.

Perhaps he likes the disappearance of the leather smell, and he playfully sticks his head in and sniffs it.

Then he bit it, and for a moment I thought it was a playful bite.

"Max!"

Percussion!

At some point, Louise struck the dog with a lightning-like movement of her hand.

Keke!

Max, who had been hit hard on the side of his nose, whimpered and widened the distance.

Everyone was confused by the sudden situation, but before they knew it, Louise came forward and grabbed Seongjin's hand. And isn't he looking around with a pale face?

"... Louise?"

"I apologize, sir. I'll just check it out in a moment."

She took her time and meticulously examined Seongjin's hands.

And when he soon confirmed that there was no damage to his hand, he seemed relieved.

"Fortunately, there were no injuries."

"of course. It didn't hurt. "I thought Max was just joking."

Then Louise looked straight at Seongjin. His eyes were so dark that his emotions could not be easily read.

"Sir, the wolves of the Sigismund Territory travel to and from the Demonic Land. So, you must not allow a wolf dog that carries their blood to bite you."

"... .."

"Even if you expose your belly and show submission, or no matter how friendly you are."

It was a voice so firm that it felt strange.

206. Louise (9)

-When the year is unusually warmer than usual, flowers sometimes bloom even in the harshest cold. It is said that the rare and captivating scent of the flower drives wolves and lycanslopes crazy. Therefore, if the scent of flowers is permeated by the wind flowing from the demonic landscape, the hunting dogs should be controlled and they should not leave the house at all.

Even with her grandmother's threatening stories, young Louise always snorted.

That was until one day, when I smelled an unfamiliar and sweet scent while taking a walk.

-... Max.

Even though she was busy taking care of her nursing baby, she was a loyal friend who followed her around whenever it was time for a walk.

That is, until I saw the death clearly reflected in the eyes of that faithful dog.

* * *

"Max."

Louise, who came to the breeding farm early in the morning, tried shaking the unseasoned beef jerky.

But the arrogant wolf-dog only glanced at her face and turned his head away.

Max's cub, unlike his mother, never opened his heart to her.

Louise couldn't tell whether it was the distance that came from the forced master-slave relationship, or the smell of her mother's blood that she smelled as a cub.

In the end, she had to trudge back home, as always, without any results.

"Sniff. Did you see that dog again? "It seems like they haven't been to the kennel lately."

Her father, who happened to be eating a quick meal by himself, asked. He must have smelled the scent of dogs in the air.

Louise, who was rummaging through her portion of the cold stew for a moment, answered half-heartedly.

"Max has not been at the estate for the past few days."

"okay? Old Man Ben wouldn't have been so lax in cracking down on the kennels, but he's pretty good at escaping from us. "We have an important guest coming today, and I don't know if it's okay to leave him wandering around like that."

Her father, Sebastian Vatel, is the commander of the estate's guards.

Originally, he would have patrolled the Guard's guard posts with the Margrave on behalf of Knight Commander Wolf, who was late returning home.

However, he received a message that the Grand Duke was bringing an important guest, and now, unusually, he is sitting in the estate.

Instead, Vincent Sigismund, the former Margrave, used this as an excuse to expel him to the Demon Lord.

It was under the pretext of protecting the Margrave, who was not particularly distinguished by military force, but no one knew that it was actually just an excuse to avoid the prince. Because he has always been uncomfortable with people from the Seonghwang family.

"Should we return to the magic room immediately after Mom

arrives?"

In response to Louise's question, he picked up the sword and shrugged.

"I guess so. Aren't the temperatures unusually warm this year? "The behavior of the Lycan Slopes is unusual."

From time to time, the faint scent of flowers blows through the warm wind.

Trying to hide the creeping anxiety, Louise stuffed the bland stew into her mouth.

"By the way, Louise."

Sebastian, who looked at her blankly for a moment, hesitated a little and continued speaking.

"that... Work, how... "Is it worth it?"

"... .."

"The head deacon praised you. "He's such a stubborn guy that he doesn't do anything about it, but it seems like you're doing very well at the count's residence."

For a moment, her father's eyes fall on her hand. I'm sure you know that she hasn't been able to let go of her obsession until recently, and that she wields her sword alone.

In the end, Louise had no choice but to smile bitterly and answer like this.

"Yes, it's fun. "It also suits my aptitude well."

What if it doesn't fit?

Prince Mores, who finally arrived at the estate, was a very different person from what was rumored.

When the boy, who was neater than expected, got off the carriage,

people could not hide their confusion for a moment.

With his sullen expression, he seemed somewhat cold, but when he smiled at the countess, the air around him instantly became brighter.

Thanks to this, the count's relatives were immediately fascinated by him.

Well, didn't you quickly tame that arrogant Max? Definitely not an ordinary person.

'But I am Max's owner... ..'

I would be lying if I said I wasn't a little disappointed.

"Thank you for your help. "You are very strong."

As the prince's luggage was being carried to his room, a woman carrying a huge trunk on each arm said something like that.

"My name is Edith. She is your dedicated maid. Please take care of yourself during your stay."

"This is Louise."

It can't be just a maid. An Auror user of that caliber is definitely a secret escort disguised as a maid.

But Louise decided to pretend not to know for now.

Since he was invited by the Archduke, Prince Mores must have come to secretly investigate the 'medicine tea'. In that case, it is understandable that you would want to have a strong bodyguard by your side in case of any emergency.

However, Louise, who was in the middle of carrying luggage, suddenly detected a very strong scent of flowers in the prince's bag.

"... "Rose scent?"

A flower that does not bloom properly in the cold Sigismund region. So, the strong floral scent that I have only encountered occasionally

in perfumes used by countesses and young ladies.

"yes?"

Edith was confused for a moment, but then nodded as if she understood something.

"iced coffee. That must be the quarantine perfume sprayed by Rep. Jibril. They say they make preparations in advance to avoid getting sick while traveling. Since you were so disgusted with it, I brushed it off, but I guess it's still there? Louise, you have a sensitive nose."

As her explanation flowed through one ear, Louise felt a vague, sourceless fear.

This is definitely different from the scent of that day and the sweet scent of medicinal tea. But why do I have this ominous feeling that everything is going wrong?

And Louise's anxiety soon became true.

The prince who had participated in the luncheon dinner was brought to the room as a dead body for some reason.

Louise was astonished when she detected Ye's familiar scent mixed between his body odor and the faint scent of roses.

"... "Medicine tea?"

Then, despite not even being able to open her eyes properly, the prince answered her calmly.

"huh? "Oh, right."

Louise was confused.

He was a guest invited by the Grand Duke, who had gone to the imperial capital to investigate the distribution of medicinal tea. He definitely thought he had come to solve the territory's problems with him.

Of course, you know something about the dangers of this car, right?

"Why on earth... .."

But there wasn't much time to think about it.

The prince suddenly began to bleed a huge amount from his nose, and after saying to call an exorcist, he soon lost consciousness and collapsed.

Louise chewed her lips nervously.

What should I do with this?

This person is a noble prince of the empire. If something goes wrong with him like this, he and the entire earl family will be angry.

Originally, we should have called a doctor and a priest right away.

'... There must be a reason why they told us to keep it a secret.'

Moreover, even though it had only been a short time since she had met the prince, Louise was clearly feeling it.

Strangely enough, underneath the prince's seemingly light-hearted actions and speech, there is a strange power that is difficult for ordinary people to resist.

For now, let's follow the orders.

Louise finally came to that conclusion, lifted the bedding to cover the traces of bleeding, and quietly left the room. And by inquiring about Prince Mores' party, they were soon able to bring in the exorcist he had mentioned.

"What's going on?"

When Louise suddenly appeared with Sir Sharon, the young knight standing as a guard asked in confusion. Although he was a fairly high-level Auror user, he seemed completely oblivious to the commotion in the room.

[...] Tsk.]

The exorcist who was entering the room looked at him for a moment and clicked his tongue in disapproval.

While the knight was dumbfounded by the sudden cold attitude, the exorcist turned to Louise and gave an order.

[You should wait outside.]

"... ..!"

Louise, who naturally made eye contact with her, immediately trembled from the eerie feeling that came over her.

Strange silver-gray eyes that shine alone in a dark hallway.

'... 'Wasn't it a black eye?'

Louise was embarrassed.

When I first met her, I thought she was a strange woman with an eerie smile.

Now, she felt like she was facing the head of the previous generation, perhaps much heavier than him, and had a noble and intimidating feeling that she could never resist.

Most of all, her eyes.

Scary eyes that instantly remove all the light in the world that teases our shallow senses, and gaze into the pulsating abyss beneath them.

Those eyes, which perhaps resembled the gaze of a god, went beyond my skin and penetrated my thoughts and soul at once.

[...] okay. Are you ultimately going to go down that path?]

She was completely overwhelmed and frozen, but then she turned her gaze away from Louise and said something incomprehensible.

[But what can I do now? Everything is the child's choice... ..]

"... .."

[Be thoroughly prepared for what comes from the North.]

With that said, finally.

Percussion!

The door closed violently in front of her eyes.

No matter how much I thought about it, it was not the amount of blood loss that a person could experience in one day.

However, that evening, the prince suddenly became sober and even wandered around the count's residence alone during the night.

"Did anything happen to you overnight?"

Louise, who came to work early in the morning, noticed a subtle change from usual and asked the night security guard.

"huh? iced coffee. Louise. The prince slept quietly all night. Is this the average distance from the ecliptic? "I heard you were so tired that you couldn't even attend the dinner last night?"

I wonder if the security guards, who are said to be quite active, did not notice anything.

Sniff.

Louise raised her head and took a small breath.

What is clearly lingering in the hallway is the body odor of a new prince that appeared last night. In particular, Louise couldn't be confused by the light rose scent permeating his clothes.

And that body odor continued all the way to the matriarch's study on the second floor.

'no way... ... ?'

On the first day I came to the territory, I wanted to do something big like that.

Louise tried to push away the doubts creeping into her head.

But coincidentally, from then on, Hermann and the Archduke's people began to move quickly.

"Louise. "Can I ask you a favor?"

Hermann cautiously called to her from the hallway.

"I hope they select just two people who are addicted to medicinal tea, especially those who have severe hallucinations. "It's amazing how quick you are at identifying people like that."

"Yes, that's not difficult."

Louise had a particularly good nose compared to others, and was able to quickly spot people with a strong scent of medicinal tea.

It was she who first warned about the dangers of medicine tea. She did the same thing to the Archduchess and Hermann several times afterward for their investigations.

"But what are you trying to do to find them?"

"I want to take you to the imperial capital. "We will hand it over to the court as evidence to accuse Milo's evil deeds."

"Can we stop the distribution of medicinal tea with that?"

Isn't that too simple? It took so long to find clear evidence about the harm of medicinal tea.

When Louise looked suspiciously, Hermann sighed softly.

"This is the prince's order. You say you want to negotiate with the head of the family directly. "Now all we have to do is secure the victim of the drug truck and confiscate part of the vehicle as evidence from the retail store."

"... .."

As expected from Louise, the prince visited the estate to resolve this matter.

'But does that really work?'

But, as expected, Prince Mores actually acted as if the investigation was now over.

He is going out of the room, singing a song to bring the head of the family to this place immediately.

"When does Margrave Sigismund come?"

"Hmm, my dear. I've sent someone, so soon..."

"So when is it coming?"

"Wouldn't it take some time to repair all the guard posts?"

"So when are you coming?"

"Hey..."

While Hermann was crying because of the constant bullying, the prince raised his head and quietly looked up into space with unfocused eyes.

At that moment, Louise saw a faint silver light passing through his eyes.

"I can't wait to go home."

If I don't hurry up, I think I'll miss the time. I think I'll be stranded here for a long time.

Even though he was not a child, Prince Mores whined like that.

It was the evening of the third day since the prince arrived.

The Wolf Knights finally returned to their territory. It was accompanied by a group of prisoners and an enormous amount of daily necessities.

And at the same time, a reply from the head of the family arrived from the forefront of the demonic realm.

"Confirmed large-scale abnormal movements on Lycan Slope. The number of individuals moving south is about... Two thousand?"

Hermann's face turned pale.

"The Wolf Knights will return to the demonic realm right away. Guard Commander Sebastian Vatel mobilized as many combat-capable personnel in the territory as possible... .."

As Hermann's voice began to tremble as he read the letter, the Archduke next to him continued his report in a calm voice.

"Lowering. It is said that Lycanslope Lord was seen among the group."

His face is also depressed.

This was an unprecedented disaster that struck the Sigismund Territory.

"Over the past 10 years, there have been big and small conflicts with the magic beasts moving south, but no matter how many there are, the number has never exceeded the spirit. "Let's put the medicine cart aside and now is the time to gather all the resources of the territory."

"... .."

"It looks like a conversation with the matriarch will be a long way off, so I think it would be best for you to return to the imperial capital as soon as possible."

However, the prince's reaction upon hearing the report was unexpected.

He stared into space for a moment, scratched his cheek, and then sighed softly.

"okay. "I thought that was probably the case."

After saying that, Prince Mores stood up with a sullen expression on his face.

"Lord Masaine. Summon the resident knights. Commander, please

bring Sir Sharon and Sir Valerie."

As the knights hurriedly left the room, the prince began to put on his robe by himself.

Luise quickly approached and attended to him.

"... "What are you trying to do?"

The Archduke sensed an unusual atmosphere and asked in confusion.
OK-

Crash.

Lastly, the prince, who wore a sword belt with a nutcracker attached to it, spoke as if it were obvious.

"We are also going to the devil's eye."

207. Lycan Slope Road (1)

A few days before Lycan Slope began its large-scale southward movement.

A strange guest came to visit the Marquis D'Aciano, a former great nobleman of Ortona.

He was a very tall man, and wearing a cape with intricate embroidery and a colorful half-mask, he looked strange, as if he were attending a festival.

The servant who was guiding him to the marquis was startled by the guest's flashy attire, but soon lowered his head and calmly opened the door to the banquet hall.

"The day is coming when the Prince of Cyprus will finally wear that mask."

A huge table that you only see at banquets.

The Marquis d'Aciano, sitting alone in front of him, was greedily devouring the mountain and sea delicacies that had piled up.

Berseus Dashiano.

At the height of the civil war, he was a hard-line royalist who fought against the republicans, and now that Ortona is completely over, he tightly controls the area and reigns like a king.

Contrary to his rugged appearance like a bandit, his political acumen was very delicate and sophisticated. Not only did he easily absorb the weak nobles in the vicinity, but he also accepted many of Ortona's refugees as his subjects without much fuss.

It is no exaggeration to say that the current Dacia Noryeong, which has grown like that, has become a small kingdom rather than a single territory.

"Cyprus is not a kingdom."

The cold eyes of the man who responded like that rested on the marquis's thick beard for a moment.

His beard was a mess of small pieces of flesh and blood. This is because he was tearing off the entire thigh of a female deer, which had not been cooked properly and was oozing blood.

With such a dirty look on his face, the Marquis d'Arciano responded politely as if he were a wise man.

"Do not decline the honor you deserve, old friend. Is there anything in this world that is not a kingdom? Instead of the cutlery that upholds the king's authority, beautiful gold shines brightly. "Only fools do not know who they are governed by."

As he said, the Marquis d'Arciano detested anything that tried to deviate from the laws of the kingdom. For him, the kingdom was the same as the providence of nature.

Every group must have a 'lord' to rule over it. Fair qualifications, equal rights, etc. are just nonsense barked by toothless dogs who have never been involved in hunting.

That was why he took the lead in destroying the foundationless republican government.

He sided with the royalists and overthrew the idiotic republican government, and eventually expelled the unworthy king, turning Ortona into a lawless zone of the might of the jungle.

And now he reigns as the king of this area. Proving his qualifications as a monarch.

"Well, those country idiots don't even care how successful the empire is right now, right? "Everyone is equally foolish."

He took a gulp of red wine to clear his throat, and only then did he formally ask the man to sit down.

"I've never invited you, but a guest is a guest. Please sit down. "Even if there isn't much to prepare, I hope you have a pleasant meal."

However, the half-masked man did not sit down.

Not only was a meal that smelled of blood unpalatable, but now was not the time to leisurely eat.

"I've warned you many times over the years, Berseus. "Even now, your people are destroying my garden."

"A flower garden? It's a flower garden. "Isn't this an herb garden where drugs are grown?"

Berseus snorted and played with his damp beard.

"okay. Now that I think about it, the temperature is quite warm this year. That unlucky Deleria must have already spread throughout the forest. Don't worry. "When those ominous things bloom, I will send the group down to the south on my own."

"You know very well that sending him down in moderation is not enough."

The half-masked man walked slowly and approached the Marquis. But instead of sitting next to him, he put his arm on the back of the high chair and lowered his head to look down at the marquis.

"How long are you going to keep playing puppet like that? Isn't it a hassle to police your descendants from afar every year? While I'm leaving, I just need to come down to the south, further south."

"More from there? "How far?"

"Don't act like a fool. That's not like you. "Isn't the southern part of the Demonic Land already your land?"

"It's not the same, it's my land, without a doubt."

"exactly. So, if you can unite with the forces of Tarshiano, won't you become the owner of a huge kingdom that no one can conquer? But why are you leaving Sigismund in the middle alone?"

Hehehe.

Then Berseus snorted loudly and picked his ears as if he had heard something.

"Nonsense. The southern part of the Demonic Land is the territory of the barbaric Lycan Slope. And Dacia is definitely a land of humans. Well, it's one thing to be barbaric, but isn't it natural to have a clear border between two regions that can't mix? "Why would I attack them if Sigismund provides a fence for them?"

"It is your prejudice to think that you cannot mix. "Isn't there already a king of the Lycanslopes living as if he were a human, Lord Berseus?"

Then krrrrrr-

A low, growling sound resounds from deep within the Marquis' vocal cords. The eyes of a beautiful beast glaring at the man gave off yellow light.

"It would be a great mistake to think that everything is played out in your hands, arrogant [Puppetmaster]. "Our meeting of six people is not that foolish."

Then the half-masked man leaned against the back of the chair and shrugged his shoulders.

"Then I guess you're just a coward. So, how do you feel? "It feels like a human boy, whose life was just a light in the wind a few years ago, is now sitting on top of the six people who protect Delcross and is controlling you."

Kuang!

At that moment, the Marquis struck with such force that the huge dining table was instantly broken into pieces.

Cheonggang. Cheonggang.

All the plates fell to the floor, and the mashed food gave off a strong bloody smell.

"You'd better take good care of that senile snout, puppeteer!"

Long fangs protrude from Berseus's angry mouth.

Even though his body was huge for a human, his muscles were now even more bulging and anyone could see that he looked far from the shape of an ordinary human.

The Marquis growled menacingly at the man, pointing out sharp claws that had grown over two inches long.

"Do you think I don't know your intentions? By instigating the Penitent Church, they intentionally tried to erase the top by using an eye-catching method of summoning demonic beasts. "As if everything from beginning to end was the work of the Dark Church!"

If he moves his hand even a little, his head will be blown off. But the masked man answered without blinking an eye.

"It's just because all the eyes of cause and effect were there together."

"The goal was to eliminate it? Don't be funny! Do you think I will easily fall for the tricks of you who are so obsessed with hiding your tail? "It's not enough to eliminate the top with Milo, but now you're going to move our species and eradicate the Sigismund Spirit?"

"Also, because all causal eyes are there."

The half-masked man answered like that and continued speaking casually, shaking off the food residue that had splattered on his cloak.

"You need to think carefully. Thanks to my actions, the Guardian of Delcross has exhausted a lot of causality in the north. I won't be able to move easily for the time being. And the third prince plans to stay in the Sigismund Territory for a while. "Isn't this a golden opportunity to eliminate the evil that causes all the absurdity of

cause and effect in this world?"

"So you want me to get rid of it? It's ugly, puppeteer. Are you trying to survive by getting rid of him somehow?"

"I won't deny that. My life now depends entirely on his actions. But isn't that the same for you too?"

The wall inside the half-mask staring at the Marquis gave off a cold light.

"After the Guardian of Delcross divided the world at will, the fate of your race was already decided. One day, they will be treated as mere beasts, and in the end, they will all be subjugated by the hands of humans."

"... .."

"Perhaps this will be the last chance you are given. "This is the only opportunity for Lycan Slope to take deep roots in the human realm."

Slurp.

The sharply sticking out fingernails disappear and the pointed snout returns to its original appearance. The Marquis, who had suddenly returned to his original appearance, stared at the man in silence for a moment.

And sniff.

Berseus, who confirmed the man's scent by ringing his nose once, leaned back and let out a sneer.

"You're talking loudly. Even though his insides are stained black with hatred for Seonghwang. "No matter how hard I try to hide it, I can't fool my nose."

"... .."

"Doesn't he want to somehow get revenge by getting rid of something he cherishes? Because he is literally the one who killed your body. Sigurd Sigurdson."

The Marquis swiped the red blood from the corner of his mouth with his tongue and smiled bitterly.

"But there is no disagreement with what you said about this being a good opportunity. I'm not willing to be fooled if you cooperate properly. It would be all the better if the Holy Emperor could not move, but if he were to force it to move, it would also result in irreparable loss of cause and effect."

Tuk-tuk. The Marquis burst into laughter, tapping the puppeteer's cloak with his blood-soaked hands.

"Yeah, that's not bad. ha ha ha."

Thanks to this, the puppeteer's eyebrows furrowed, but there was no way for the Marquis to notice the expression hidden behind the half-mask.

Of course, I had no intention of showing my displeasure. If Berseus had known that fact, he would have been so happy that he would have wiped his hands on his clothes.

"That's what came to mind when you mentioned cooperation, but I'll give you some good information here as well."

The puppeteer opened his mouth, shaking off the area his hand had touched.

"Do you know? "The Nebraska blood still remains in the Sigismund Territory."

"... .."

An eerie light appeared in the marquis' once relaxed eyes.

The puppeteer, who felt that his discomfort was relieved even a little, smiled confidently.

"What if he gets into trouble with his fellow countrymen and something unfortunate happens that breaks his true nature? If you don't get rid of him quickly now, you'll lose your meager status entirely. "Lord Berseus."

* * *

Sigismund Range was a natural fortress with a fairly clear topographical border from the Magyeong.

To the south is Lake Salz, a huge lake that extends to the border of Rohan, and to the north are two canyons crossing high glaciers.

In the only snow field leading to the basin where the territory was located, numerous ice walls and guard posts that the Sigismund people had slowly built over the past hundreds of years were tangled together.

- Against demonic beasts that have no concept of siege, this line of defense will never be breached!

This confidence was the basis for considering self-rescue measures without requesting any special support, despite the unprecedented large-scale movement of Lycan Slope.

Of course, pride in having been able to successfully fend off demonic beasts alone for hundreds of years may have also played a role.

"There is no other place to ask for help anyway."

Saying that, Hermann sighed.

The only immediate neighbors are the bat-like Castile and the Ortona-eaten Daciano who sided with the royalists.

Of course, you will not go over the Sigismund Territory, which is Delcross's territory, carelessly, but if you bring them in, you will definitely have to pay a higher price than necessary.

"hmm."

First, 250 troops, including the Wolf Knights led by Lord Ilma, hurriedly left for Lord Ilma.

The 400 troops organized by Guard Commander Sir Sebastian as the first group are scheduled to depart now. After the second and third formations are completed, excluding the minimum security

personnel, the total number of troops will be a little over 1,100.

Even if you include all the troops stationed at the border of the Demonic Realm, you cannot shake the feeling that their absolute numbers are quite insufficient.

"Shall we ask the imperial capital for help?"

"The territory is not at its full power yet, sir. There is no change to the fact that they have to overcome the ice walls piled up in the snow field anyway. "The battle will probably not be much different from previous years."

For a moment, I was taken aback by the unprecedented number of 2,000 lycan slopes.

Orden, who had already regained his composure, spoke with a calm expression.

"Hmm, really?"

Why? I have a feeling that I am somehow not good enough.

Well, actually, I've already sent word to one place asking for help, but there's no need to talk about it now.

As Seongjin thought so, he stroked the head of Max, who was sitting next to him.

Then, the wolf dog showed affection that was not befitting its size and pressed its body against Seongjin's leg.

Kiingkiing.

"It's the first time I've seen him be so kind to a person."

Orden, who was looking at the scene, said in wonder.

"Even though it looks like that, he is the highest-ranking wolfdog out of all the wolfdogs I own, sir."

"okay?"

Now that I think about it, I am reminded of the wolf dogs that were so scared at the kennel not long ago.

He was the head of the military base at the kennel for such a pooppy puppy? Could it be that they were completely discouraged because of Max?

"Are you serious, Max?"

I asked that question, but Max just tilted his head with an innocent expression.

Kiing?

Seongjin couldn't resist the cuteness and gently scratched the bridge of his nose.

Well, it might not matter anyway.

Because it's so cute.

* * *

And that evening.

An urgent report requested by Seongjin through the Monkey Watchtower has arrived at the Blue Rose Labyrinth.

-I'm bored. come over. It would be better if you bring the Lilium Detachment.

"Mores sent this?"

"Yes, sir."

In response to the informant's answer, Logan looked at the letter carefully with a puzzled look on his face.

But the postscript that followed was even more shocking.

-P.s. Don't worry about expenses. I made a lot of money too.

Make money?

Weren't you on a business trip?

"... Seongjin Lee. "What on earth are you doing in Sigismund?"

208. Lycan Slope Road (2)

"Brother Mores? "I was bored so I told Sigismund to come and surprise me?"

What is that without any hesitation? Don't you understand English?

Sisley tilted his head for a moment and then nodded, saying "Aha."

"but. Because that's what Brother Mores does. It's the exact opposite of what I expected, but the bigger the twist on the original, the better. Have a nice trip, brother."

Logan furrowed his eyebrows at the youngest member's strange answer.

To be honest, what Sisley said was completely incomprehensible.

"But what kind of justification is that for coming to play? There are many duties in the imperial capital that a prince must take care of. This is not the time to play around. Besides, I haven't been able to watch your training yet... .."

However, upon hearing those words, Sisley shook his head resolutely.

"are you okay. Training is something you repeat alone, so what? I thought you wouldn't be able to teach me for long anyway.

"Originally, my brother would have been busy boarding a ship in Cyprus by now."

"... I?"

"huh. It was a time when sea magicians were on the rise. But strangely, seeing as it has remained quiet so far, it seems like Brother Mores has done something in the meantime and things have

changed."

"... ... ?"

The two were now at the training hall of the Knights of St. Marsyas. Logan, who had recently gained some free time while staying in the Imperial Capital, was watching Sisley's Auror training every morning.

After joining the Order, Sisley participated in all of the regular training of the Knights of St. Marsyas.

However, Auror training lessons were an exception, and this was because there was no teacher who could properly teach the saint who had unconsciously awakened Auras on her own and had accumulated quite a few levels.

There are many instances where the aura released from a saint without her knowledge flies into a fatal position in the blink of an eye.

The instructors were so confused that they gave up teaching, and in the end, Logan, the unofficial Dekaron Knight and Sword Master, had no choice but to roll up his sleeves.

"I'll have to discuss it with Abama later. "Shall we practice first?"

"Oh, just a moment, brother. "Just fix this."

Then, whimpering, the little saint dragged a bunch of armored scarecrows piled up in a corner of the training hall.

"What is all this?"

"hmm. "These are the scarecrows that I broke while practicing yesterday afternoon."

Logan looked at the armor crumpled like a piece of paper with a bewildered expression.

It's not just crumpled. Isn't it completely flat, as if it had been dropped from a cliff and crushed by a huge rock?

At this rate, wouldn't it be better to just melt it again?

"This is good, Brother Logan. "At least there wasn't a hole, right?"

"... .."

When I first started taking Auror introductory classes.

Sisley, who was practicing weaving Aurors according to the rules, soon ran into a huge difficulty.

As the Auror's striking points were able to be concentrated at one point, the flail she wielded had a penetrating power similar to that of a lance.

Rather than the collapsed scarecrows, the pierced and completely unusable scarecrows began to pile up.

Only after the lesser Logan was taught additional methods of dispersing the blows was the destruction brought to a halt.

And the result is armor that has been flattened by splash damage alone. Well, it looks like the saint herself was satisfied with that.

"This is all thanks to you."

Sisley, who praised Logan like that, clenched his fists.

Kang! Kang! Kang!

Every time the saintess swung her fern-like fist, the nearby Inquisitors flinched and trembled.

"... Still, the training is not completely fruitless."

Logan looked at that for a moment and nodded.

Although the delicacy of operation was lowered, at least it was possible to control the degree to which the plate mail that had been distorted could be opened by hitting it in the opposite direction.

"I think this is also subtly practicing auror control, brother."

"It is fortunate that the armor of the Holy Knights has a high ratio of wrought iron. Otherwise, it would have shattered the moment you hit it. Ah, Sisley. "It's still crushed there."

"here? okay."

Kang! Kang!

In contrast to the brother and sister's peaceful atmosphere, inquisitors with tired faces occasionally passed by, glancing sideways at the two.

* * *

Late morning that day.

Waiting for the political meeting to end, Logan visited Seonghwang's office.

Logan also wanted to go to Sigismund Territory. He was worried about whether Seongjin was conducting a proper investigation, and he thought that if the devil's servant was there, he would definitely be of help.

He just couldn't tolerate the ridiculous excuse of 'going out to have fun' as a stubborn person.

However, when I actually went to the office and looked at the situation, I realized that Sigismund's situation was worse than I thought.

Although it was not official news, the imperial capital's intelligence department was already aware of the news of abnormal movements in Lycan Slope through Arranger.

'It's only been one day since trouble arose in Siegsmund. But news has already reached the ecliptic? Indeed, this is the power of the empire that has reigned as the conqueror of the continent for a thousand years... ... '

Logan felt a chill in his stomach.

Of course, this was Logan's mistake as he was not fully aware of the

existence of Arranger, a group of psychics organized by Seonghwang.

"Yeah, that's what the kid said."

"Yes, Abama. But considering the situation there, shouldn't this ultimately be seen as Mores' request for reinforcements?"

Logan looked down at the letter Sungjin had sent with a confused face.

Lycan Slope 2,000.

Logan, who often went out to subdue demonic beasts, could easily grasp how enormous this number was.

Originally, Lycanslope was a magical beast with a size and physical strength that was superior to that of humans. That single number can never be countered by a single human soldier.

In addition, there are quite a few strong individuals who show strange talents, like human Auror users.

Perhaps Lee Seong-jin wants the imperial capital to send a large army?

"What do you think, Amelia?"

Seonghwang, who was looking at Logan blankly for a moment, turned his head and asked Amelia, who was there.

"Yes, Father, Your Majesty. I believe Mores' request could not have been more appropriate."

The princess opened her mouth in a calm voice.

"It is still too early to officially move troops from the imperial capital. Isn't this information given by an official source? Even if troops were dispatched out of pure goodwill, it was enough to give the impression that the county was being monitored in advance. "All kingdoms and territories subject to the empire will be on high alert for this."

"I see."

"The most important problem is that there has not yet been an official request for assistance from the Margrave. According to the castle law and imperial law, unless the lord is accused of devil worship or has grounds for disqualification, leading troops across the border of the territory without the lord's request is strictly prohibited."

Logan listened to Amelia's voice as if fascinated.

I thought he would be stamping his feet, saying that he had to go quickly to help Mores, or that he had to get the child out of the estate right away.

The only thing that calm voice utters is the truth. Did my sister, who was always kind, have this side?

"Also, under imperial law, simply stationing troops near the border in excess of one-fifth of the total military that a territory can mobilize is considered a serious hostile act that threatens the territory.

Therefore, it is impossible to prepare for an emergency by stationing troops near the Sigismund Range in advance."

Seonghwang nodded at her answer and asked another question.

"So what do you think about the Holy Knights, Amelia? There are already regular missionaries traveling across the continent without borders. "Sending out paladins who dedicate their lives solely for the sake of the Lord's will does not seem to go against the purpose of caring for territories and subjects in danger."

Then, a joyful light appeared in the princess's clear gray eyes.

"The Holy Knights, the sword and mace of the Lord God, are probably a group that cannot act on their own due to their fair and altruistic nature. Any official activity of the Holy Order requires prior approval from the Holy See. Even if they do simple volunteer work, they are a group that must control themselves to ensure that there is no deviation from the maintenance of adults. Therefore, it is difficult to be perceived as having engaged in reciprocal activities for a specific territory."

"Then when will they move? "Is it just a decorative weapon stored in

a scabbard?"

"When it is clear to anyone that the subjects of the continent have fallen into a ricochet. And it is when there is evidence of a serious disqualification for the lord, which is equivalent to devil worship."

Recently, Princess Amelia often appeared in the Emperor's office like this.

After a successful political meeting, I sat next to him, listened to reports coming to him, and learned about the tasks he handled. Thanks to this, some were raising concerns that the princess might be jumping into the battle for her succession in earnest.

On the other hand, there were other opinions.

After the birthday party, the issue of the princess's national marriage began to surface in earnest, and the story was that the emperor was trying to teach his beloved daughter about government affairs in earnest.

Whatever the reason, the emperor was very satisfied with the little time he spent with his daughter outside of the audience, and Amelia was very satisfied with helping her father, who was suffering from a heavy workload.

"Then why did you decide that Mores' request was appropriate?"

"Yes, Father, Your Majesty. By clarifying his purpose, the child 'come to play', he made it clear that he had no military purpose whatsoever in Sigismund. He also requested a small detachment rather than a unit of knights, making it clear that he would not pose any threat to the territory."

"I see."

"This is the Liliun Special Forces, renowned for their voluntary subjugation of demonic beasts. Even if there is no formal request from the lord, no one will find fault with their small movements."

Seeing his daughter becoming more intelligent day by day, Seonghwang smiled slightly, as if satisfied.

"Did you hear that, Logan? "I guess that's what Mores meant when he asked me to come visit."

"... .."

"As for the size of the troops that can move privately in the imperial capital, it is probably about the size of the Lilium Detachment, as I heard. That would not be an official request from the county, but rather a picture of a person stopping by to see Mores while running a punitive force. "I think that would be the most acceptable support we can provide."

Certainly, the Lilium Detachment possesses the most outstanding combat power among the Knights of St. Bastian. This is a group that gathered together from the beginning because they admired Logan's military power and personality, and did not neglect training every day to follow in his footsteps.

But did she expect it all?

As Logan looked blank at the sudden turn of events, Seonghwang tapped his shoulder and continued speaking.

"Okay, Logan. "Officially, let's take the form of a regular subjugation to watch out for demonic beasts that move as the seasons change."

"... Yes, Abama."

Logan answered with a puzzled expression.

"and... .."

Seonghwang stared at Logan with unreadable eyes for a moment, then nodded.

"okay. Let's do it like this. "If you safely bring Mores to the imperial capital, I will return the remaining amount of the subjugation team's activity expenses as your pocket money."

"... ..!"

Wait a minute, after Lee Seong-jin, there is also Abama!

Do you think I have some kind of money demon?

As I opened my mouth in complete bewilderment, Amelia smiled brightly next to me and opened a document.

"This is the cost of the regular activities of the punitive force every year. "This time, I will return after completing the subjugation in Sigismund Territory, so I think at least half of this amount will be saved."

omg.

Logan checked the documents and swallowed a sigh of relief.

'At this rate, the dream of rebuilding Ortona will soon come to fruition... No, not this.'

Logan, who was momentarily fascinated by the eye-watering amount, soon fell into a deep sense of self-destruction.

How did General Gael Bertrand, who was praised as a knight among knights, end up like this?

But the boy soon composed himself.

'no. Wasn't I prepared to bear any stigma for the sake of my country, Ortona? That's just the nickname 'money ghost'... ... '

Logan realized that it was time for him to take a step forward.

Look at that Sisley.

It seems like only yesterday that he was held in the arms of the Holy Emperor with a tooth in his mouth, but isn't he now becoming a dashing holy knight who can destroy and repair scarecrows on his own?

What about Amelia?

Although she was a delicate little girl who needed to be looked after, she has grown up and is showing the aspect of a seasoned politician who understands and supports the deep meaning of Seonhwang and

Seongjin.

'Besides, the same goes for Lee Seong-jin.'

You said you made a lot of money in that short period of time.

With his actions, he is severely criticizing himself for foolishly wasting time in the imperial capital.

'Lee Seong-jin, I have not yet forgotten the purpose of life you found for me. From now on, I will try to make money properly. So that I won't be embarrassed by you anymore.'

* * *

Tuk-tuk.

"Sir, why are you doing this? What makes you uncomfortable?"

Masain asked the prince who had been shaking his head intermittently since before.

"Uh, Lord Masaine. never mind."

Seongjin shook his head and then lightly tapped his ear one last time.

'What got in your ear? 'Why does it itch so much?'

Besides, I've been feeling strangely uncomfortable since a while ago.

Is it because we are heading to a place that can be called a battlefield for the first time in a long time? It seems like something is off.

Seongjin was currently at the tail end of the second troop and was heading towards Magyeong. Orden, as well as his resident knights and paladins.

"Hey!"

Seongjin, who fell behind for a moment while tapping his ears, soon skillfully increased his horse's speed and caught up with the procession.

Although he was not very familiar with horseback riding when he started, Seongjin was always a quick learner when it came to using his body.

"What do you think, Max? Do you think we will win?"

When I playfully asked the wolf dog that was following me at my feet, it looked up at Seongjin for a moment with clear amber eyes.

And then.

Wow.

Max raised his snout and howled long into the air.

Then from afar.

Oooh.

As if on alert, a long, drawn-out cry could be heard faintly.

It was a clear sign that they were approaching the border of the demonic realm.

209

209. Lycan Slope Road (3)

Dull bravery is like a blind spear that stabs its allies.

Wise valor is the guiding light for your allies.

purple! The meaningless struggle of that black demon race.

Even a rain of arrows couldn't stop him from running.

The blades of the branches cannot reach his armor.

Eventually, the young warrior raised his shining sword... ..

"The tree monster shot him with an arrow? Why does the arrow try to stop the warrior?"

Laurent let go of his lyre and sighed in response to the little boy's question.

"It was in the song earlier, right? Of course, it was the Wolf Knights who fired the arrow. but... .."

"mom! This guy is stupid! "The Wolf Knights are shooting arrows at our warriors!"

The only listener, a sniveling little boy, jumps up from his seat and runs towards a woman. He was the owner of the bar who allowed Laurent to sit down.

She clicked her tongue slightly at the downcast bard.

"It's nice to hear free songs, but is it okay if I have to pay like that every time?"

"That's right. "I heard that the people here really welcome bards."

"Well, since the time is right, no one drinks alcohol in the evening these days."

The interior of Sigismund's estate was in disarray. News of the large-scale southward migration of the demonic beasts has spread, and the head of the guard is in the process of forming his unit by selecting combatants step by step.

The residents of the territory were busy locking doors when the sun went down, and it was highly unlikely that anyone would have the time to ask for a bard's song in such an atmosphere.

The reason I've been doing nothing lately is probably not just because Laurent's song sucks.

"So, who is that great warrior in the song?"

The woman asked while stroking the head of the little boy hanging on the hem of her skirt.

"Didn't I tell you before? "It is me, the prince of the empire."

"Then when will you, the prince, meet the blue-eyed girl?"

"... yes?"

"Isn't that what you're singing now? "The Wandering Prince and the Blue-Eyed Maid."

"no... .."

They are His Majesty the current Emperor and Empress. And now the hero of this story is not Him, but His Fourth Son... ..

Laurent, who was thinking a lot in his head, soon sighed.

Do I really need an explanation? No matter how much he saw the qualities of a great hero, Prince Mores was still just a bastard prince who was not even recognized by these people.

"Come on, let's sing the prince's love song. "In the past, my heart fluttered when I heard songs about great heroes, but as I've gotten older, I really like stories about unfamiliar love these days."

"But my love songs are still lacking. With all my pride as a bard, such a poor song... .."

"If you play me a great song, I'll give you a drink in return."

The free alcohol had no artistic spirit or anything.

Laurent sang 'The Wandering Prince and the Blue-Eyed Maid' in front of her, followed by 'The Genius Swordsman and the Fair-Blonde Princess', and finally, he poured out his latest work, 'The Genius Wandering Swordsman and the Moon Maid'.

The golden crocuses bloom and fall, and the owl mourns all night long.

Tiriring.

When the sad tune ended, the woman clapped her hands with a satisfied look on her face.

It's a song that is evaluated as being cliché, but proven clichés always work somewhere.

"Dear Lady of the Moon, it's been a while since I heard a good song. It really reminds me of 'Princess Lycanslope', which I used to listen to often. "The princess also said that she couldn't forget the dead knight and waited for him all her life."

That was a great love song too. The woman memorized that.

Then Laurent opened his eyes and asked again.

"Lycan Slope? "Isn't that just a magic beast?"

The love between a demon princess and a human, such a scary story?

But towards Laurent, who was disgusted, the woman clicked her tongue.

"After all, outsiders don't know. According to the story that has been passed down here since ancient times, the original Lycan Slopes were not crazy beasts like that."

"... "You're saying it wasn't a witch?"

"okay. Those lowly bastards who are currently wandering around the devil are inferior beings who have lost their sanity and have become complete beasts. It is said that the original lycan slope closely resembles a human. It is said that they were a noble race of people who had been visiting this land consistently since the era of the three ancient dragons. "It is said that the princess who fell in love with the human knight was also an elegant and beautiful woman with almond-colored eyes."

"This is the first time I've heard anything like that."

The idea of a different race similar to humans was something that Laurent, a bard, had never heard before as he traveled around the continent and heard many stories.

Then the woman hit him hard on the back and giggled.

"Well, that's because the priests won't sit still if such a story spreads. They say that this story is not in the scriptures and that it is all a trick of the devil. "You can't just talk about the past and get handed over to the Heresy Tribunal, right?"

"I see."

When Laurent nodded, the woman whispered to him as if she were revealing a big secret.

"You played three great songs, so I guess I'll tell you this too. Do you understand? According to the story, the descendants of the Lycan Slope are still alive and well somewhere on the continent. "A real lycanthrope with wolves as its servants."

"... "A wolf?"

"okay. The real Lycan Slope uses wolves as freely as if they were limbs."

* * *

Kkkkkkkk!

The wolf-dog bared its teeth and barked toward the north. It was not the northwest snowfield they were heading towards, but the direction of the glacier canyon.

Since he was clearly on alert, Seongjin calmly concentrated his energy in the direction Max was facing.

But other than the increasingly heavy snowfall, there was no sign of anything special.

"Do you know what's over there, Max?"

When I asked that question and stroked his head, Max stuck out his tongue and wagged his tail.

It's like, you know? know? It seemed like he was saying this, and for some reason, Seongjin felt uneasy.

"Lowering."

At that time, Orden came to Seongjin's side.

It appears to be wearing simple armor designed for mobility, with two swords on its waist and several javelins on its back. It was probably basic equipment for hunting demonic beasts.

"From now on, the ice wall gets thicker and thicker. Since horses cannot move, from now on we will have to move only on foot."

As they said, in front of them stood a thick wall of ice with a gap so low and narrow that two people could barely move. Up to 400 troops are trying to pass through that narrow gate one after another, creating a severe bottleneck.

On the way here, we passed through high ice walls and wooden fences several times, but from now on, we are faced with truly terrifying ice walls built to defend against monster beasts.

"It is an extremely cold area that even carts cannot pass through. As a result, the bases on the ice wall are absolutely short of supplies. It will never be an environment worthy of you living in. So, can you please think again?"

Orden had already dissuaded Seongjin from coming to the battlefield several times.

Of course, Orden himself knew better that Prince Mores had great skills, contrary to rumors. Nevertheless, whether he could safely leave him in the close combat area of the demonic realm was another matter.

The prince is a member of the noble family of the Holy Emperor and is Amelia's beloved younger brother.

Just in case he ends up in danger.

'Amel will never see me again!'

Just thinking about that made Orden feel like his heart was breaking.

But Seongjin, who looked at him blankly for a moment, shook his head.

"I don't expect any extravagant treatment from others on the base."

"But you. There is no need for you to take any risks. We appreciate your willingness to share in Yeongji's hardships, but please also consider our position as we cannot take him to a dangerous area.

"You can still easily return to your territory now."

okay. It's not that I don't understand his position.

Orden probably doesn't think of Seongjin and his group as a meaningful force.

As for the number of people Seongjin has now, there are only four resident knights, including Lord Masain, and two paladin knights.

Of course, Sir Masain and Sir Maria are rare high-level knights, but they are hothouse knights of the ecliptic with no experience in

hunting demonic beasts. If you consider it as an overall force, it would not be a very meaningful force.

"But Archduke. "I have to stay on the battlefield for the time being."

Because the Liliium contingent led by Logan will come here to pick me up.

A Liliium detachment would be a meaningful force. He must have faced all the sea waters of the continent, and that included the demonic beasts of the Demon World.

Above all, our Logan is the second coming of General Gael Bertran, the final sword of Ortona. He is the youngest sword master!

"... "You mean the Liliium Detachment?"

When Orden was taken aback by the unexpected news, Seongjin smiled with confidence.

"okay. I called you to come over before leaving here. It's a direct call from the prince, and the margrave is already on the battlefield. So now, even if the detachment comes here, the Margrave won't be able to say anything, right?"

The Margrave was very uncomfortable with Logan's stay and had a history of expelling him from the estate.

However, they say that they have personally brought the prince to the battlefield for his safety, but will Margrave Sigismund dare to stop them?

Since I'm on the battlefield, I'll do some subjugation of demonic beasts, send a threat to the Margrave to stop selling medicinal tea, and help Young Ji-min to raise his reputation.

After hearing the explanation, Orden barely seemed to understand.

"I understand, sir. Then, from now on, you should never leave your safe zone. "If you think it's dangerous, evacuate immediately."

"okay. "I'll be careful."

Seongjin also had no intention of coming forward for no reason.

I just want to sit quietly in the safe base and watch the battle between Lycanslope and the Wolf Knights.

I wanted to see with my own eyes the battle of the magic beast experts that Sisley was so impressed by. I'm also curious about the difference between the boss mob I met in the labyrinth and the lycan slope in the demon world.

However, in response to Seongjin's obedient answer, Orden looked very suspicious.

"Is it for real this time? "Your Majesty says you are careful, but I have never seen you properly protect yourself."

Ah, on the topic of Orden!

This simple ignorant guy figured out so much in such a short period of time?

It was only when the sun was setting that Seongjin and his party were finally able to pass through the ice wall.

"I've only heard about it, but seeing it in person is truly majestic."

Lord Martha shrugged his shoulders and lifted his head like a turtle, exclaiming. The entrance was so narrow that he, who was tall, could not even stand properly.

The ice wall was so thick that it took quite a long time for them to pass through the tunnel-like entrance.

"This is still the first ice wall. It is the narrowest wall connecting cliffs. "It grows in the form of a fan as it goes into the second and third waves, so in the case of the third ice wall facing the snow field, it is 40 meters high and almost 300 meters long."

"Such incredible!"

Director Bruno let out a sigh in response to Orden's explanation.

How can such enormous structures be built in one territory?

This was possible because the border adjacent to Magyeong has a harsh climate where ice does not melt all year round.

Compact the dirt, rocks, and snow well, then pour boiling water over them. Then, after a few hours, it freezes hard and turns into a rock. Then, pile rocks and snow on top and pour water.

If you keep repeating this, you can create a fairly tall ice structure in just a few days with a small amount of manpower.

"Hoo!"

"Wow!"

After exiting the tunnel, Seongjin and his group were once again impressed by the appearance of the ice wall, which was different from the inside.

Inside, it was a rugged mound that was easy to climb up, but the ice wall seen from the outside was a smooth and steep ice wall with a slope of less than 5 degrees.

"Because the load supported by the walls was heavier than expected, it was not possible to make them completely right angles like a normal castle. Cracks form quickly. However, if you gradually build up at a gentle slope from the bottom, you can maintain a structure that is close to a right angle, at least on the outside."

As Seongjin and his party couldn't help but wonder, Orden seemed secretly proud. A faint smile appeared on his blunt face as he explained the structure of the ice wall in detail.

Right then.

growl!

Suddenly Max lowered his body, baring his teeth into the air.

"Max?"

Seongjin, who was puzzled, also noticed something unusual almost at the same time.

'... strong!'

A strong man who far surpasses Lord Masain.

Someone with a force comparable to that of Balthazar, the greatest knight on the continent, was now running towards them like the wind.

"What kind of guy are you?"

The sound of those shouting from far away quickly becomes closer.

Whick!

Someone leapt from the ice cliff and boom! It immediately landed in front of the group.

The ground in the area shook due to an impact so large that it could not be ignored, and small pieces of ice fell from the ice wall.

"... Grandfather!?"

Orden shouted in surprise, and while he was still shouting, the old man had already reached Seongjin's nose. He was already in perfect condition, holding the blue sword in one hand.

An old man with a sturdy build that would make you believe he was a young man, if not for his graying hair. He glared fiercely at Seongjin and shouted in a harsh voice.

"What are you? "How is it that he can hide such a violent spirit and act calmly, pretending to be a novice Auror user?"

"... what?"

The group froze in shock at the harsh words directed at the royal family.

"Grandpa, hold on for a moment! Don't be rude! this person is... ..!"

Orden became thoughtful and grabbed him, but the old man didn't even pretend to listen and swung his fist at him. It was like lightning.

Pow!

"Keuuk!"

As Orden stumbled and fell backwards, the old man ground his teeth at Seongjin.

"What are you doing to my grandson!"

"Wait a minute, it was the old man who just hit him."

Director Bruno muttered next to him, but whatever. The old man's glaring eyes glowed with blue fire as he glared at Seongjin.

"Answer me! This is wrong! "What did you plan to do by deceiving my grandson and sneaking into our territory!"

Well, aren't there all these old people who just leave without any hesitation?

Seongjin answered with a puzzled expression.

"This body is the prince of the Holy Empire. "What are you asking like that, old man?"

"What? Prince? No way?"

The old man began to tremble, and now he started hurling his point at Seongjin.

"Do not lie! It can't be! Decades! If you haven't spent your whole life on the battlefield, how can you have such a vicious spirit! Are you a devil? okay! Gero is a devil disguised as a human!"

Oh, he's a brave old man.

Seongjin was looking at him blankly and thinking, when Masain suddenly pulled out his sword and blocked Seongjin's path.

"Let's see! Let's see!" Be quiet, Sir Vincent! "There are limits to the

respect given to the empire's greatest generals!"

Masain growls at the old man with an evil look on his face.

Chaeng, chang!

Following him, Commander Bruno and the knights all drew their swords.

"no?"

Only then did the old man look a little embarrassed. Because all the Imperial Guard knights and Holy Knights came out to protect Seongjin.

"Hmm."

Seongjin slightly raised his eyebrows at him.

good. Another negotiation card to present to the Margrave was accumulated.

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210. Lycan Slope Road (4)

Vincent Sigismund.

Former Margrave of Sigismund and one of the few Dekaron Knights on the continent.

He is the one who completed the three giant ice walls and stabilized the boundaries of the Demon World. After transferring the title of earldom to his grown son, he was active in the southern front and made a name for himself as a great general.

Although he was excellent at inaction, he was also famous for saving his allies from danger several times with his animal-like intuition. Even though he has no divine power, he has even been able to detect demonic species with his keen senses.

Of course, when Seongjin saw it with his own eyes, he was just a stubborn old man.

"Prince Mores? Do you really think I don't know his face? Ah! "I am not fooled!"

Masain urged him again to show proper respect, but the old man only stubbornly turned his head away.

"If you're a prince, isn't he a child who hasn't even written his terms yet? But the presence coming from over there is definitely not that of an ordinary human being! Unless they are crazy about murder, how could there be such a person in this peaceful era? It is obvious that they have spent their entire lives going back and forth between the Ortona Civil War and the Southern Front!"

The old man seemed to be paying attention, as he was referred to as

'that guy' rather than 'that guy'. The Holy Knights, who wouldn't know if they were demons, continue to surround Seongjin, so even he is at a loss.

Of course, it is not a crime of lese majeste that can be overlooked with such tact.

"I will not warn you again, Sir Vincent. "Hurry up and apologize deeply to your Majesty, and set the proper example you deserve!"

"Masain! They are probably deceiving you and the paladins in some way! "Do you really not know that?"

"You really did it until the end... ..!"

Feel so good. It would be a bit of a headache for the Margrave to get rid of all these blasphemies.

At this point, should we force Sigismund to make a deal with a new merchant and take advantage of the relay fees?

While making such calculations in his mind, Seongjin looked at old man Vincent with curious eyes.

'Come to think of it, Logan said that too when we first saw him.'

It was said that Seongjin's presence was completely different from Mores'.

There's no way Logan wouldn't know that an old man who wasn't even a sword master noticed it. Seongjin guessed that it was probably because the memories of the struggle spent on Earth were affecting his current presence.

'That means, at least when I was young Mores, I had no memories of being on Earth.'

How can you be Mores?

Considering Seonghwang's warning not to be suspicious, he just assumed that he, like Logan, had been reincarnated in Delcross.

However, when he was Mores, he clearly had no memories of Seongjin, and Seongjin also has no memories of Mores as a child?

'More than anything, will Logan willingly believe this? My father confirmed it, but it's just speculation, and there's no clear evidence...
... !'

While Seongjin was in such trouble, Orden, who was barely able to gather himself by holding his side, began to get extremely angry at the old man.

"Grandpa, please don't tarnish our family's name any more!"

"what? Scam? Are you saying that you are ashamed of this expense? This shameful bastard! Who am I? "This Vincent Sigismund can compete with Balthazar, the greatest knight on the continent!"

But Orden's expression was cold.

"Honestly, it's not like you can objectively compare yourself to Master. "You may be a sword master, but you are not my grandfather."

"What? Such a beautiful sight! "He's like a naked thunderbolt who doesn't know what's up or down!"

"You just committed a great crime of disrespect towards me, and now you're telling me that you don't know what's up and down!"

Come to think of it, Orden was also famous as the best disciple of Balthazar, the greatest knight on the continent.

When I wondered why I had another teacher, leaving behind my grandfather who was a Dekaron Knight, there was a reason. The two people had very different personalities.

"I cannot tolerate further disrespect to someone who came willingly to help our territory!"

"This guy! "How dare you tolerate someone so much!"

"As the Archduke of Sigismund, I am warning the seditious elements

who are resisting the Empire!"

Then old Vincent, who was shocked, shook his chin in anger.

"Right now, are you accusing me of being a seditious element?!"

"Isn't it true?"

"What on earth do you think you are? Even if that were true, shouldn't we stand on the side of our own flesh and blood and protect them to the end?"

Then, blue sparks flew out of Orden's eyes.

"Well said. "Did someone whose blood and flesh were so precious do something like that to Princess Amel when she was young?"

"what... what?"

At those words, the old man suddenly looked visibly embarrassed.

"Why, why is that story suddenly coming up here? "It has already happened."

"Your grandmother has been tormenting you so persistently, but have you ever tried to protect the princess?"

"Isn't that important! Hey! now stop!"

for a moment. This was something that could never be ignored.

Now that I think about it, I think I once heard that the Count Sigismund family was my sister's maternal family.

Director Bruno, shocked by what he felt at that moment, trembles and looks back at Seongjin.

"... Lowering?"

Ignoring his shocked gaze, Seongjin called Masain, who was looking at the two people's scuffle with an embarrassed look.

"Sir Martha."

"Yes, sir... ..!"

The blood drained from Masain's face as he inadvertently turned his head.

"It's because I don't remember much from before. "Could it be that Princess Amel, whom the Archduke speaks of, is Sister Amelia?"

"Well, that is... .."

"What did that senile old man do to my sister?"

"... .."

Before His Majesty found Princess Amelia, there were rumors that the count's family treated her poorly. It's just that neither His Majesty nor the Princess has ever mentioned this, so they say it's just a rumor... ..

Masain reluctantly explained that and looked at Seongjin's complexion with anxious eyes. It was as if he was worried that he might pull out a nutcracker and rush at the old man at any moment.

No, what are you looking at me for? I'm not that thoughtless person.

At least officially, I won't be the first to draw my sword. Really.

Seongjin caught a glimpse of the worried gazes of his companions and slowly walked towards the two people.

"Grandpa, you've always been like that! "Let's focus on useless things and close our eyes on really important things!"

"No, when did I..." ..!"

The old man who was raising his voice suddenly looked at Seongjin in surprise.

"Well, what is it? Those eyes. I'm going to make a life-or-death decision with myself right now... ..!"

"Why do you think I can't do it?"

Well, from the outside, it would be like a low-level knight fighting a Dekaron Knight.

But you know what? It may take a bit of effort, and I will have to pay a considerable price, but I still have a picture of dealing with you in my mind to some extent.

The words of the person making such calculations were always the same, whether they were humans or monsters. In the end, I will be the one standing on the ground until the end.

"I thought that would be possible with just that level of auror... .."

"If in doubt, why not just close your eyes and take the plunge? Aren't you suspecting me of being the devil anyway? "Perhaps once you draw that sword, everything will become clear, old man."

Because that's what I don't want either.

When Seongjin raised one corner of his mouth, the nervous old man reflexively put his hand to his sword.

"Sir, what is this?"

Only then did Orden seem to have cooled off a bit, looking at Seongjin and the old man in turn with a puzzled expression.

A sudden, close call situation.

"Lowering!"

Masain must have sensed that the air current was unusual, so he quickly ran in front of Seongjin. Soon, the knights who received a signal from Leader Bruno rush to block the gap between Seongjin and the old man.

Then the old man who was watching quietly put down his sword. The pressure emanating from the prince was so overwhelming that Dekaron Knight was almost overcome by the force and pulled out his sword.

"Tsk."

Seongjin clicked his tongue slightly.

"No matter how senile the old man is, he still seems to have the spirit not to draw a weapon against a member of the imperial family in front of others."

"Lowering... ..!"

Masain, who had realized that the prince had really intended to fight Dekaron Knight, looked as if he was about to faint.

However, Seongjin tapped Masain on the shoulder and spoke softly.

"Leave it alone, Lord Masaine. It looks like the old man has become a little senile after working too hard for his fiefdom. You can't possibly charge an old man with a feeble mind and body like that for treason, can you? Stories should be told between sane people. "I will meet the Margrave right away."

treason.

A heavy crime that Orden wanted to avoid even though he was referred to as a seditious element.

The prince threatened the margrave that if he made a mistake, he could even charge him with 'treason'.

"that... .."

The old man opened his mouth belatedly, but Seongjin coldly turned away from the old man. He won't even give you a chance to apologize in the first place.

As the prince takes the lead and starts walking towards the second ice wall, Orden, the knights of the Royal Guard, and the Holy Knights silently follow behind him.

Eventually, when Seongjin and his group got far away, old Vincent turned his head and muttered softly.

"... Oh my, this is a big deal. It really seems like the prince is right. "That cruel smiling face is definitely the same as my father's."

* * *

It was after the sun had completely set that Seongjin and his group arrived at the base on the third ice wall.

Wooooow-

Here, the cries of lycan slopes could be heard from quite close by. As I stood on the ice wall and looked down at the snowy field, I saw several pairs of brightly shining eyes flickering as they looked in this direction.

"It looks like they're not coming straight here."

"Yes, sir. There are bases and guard posts made of ice outside the ice wall, but although we occasionally touch them, we have not launched a full-scale attack yet."

Sir Ilma, who had arrived in advance and was maintaining the base, greeted Seongjin and his group and explained that.

It is said that this is very different from their usual behavior of hunting soldiers in groups. It seems like they are testing something, or it seems like they are herding soldiers into an ice wall.

Perhaps it was because of the presence of Rod, who was said to have been seen among the group. That entity is systematically controlling the Lycan Slopes.

"Take advantage of it." "I don't know what the purpose is, but is it okay to gather soldiers like this?"

Seongjin asked, praying for the demon king's spiritual eyes and checking the shadows of the lycan slopes shining bright purple.

"Nothing has changed much, no matter what their goal is. Until now, they have never crossed the third ice wall. The soldiers at the guard post have all retreated into the ice wall by today. "Now we will meet their forces here."

Damage so far is one dead and a few injured.

Ridiculously, the damage occurred because the retreating soldiers were unable to cross the ice wall at the same time.

This is inevitable because the entrance to the snowy field is a gap narrow enough for one person to barely pass through. Even that was now blocked by a large stone rolled with a crowbar.

"People come and go here?"

"Usually it's blocked here too. "When I'm in a hurry, I lower the ladder from the ice wall."

It was a structure where a rope ladder was lowered from above or pulled up with a rope. At least Auror users can easily climb up the wall, but it will be difficult to climb over the wall after receiving even a severe injury.

Naturally, this question arose.

"Why don't they build a proper gate?"

No matter how much it is for defense, the entrance is so narrow. At least the horse should be able to move.

"Well, we tried to make a door, but it was impossible."

The problem arose because the door could not be properly installed between the ice walls. No matter what structure it was made of or what material it was made from, the door would often freeze to the wall the next day.

When I made a swing door, the hinges were frozen to the wall, and when I tried to pull the door up with a pulley, the entire chain was frozen to the pulley.

Since the ice wall was not built with proper embankments, supporting the load of the door was also a problem. Occasionally, cracks may occur in the ice wall due to the excessive load of the pulley hanging without an axis.

"Hmm, I see."

Seongjin nodded, and Lord Ilma looked back at the group with a puzzled look.

"But why is everyone in this mood? "What happened on your way here?"

Perhaps it was because they had been traveling together for several days, but they seemed to have noticed the strangely rigid atmosphere of the group.

Moreover, the prince, who had a sullen face as if he were indifferent to everything, had a particularly grumpy face today.

"Something happened. "I guess I'm just a little tired from coming all the way here."

Seongjin shook his head and smiled at Lord Ilma.

"By the way, Sir Ilma. "It is a little late, so can I finish the explanation and meet Margrave Sigismund right now?"

The rarely seen prince's gentle and gentle smile,

However, at that moment, Sir Ilma felt a strong chill running down his spine for some reason.

211. Lycan Slope Road (5)

"Can I meet the Margrave right now?"

Seongjin asked with confidence. According to his expectations, there must have been prior notice from the Margrave about this meeting.

Sure enough, Lord Ilma, who was frozen for a moment, soon nodded and answered.

"Yes, sir. The head of the family is preparing to welcome you. "I will take you to the barracks right away."

If you think about it, even if you are a member of the royal family, you are nothing more than a lump of burden that you cannot use with all your might.

Nevertheless, it was clear that the leader of the Wolf Knights came out to meet him and willingly gave him a tour of the base, probably under special instructions from the Margrave.

You must have heard to some extent about the conflict with old man Vincent. So, the idea is to buy some time to properly understand the situation.

And I hope that the young prince, who was distracted by the majesty of the ice wall, will feel somewhat relieved. Perhaps he hopes that there will be a fluke that will make him forget Old Man Vincent's rudeness.

[...] hey.]

As I was walking behind Lord Ilma, thinking about various things, the demon king spoke carefully to Seongjin.

[Are you still angry? Why do you keep smiling?]

Just as he said, Seongjin was smiling.

'Oh, it's nothing. The Margrave seems to be more shrewd than you might think. 'I'm happy about that.'

[Huh? Are you happy?]

okay. How could I not be happy?

At least he's not a bumbling fool like Orden. He is a guy who is fully capable of protecting his share even if he rushes in with determination.

'That means you can eat as much as you want without feeling guilty.'

[...] Ugh, I happened to get caught by this guy...]

The Demon King sighed.

No, but whose side is this guy on?

The group arrived at a place where tents were gathered together.

A truly spectacular sight unfolded, with a wall of ice filling up every gap between the tents, perhaps to protect them from the cold wind. It looked like small huts made of ice.

"It's an ice tent. It's cold just to look at it."

As Sir Claudia, with a red nose, trembled and muttered, Sir Ilma looked back and smiled.

"When you go in, you will be surprised at how well it keeps you warm, Sir Claudia. "It's several times warmer than just one tent."

As they said, the tent was completely covered with a light layer of white snow to keep warm. Sir Claudia, who saw that, was frustrated again.

"There is no flue in the tent at all..."

In this place where supplies are scarce, even starting a fire is a luxury. This means that you have to endure the cold with all your aura.

Seongjin and his group were then guided to the largest tent in the center of the ice tents, which served as both a strategy meeting room and the head of the house.

"Meeting the Third Prince of the Holy Empire."

As if he had been waiting for them in advance, the Margrave greeted them in front of the tent.

Hendrick Sigismund.

A man known to not stand out between his father, a Dekaron Knight, and his son, who is said to be a genius swordsman.

"It is the greatest honor of Lord Sigismund that a descendant of the Holy Family personally inspects the ice wall. 'It's cold. Let's eat inside.'"

He was a mature man who looked heavy and shabby. He also had straight, handsome features that looked a lot like Orden.

Just a roughly shaved chin with traces of stubble and messy hair sticking out made him look extremely ordinary.

Of course, there were other things that caught Seongjin's attention.

'The clothes are neat, and the beard is left on purpose.'

Just like the impression I got from the study, I can't shake the feeling that it was an intentional distraction.

Seongjin decided to not waste any more time exploring with him.

"I will be blunt, Margrave. 'I have something to discuss with you.'"

"... .."

The Margrave seemed a little surprised by the prince's quick speech,

but he soon informed Lord Ilma and instructed him to guide the rest of the party to their lodgings.

When they were left alone, he asked Seongjin to sit down and smiled kindly.

"Please sit here, sir. Fortunately, this tent is large enough to accommodate a small furnace without any ventilation holes. "It is a luxury that is difficult to enjoy at an ice base."

And when Seongjin took off his cloak and sat down, he took it in his own hand and showed a slight acknowledgment.

"Anyway, you look very different than when I saw you at last year's birthday party. "If I were a faceless person, I would think you were a completely different person."

Seongjin's eyebrows twitched.

So, do you think Old Vincent's disrespect was just a mistake and you want to take the plunge?

"okay. I understand. "If you are slow to discern between interests and interests, you may not be able to recognize them and may make a mistake."

"yes? that..."

"However, if he continues to act arrogantly without remorse even though he has had enough time to realize his mistakes, he is clearly either insane or harbors evil intentions towards the empire."

"Lowering..."

"How is it? Have you come to your senses now? "Are you willing to kneel down to apologize?"

"..."

Seongjin's cool gaze and the Margrave's dry gaze met for a moment.

As if he had decided that the other person was not someone who

could be grilled and boiled, the Margrave straightened his posture and sat across from Seongjin.

"My father has been putting a lot of effort into examining the magic scriptures recently. You were once called the greatest general of the empire, but now that you are older, your judgment sometimes becomes clouded. "For a child, this is a very sad thing."

His voice was very somber. A voice that might be heard by a child mourning the decline of his aging father.

At the same time, he subtly emphasizes that his father contributed greatly to Delcross.

"How can I apologize for this rudeness? Can I ask for your forgiveness on behalf of my father? Instead, ask him to kneel and I will do so. "I ask you to consider the veteran's hard work in serving the empire and be generous to me."

Seongjin looked into the Margrave's eyes, which were still dry despite his gloomy expression.

If you can get away with something just by saying something, what can you say?

At first glance, he seems to have thrown away all his pride as a lord, but in reality, the Margrave knows well that Seongjin will not make such an apology. Because it doesn't make any sense.

'He was probably being reported on everything about my movements over the past few days.'

I know that the prince is deliberately refusing to eat with the count. Moreover, he did not immediately scold old Vincent for his rudeness.

In that case, he must have come to the conclusion that Seongjin probably wants something from the Count family.

"okay. "I fully understand your position."

Seongjin nodded obediently.

"By the way, that old old man happens to be a Dekaron Knight."

"... .."

"I have never heard of Dekaron Knight, who perfected his mind and body by achieving balance with the Aurors, becoming senile."

The Margrave smiled awkwardly, as if embarrassed, but his eyes became sharper than ever. Looking straight at him, Seongjin spoke clearly and forcefully.

"That means he is not senile but truly seditious, or he is not a Dekaron Knight."

"That means... .."

"If you are a subversive person, I cannot allow you to remain as a Dekaron Knight. If he is not a Dekaron Knight, there are plenty of people who can replace him anyway, so it doesn't matter. "If, as you say, his judgment is clouded, isn't it time to take the sword out of his hand?"

The color drained from the Margrave's face as he realized the meaning of those words. At this point, he can no longer maintain an inertial smile and pretend to be a nice person.

What the prince is saying now.

"Your Majesty, you are now abolishing Dekaron Knight's Auror... .."

The Margrave's voice trembled in shock, but Seongjin's expression remained cold.

"It's not unprecedented. "You know that too, right?"

"... .."

"What an unfortunate incident. Coincidentally, his crime was also lese majeste. "He abolished his Auror himself to atone for his disciple's sins."

The Margrave was also not unaware of the anecdote.

Bruno Green.

A man of great standing who came from a commoner to become a Dekaron Knight.

"Do you understand? The crime of disrespect towards the royal family is such a serious one. Because he was once called the greatest general of the empire and the last bridgehead of the Demonic Realm, I did not humiliate the old general in front of everyone. But if you knew that kind of consideration, isn't it clear now what kind of attitude you should show me?"

"... .."

On the contrary, Seongjin smiled lightly towards the Margrave, whose expression had completely disappeared.

"I want to tell you this, Margrave Sigismund."

Seongjin tapped the handle of the chair out of habit.

"I have tried my best to accommodate you as much as possible. Because of the friendship I developed with your son in the imperial capital. Do you know? "I could have used my own safety as an excuse to request large-scale military support from the imperial capital."

It did.

However, even to Seongjin, who had no common sense about this world, it was not a good idea to arbitrarily draw troops into another territory.

So, I thought about a method that would have less impact and be more efficient. That was the Lilium Detachment.

"The Lilium Detachment is one of the most apolitical groups in Delcross, and is one step away from the influence of the church. Moreover, I am confident that they are an elite unit that is the best against demonic beasts. "Thanks to me, didn't the picture of receiving appropriate help and solving the demonic situation on its own in the territory without outside help have been completed?"

"..."

The Margrave was silent for a moment, then sighed softly and rubbed his forehead.

Seongjin, who noticed a faint look of disappointment crossing his face, relaxed his stiff posture, leaned back against the backrest, and smiled.

"Okay then. "Let's first discuss the items we collected from the top of Milo."

[...] Ugh, I happened to get caught by this guy...]

The Demon King sighed.

No, but why has this guy been moving to the wrong side?

The conversation that followed went smoothly.

"These are items contaminated with demonic energy. Are you saying you will get the full price for all of them?"

"How could that possibly be the case? "Shouldn't the price be higher?"

"... yes?"

"They have been purified by the miracle of the main god and have become sacred items that have even been blessed. "Are you just going to eat it raw now?"

"no..."

At first, I was just going to be satisfied with the full price, but what happened earlier changed my mind a little. I need to save a lot of profit and buy a gift for my sister.

"Milo merchant owner Giacomo Milo will be arrested on charges of being a devil contractor. The top of Milo is now over. So let him stop the exclusive contract with him and stop distributing the medicinal tea immediately."

I guess there can be no difference of opinion here.

The Margrave had a lot to say, but he soon closed his mouth with a resigned expression.

"From now on, we will start trading with other merchants. My condition is that you do not have an exclusive contract with any one company and that you continuously interact with at least two companies. And one of the top things to do is to be introduced to Branch Manager Schmidt of the Merchants' Union."

Branch manager Schmidt? Why does he suddenly appear?

The Margrave frowned slightly.

Of course, Branch Manager Schmidt was already Seongjin's hand and foot, but there was no way he would have known that fact. I could only guess that perhaps it was under the influence of Grand Duke Asein, the powerful figure in the Merchant Union.

"What benefit do you gain from that?"

"When you talk about profit, you sound sad. I am the prince of Delcross, Margrave. "Whether I sleep or wake up, I only think about the safety of my subjects."

"... .."

The Margrave's eyes narrowed.

Because neither those who said it nor those who heard it knew that it was nothing more than empty nonsense.

[You are saying that you will obediently make the devil do something good? Be honest. What on earth are you planning?]

Well, I just thought I might make some profit along the way.

Plus, Schmidt has some debt.

When I instructed them to create a stable route to supply salmon from Ortona without going through Cyprus, they all looked like they

were dying.

The initial investment that needs to be made is quite large.

[But why must it be salmon? There must be many more efficient products to start a business with, right?]

That's because the item I'm most interested in is salmon.

I told you, right? They said they would open a salmon specialty store in Hwangdo.

'... And what else are you ripping off?'

While thinking about this and carefully examining the inside of the tent, something suddenly caught Seongjin's eye.

"... uh?"

* * *

"Lord Masaine. "Look at this!"

That night, Seongjin, who returned to his lodgings after finishing his meeting with the Margrave, shouted at Masain.

"I have received a great deal from the Margrave!"

Masain blinked and looked at Seongjin for a moment.

Just a moment ago, the temperature around me felt like it was going to drop, but what happened in the meantime made me feel so relieved that I was jumping up and down?

Either way, Seongjin was very excited and unpacked the long object he was carrying in front of him.

"... Henesys long sword?"

What appeared in the package was a long sword that looked bloody.

The last weapon created by a famous Ortona master craftsman full of anger and regret just before the country was torn apart.

At first glance, it was similar in size to Logan's sword, but its appearance was completely different from Arjuna's.

Unlike Arjuna's curves, which formed flowing waves, the sharp protrusions that jutted out from the blade were as ugly as saw blades or thorns.

Also, what is the material like?

The black iron, which Masaine had never heard of, was assumed to be a special metal, and shed an eerie luster along the well-honed saw blade.

"how is it? Are you going to give it to Sister Amelia as a gift?"

... what?

Masain quietly broke into a cold sweat.

"I beg your pardon, sir. "This looks like a sword possessed by a devil."

Doesn't it have a hideous appearance, like something a devil from a story would carry around?

Giving a sword like this to Princess Amelia, who is like a rose?

However, after hearing Masain's honest evaluation, Seongjin smiles happily at him!

"yes? Right? Looks like a devil's sword, doesn't it? So this is perfect!"
"This is totally your taste!"

212. Lycan Slope Road (6)

"... "You gave me that sword!?"

Old man Vincent's face turned pale.

I couldn't bear to see my son, so I snuck back in late at night, and the famous sword that I cherished and never let go of wherever I went had disappeared.

"you... you... ... !"

Given the prince's mood, I guessed that he wouldn't just let it go. I never expected him to steal my beloved sword!

Although he was devastated by the unexpected result, Hendrik Sigismund, the person who handed over the sword, had a calm face.

"Aren't you just looking at it every day without being able to use it anyway? "That sword does not match my father's imperial sword method or Banahas practice."

"You're saying that because you don't know the true value of that sword!"

What is that sword!

Isn't this the greatest sword forged by the hidden master who is known to have created General Gael's Arjuna?

"Why did I spend so much money to get it! "If Ortona had not fallen, would we have been able to obtain that treasure at such a price?"

"After all, it is the sword of a ruined nation, and it is a sword suited only to practice methods that are being put into practice. Why do you

care so much about the ornaments found by idle collectors? "It's not like your father."

"But that doesn't mean it's so easy to get that precious cloud iron sword..." ... !"

"If you try to get the Cloud Iron Sword again, it's not impossible."

No, that's not it!

Old man Vincent stamped his feet in frustration.

"That's no ordinary meteor! "It was said to be a sword made of a material that could never be reproduced with current continental sword technology, and the method of handling it has now been lost!"

But Margrave Hendrick's eyes remained cold.

"Then doesn't that mean you can't forge a new sword with it anyway? What on earth do you use that for? "No matter how rare it is, didn't your father plan on taking it to the grave instead of selling it anyway?"

The son, who had no interest in the sword, did not place any value on the ugly sword that would not be of any help to the family.

In the end, old Vincent had no choice but to swallow his anger and yell at his son.

"But it's my sword! "Shouldn't you have at least asked this father's intentions?"

"Do you mean intent?"

For the first time, a hint of anger flashed in the Margrave's previously dull eyes.

"Then did your father commit such an accident by asking about my intentions? "Treason? Did he intend to roll up the whole clan and eat it?"

"That's just the young bastard's pretense! "Treason!"

"I heard you drew your sword? I heard he almost pointed it at the prince? "Do you think I don't have eyes or ears?!"

In the first place, old Vincent committed lese majeste in front of too many people.

I tried my best to make it up to a small mistake, but Prince Mores was not as soft an opponent as I thought.

"Do you know where that is? Can you imagine how thorough the preparations he has made to tie our family into a state of immobility! "Why do you dare to touch someone like that?"

After receiving reports of his movements at the Count's residence, I expected that he would be a formidable person despite his young age.

But when I actually met Prince Mores, it was all just the tip of the iceberg.

Weren't the words the prince quietly uttered while requesting the discontinuation of the distribution of medicinal teas be enough to chill the margrave's spirit at times?

-Milo merchant owner Giacomo Milo will be arrested on charges of being a devil contractor. There is already enough evidence, and a complaint has already been filed in the Heresy Tribunal.

At first glance, it seemed like Milo was cleverly aiming only at the top, but the Margrave did not know that if he took just one step further, the Sigismund family could become entangled with the Dark Church.

Moreover, thanks to the atrocities of the old man who thoughtlessly committed the crime of blasphemy, couldn't he have been denounced as a devil worshiper who dared to rebel against the royal family under the instigation of the devil?

If the prince had only had a strong mind, he could have made it happen with all his heart. Because the prince also hinted at that several times during the conversation.

-Of course, since there was no time to rest due to the vigilance of the

demonic realm, you would not have been able to keep track of everything that was happening in the corners of the territory. If he had known, I think the Margrave would not have tolerated this.

However, it was obvious what the prince was really trying to say as he slightly twitched the corner of his mouth while saying that.

-You left it knowingly, right? I know everything. There is also evidence. If you mess up even a little bit in the future, you know?

There is only one reason why he didn't do it. He said that even if he buried the Sigismund family now, there would be no benefit for the imperial family.

What kind of family is the Sigismund family? If you give a certain amount of support every year, isn't it an efficient dog that will protect the boundaries of the magic world on its own?

-We communicate really well with you. I think we can continue to be good partners, Margrave.

Anyway, regardless of its utility, the prince had no hesitation in forcing various things on the pretext of his weakness. It seemed like they wanted to cut down on the subsidies that came from the imperial family every year.

Even if I had slowed down just a little bit, I would have been completely wiped out without even leaving a single root.

It was truly fortunate that the prince finally sold his attention on a useless decorative sword.

"I can't believe I'm tempted by such a fancy, decorative sword. "No matter how experienced I act, I'm still just a young boy."

"What a show! Hendrick, that is truly a sword like no other in the world... ... !"

Hearing the complaints of the unfair old man in one ear, the Margrave quietly sighed in relief.

* * *

That night.

Seongjin, who completed his meditation before going to bed, fell into a comfortable sleep inside the ice tent despite the cold temperature.

It felt great to get something unexpected, and the little magic stone Sisley gave me did its job well.

Thanks to this, Seongjin's bed became reasonably warm to the point where it felt comfortable, even without using a separate auror.

'I guess I'll have to thank the little guy later... ..'

Seongjin repeated that and fell asleep contentedly.

Former Dekaron Knight Bruno, as well as Sir Martha and Maria, who were skilled in Auror management, quickly adapted to the cold and fell into a deep sleep.

However, the situation was different in the case of Sir Claudia, Sir Calmen, and the two paladins.

It's not that he was immature in using Auras, but he wasn't at the point where he was unconsciously circulating Auras while he was sleeping.

The soldiers provided a small brazier considering the circumstances of the first-time guests.

However, in order to heat the furnace in a small ice tent that did not even have proper ventilation in order to maximize heat retention, the tent entrance had to be left slightly open to let in the cold wind.

Eventually, they, who had been sleeping and waking up repeatedly inside the tent, were unable to overcome the cold and rushed out of the tent.

Fortunately, there were a couple of bonfires set up outside the tent. Soldiers on watch and those working night shifts were all gathered in front of the bonfire, drinking warm stew and tea.

"Don't be so nervous, come here and warm up. "I'll give you a cup of

tea."

For the people at the base, it was quite amusing to see young, inexperienced knights from the Imperial Capital unable to adapt to the cold and having trouble sleeping.

However, he did not intentionally try to be territorial just to make them suffer more. This may be thanks to the stable atmosphere of the front line and the reassurance provided by the ice walls, which gave me peace of mind compared to the flocking army of demonic beasts.

Of course, it was also the fault of the Wolf Knights, who traveled with them in the Imperial Capital, who treated them quite friendly.

"What car is this?"

"Oat tea. "It is probably a grain that is not commonly eaten in the Imperial Capital, but the only grains grown around here are oats and a little barley."

The group, who had been nervous about Sir Oscar's answer as if it might be a medicine tea, sighed in relief and accepted the warm tea.

Sir Oscar, vice-captain of the Wolf Knights, was in charge of night security on behalf of Sir Ilma. Although I didn't know the details, I could sense that the group from the Imperial Capital was strangely reluctant to use the [Medicine Tea].

"No need to worry. Drinking medicinal tea is prohibited on the front lines. Occasionally, someone will relax and fall asleep or talk strangely in their sleep while on guard. That's why the Margrave himself recently banned medicine trucks from entering the base."

Sir Valerie and Sir Sharon gave each other a small glance. As expected, it was clear that Margrave Sigismund had some knowledge of the influence of the medicinal tea.

The group is warming up while drinking warm grain tea.

Ooooh-

Lycanslope's cries were once again heard nearby.

"Those guys are messing around again! "What on earth are they planning?"

Following Sir Oscar, who grumbled and got up from his seat, the group climbed the ice wall and looked towards the snowy field in the distance.

As the saying goes, several lycanslopes were hovering near the ice wall. However, when they detect them on the ice wall, they are soon driven out into the coniferous forest.

They continue to gather in the snowy field, but they rarely come within direct firing range of the bow.

"Your eyesight has increased."

As Sir Valerie said, the number of people wandering around the snowy fields and touching the ice walls has increased to dozens.

"There are a lot more lycanslopes gathered in that forest. The number gathered now alone is over 1,000, and that number is moving south. "Isn't it a pretty scary sight?"

When I looked at the direction Sir Oscar was pointing to, I saw dozens or hundreds of bright lights shining brightly through the dense coniferous trees.

Perhaps the Lycanslopes, who have a vision far superior to that of humans, are observing each and every movement of the party even from a great distance.

"Although they were engulfed by the demonic energy of the Demon Lord and turned into demonic beasts, they are still people who have basic thoughts. Even though he went south along the road, he probably didn't have the courage to cross the ice wall."

Sir Oscar snorted.

However, to the group who were not familiar with the magical beast called Lycan Slope, the calm eyes that were all focused in this direction seemed somewhat ominous, like a sign of something.

Isn't it like the sight of wild beasts taking their last breath before their prey?

"... Is it because of my mood? "It's like I'm waiting for something."

At the end, Sir Claudia's trembling voice.

The group stood quietly on the ice wall for a while, unable to take their eyes off the forest's glare.

* * *

licking. Something wet licks my cheek.

Seongjin, who suddenly woke up, came to his senses when he heard a low voice calling him.

[Lowering.]

Early morning, before dawn.

A wolf larger than a calf was standing next to Seongjin's bed, staring down at him.

It was so large that it filled the tent, but the reason it didn't look that threatening was probably because of its calm black eyes.

"... "Max."

[Shh-]

Seongjin stood up and opened his mouth, but the wolf quietly warned him.

[The knights you brought may wake up. All you have to do is nod your head.]

Only then did Seongjin realize that the other person was speaking with resignation.

What on earth is going on?

[If it's okay, would you like to come out with me for a moment? I

have something to show you.]

now?

Seongjin was dumbfounded by the sudden proposal, but with an ominous premonition that he did not know what it was, Seongjin put on a warm winter suit and put on a sword belt with a nutcracker attached to it.

Then softly. After wagging her tail once, Max turned her back on Seongjin.

[There is no time. I have to get back quickly, so get on my back.]

... Take a ride?

No, it looks like it's about the size of a pony.

Seongjin hesitates, but Max's tail wags gently and peacefully. When Seongjin, who had been strangely distracted by him, climbed onto the back of the horse, the wolf made a request in a low voice.

[Please kill all signs like before.]

Auror concealment?

Seongjin, who roughly guessed, killed the sight, and the wolf immediately rushed out of the tent. And soon the wolf's windy run began.

It was so fast that I couldn't even open my eyes because the wind was blowing so hard in my face.

The wolf jumped over the ice wall in an instant, then jumped onto the high cliff and started heading north.

[Lee Seong-jin.]

At that time, the Demon King whispered.

[I have been feeling a little bit of magical energy from this wolf just now.]

okay?

Seongjin checked the surroundings with the help of the demon king's spiritual eyes.

Sure enough, a purple aura spreads beneath Max's feet every time he steps on the ice.

'Can you feel that at Max's feet?'

[Huh, after hearing it, it seems like that... ..]

Meanwhile, Max was heading north like the wind, and before he knew it, he was running over a steep ice canyon.

Eventually, the place where the wolf stopped was a high hill overlooking a small group of Lycanslopes.

"That... .."

[That is the Lycan Slope Road.]

Even without the explanation, Seongjin could intuitively know that the gnome was the leader.

A huge body that appears to be 1.5 times the size of the others.

'You're wearing clothes...''

It was like that.

Unlike the Lycanslopes, who were naked like wild monsters, this one wore short skirt-like clothing and even had a sparkling goldwork necklace around its neck. In many ways, doesn't it remind you of the Lycan Slope Road you saw in Labyrinth before?

Of course, the one I saw in the labyrinth was bigger and more flashy.

'But, wait a minute. Which means Rod is here... ..'

Are you saying that their main target isn't the 3rd ice wall?

What on earth are you planning?

[Due to the closedness of the guard post and the lack of means of transportation, it is not easy for the Wolf Knights to scout this far.]

Max, who was looking down at the scene, spoke quietly.

[In addition, Sigismund has not yet suffered a large-scale attack in the canyon. Demonic beasts, including the Lycan Slopelord, are plotting in the canyon, but Sigismund will also send his third force to the ice wall of the snowy field today. If all goes according to plan, the troops in the canyon and around Lake Salz will not be reinforced at all.]

okay. I understand how worried he is.

Perhaps they want Seongjin to personally convey this fact to the Wolf Knights and the Margrave.

however.

"Why are you showing this to me?"

To be honest, it's not just Seongjin, it's okay to be seen by anyone in the Wolf Knights.

[that... ..]

Then Max hesitated and opened his mouth.

[This is because it is difficult to ride on the back except for degradation. If it weren't for my feet, it would be impossible to reach the canyon in one go.]

"hmm"

Seongjin looked at Max's tail, which was moving around alone. Compared to the bastard's calm expression, his tail was showing excitement as if it were a separate creature.

"This guy can transform at will and moves like his own limbs, but it still seems impossible to completely control the emotions his subordinates feel."

Seongjin looked straight into the eyes of the giant wolf dog and smiled.

The dry yet calm black eyes that I had become accustomed to seeing often recently.

"Right, Louise?"

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213. Lycan Slope Road (7)

When a channel opened out of nowhere, I stayed in the flame dimension created by Seonghwang for a while.

Seongjin heard many stories from Seonghwang, including one about the 'Council of Six' that protects the Delcross Dimension.

They were also called 'guardians of the border'. As the saying goes, they were representatives of the 'border race' that had been living on the border of the dimension since ancient times.

[A borderline race?]

[okay. They are a high-ranking race that travels from Ionia to the Delcross dimension from time to time.]

It is said that Delcross was originally a solid dimension that resonated with its counterpart, the original world, forming a complete circle.

The name of that world is Ionia.

A beautiful world that was destroyed by a flood of [catastrophe] many years ago, and is now completely gone.

Among the five races that guarded the border of Ionia at the time, a representative from each race served as a guardian of the border for generations.

And under the leadership of the former 'Guardian of Delcross', they formed the 'Council of Six' to protect the border between the two dimensions.

[Who is the Sentai Guardian?]

[This is a wise ancient dragon that has protected Delcross for the past thousand years. I can't tell you his true name, but I call him 'elder'.]

Unbelievable! Dragons really existed in this world!

If I could, I really wanted to tell Sister Amelia.

'But it's surprising that the representative of Delcross is not human.'

In fact, the race that dominates all of Delcross is human.

Well, it is said that until Cadmus, the first prosperous man, laid the foundation of the empire, humans were considered a barbaric lower race by the Ionian races. So even if humans took the lead in something, they would never have followed suit.

[The Ionian races had unique characteristics that were different from humans. Most races had something called [Essence] that protected and supported the spirit of the clan. The spirit connected to the entity was constantly communicating with [essence] to maintain reason and preserve their high-dimensional mental world without loss.]

It is said that they easily cultivated civilization through that [essence].

Even without any special training, my spirit was extremely elevated and my mind always remained calm.

Also, without having to work hard to learn something, the knowledge of our ancestors was passed down to our descendants.

[They were all scientists and philosophers, artists and warriors at the same time.]

It was probably natural for them to achieve a high level of civilization. By simply sharing the small joys that individuals discovered and enjoyed with [Essence], the species continued to develop rapidly.

However, Ionia fell, and its brilliant civilization came to an end.

It is said that because the border races reached the Delcross

dimension, it was possible for some of them to take refuge here when the world was destroyed.

However, in that urgent situation, it was impossible to completely transfer the [Essence] that supported the spirit of the entire race to Delcross.

In the end, two of the five races lost part of their essence, and two other races lost their essence completely.

[One of these races is the Lycanslope, Mores.]

An elegant race that once had both intelligence and military power, and had giant wolves as their servants.

However, now the connection with the essence has been lost, reason has become clouded, and it has been completely contaminated by the demonic energy of the demon world, reducing it to a mere beast.

Demonic beasts that only respond to the will of the Lycan Slope Lord and move without will like swarm monsters.

At that point, a natural question arose for Seongjin.

[If they lost their essence and were reduced to beasts, how does the Lycanslope Lord maintain their sanity? And how can they still remain in the 'Council of Six'?]

Then Seonghwang smiled slightly at Seongjin. He seemed to think it was a pretty good question.

It seemed as if he was proud of his well-raised young son, which made Seongjin feel strange.

[The current Lord, Berseus, is not a pure-blooded lycanthrope. He is a distant descendant of Dacianus, a Lycanslope who was the ancestor of the Marquis of Daciano a long time ago.]

And the explanation of the success that followed was surprising.

It is said that some lycanthropes that have been traveling to and from Delcross since ancient times have, in rare cases, combined with

humans. There was a slim chance that mixed-race descendants were born from them.

And the descendants are said to have inherited their parents' strong strength and mental ability to rule their families. Sometimes, we were lucky enough to inherit some of our ancestors' 'knowledge'.

But even for those descendants, the limits of their lineage were clear. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't completely connect to the [essence] like a pure-blooded lycan slope.

Those differences led to discrimination and persecution of mixed-race descendants.

[then... ... !]

[okay. They probably never thought that the human bloodline, which they considered uncivilized, would become the last bastion of their own reason.]

Because it was a half-body disconnected from the essence, it was able to maintain its reason without relying on the essence. And that has now led to a reversal in the relationship between pure Lycanslopes and mixed-race descendants.

[however.]

Seongjin tilted his head.

[The ancestor of the family, then isn't the current Marquis a very distant descendant from him? I think the lineage is too distant to maintain the traits of Lycan Slope.]

[okay. Nowadays, most descendants have almost lost the traits of their ancestors.]

Seonghwang nodded and stared at Seongjin with slightly deepened eyes.

[By the way, Mores. Do you know about 'atavistic inheritance'?]

* * *

"Right, Louise?"

As Seongjin asked that question, he looked straight at the huge wolfdog in front of him, and at someone who was clearly a distant descendant of Lycanslope who had the wolfdog as his servant.

[...] ... !]

The black eyes, which had always been so calm and even dry, were shaking aimlessly for the first time with a look of embarrassment.

'Max' hesitated and took a step back from Seongjin.

[How on earth...]

At that moment, a huge amount of aura surged from the wolfdog's body. He was unable to properly control his emotional agitation, and a part of his auror that he had been thoroughly conserving was revealed to the surface.

[omg! A pretty strong Magi, Seongjin Lee! How have you been hiding this so well?]

The demon lord took a deep breath and shouted.

It is probably related to the strengthening of the aura that Seongjin is feeling. I thought he was a very different auror from others, but I never thought that the auror itself was actually combined with magical energy.

But Seongjin could no longer continue his thoughts. This is because Louise's agitation upon realizing that her identity was discovered was unexpectedly strong.

[How did you find out about that? There would have been no clues to guess or evidence to be sure! Even in this era, there is no way that there is anyone left who knows the truth about Lycan Slope!]

Although the words were said in resignation, her voice sounded as if she was out of breath.

[Who did you hear it from? Who else knows that fact besides you?]

"calm down! I just happened to find out about it by coincidence!"
"Lycanslope traits sometimes appear in descendants as an atavistic inheritance!"

Seongjin also did not suspect Louise of being 'Max' from the beginning.

When I think about it now, I wonder why I didn't recognize Max's gentle attitude and unique dark eyes before.

Still, who would associate a giant wolf with a normal person?

When I met the guard captain, Sir Sebastian, I felt that the atmosphere was somehow familiar, and the fact that I felt that impression even stronger when I saw Louise for the first time was probably just a case of *déjà vu*.

Of course, Louise showed a special side at times. However, he thought that maybe it was because his nose was unusually better than that of ordinary people.

It was after Director Bruno's cautious remarks that Seongjin began to doubt her in earnest.

-She goes to work early in the morning and works at the count's residence until late at night, so when on earth is Louise practicing swordsmanship like that? He's really diligent.

Seongjin muttered that as he passed by, and the leader's face took on a serious expression and he confessed to him. Louise gave up her path as a swordsman because she failed to become an Auror.

-As the daughter of Sir Ilma and Sir Sebastian, I had all the expectations. It's truly a pity. When she was young, she was an Auror and had a hard time with her late initiation, so if she were to suffer, wouldn't she be able to understand her hardships?

At that time, for the first time, Seongjin tilted his head.

No, leader. Surely the leader doesn't know? He's a really strong kid!

Looking at the Auror's excellent concealment, it is clear that his

Auror proficiency is no joke. But does it make sense that you haven't even been initiated yet?

But it wasn't until I started using the devil's spiritual eye in earnest that I became convinced.

After seeing her Aura with my own eyes, which was significantly different from that of an ordinary person.

'... It was definitely purple.'

Unlike ordinary people's auras, which glow in a spectrum from yellow to blue, Louise's was a vivid purple. As if something was mixed up with the aura.

And I checked it out yesterday when I arrived at the third ice wall. The contaminated aura that glows purple is truly a characteristic of Lycan Slopes.

Once there, the various clues that had been playing around separately in Seongjin's mind began to come together.

Descendants of lycanthropes and giant wolf dogs.

A trait of Lycan Slope that is said to appear unexpectedly due to atavistic inheritance.

And Louise has no choice but to hide her skills from others.

"Besides, you called me 'lowly' earlier. "When we met in the snowy mountains before, I said 'you'."

[...] ... !]

"You've gotten used to the name you call me. Do you know what else? Your way of speaking is quite unique. "I've been with you for a few days now, so how can I not understand your tone of voice?"

Then the wolfdog blinks as if embarrassed.

Fortunately, Seongjin's explanation seemed to have had some effect. The Aurors that were running wild in all directions slowly began to

sink into the body.

"I was also curious why you always pretend like you can't use Aurors. You're naturally strong, right? I saw it clearly when I ran here, Louise. You handled 'Schunishuhe' really perfectly, didn't you?

"Whether it is in the snow or on ice, it runs lightly without slowing down at all."

[...]]

Slurp.

The aura seems to seep into the wolf dog's body and is completely absorbed. The black eyes, which had suddenly regained complete peace, were looking at Seongjin with a cautious light, as if examining his intentions.

[Wow, that strong magic energy has disappeared without a trace. It's really amazing.]

The demon lord mutters in admiration.

It was definitely a great Auror concealment. It was enough to fool not only Lord Martha, but even Captain Bruno.

Didn't they sneak into the tent and sneak out Seongjin? If Dasha had known this, she would have struggled with a sense of shame, saying that she was being pushed around by wolves and dogs.

[...] My parents don't know about this, sir.]

Louise finally opened her mouth and, unexpectedly, made an excuse for her parents.

[As a child, when I first developed Aura, I felt something was strange. My Auror is somehow different from other people. And even in my young mind, I felt the need to completely hide this from others. Since it was a decision I made entirely on my own, my parents firmly believe that I have not even entered the profession yet.]

okay? I thought maybe Sir Sebastian would know.

Because he really has a similar personality to his daughter.

"Isn't it the lineage from your father's side that you inherited?"

[Yes, that's right, my Majesty. However, in my case, the trait was expressed accidentally over a long period of generations. My father knows nothing about this lineage.]

Descendants of Lycanslope who sometimes inherit the 'knowledge' of their ancestors.

In this way, Louise naturally understood and responded to the situation she was in through her innate knowledge.

Having wolf dogs as servants, giving them auras and then taking care of them. Even without learning from anyone, I was able to learn it on my own as naturally as breathing.

[Then maybe it would be better now, sir.]

After finishing her explanation, Louise asked in a calm voice.

"What are you doing?"

[I am Lycanslope. They are the same race of demonic beasts that threaten the territory in the Demon World, and they are a different race that the empire classifies as a race of devils.]

"What does that matter? Louise has never done any harm to the territory, right? "Do you think we can just stay as is?"

[But aren't you the prince of the Holy Empire?]

Louise's eyes even looked determined when she asked that question.

Even if you know the truth, you can't easily believe in the option of leaving it alone. It was clearly visible that he was considering a situation where he might secretly bury the imperial prince and destroy the evidence.

Considering the safety of not only herself but also her parents in the estate, it may have been an inevitable choice for her.

Didn't she say this to Seongjin the other day?

-If you are from the Seonghwang family, I cannot give you a detailed explanation about myself. This is an inevitable choice for all of us, so could you please understand?

Well, regardless of understanding, it cannot be taken lightly.

Seongjin warned as he gently fumbled with the handle of the nutcracker.

"It would be best to judge carefully."

[I am a good person. I don't want to hurt you.]

Louise's eyes, which had been stained with complex emotions for a while, calmed down. It was clear that he had chosen something in his mind, but it didn't seem to be a good direction for Seongjin.

Crrrrr.

Because the deep low frequency ringing in the throat was a clear signal of threat.

[No matter how much I think about it, there is no other way. Could you please cooperate obediently?]

"What are you going to do?"

[I must make you one of my subjects.]

What man?

"hey! Do not be ridiculous! It's not that I don't know your position, but I also have family who worry about me just like you do. "I can't just accept your situation unconditionally."

[This is the best path for everyone. Do not worry. It will be over soon.]

The wolf dog's mouth opened and its sharp teeth gave off an eerie glow.

Right then.

Boom!

The wolf dog's limp tail suddenly began to shake violently.

[oh? Max? wait for a sec... ... !]

And push shush. Like the air blowing out of a balloon, the wolfdog began to shrink in size little by little.

what?

While he was puzzled by the sudden situation, a wolf-dog with such an awkward appearance approached Seongjin, wagging its tail excitedly. and.

Wow.

With a small crushing sound, the wolf dog's sharp fangs lightly bit Seongjin's hand.

"... ... ?!"

[...] ... !]

Seongjin was embarrassed.

Not only was that not Louise's intention as he was reading, it was a playful bite that did not feel alive at all. Thanks to this, he had no intention of defending himself at all.

Blood flowed from her hand, and at the same time, Louise's scream-like cry rang out.

[Oops, Max! If I disconnect now... ... !]

And just like that, my thoughts were cut off.

"... Max?"

Let's sing "gingaminga."

Wong!

The wolf-dog let go of his hand and barked loudly in response.

Clear amber eyes with a faithful glow.

Max, the wolfdog who had already returned to his original size, was licking Seongjin's wounds and wagging his tail happily.

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214. Lycan Slope Road (8)

What you see before your eyes is a vast and majestic snowy landscape.

Beyond the sheer ice canyon, tall coniferous forests covered in snowflakes stretch endlessly to the horizon.

Eventually, as the first dawn broke, the elegant silhouette of nature slowly turned golden.

"The scenery is really nice. There's no way back... .."

Seongjin, who was sitting on the cliff with a helpless feeling, opened his mouth while scratching the ear of Max, who continued to stroke next to him.

"Hey, Max."

Wong wong!

"I somehow get the feeling that you don't like her, but can't you just invite Louise here one more time?"

Then, ki-ing! Whip!

Max seems to have understood what Seongjin said, but he puts his ears back slightly and whines. Is it because of my mood? It's like, 'Why are you saying that?' I also felt like I was being blamed.

"... "Do you hate it that much?"

Then the wolf dog, which was staring at Seongjin with bright eyes, stuck its head in and licked the wound on his hand.

The bleeding had already stopped a long time ago, but the dog's sharp teeth marks were clearly visible on the hand that had been bitten quite deeply.

What does this mean? Looking at the amount Max was doing, I don't think his intention was simply to attack.

[hmm. Although it is very weak, I feel like a kind of thought circuit is connected between you and that mongrel dog through that wound.]

The Demon Lord, who had been contemplating the wound for a while, spoke in a slightly sullen tone.

[Maybe it has something to do with the way the Lycanslopes control the family. That mixed breed dog left a kind of 'imprint' on you.]

'... 'Max made me one of his subjects?'

Seongjin asked, tilting his head.

'It doesn't seem like anything has changed, does it?'

Then the Demon King got scared and shouted.

[Will that work? Whether you belong to a demon or a demonic beast, relationships connected through thoughts are not always one-sided. Although this is a relationship led by that mongrel dog, the superiority relationship between you and that bastard is very obvious just by looking at it! Think about it, Seongjin Lee. You are having a spiritual conversation with this great Demon Lord, but you are not particularly under the control of my thoughts, are you?]

Well, I see.

I thought that because I was a member of the family, I would become something of a puppet. Just like the Lycanslopes follow the Lord's orders.

[That mongrel dog wouldn't have expected something like that, right? That guy forcibly cut off the connection with the Lycan Slope by simply creating a new imprint with you.]

Come to think of it, didn't Max try something like this before?

Even though I was hit hard by Louise and failed.

-Your Majesty, the wolves of the Sigismund Territory travel to and from the Demon World. Therefore, you should not allow wolf dogs, which are descendants of their blood, to bite you.

The fact that Louise, who was always quiet, overreacted at that time may mean that she knew Max's intentions from the beginning.

'Then why didn't they stop me from even trying?'

From the beginning, I thought her intentions and Max's feelings were separate things.

Still, it's your family, right? Was it so lax in maintaining control over the family that a relationship could be blown away by such a light bite?

[From what I saw, that Lycan Slope was also a guy with quite strong thoughts. Rather than saying that this mixed-breed dog overcame his dominance on his own, maybe he just didn't use such strong restraints in the first place?]

Maybe so.

I have a feeling that perhaps what Louise was trying to do with Seongjin may not have as much coercive power as expected.

'Anyway, one thing is certain.'

It seemed that Louise had completely lost control of Max.

Considering her personality from what I've seen so far, there's no way she wouldn't come back here even if it was possible.

"Then how should I go back now...""

I don't know, but the approximate distance from the ice base to this place is well over 15 to 20 kilometers. Plus, it's not a straight, open street.

It will take quite a while to walk since I don't know the road well.

Seongjin was quite good at performing shunishuhe, but he didn't yet have the confidence to perform a trick like running vertically down a steep cliff like Louise.

Kiing.

Max, who has no idea what to do, taps Seongjin with the tip of his nose and wags his tail.

Not moving? Are we still here?

Seongjin chuckled and patted Max on the back, as if he could somehow hear the dog's voice.

"okay. Don't move. "When you're lost, you don't just wander around without a plan."

Why don't you go?

"This is all because of you, Max. What if I blow Louise away like that without any countermeasures? "Can't you transform or use Aurors on your own without him?"

When he lightly scolded Max, he pretended not to understand even though he understood and rolled around in the snow, showing affection to Seongjin.

In any case, it seemed clear that Max did not know how to handle Aurors. The wolf dog had been running around Seongjin happily, burying its sides in the snow instead of just sneezing.

'If you notice that I have suddenly disappeared from my quarters, Sir Martha. It's going to be a mess again...'

The morning sun is slowly rising high. Lord Masaine wakes up early to start training, so he must have opened his eyes by now.

I'm not intentionally trying to upset him. Well, nothing ever goes as planned.

Seongjin sighed softly and stood up.

'Now I have to make a decision.'

Since I know the general direction, I should be able to get back on my own, no matter how many days it takes.

There is only one variable that comes to mind.

There is a possibility that someone who can find his location will get here faster than Seongjin could get back alone.

Whether it was Louise or anyone else.

'The reason it's hard to find a lost child is because the child usually isn't there and wanders around.'

So wouldn't it be better to just stay here quietly? Of course, I'm not saying I'm lost.

It was when Seongjin was thinking so much.

[...] Hehe!]

Suddenly the Demon King let out a soft scream.

'uh? what's the matter?'

Surprised, Seongjin asked urgently, but there was no answer from the demon lord. It is stuck deep in the flame crystal and just trembles.

'what? This situation. It feels somehow familiar?'

Then, gently.

I felt like a soft wind, slightly different from the cold wind, passed by my body.

'... no way?'

Seongjin, who had a premonition of something and looked around, soon opened his eyes and looked down at his hands.

Suddenly, I felt a tickling sensation, and suddenly, Max's teeth marks on my hand disappeared without a trace!

"haha... .."

Without realizing it, I let out a light laugh.

Because I couldn't have known what this meant.

'I'll be able to contact the group through Arenja soon!'

Then there was nothing to worry about anymore.

All you have to do is think about what to do next.

Seongjin felt much lighter and sat down in his seat.

Then, I strengthened my eyesight as much as possible with my aura and began to closely observe the surrounding terrain and the movements of the lycan slopes.

* * *

"Lowering! "Hey!"

That morning, the ice base was on alert.

A major accident occurred where the 3rd prince of the Holy Empire, who was treated in extreme poverty, disappeared from his lodgings overnight without a trace.

"... "How?"

Masain, who was wandering around the base with a thoughtful look on his face, muttered in despair.

It was truly like a ghost crying.

Ahead of an all-out war against the demonic beast, many troops were guarding the base tightly all night long. Where on earth did you disappear from their eyes?

For a moment, my vision became dark, but this didn't happen for a

day or two. Masain quickly came to his senses and went to Manager Bruno to report this fact.

Then, without delay, the leader finds Sir Sharon and urges him to contact Arenja.

The exorcist, who had been channeling toward the ecliptic since dawn, rubbed his dark eyes and sighed in relief.

"You found it. "He is said to be currently at the northern border of his territory."

"North?"

"yes. It is home to mountain glaciers and canyons. You don't have to worry now that you're safe. "It's not too far from the guard post in the canyon, so he tells us to join him there."

"iced coffee... .."

In a moment of relief, Masain lost strength in his legs and staggered for a moment. Sir Sharon, who was looking at him with somewhat pity, added:

"Oh, and you said it wasn't anyone's fault. "Your Majesty, you were just involved in an unfortunate accident, so you are told not to scold me too much when you meet me."

"Ugh!"

Masain, who had hit the nail on the head, kept his mouth shut.

It's not that it wasn't, but instead of the relief that swept over me, now a fiery anger began to creep in. The moment I saw the prince's face, I was ready to start yelling.

Anyway, since I knew the whereabouts, there was no need to delay. The group hurried to prepare to leave the base without even bothering to eat breakfast.

"... "The northern canyon?"

Naturally, the Margrave frowned when he heard the news.

Since they didn't attack the prince's group with all their might in the first place, it didn't really matter when they left the base.

But suddenly it's the northern canyon? Is that even possible?

"okay. Didn't I also say that Nunui Gorge was uncomfortable? "How about sending a little more troops there?"

Old man Vincent is giggling next to me.

The prince has gone missing within Sigismund's base. What kind of convenient statement is this? The prince and his companions are not saying anything right now, but if they are held accountable later, how will they handle it?

Margrave Hendrick, with a hard look on his face, coldly cut off his words.

"As I have said many times, it is extremely inefficient."

"You seem like a guy who doesn't understand this kind of thing. Anyway, what was it like? "Did you say Prince Mores left that sword behind?"

Old man Vincent was excited about what might happen, but he soon became depressed when he saw Masain coming out carrying a beautifully wrapped sword.

"Anyway, we can't just let them go. We need directions to the canyon, and at least we need to send out some search crews... .."

There was a candidate who was just the right fit.

"I will go with you."

Orden, who had already completed all preparations, followed the group with two Wolf Knights and several soldiers.

In any case, the third force of hundreds selected by the guard commander was scheduled to arrive at the ice wall soon. He

calculated that even if he got out of here, there wouldn't be any major problems.

Above all, isn't Prince Mores the beloved younger brother of Amel and a guest at the estate he invited? If his safety was at stake, it was natural for him, as the eldest son of the family, to step forward.

"But Archduke, is it true that Prince Mores is in the north? "How did you get there by yourself during the night?"

Sir Oscar asks curiously.

It was a natural question.

In order to go from the snowfield to the canyon, you first had to return to the territory through the second and first ice walls.

From there, we had to walk back toward the canyon on a rough road for more than half a day. This would be impossible unless you were a Dekaron Knight like old man Vincent.

However, Orden's thoughts on this were extremely simple.

'Well, because it's your job... ... '

If you think about it, hasn't there been a time before when you were swept away by a butterfly and flew somewhere, and then came back riding a beam of light? For some reason, I thought something like this could happen to that prince.

"Well, let's hurry. "Your Majesty is waiting."

So, Lord Masain's words were no longer heard.

The group, including Orden, left the base and began moving at high speed toward the second ice wall.

* * *

"... "Ask for vacation?"

The butler looked at the girl holding out the documents with a stiff

expression and asked curiously.

He was a child who worked diligently without missing a day, even giving up his vacation days. But why suddenly at a time when the territory was in disarray?

"Something important has come up that needs to be done. Please repair it."

Louise's voice as she said that was even solemn.

"No, that's not difficult... .."

The head deacon looked up and down at the girl's outfit, which was quite different from usual, with a puzzled expression on her face.

A loose shirt with the sleeves rolled up and trousers. As expected, the loose cape was dragging on all the way to the toes. He was probably borrowing his father's clothes.

In addition, although it is well hidden by the cloak, the silhouette sticking out on one side is clearly the hilt and pommel of the sword.

'What on earth is happening... ..'

Although he filled out the proper application form with polite handwriting, it appears that he did not consider the possibility of rejection at all. If you don't give me permission for this, doesn't it seem like they'll run out without permission at any moment?

It felt very uncomfortable, but in the end, the head deacon had no choice but to nod.

"Okay, I've worked hard so far, so now it's time to take a break. Have a nice trip."

With that, Louise left the count's residence, leaving behind the somewhat shocked face of the butler.

As I was quickly walking along the shortcut to the back gate, I soon came across a familiar hunting dog kennel.

Kiing! Wow!

The dogs were so scared that they were stuck in the corner of the kennel. Some of them were defecating on the spot because they couldn't bear the fear that came with them.

Although it was pitiful, Louise was unable to properly control the vicious force rising up.

Max has escaped his control.

The prince of the Holy Empire was stranded in a snowy field.

It was the worst situation.

'The canyon is a very cold place... ... '

Aside from keeping his secret, he was worried about how long the prince could survive there once he was alone.

Even thinking about the first time I met him, wasn't he shivering from the cold because he couldn't warm his body with his Aura?

'This is all my fault!'

I was so embarrassed that I made a hasty judgment.

The opponent is the prince of the Holy Empire and the son of the Holy Emperor, who is called the representative of God. He won't be an opponent he can easily deal with.

Moreover, even though he was well aware of Max's fondness for the prince, he never expected the dog to react in such a way!

'I have to handle the situation as much as I can.'

So as not to cause further inconvenience to my parents, who are protecting the territory with all their might from demonic beasts.

Louise, who was moving at such a fast pace, eventually stopped moving when she reached the border of the territory and took off her shoes. I also take off the belt that was holding him tightly around his

waist and stuff it into my back pack along with his shoes.

"Whoa... .."

After completing her preparations, the girl quietly closed her eyes, breathing in the cold morning air.

And he contemplates his inner self in a way that has never been done before, but is clearly still somewhere in his ancestors' memories.

Huh.

At that moment, the aurors that had been dormant for years began to be released at once. An ominous purple aura mixed with demonic energy flickers on the surface of his body with a distinct substance.

The slender body, which was not much different from that of girls of the same age, continues to expand outward. Crunchy, crunchy. His skeleton distorted and his body grew to the point where his father's large clothes were too tight.

Crrrrr.

As the exhaled breath sank low, the low frequencies of the beast began to mix in from time to time.

How much time has passed?

What finally appeared was a young Lycanslope wearing a large cape.

The only thing that made it possible to recognize that it was Louise was her pale flaxen hair, the same color as her hair, and deep-set black eyes.

Sniff.

Luise, who smelled the air out of habit, soon guessed the direction of the canyon and quickly started running.

Wooooooo-

At that time, a threatening cry was heard from afar, putting her on

strong alert.

It was a signal that the Demon Lord's Lycan Slope Lord had sensed the birth of another Lycan Slope Lord.

215. Flower Garden (1)

At dawn, dawn comes.

The Marquis d'Arciano, who had been drinking alone all night, bared his teeth and smiled at the sight of an uninvited guest.

"Coincidence? "It seems like the number of people looking for this body has been increasing recently."

At those words, a person's shadow suddenly appears in the empty air. Someone is leaping through space from [the gap].

As far as the Marquis knew, there were only two people in Delcross who could freely perform this feat. And now one of them is tied by the [agreement].

"I see you often these days. "Guardian of Delcross."

As expected, the person who showed up was an old man he knew well.

The old man's wise face looked like that of a famous scholar, but the golden eyes that glowed beautifully in the darkness were by no means those of an ordinary human being.

In response to the greeting the Marquis gave, the old man frowned slightly and responded.

"Be stubborn in moderation. "Isn't there a separate guardian now?"

"Isn't he your temporary agent anyway? "I cannot dare to acknowledge such a half-hearted person as the guardian of this world."

"Your approval is not very important."

The old man coolly cut off the Marquis' words and spoke about his business in a slightly annoyed manner.

"I guess you don't know why I came here. "Stop what you're doing right now, Berseus."

"What did I do?"

"I have a guess as to who you were instigated. Are you crazy now? "How can you be so captivated by the words of such a person and disrupt the cause and effect of the world so much!"

Then the Marquis of Dashiano, Berseus, shed arsenic blood.

"If the problem is that cause and effect are in disarray, isn't there someone else who can control it before me? "That insolent brat just broke the [agreement] again."

"No, it didn't overflow this time."

"What? No way?"

"You seem to have forgotten, but the current guardian is a child who is better at coordinating cause and effect than anyone else in the world. And even if it were overflowing, it wouldn't justify what you're doing now, Berseus."

Then Berseus' eyes flashed grimly.

"Then tell that proud guardian directly! I want you to come here and stop me yourself! I will not convene a meeting or withdraw authority. "Why on earth are you so soft on him?"

Then the old man closed his mouth.

Just as Berseus was inducing Lycanslope, who had lost his mind, to violate the Emperor's agreement, the Emperor would also have hoped to create sufficient justification for him to go beyond the appropriate line and hunt.

So, instead of the energetic young people, an old man who just wants the world to be quiet has to step forward.

"Listen carefully, Berseus. If things continue like this, your species may be destroyed this time. "Aren't they the ones who barely saved us from [disaster]?"

The old man began to gently scold him, but the king of a race that was about to be destroyed picked his ears with a look on his face that said, "That's such a trivial thing to say."

"Honestly, what does it matter whether they perish or not? They have been reduced to animals anyway, and someday they will all disappear at the hands of humans. Don't you just need a true 'Border Guardian' to inherit the [Key] of the dimension? "That's me."

"you... .."

"I'm not going to make excuses now. Actually, I did some theater to inherit the [key] from 'Council of Six'. "I was sick to my stomach pretending to be for my fellow countrymen."

"... .."

Before the fall of Ionia, Berseus suffered all kinds of contempt and persecution from his pure-blooded compatriots.

It's not that I couldn't understand his feelings, but I expected that all his anger would have been resolved now that he was standing at the top of his people.

However, the hatred towards the mixed-race Lycanslope Lord's race was deeper-rooted than expected.

"Are you planning to take revenge again now? "What does that mean to you?"

The old man tried to persuade him with a perplexed face.

"You know very well, right? Those who had problems with you were swept away when the [Disaster] flooded. Most of those who survive now are innocent. And aren't they all already yours? The southern

part of the Demon World is your territory. "It's all your kingdom!"

"exactly. He said that too. "Why don't I know something that anyone can see?"

After responding like that, Berseus instantly glared at the old man with sharp eyes.

"But what should we do with this? I found it and threw it away. "The descendants of that arrogant Nebraskan."

"... ..!"

"Don't say you didn't know. Guardian of Delcross. "Do you think I don't know that you 'council of six' want to replace the half-rod that has fallen off at any time?"

Percussion!

Berseus emptied his glass in one go, set the empty glass down roughly and growled at the old man.

"So, write it down clearly. I have no interest in the petty status of Lycanslope Lord, but I can't stand to see them being passed over to Nebraska's descendants and become his power! Even if I have to erase them all from this world, I will not just hand them over. Do you understand?"

* * *

"So, what on earth are they doing?"

Seongjin, who had been observing the Lycan Slopes for a while, muttered. He was unable to crane his neck and ended up with half of his body hanging over the edge of the cliff.

If I raised my aura to the maximum, I could clearly see the lycan slopes busily moving between the coniferous forest and the canyon. The problem is that no matter how much I look, I can't figure out what I want to do.

The things moving below were about a dozen Lycanslopes, including

Rod. But what this group of people did was truly bizarre.

Rod points somewhere in the ice canyon, and one of them climbs, digging his claws into the slippery cliffs. Then, when it reaches the limit, it slips or falls straight down.

As the height was higher, the person who fell was never okay. Then, they drag the dead or injured Lycanslope into the forest and disappear, then move to the next location and repeat the same thing.

Isn't this behavior too self-destructive to be seen as simply looking for something?

'I guess I need to get a little closer... ... '

I wanted to disguise myself as an Auror and go down, but in the current situation, that wasn't possible.

When he tried to climb down the cliff alone, Max whined sadly at Seongjin.

Even now, it's a dangerous distance, and if a dog howls, they'll get caught right away.

However, even if you try to go down carrying the dog, it is obvious that you will be discovered since Max cannot erase his presence.

"Max. After all, it would be unreasonable to ask for something like Auror concealment, right?"

When Max said that, he looked at Seongjin.

A face that seems to say, 'Why are you asking me that?'

'Is it because of my mood? Somehow, I feel like I know what Max wants to say better than before... ... '

Is this the effect of the thought circuit?

Then a sharp retort immediately came back to me in my head.

[Of course it's my mood, Seongjin Lee! The connection with that

mongrel dog is not strong enough to convey thoughts properly!]

'Uh, okay.'

[Do you understand? The soul conversation we are having with something like that is on a completely different level!]

No, but why has this guy been so angry since a while ago?

'First, open your spiritual eyes. 'You might see something different.'

At Seongjin's request, the Demon King grumbles and opens his spiritual eyes. Soon the entire snowy field was dyed the familiar pink color.

Now Seongjin seemed to understand, to some extent, the rules of color that are translated into vision.

Cold objects such as snow appear pink, while campfires and warm food appear blue. However, seeing as the pink color became lighter on cold nights, it seemed to show a relative temperature difference rather than an absolute temperature.

On the other hand, the color of the energy or aura of a living thing varied depending on its nature and strength, not temperature.

[Color?]

When I asked the Demon King about this, he looked puzzled.

[well? Well, isn't it interesting? The spiritual eye is closer to simply showing the essence of things. Is that perceived as a color to you?]

Perhaps what Seongjin was seeing was not the sense of the spiritual eye itself, but something that happened during the process of converting the image crystal into visual information.

Anyway, Seongjin turned his attention to the Lycan Slopes, which were now glowing purple, and took a close look at what they were doing.

And soon I discovered something strange, different from what I could

see with my own eyes.

An object emitting bright scarlet light from the hand of the Lycan Slope Lord.

'... 'What is that?'

It was an object small enough to be completely obscured by Rod's hand, and the intensity of the light was changing every moment as if it were pulsating.

And soon Seongjin was able to realize another fact.

The timing of the Lycan Slope Road pointing towards the canyon coincided with the time when the object was blinking at a very high speed.

Seongjin narrows his eyes and cranes his neck to look at the object more closely.

Growling.

Max suddenly put his ears back and exposed his teeth as he felt something.

At the same time, Seongjin also sensed it. From the rear, the vaguely familiar figure of someone was approaching them at high speed.

'This... ... !'

Seongjin, who guessed his identity, withdrew his spiritual eyes and quietly waited for him to approach.

just as expected.

Sniff. Soon, a familiar face rises up from the cliff and lands in front of Seongjin.

It was Louise.

"Luckily you are safe, sir! Are you okay? "Aren't you cold?"

She shouted urgently and approached Seongjin.

Seongjin, dumbfounded, stared at Louise for a moment. This was because the girl who asked that question was actually standing in the snow with her bare feet.

You look really cold right now, barefoot and wearing baggy pants that are rolled up so your ankles are exposed.

"Uh, I wasn't cold until now, but the moment I saw you, I got really cold. "What are you doing without shoes?"

"Am I not Lycanslope? "I don't get cold."

"Do you look like a human to me now?"

"Of course I detransformed before I got anywhere. "Because the location cannot be pinpointed by the Lycan Slope Lord."

It's still a calm voice.

at that time.

Crrrrr.

Max tilts his ears towards Louise and straightens his tail. Clearly wary of her.

Louise looked at Max with mixed eyes and then turned her head.

"It was your family. Is it okay to leave it like this?"

When Seongjin asked Max, who was very excited, as he comforted her, she took out her shoes from her backpack and sighed.

"yes. "It was going to happen one day."

"okay? "Seeing what you did earlier, I thought you were going to try to get your family back by all means."

"... At that time, I made a mistake. "I apologize, sir."

Max is said to be Louise's first and only descendant.

Originally, Louise had completely hidden her abilities as a

lycanthrope, but faced with a puppy that had lost its mother and had no food or drink, there was no other way.

Moreover, it is said that Max refused to be touched by Louise, who was covered in the scent of his mother's blood.

Louise, who couldn't bear to see the dog biting her hand viciously whenever she touched it, became attached to Max and made him one of her servants.

And there was only one restriction she placed on Max.

-Never refuse food from your master when necessary.

Thanks to this, the puppy was able to gobble up the food that Louise gave him. In the end, her antipathy toward him was not resolved, and her hostility grew along with her own size.

Up until now, I had managed to keep a low profile, but as soon as I was completely freed from the clutches, the suppressed antipathy began to surface.

"okay? They somehow managed to keep him alive until now. "Max was ready to bite you whenever he got the chance."

That was a sincere question.

Even though it was a clumsy relationship and not a proper family member, Seongjin clearly sensed the deep hostility conveyed by Max.

The reason Max didn't attack Louise right away was because she was too strong for the wolf dog to handle. I'm sure Louise didn't know this.

"Max is a dog that has special meaning to me, sir."

A rare, sad feeling faintly appeared in Louise's eyes as she answered like that.

"Even though we knew that both sides would end up twisted in the end, we had no choice but to maintain our relationship like this."

"okay."

"But maybe it's time to sort things out."

And Louise bowed her head politely to Seongjin.

"From the moment he first saw you, Max decided to follow you.

"Once you make up your mind, you will never change your mind, so please take good care of Max in the future."

"Hmm, whatever."

Seongjin scratched his head. Actually, even if Louise said she would get it back, I was planning on taking it away.

Max's actual owner was technically the Margrave, but it wasn't hard to get it as a bonus.

This has been decided. I have to take Max to the imperial capital like this.

"By the way, this is the problem of Lycanslopes. Louise, do you know what they are after?"

In response to Seongjin's question, Louise looked down the cliff and narrowed her eyes.

"Of course, what they are ultimately targeting is the Sigismund territory. I don't know how you knew, but Lycanslope Road has been looking for me for some time now. "I can clearly see its cries filled with warnings and threats."

I heard that I've been hearing wolves howling a lot lately, so it seems like it all had a special meaning.

"But I just get the feeling that something is being planned. "To be honest, I don't really know what they're aiming for."

Then Seongjin tilted his head.

hmm. Isn't there a simple solution to that?

"Can't we just make one of them our servant?"

"yes?"

"I heard you got caught anyway? Then isn't it okay to move openly?"

"Let's just go catch one now!"

Even Louise, who had always maintained her composure, couldn't help but be greatly embarrassed by Seongjin's unexpected words.

"Now?"

"huh. Are you strong? Are you going to catch me and Rod while I'm at it? "That guy has something that bothers me."

"... yes?"

Louise couldn't believe her ears even after listening intently.

What is this person talking about?

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216. Flower Garden (2)

"Are you serious, my lord?"

Seongjin tilted his head as he looked at Louise's confused face.

why? If you have the ability to take control of a group of people, isn't this the first thing you should think about?

If possible, make Rod a subordinate. I think this is the best way to find out what they're doing. It would be better if it could be prevented altogether.

"It doesn't seem to be such a simple matter."

Realizing that Seongjin was sincere, Louise looked down the cliff and made an embarrassed face.

"First of all, those Lycanslopes probably don't even know what they're doing. If you were in your right mind, you wouldn't fall off a cliff like that. Just from the feeling conveyed here, you can tell that they have almost no reason left. Even if I made him a subordinate, I doubt there would be anything he could find out. There... .."

And her eyes turn to Lycan Slope Road.

A ferocious lycanthrope that is much larger than other individuals, has red fur, and even wears a necklace.

"There's something about that 'road' that bothers me a little. On the surface, it seems like that entity is controlling all of Lycan Slope, but perhaps because of my mood, my senses feel like that is not the end."

"It's not the end?"

"yes. I can't feel any real sense from that entity either. This is such a strange thing. Even when he was looking for me and threatening my territory, I thought he definitely felt a strong will towards me. "Is that really the Lycan Slope Road?"

Ah, I think I can give you the answer.

I heard this or that from my father.

"It's probably because that 'lord' is also someone's servant. That one is probably the strongest of the pure-blooded Lycanslopes. And the real Lycan Slope Lord who has that bastard as his servant is none other than Berseus Dashiano, the master of the old spirit of Dashian."

Louise's eyes widened at those words.

He seemed perplexed as to how on earth Seongjin knew such a thing.

"Really. "I heard this from the most reliable source."

Seongjin confidently confirmed. These are the words of God's representative.

Louise, who had been carefully considering something, nodded.

"yes. The basis is not clear, but it sounds quite reasonable. Assuming that there is someone else controlling that rod, all the discomfort I felt makes sense. "This is the difference between when he directly controls it and when he only carries out orders."

Just like when she directly controlled Max.

"If so, that creates another problem, Sir. "We still don't really know the abilities of the Marquis d'Arciano."

Lycan Slope can distribute power to his subordinates according to his capabilities. Just as Max, a wolf dog who could not use aurors at all, expanded his body and used Schnee Shuhe freely.

In that case, it is unclear how strong the fake rod over there will become, contrary to what it appears to be.

Since they are already pure-blooded Lycanslopes, their physical conditions will be superior to Louise's.

"Furthermore, it is dangerous to try to make someone your subordinate directly. If you are already a member of someone else's family, there will be a mental struggle with me over control. The worst case scenario is that I could end up under his control."

hmm. The number of such cases was not taken into account.

Seongjin was lost in thought for a moment as he touched the handle of the nutcracker.

'But no matter how I look at it, I think the answer is to take away what that fake Lord is holding...'

I want to quickly catch that guy, finish him off, and go home.

The worries didn't last long.

"Louise, let me ask you two questions."

The prince's gray eyes looking down at the lycan slopes looked unusually serious, and Louise nodded without realizing it.

"Yes, please speak, sir."

"first. Can you point your sword at the lycanthropes?"

That's what it takes from the beginning.

From a human's perspective, they are just demonic beasts threatening the territory, but Louise is both a human and a lycanthrope. Wouldn't they feel that they are massacring their poor compatriots who are not in their right mind?

Then the girl smiled bitterly for a moment and then answered with a determined expression.

"It's not like we don't have any experience killing them. They are fully aware that there is no turning back and that I must live as a human from now on. Even if I don't feel like it, it won't be enough to hold

me back when I need it."

"Okay, then the second question."

Seongjin looked back at Louise and slightly raised one corner of his mouth.

"Let's assume that the Marquis d'Aciano manipulates that fake Lord and exerts the utmost power he has. So do you think he can take on Vincent Sigismund?"

"... .."

Louise pursed her lips for a moment. Because it was difficult for him to answer that question right away.

If the Lycanslope Lord reaches his full potential, will he be able to surpass Old Man Vincent, the Dekaron Knight?

What does that mean, if it's not just Dekaron Knight, is it worth doing?

"I don't know much about the Marquis d'Arciano, but I am at least certain that he is not a Decaron Knight. So no matter how strong the moving body is... .."

"okay."

Seongjin nodded with a carefree expression.

Then it's okay.

Louise, who was looking at his face closely, sighed and took off the shoes she was wearing.

I wonder where that confidence came from, but when I look at the prince, I feel like it's not just empty words, so it's really strange.

"Why the shoes again?"

"You never know when you'll transform, right? "These are expensive new shoes that I bought a while ago."

"Oh, I see."

Seongjin, who answered calmly, picked up Max, who was whining next to him, and spoke.

"Then, shall we go down here first?"

* * *

Slurp.

The two came down the cliff easier than expected. In the meantime, it was thanks to Seongjin's Schunishuhe progressing further.

Although it was not easy to maintain balance as he was holding a large dog in his arms, Seongjin imitated Louise and slid down the cliff without much difficulty.

"A person who uses Aurors so skillfully, why was he shivering from the cold back then?"

Hearing Louise's voice mutter in confusion, Seongjin just shrugged his shoulders.

What should I do about something boring and annoying?

And the two hid Max and his luggage under a large rock.

Whine!

Seongjin wrapped a rope around the dog's neck while comforting Max, who was desperately trying to catch up. It was found in Louise's backpack.

"I'll come pick you up right away, so just stay here for a moment. huh?"

They were steadily reducing their numbers by falling off cliffs themselves, but there were still quite a few lycan slopes left. If you don't attack with Auror concealment and reduce the number of people as much as possible, you will have a hard time.

"You must never cry or anything. I'm getting scolded. got it?"

Seongjin gave a stern warning.

Then Max looked at Seongjin with a resentful expression, stopped whining, and started biting the leash with his teeth.

"let's go."

Convinced that Max understood what he said, Seongjin winked at Louise and cast Auror Concealment.

Louise, who was looking at them curiously, also followed closely behind him, completely hiding her presence.

"I don't know how you are able to communicate with Max even though you are not of the same race. It's amazing that the engraving was done properly in the first place. "I thought I could sense a familiar presence from you somewhere."

Come to think of it, from the first time she saw Seongjin, she asked him if he was one of her compatriots.

"But will you be okay? "If it's a rope like that, Max will break it in no time."

"Yes, of course."

If it doesn't break, you're in trouble.

You just need to be able to hold off until the first few surprise attacks are successful. What if another demon we haven't found attacks Max in the meantime?

Luise's face fell as she heard Seongjin's answer. Even though he seems to have a simple way of thinking, he actually has a lot of thoughts about various things.

Meanwhile, Seongjin astutely examined the surrounding terrain and the distribution of lycan slopes. At dawn, the number of demonic beasts that numbered in the dozens fell from the cliff one by one, and before we knew it, the number had decreased to around ten.

After quickly calculating, Seongjin gave simple instructions.

"Let's start from the edges. "I go from the right, Louise, you go from the left."

And before Louise even nodded.

Hwiiing.

With the wind blowing from somewhere around his body, Seongjin jumped into the back of a lycanthrope that was looking up at the cliff.

Phew.

The nutcracker pierced his left side, avoiding his ribs and digging deep into his chest in a diagonal direction. According to the calculations, this is probably where the guy's heart is located.

This was because the height of the smallest Lycan Slope was basically over 2.5 meters, and it was judged that it would not be easy to cut the thick muscles of the body to the heart by cutting honestly from behind.

Fortunately, the blade loaded with aura easily cut through the beast's tough muscles like tofu.

Hehe!

Sensing the beast's flinching reaction, Seongjin turned his body half a turn while fixing his hilt, and slashed the nutcracker diagonally downwards.

Crackling.

The sword that cut deep into the chest pain was pulled out, scraping the spine. Lycan Slope, whose spine and part of his spinal cord were cut off in the process, eventually fell to the ground helplessly, spewing out blood.

Wow!

Crrr!

Only then did the Lycan Slopes, who felt something strange, look back at Seongjin.

Meanwhile, Luise, who had rushed to the left of the guys, went straight into the heart of one of the magic beasts that was turning.

Boom! Wow!

The heavy bastard sword, wrapped in a dark purple aura, sliced through the beast's ribs and ripped out its heart in one go.

It was an incredibly exciting move that was hard to believe since he had never swung a sword properly until now, hiding his skills.

Choi ah!

Fountains of hot blood splatter on the cold, icy floor.

'haha!'

Seongjin, reassured by the movement without any hesitation, immediately headed towards the next target.

Paang!

He jumped up with Aura wrapped around his legs, and powerfully stabbed the lycanthrope, which was still unable to understand the situation, from the bottom up.

Phew!

Whoops!

Seongjin, who stumbled and stepped on the body of the creature that was slowly falling backwards, was able to hold on to the nutcracker that was deeply dug in, so he was able to face the creature's face directly.

That fleeting moment. Shock and doubt flashed through the beast's eyes, which were blurred and bloodshot.

Stumbling.

When the guy belatedly swung his arm helplessly towards the intruder on his chest, Seongjin was already pulling out a nutcracker and kicking the guy's body.

Gurgling.

Instead of crying, the guy fell down spewing out bright red phlegm.

Paang!

Seongjin turned around as he stepped on the cliff and quickly ran towards the next guy who started barking and baring his fangs.

Kaang!

Sharp nails block Seongjin's sword. Next, a fist was quickly swung at his head, but Seongjin, who slipped away, deflected the sword and slashed the man's abdomen.

Cough!

The thing stumbles with a scream. But unfortunately, this time it was not fatal.

Clumping.

As if it were a separate, living creature, its muscles quickly contracted and began to stop the bleeding on their own. They were a race whose regenerative power was unrivaled.

'If things continue like this, you'll get better soon, right?'

I was about to swing my sword without missing the hesitating guy, but other Lycan Slopes rushed towards Seongjin at the same time.

Wooooooo-

Crrr! Kkkkkkkk!

'this!'

I gave up on finishing it and dodged the fiercely swinging claws and punches here and there, and then directly struck the threatening claws coming from the front with my sword.

visor! Quad deuk!

With a growl and a growl in his throat, Lycanslope grabbed the nutcracker with his other hand.

He was cut by a blade carrying an Aura and was bleeding, but looking at him fiercely with red, bloodshot eyes, he seemed to be very poisoned.

Although his reason was blurred, the basic concept of joint attack remained, and while he was arguing with the guy, other Lycan Slopes rushed towards Seongjin.

However, Seongjin is not the kind of person who will give such a chance.

Ugh.

By focusing all of my body's aura on the nutcracker, I was able to forcefully wrench the sword from the ignorant man's grasp.

Seongjin pulled out his sword and urgently lowered his posture to avoid the incoming punch.

Hehehe!

The guy with both hands completely tangled up makes a pitiful cry and retreats. Seongjin quickly pulled her body out of the gap and looked at the surrounding situation for a moment.

Perhaps it was because they went on a rampage first, but most of the Lycan Slopes seemed to rush towards Seongjin. Thanks to this, Louise was able to maintain a relatively leisurely attack and defense against the remaining demon beasts.

In the meantime, the fake Lord just stands there blankly, as if he still hasn't figured out the situation.

'... ... ?'

I felt a strange sense of discomfort for a moment, but I didn't have time to observe it properly. This is because other lycan slopes rushed in fiercely.

A fierce battle continued for a while.

However, since each individual's combat power was limited, it was probably a matter of time in the end. Unable to withstand the hit-and-run attack that cleverly used the terrain of the canyon, the Lycan Slopes fell to the ground one by one, spattering blood.

That was when Seongjin left the last two Lycan Slopes.

"Lowering!"

Suddenly, Louise's voice was heard calling him urgently from behind.

"... ... ?"

When I turned my head, I saw Louise with wide eyes, looking up at something and breathing heavily.

Seongjin, who had been following her gaze without thinking, was momentarily taken aback.

"... ... !"

The red Lycan Slope Road where I was just standing there dumbly.

For some reason, that guy was frozen in place, looking down at Seongjin and Louise, tears like chicken droppings.

217. Flower Garden (3)

Before starting the battle, Seongjin expected a considerable melee.

This was an idea that took into account the Lycan Slope Lord that was fought in the labyrinth boss room before. At that time, Orden and I had a hard time against him.

The fake Lord in front of me right now was not as good as him, but he had a much stronger body and aura.

Even though my reason was clouded, I wouldn't have been able to resolve the situation so quickly if I had just rushed in with the other guys.

But now, the leader of those demonic beasts is staring at them and shedding tears.

It was a sight that neither Seongjin nor Louise could have imagined.

"The reason that guy has been standing there so stupidly... ..!"

The red, bloodshot eyes and blurred focus did not belong to someone who had properly regained their senses.

However, the expression on his hazy face, as if he were daydreaming, was a mixture of oppressed and twisted remorse and sorrow, and seemed to be full of joy.

This is clearly the appearance of an intelligent life form.

Seongjin flinched for a moment, but held the nutcracker and adjusted his posture. This is because the two Lycanslopes that were still remaining rushed towards him at the same time.

Grrrr!

Kkkkkkkkkk!

Taaat. Instead of swinging the nutcracker, Seongjin quickly stepped back and took a defensive stance. If we want to find out more about why he does what he does, we have to first clear up the situation completely.

'You can catch two quickly, but... .. '

However, after learning about another possibility about these demonic beasts. Naturally, we have no choice but to be cautious in future attacks.

Unlike before, taking a little more time, Seongjin organized the remaining two lycan slopes step by step.

"Lowering... .. "

Meanwhile, Louise was standing there as if nailed, staring blankly up at the fake Lord.

The two hands holding the bastard sword are already hanging down listlessly. The will to fight was completely lost.

"Louise."

As Seongjin approaches and calls out, black eyes filled with complex emotions look back at him.

Shock, hope, guilt, pity.

It is a whirlpool of raw emotions rarely seen in a girl who maintained a calmness unbecoming of her age.

"Lowering. I like these... .. "

He swung his sword, telling himself over and over again that they were no longer his kin, that they were just magic beasts without reason.

Perhaps he was so blinded by his own safety that he gave up on finding a way for his fellow countrymen from the beginning.

Could it be that he has already made a mistake that can never be undone?

"I think maybe my compatriots... .."

A thinly trembling voice trails off at the end of the sentence.

At that time, the fake Lord must have heard Louise's voice and trembled.

"... cognation."

Crrrrr.

The sharp muzzle of the demon beast let out a syllable with a clear meaning along with a low-frequency growl.

Amazingly, it was the language of the empire!

"... "My people."

At the same time, the status of the fake lord also changed. Even though I was staring at Seongjin and Louise, for the first time, a clear sign of recognition towards them appeared in my eyes that had been somewhat blurry.

"... Lycan Slope, the official language of the empire?"

Louise, shocked, opens her eyes and mutters...

Sigh.

The fake Lord, who sniffed loudly and sucked in tears, spoke in a clearer voice.

"okay. They are of the same race. This nostalgic feeling is definitely Nebraska's... .."

And the fake Lord looked at the two people in turn and asked a question.

With a voice full of remorse and with an infinitely deeper resonance.

"Are you trying to destroy that devil's [flower garden]! Are you willing to become the last hope of your poor, deluded compatriots?"

* * *

Lycan Slope, Vajra.

He was, by far, the legendary Lycan Slope Lord, the last pure-blooded Lycan Slope with Nebraska blood.

The day when [disaster] flooded and covered everything in Ionia.

Lycanslope Lord Murat, who had evacuated his clan to a temporary shelter, ordered him to do so.

-Protect the remaining compatriots with all your might, Vajra. If something happens to me, don't be fooled by the empty words of the 'Council of Six' and lead them with your own judgment. Now the only one I can trust is you.

Lord Murat solemnly left, saying so, never to return.

And soon after, the representative of the '6-person council' came to them and forced them to make a cruel choice in a cold voice.

-Are you going to commit suicide yourself? Or will you die by my hands like this?

As if saying that he would annihilate everyone was not just empty words, he was already holding a gray sword in one hand and staring at Vajra. He had sinister-shining silver eyes that did not show the slightest emotion.

At that time, Berseus, the demon guard who was next to him, made an urgent suggestion.

-How about this? Let's take refuge in Delcross instead. It may be impossible to save everyone, but at least some of our people will be able to survive. I will keep the path to the Demonic Sutra as open as possible.

Vajra hesitated. The [Demon Realm] managed by Berseus was not a good land for pure-blooded lycan slopes to set foot on.

It was a miserable prison where people of the same race who had lost their connection to the [Essence] and had completely lost their senses had to wander around until they died as ugly beasts.

However, Berseus drove a wedge into him once more as he suffered.

-If this continues, all of my fellow countrymen will not escape death at the hands of the author. What are you hesitating about? Has not Lord Murat entrusted the future of your people to you?

The decision was quick and there were no major interruptions.

The representative of the 'Council of Six', who was quietly watching what they were doing, raised his sword and declared in a calm voice.

-This is also your choice, it is not a cause and effect permitted to me. However, you will forever regret not taking the lives of your compatriots now.

A faint feeling of compassion passing through his eyes.

Suddenly, an ominous premonition came over Vajra's head, but the door to the Demon Lord had already opened and his compatriots were desperately rushing towards the Demon Lord.

As a result, the number of people who survived was less than half of those who were in temporary refuge.

The red [disaster] that rushed in without waiting for them mercilessly wiped out the rear of the compatriots and immediately poured down in front of their noses.

-Close the magic mirror! Berseus!

I had no choice but to mercilessly close the dimension door in front of my compatriots who were crying out in fear and despair.

-iced coffee!

Deeply frustrated, Vajra stood in front of the closed door and mourned for a moment for his lost compatriots.

It was right then.

-Puhahahahaha!

An unstoppable roar came from next to him.

Vajra raised his head in puzzlement and came face to face with a demonic prison guard who couldn't hide his happy expression while baring his fangs.

-Beerseus?

-Ha ha ha ha ha! You stupid beasts! They pretend to be proud, proud, and noble, but when they become desperate, they jump in to become prisoners!

-... What?

He was dumbfounded, unable to grasp the situation, but Berseus' eyes widened as he looked at him.

-You still don't understand? Now you are all my prisoners!

At the same time, the sweet scent of flowers rushes to the tip of your nose.

That was the last memory that Vajra clearly recognized.

* * *

"I was aware of the fact that the moment we reached the demonic state, the minds of our compatriots would definitely become clouded. Still, I thought there would be some time to reorganize the compatriots... .."

"... "What was that flower scent?"

Louise asked with a serious expression. It seemed like there was something going on.

"It is a blue flower that emits a scent that paralyzes reason. It has been growing wild in the depths of the Demon World for a long time. That is why this place has been used as a prison for the compatriots since ancient times. "So that those who have lost their senses do not commit unnecessary acts or suffer for no reason."

"prison... .."

"But somehow, when we arrived, those blue flowers were in full bloom all over the forest. "The entire center of Demon World has become a [flower garden] full of drugs!"

After saying that, Vajra looked at Seongjin and Louise and shed tears again.

"His warning was correct. "I cannot regret the decision I made that day any more deeply."

The Lycan Slopes wandered around the demon world for years, losing their reason.

Sometimes, I follow the instructions that come to my head without any meaning or purpose.

Go down south.

Attack the humans.

Go back to the deep demonic sutra.

The Lycan Slopes, not knowing that they were dying, fought for power with the demonic beasts as instructed, and when they became hungry, they preyed on their own kind.

It was truly the life of a complete, cruel animal.

How many years have you been wandering around like that? Vajra, who occasionally came to his senses, gradually stopped thinking.

Well, well, well, well.

The glorious goldwork that once proved Nebraska blood was now

nothing more than a clutter that made an annoying noise.

"And a new order has recently been issued."

The instructions were simple.

Gather your compatriots in a snowy field with a view of the ice wall.

And find something in the canyon.

"Looking for something? what is that?"

In response to Seongjin's question, Bajra shook his head.

"I don't know the details either. "I was just told to use it."

In his outstretched palm, he held a small piece of ice that gave off a faint light as if it were pulsating. It was a strange ice that did not melt at all even if he held it in his hand for several days.

[Gasp, Seongjin Lee!]

At that moment, the demon king took a deep breath and shouted.

[That's an item from the normal world!]

Well, I thought so.

Isn't ice that doesn't melt something that completely defies the natural laws of this world?

'We've only seen things from the normal world once or twice, so why are you making such a fuss?'

The Demon King stamped his feet as if he was worn out by Seongjin's scolding.

[The rules that govern that thing are so strong! You may not know this, but even things in the normal world have grades! And that's definitely an incredibly high-class item that's hard to see again!]

'okay?'

[huh! I want to take a closer look at that! Can't we ask for that?]

Is it all that difficult?

Even while Seongjin was talking to the demon lord, Vajra's explanation continued. It is said that he received the following instructions along with this piece of ice.

-Find a place in the canyon where the ice pulse becomes stronger.
And check out the vibrations felt in the glacier.

Naturally, one thought came to the minds of Seongjin and his group.

'... 'Is there something in the glacier in the canyon?'

Anyway, from then on, the several-day canyon exploration began.

It was an ignorant expedition without a map or turntable, but Bajra didn't care. The canyon they had already explored was soaked with the blood shed by the Lycan Slopes.

And the cruel exploration ended when there were only a few lycan slopes left to climb up the ice wall. This is because small humans armed with swords suddenly appeared before my eyes.

But why?

Even though they were brutally slaughtering their own people, the moment he saw them, Vajra's heart began to beat violently.

'... They are of the same race!'

okay. This is clearly the energy of the same people.

It was buried beyond his consciousness and he couldn't even remember it anymore, but it was a nostalgic and powerful energy that stimulated his instincts.

In this way, he was lifted from the hell-like world of illusions to reality.

"Please help! "Those who inherited the legacy of Nebraska."

Hot tears flowed from Vajra's eyes as she said that.

There was no time anymore.

Before my mind becomes covered with hazy fog again. Before the ruthless [Lord], who holds a grudge against his own people, notices the incident.

"Please destroy the [flower garden] of those flowers deep in the demonic realm. Otherwise, the future of our people... .."

Seongjin and Louise, who had just been ruthlessly slaughtering Vajra's compatriots.

Nevertheless, just because the two bear a faint trace of their old blood relatives, Vajra has no choice but to rely completely on them.

The heat generated by that desperate feeling was conveyed to the two even in the cold air of the canyon.

"Please tell me the location of that [flower garden]."

Louise opened her mouth in a stern voice.

"... Are you helping us?"

"I don't know whether it will help you in the end or not. Anyway, as long as you invade Sigismund Territory like this, the ending you will face is predetermined. but... .."

As she said that, her eyes were strangely dark and sunken.

"At the very least, I want to prevent you from making the worst choice because you are possessed by Demon Lord's [Flower Scent]. At least this is my truth."

"iced coffee! Thank you! Thank you so much!"

hmm.

Seongjin tilted his head at Louise's words.

okay. It would be natural to want to help our fellow countrymen who

are weak in spirit and body.

'But why?'

I don't feel like leaving things like this.

After thinking deeply for a moment, Seongjin looked up at Vajra and asked.

"hey. "If you don't know what it's for anyway, how about handing it over to me?"

Bajra, who made eye contact with Seongjin after hearing those words, suddenly felt a strange sense of déjà vu.

Strange eyes that sometimes appear silver-grey under the morning sunlight. Hadn't he once seen those eyes forcing him to make a choice?

As if possessed by something, Bajra held out a piece of ice towards Seongjin. Somehow, this time she felt like she wanted to hear those words.

It was right then.

[Hoo.]

A soft, eerie sound of laughter came from Vajra's head.

[...] I finally found it!]

218. Flower Garden (4)

For a moment, a chill ran down my spine.

Seongjin reflexively pulled back and tugged on Louise's long cloak next to him.

Thanks to this, she almost fell head first, but she corrected her posture by touching the floor and asked with a puzzled look on her face.

"Lowering? Why all of a sudden... .."

At the same time.

Kuwaan!

A huge crater formed on the ice where Louise was standing. It was the result of Vajra's ignorant fist that hit the mark.

The shock wave was so large that some of the snow accumulated at the top of the canyon fell to the bottom.

"Why suddenly?"

Louise was greatly taken aback by Vajra's sudden change in attitude. Isn't he the one who just now was complaining about his detailed story and pretending to be all kinds of sad?

"That's not Vajra."

Seongjin responded, pulling out a nutcracker and aiming it straight ahead.

Louise was also startled and raised her sword. In an instant, he

noticed the presence of a person who had suddenly changed.

[...] I finally found it!]

In the minds of these two people, a loud voice with a ferocious resonance was heard.

[It's crawling on its own feet! It must have been quite troublesome to hunt down all the Sigismund spirits!]

A method of communication that involves sending thoughts through relatives. There was no way Louise, who had treated Max like a subordinate until recently, would not have known that method.

"... Lycan Slope Road!"

As the saying goes.

The ice fog that had been floating like smoke cleared, revealing Vajra, who was clearly different from before.

The massively bulging muscles and bristling red fur made the creature's body appear even more gigantic.

Is that all? Before she knew it, she had lost her wits and her blurred eyes were shining eerily as she glared at Seongjin and Louise.

It was a clearly hostile attitude.

[Humans. Which of you are you?]

The Lycan Slope Lord who rules Vajra, probably Berseus, growled and asked the two people.

Between the sharp, long fangs that were fully exposed, a strong puff of breath spread white in the cold air.

[Which of you is a hybrid with Nebraska blood?]

Same with Vajra.

The Lycan Slope Lord Berseus, who controlled him as a member of his family, also felt the energy of Nebraska in both of them, albeit

slightly.

But he already knows there is only one Nebraska bloodline. In that case, wouldn't one of the two be a member of a mixed breed that wouldn't mind being beaten to death?

[Answer quickly!]

But the moment he heard that question, a strange premonition flashed through Seongjin's mind.

And before he could clearly recognize it, Seongjin had already opened his mouth and started talking nonsense to the Lycan Slope Lord.

"okay. Why are you looking for me? "You worthless mongrel."

"... ... !"

[...] ... !]

Louise and Rod's eyes widen at the same time as they look at Seongjin.

"... Lowering?"

[What? How dare someone call you a hybrid now... ... !]

The demon lord was also scared.

[Hey, Seongjin Lee? Are you crazy?]

hmm. I know. I feel like I've done something big.

But regardless of that perception, Seongjin's mouth was steadily provoking the guy.

"What's wrong with someone who knows? The world knows that neither you nor I are pure-blooded lycanthropes. Then you shouldn't have brought up the mongrel thing in the first place. "Can't you even do simple calculations like that, you poor mudblood?"

Then Rod's face became grim.

[You... What are you doing... .. !]

"Then why did you do that? I was just trying to stay quiet, but some damned mongrel was making noise and squealing throughout the territory, thinking he was looking for me. It's annoying. "Still, can a sweet sound come out of my mouth right now?"

Of course, everyone heard this from Louise.

That alone seemed to convince him completely that Seongjin was his target.

[Kuhuhuhhh!]

The guy who let out a roar that made the entire canyon roar is glaring at Seongjin. Now the guy's eyes were burning with anger, so much so that sparks flew out.

Slowly, the dark purple aura spreading from his entire body began to gradually become stronger, as if reflecting the level of his anger.

[...] I'll kill you!]

I'm afraid those words will end.

Coo!

With a heavy impact sound, the jumping rod rushes toward Seongjin and Louise. As if they had made an appointment, the two split to two sides and avoided the guy's attack.

Meanwhile, Louise, who received Seongjin's glance, kept her mouth shut, but the question in her eyes was clear.

'why?'

Well, it's hard to explain now, but somehow I felt like it had to be that way.

Anyway, it doesn't change that it's just the two of us dealing with him. If so, then this misunderstanding may act as a big variable in the future movement of the thing with a separate body, right?

[Is there any chance that you will end up at the hands of your father if you get seriously injured here?]

The Demon King sighed and muttered, but Seongjin remained calm.

It's okay, it's okay.

I said I caught the Lycan Slope boss once.

Quang! bang! Rumble!

The narrow canyon shakes with great impact, and the snow and mountain glaciers piled up on the summit collapse with a thunderous sound.

The physical abilities of pure-blooded Lycanslopes are so ignorant that there is no way for a bulldozer to rush forward with Aura wrapped around its entire body.

And after dealing with the guy for a while, Seongjin came to the conclusion:

'... The movements are so unfamiliar! 'Is this completely different from Blata Mentis?'

[Then are the insect-type monsters and the lycan slope the same?]

The demon king, who was inferior, scolded Seongjin in an angry voice.

'But the one I caught in the labyrinth didn't move like this!'

In fact, the boss mob that Seongjin caught with Orden was a guy with the data of Blata Mantis overlaid on the appearance of Lycan Slope. Of course, there was no way Seongjin knew that fact.

Kuang!

The ice in the canyon shatters sharply and bounces in all directions due to the guy's random punch.

Fit fit.

Some of them grazed Seongjin's cheeks and drew several red lines.

Even though he kept a sufficient distance and was dealing with him moderately, it persistently chased after Seongjin, emitting its aura to its maximum potential.

Even Seongjin couldn't help but suffer minor scratches against a guy like that.

[Then what on earth are you doing! Why are you telling such a lie to get that guy's attention!]

'no. Somehow, I felt like I had to do that.'

If you think about it with common sense, it's true. The Marquis of D'Aciano is not just a lord of the Lycanslopes, but a nobleman with great power among humans.

Even if it's not today, you can target Louise, a commoner, whenever you get the chance.

[So you're saying you're okay?]

That's right, I'm the prince of the Holy Empire.

Is it okay if the last one is a marquis? Do you think you dare touch me?

[...] I'm amazed!]

The Demon King clicked his tongue.

"Lowering!"

At that time, Louise shouted from behind him and swung her bastard sword.

Boom.

The heavy sword was swung wide and struck towards the guy's thigh.

An attack that only considers the amount of impact. Since the target is so large, it is believed that there will be no chance of a miss.

but-

Kwasik!

Her fingernails covered in purple aura easily blocked her sword. Then, as she swung her arm as if to shake off her sword, Louise's light body, which was touching her sword, was easily thrown away and flew away.

"Tsk!"

Louise flew almost to the other side of the cliff, spun around and stepped on the ice with her bare feet. Even though there was no significant difference in Auror operation, their physical conditions were very different in the first place.

"... ..!"

She looked at Seongjin with an urgent face, as if asking for permission. It looks like he wants to transform into a lycan slope right now.

However, Seongjin has already heavily drugged the guy, so he can't reveal his identity on his own now. That's a good decision.

Seongjin shook his head slightly towards Louise.

'Let's just go.'

The odds of winning were good.

First of all, it was difficult to see him using the body of a pure-blooded Lycanslope properly.

'The Marquis d'Aciano is not a man who uses his fists properly!'

I am used to using both hands. The two hands that mercilessly smash into the canyon are being swung with similar strength and evenly.

However, Seongjin, who had lived his entire life swinging his fists, could tell that those were not the movements of a guy who had learned to punch properly.

[What a rat!]

Rod was furious.

This is because Seongjin not only pulled out like a loach every time, but also made huge wounds without missing the opportunity.

The wound quickly improved thanks to the regenerative power of Lycan Slope, but even so, he couldn't help but feel angry.

[Kwaang!]

The cliff shatters again with a nervous cry.

Seongjin kicked his feet and flew to the other side, narrowing his eyes and watching the guy's movements.

'Plus, that damn gap... ... '

The spacing of a one-handed weapon that can be wielded lightly, a little further than a fist.

But it's the same as punching. Judging from his arm movements, it is a weapon that does not require delicate angle adjustment.

'Is he actually a guy who uses blunt weapons? ... '

It was time to think like that.

What Seongjin discovered in the guy who gritted his teeth and turned towards Seongjin was-

"Uh, that... ... "

Seongjin opens his eyes wide and looks at it intently.

The rod struck the ground like lightning and rushed right in front of his nose.

'... Oops!'

Although my body reacted late, the result of that momentary hesitation was painful.

Rod quickly caught up with Seongjin and succeeded in grabbing him and slamming him to the floor.

[Lee Seong-jin!]

Quang!

"... "Wow!"

With an impact as if I was colliding with heavy equipment, my breathing stopped for an instant.

"Lowering!"

Louise's scream-like cries were heard from afar. In an instant, my vision turns white and then returns.

Cough!

Field coughed, and Seongjin struggled to understand the situation with his unresponsive head.

Although it quickly surrounded the Auror, the impact of the pureblood Lycan Slope's impact with all its might was significant.

'My spine seems fine. Maybe a couple of ribs came out...'

Clumping.

The guy poured out his aura and pushed Seongjin hard onto the ice floor. It seemed like they wanted to crush him like this, but Seongjin's auras that resisted were also formidable.

but.

[Finally caught it!]

Now a moving target.

Rod let out a laugh and raised his remaining arm. He wanted to crush Seongjin's head in one fell swoop.

Gritting his teeth, Seongjin focused all his attention and measured the

timing. He does not take his eyes off the bastard's fist, tightly gripping the handle of the nutcracker.

Right then.

Ta-ta-ta-tat!

With the sound of lightly running in the snow.

Wow!

Suddenly, a dog lunged from behind and bit Rod's forearm, which was raised upward.

It was Max.

"... ..!"

[What is this again!]

Rod suddenly appeared and looked in bewilderment at the dog hanging on his arm.

Compared to ordinary dogs, Max was a much larger wolf dog, but since he was hanging on a lycan slope well over 3 meters high, there were no cicadas in the old tree.

But even so, the burning eyes of the wolf dog were nothing short of brave.

I am strong! I am huge!

Seongjin clicked his tongue inwardly, feeling like he was hearing that kind of voice from Max.

Is this guy mistakenly thinking that he has transformed?

"Max!"

Louise rushed over and swung her sword.

However, Rod lightly swung the arm on which the dog was hanging and once again shooed her away.

Despite such a large series of movements, Max, who was hanging with his teeth buried in his forearm, did not move.

[...] What is this?]

Rod stared at Max with a dumbfounded expression. Then, for a moment, his eyes narrowed slightly.

[okay. Was it the blood of the Ionian wolf? Although it is a clumsy hybrid, it is probably a bloodline rarely seen in this dimension.]

Slurp.

With the wolf-dog hanging, it raises its arm straight toward its muzzle. Looking at the sharp fangs sticking out, it looks like it is about to bite the wolfdog at any moment.

[Well, it might be useful if you make it a servant.]

It was right then.

Suddenly!

With an eerie cracking sound.

Oh my gosh!

Suddenly, a strong fountain of blood surges into the air, blocking his vision. At the same time, one arm suddenly becomes empty.

Rod looks at his severed forearm in disbelief.

Hwiiing.

Seongjin, holding the wind-wreathed nutcracker, staggered to his feet.

"... Do not be ridiculous!"

From the face drenched in the blood of Lycan Slope, all that was visible was pale silver-gray eyes that glowed fiercely.

The moment he met those cold gazes, Berseus felt his heart sink.

[...] Have I seen you somewhere?]

Is it because of Nebraska blood? Why does that person feel so familiar?

Crrrrr-

Facing Rod, who was reflexively showing his teeth and being wary, Seongjin also raised the corners of his mouth and fiercely showed his teeth.

"Max is mine. "You 'mongrel' bastard!"

Let's see, let's see, how dare this now?

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219. Flower Garden (5)

The fact that he succeeded in capturing Seongjin means that he, on the other hand, will no longer move. The same thing was true that they were fixed targets for each other.

In that case, all you have to do is focus the aura on your entire body and cut it off.

"This is what happens because I stare at my dog for no reason!"

Seongjin snorted inwardly at Rod, who was staring at his bleeding wrist in bewilderment.

I wanted to laugh out loud, but it wasn't possible because I felt a stabbing pain every time I took a breath. It really looks like a few ribs came out.

Seongjin aimed the nutcracker at the creature and carefully traced its ribcage with his left hand. This is to place an aura in detail on the area suspected of having a fracture so as not to interfere with subsequent movements.

Then he shouted the dog's name with strong intention.

"Max!"

Then, the wolf-dog, who completely understands Seongjin's intention, lets go of Rod's forearm and jumps to the floor.

[...] ... !]

Then, he quickly bit down on Rod's hand that had fallen on the ice and widened the distance!

This was a measure to prevent Lycan Slope, which has excellent regeneration, from being restored.

[Kuh?]

Rod, who missed the opportunity to retrieve his hand even though he opened his eyes, made a dumb sound.

No matter how fast the lycan slope recovers, it is nearly impossible to completely regenerate a hand from nothing.

The guy looked frustrated and moved his body hesitantly to follow the dog. But Louise was not one to miss that momentary gap.

Phew!

A bastard sword heavily laden with purple aura pierces the man's shoulder and protrudes above his collarbone. A large amount of blood surged once again.

[Ugh?]

Beerseus, who was embarrassed, grabbed the blade with his free hand to stop the blade from digging in further. At the same time, his mind began to spin in confusion.

'I was wondering why I didn't transform even when I was cornered, but it turns out I didn't have to!'

The skills of the people I thought were easy are stronger than you think.

The boy, who thought his quick movements were annoying, instantly blew off his hand with the cutting power that allowed him to skip several levels of his Aura.

Also, the girl who wielded an unreasonably heavy sword adapted quickly as the battle continued and was using her Auror stably.

[this... The power of Nebraska's blood... ... !]

That boy even takes the Ionian wolf as his servant and manipulates it

at will!

[If the transformation is done properly, there is no way to know where the weight of the scale will tilt.]

Rod, who had already firmly believed that Seongjin was a descendant of Lycanslope, was seized with a sense of crisis that he might have to make an ugly escape from those brats.

Deep inside, I want to beat them both to death, even if it means burning their bodies. However, we could not lose Vajra, who controlled all of the Lycan Slopes here.

[Crumbling!]

Gritting his teeth, Berseus strengthened his hand holding the sword and tried to slowly push the blade away.

Quad deuk.

However, Luise, who pushed the blade with all her weight, was also no easy task.

"Hmph!"

It may not have been visible to Rod, who was looking back, but Louise was already almost on the verge of transformation. Sharp fangs are sticking out from his mouth, and his fingernails are also growing sharply.

Perhaps, if Seongjin hadn't woken up in time, he would have transformed into a lycanthrope and fought the guy.

"Whoa... .."

After gathering himself, Seongjin held the nutcracker upright and scoffed.

"I felt sorry for the person being manipulated, so I tried to avoid causing physical harm as much as possible... .."

The argument is that until now, things were in their own hands.

A thoroughly down-to-earth attitude. The enraged Lord's veins bulged in his eyes.

[...] Don't be funny!]

Unlike the outside of the body, which can be defended with auras, the internal organs are extremely vulnerable.

The slightest movement was enough to tear his back and shoulders, but to Rod, who was already suffering, such injuries were nothing.

Crrrrr-

To prevent the sword that pierced his body from heading towards his heart, he held the tip of the sword in place with his hand and began to force himself to stand up. Then, with a clang, Louise's sword touched his collarbone, making a harsh sound of scraping the bone.

Hilarious.

Eventually, Louise's sword, which was holding on, begins to be pulled out little by little.

"If things continue like this, I might really end up killing Vajra."

Seongjin, who was quietly watching the scene, opened his mouth.

Although he said these words while glaring at the Lycan Slope Road, his actual target was a different listener.

-If you continue like this, you might end up hurting the only member of your compatriot with whom you can communicate. Is that okay?

Then Louise, who understood Seongjin's intention, gritted her teeth and shouted.

"... It doesn't matter! As long as he is strongly bound to the family, he can never escape from the load. Rather, it would be for his benefit to let him go in peace!"

"okay."

Seongjin nodded and ordered.

"Then let him go now."

"... ..!?"

Louise was taken aback for a moment by the unexpected command.

why? Shouldn't you hit the guy as much as possible while you're holding him?

She looked at Seongjin with confused eyes, but the gaze of the prince facing her did not waver at all.

Gray eyes full of firm confidence, fully aware of what he is doing and its results, reaching somewhere that is difficult for Luise to fathom.

Sreuk-

Inadvertently, the strength in my hand loosened and the sword was pulled out of its own accord.

[Where!]

When his body suddenly becomes free, Rod fully stands up, roaring. I realized that the person in front of me was trying to do something unusual.

The bastard raised his remaining hand and attacked the prince, spilling his blood.

"Lowering!"

[Lee Seong-jin!]

The vicious nail was just about to reach the prince's head.

wickedness-

The nutcracker swings without a sound.

Banajas exercise, 2nd type 2.

A sword type with the widest horizontal cutting range among the standard swords of the Imperial Knights, refined over a lifetime by the renowned genius Banahas.

"I... ... !"

For a moment, Louise stopped breathing.

It was obvious that the attack, which was deformed and swung at an oblique angle, was carried out within the gap between the simple long sword.

Nevertheless, somehow, in Louise's eyes, it felt as if the tip of the sword had cut through the air of the entire canyon and reached beyond the coniferous trees.

On that beautiful road, the cold air freezes, and time freezes.

Rod's head, which was nearby, was just on the road.

Hwiik-

The head, neatly separated from the body, flew lightly through the air.

As magically frozen time passes, Rod's body slowly falls to the floor.

Coooooooo!

Rod's heavy body narrowly passed Seongjin's side and fell to the floor. Due to the impact, thick snow fog scatters in all directions.

"..."

Louise could not come to her senses from the lying scene unfolding before her eyes.

Only Seongjin, who had delivered such a huge blow, just kept the nutcracker on his belt as if nothing had happened.

"Okay..."

Seongjin, who held his side and groaned for a moment, lightly

gestured towards Max, who was running around anxiously on the other side.

"Max, come here!"

Wong!

The wolf dog, who understood Seongjin's words like a ghost, put Vajra's hand on the floor and quickly ran towards him.

Boom boom.

As if reflecting the animal's excited mood, its furry tail wags busily. Seongjin was dumbfounded.

"Hey, man. "What are you so excited about just because you did a good job?"

After giving a somewhat harsh scolding, Seongjin began to give a long speech to the dog who was sitting quietly in front of him.

"Do you understand, Max? I can clearly see something dangerous, but I shouldn't rush into it without thinking like that. How do you think the person next to you feels? Do you know how surprised I was earlier?"

OK-

Kiing?

Max tilted his head and looked up at Seongjin.

but-

I defeated him. Didn't I do well?

Just a bright face.

"Ugh, you immature thing... .."

Seongjin sighed and patted Max's head, then suddenly noticed Louise looking at him with a strange expression.

"what? why? what?"

"... "No, it's nothing."

what. I feel bad for some reason?

Then the Demon King let out a long sigh.

[That's right. Put your hand on your heart and take a look at yourself, you immature troublemaker!]

'... shut up!'

Poor Vajra was completely killed by that last blow.

While Louise silently looked down at the guy's unfocused, wide-open pupils, Seongjin picked up a handful of clean snow and rubbed it on his face.

"It's a pity that we couldn't save Vajra, but there's no time to be discouraged. "There is still more for Louise to investigate."

"... "Do you want to investigate?"

"huh."

After answering that, Seongjin pointed to a large rock at the bottom of the canyon.

"The remaining Lycan Slopes."

"... Are there any left?"

"huh. "Seeing as that guy has found a reason, I somehow kept the others alive just in case."

So it took some time to get it done.

Leaving Seongjin's words behind, Louise quickly ran behind the rock. And he was astonished at the terrible scene that unfolded there and stopped breathing.

"This... .."

There were two lycanthropes writhing there, with all their limbs cut off and only their torsos left.

Their bodies were meticulously buried in the snow, perhaps to prevent regeneration by freezing the cross sections. And all the severed limbs are stretched out on a high rock at a distance.

The two lycanthropes, with only their heads barely above the eyes, bared their teeth at Louise with cloudy eyes.

Grrrr-

Kkkkkkkk!

She looked at the devastation that Seongjin had created with a mesmerized face.

I understand that regeneration is fast and that binding is impossible, but isn't this still too cruel?

"There was no other way. "I deliberately left the limb nearby, hoping to get it to regain its senses if possible."

When Seongjin approached and made an excuse, Louise responded in a weak voice.

"... "It would have been better to kill him with a single sword."

"That's your opinion. "These guys' opinions might be a little different, right?"

The prince's eyes as he answered like that seemed so cold that he looked so cold.

"Once you're alive, there might be a next time."

"... .."

It made sense. But somehow, it is difficult for me to agree in my heart.

Thinking like that, Louise placed her hand on the heads of the poor

things that were just writhing without any reason.

"... Climb the ice. Find where the vibration is. "That's the extent of my thoughts that I can barely read."

There was no surprise.

Louise, who had been investigating the consciousness of the bastards, soon sighed and stood up.

"My mind has already become so clouded that even if I made you one of my servants, there would be no room left for me to fight properly. "There seems to be no way for them to regain their senses."

And she swung the bastard sword herself.

Flutter! puck!

The heads of the Lycan Slopes are smashed in one go. Hot blood surged for a moment and then froze cold on the icy floor.

Louise looked at the scene in silence, then turned her head towards Seongjin and spoke in a low voice.

"I will take you to the nearest guard post from here, sir."

The voice was so dry that it sounded rather sad.

* * *

Louise's feet, which transformed into a lycan slope, were very fast.

She quickly jumped over several ice cliffs and ran across the canyon. Eventually, she came to a snow hill overlooking a small guard post and stopped.

"It's right there, sir. "The message will have arrived from the ice wall base by now, so they won't recognize you and attack you."

After explaining that, Louise lowered Seongjin, who was carrying her on her back, onto the snowy field.

Seongjin, who was feeling a little motion sick from the rapidly

changing vision, also placed Max, who was still holding him in his arms, on the floor.

Wong wong!

Max, who was finally freed from his uncomfortable position, started running around the snow field, wagging his tail.

"How are your injuries? "Can you walk?"

"Uh, it's okay."

Compared to Lord Masain's CPR, this is just a minor bruise.

"But Louise, you're not going?"

For some reason, it seemed like he wanted to send Seongjin alone.

Then Louise answered with a bitter smile.

"yes. I would like to serve you until the end, even if it is because of your injury, but if I show myself, won't they find out that I secretly crossed the guard post? Besides, sir, I saw that flower garden in the devil's eye... .."

Louise, who had said that much, raised her head and stared into the distance for a moment.

Beyond the steep canyon, lies the deep heart of the demonic landscape that cannot be seen from here.

"I must see with my own eyes the reality of that [flower garden]."

No, it would be better if we just went back to the estate together.

Suddenly Seongjin had this thought.

"If that's the case, wouldn't it be better to form a proper scouting party in the territory?"

"Aren't we gathering troops in preparation for a large-scale invasion? The territory won't have the capacity to do that. "It would be faster if I ran alone."

"... .."

Seongjin thought for a moment about what more he could say to stop her.

However, the moment he met the determined black eyes, he realized that no matter what Louise said, he would never change his decision.

Even though you know that something will go wrong, sometimes there are situations where you can't just do anything.

"okay. "Please be careful."

I don't know if you'll be back here any time soon.

Louise tilted her head in confusion at Seongjin's greeting, which seemed a little less energetic than usual. But since an injury is an injury, it seemed like he thought it would be like that.

"Then, my lord, please be considerate."

Louise, who left such a concise greeting, rushed like the wind and soon disappeared beyond the canyon.

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220. Heart of Ice (1)

"Kaaaaaaak!"

Berseus screamed and got up from his seat.

The water bottle shatters with his swinging fist, and the remains of food and dishes fly everywhere.

"You damn bastard, how dare you, how dare me!"

The Marquis' employees, who were unexpectedly hit by shards of cutlery while serving meals, screamed and held their heads.

In the end, the marquis' rampage finally came to an end after the banquet hall was ruined and the heavy oak table was broken.

"go away!"

Then, the workers, who were shaking with fear, rushed to leave the banquet hall.

Crrr-

Berseus, who was feeling angry at being left alone, let out a soft cry and ran his hand down the back of his neck.

The exhilarating feeling of my neck being blown off by a cold blade was still vivid in my mind.

"That damn thing...""

More than anything.

The image of that strange boy pointing a sword straight at me is

strangely stuck in my mind and cannot be erased.

Anyway, what happened happened.

As soon as the loud anger ended, the remaining problems in reality rushed into his mind like a tide.

'... If this happens, the plan will be greatly disrupted.'

I thought everything was over once I discovered my Nebraska ancestry. But instead of killing him, didn't all the Lycan Slopes that sent him back to the canyon suffer?

Above all, losing Vajra, a member of his family, was the most painful.

'Now there is no member of the family capable of leading the entire group...'

Berseus did not have all the lycanthropes of the Demon World as his servants.

Not only can he not form relationships with subordinates one by one, but if he continues to deal with polluted minds, his mind will eventually be affected as well.

So, he made a few particularly strong individuals his followers, and then controlled the rest of the group through them.

Vajra is the one with the strongest control among them. Isn't he the only pure-blooded Lycan Slope of Nebraska blood?

Having lost such a member of the family, it was unknown how many Lycanslopes would leave the front lines at will.

'... I can't help it. 'Preparations are far from over, but we have no choice but to move while we can still control it.'

After making that decision, Berseus began to busily give orders to his remaining subordinates.

'This is a golden opportunity! A chance to sweep all the annoying things into one place and make them all destroy together!'

So, I will destroy the lives of all possible lycanslopes.

Until the evil that disturbs cause and effect and the cursed bloodline of Nebraska are completely eliminated.

* * *

North of Sigismund Territory.

A small guard post at the forefront of a glacier canyon.

The soldiers, who had been on the lookout for the urgent message that came from the ice base, were relieved when they spotted a boy and a dog staggering down the hill.

However, when I went out to greet him, I immediately turned pale. Because the boy was drenched in blood from head to toe.

Toad, toad, toad.

Every time he steps, pieces of frozen blood fall down, sparkling like jewels.

'How can you still be alive after shedding that amount of blood?'

The boy, who noticed the soldiers' tired faces, wiped his cheeks with his hand and spoke with a calm expression.

"It's not my blood."

Yes, you should. It's okay.

In a small guard post where there is no priest, let alone a doctor, if it's all your blood, you'll be in big trouble!

"His Majesty Mores... "Is that correct?"

One of the soldiers asked hesitantly. I received the message, but it was because I couldn't believe this situation.

Then the boy nods his head casually.

"Yes."

Compared to his messy appearance, his attitude was quite noble.

"Oh, and this is my dog, Max."

An introduction that somehow makes me feel proud, Wong! The energetic barking returns.

The soldiers exchanged looks with puzzled faces. There was no soldier of Sigismund who did not know Max, the largest and foul-tempered hound among the margrave's hounds.

Panting!

Is that charming dog that sticks out its tongue and wags its tail in approval, really that unruly Max?

"Well, it is said that the group left the ice base early in the morning. If you hurry, you will probably arrive here late in the evening."

One of the most senior soldiers among them spoke in a trembling voice.

I would never have thought that a shabby place like this would serve the prince of the Holy Empire. Still, as the person in charge of the guard post, I had to treat them as well as possible.

"It's not enough, but I'll take you to your place first."

"Okay, thank you."

Thus, Prince Mores was led to a small ice tent.

"If you just wait a moment, I will turn on the brazier right away."

The soldier said so, but the prince vehemently refused.

"Shouldn't we have to open the tent entrance for ventilation anyway? The supplies for a small guard post like this are useless, so there's no need to waste such money for me."

The soldier was impressed by the enemy's thoughtful attitude of caring more about the situation at the guard post than about himself.

Of course, he didn't know that the prince had a magic stone that was as good as a hand warmer.

Afterwards, the soldiers snooped around the prince's tent for a while.

However, the prince, who assumed that he would be difficult to treat, simply spent time quietly in his quarters without making any special requests until lunchtime had passed.

'Aren't you really a calm and well-behaved prince!'

'Even if our child looks half as good as that person...''

They soon returned to their workplaces with peace of mind.

Meanwhile, the situation inside the tent was a little different from what the soldiers expected. Because Seongjin and the Demon King were talking non-stop through their thoughts.

[This is a good thing. There is no such thing as a complete mess.]

'Well, I can't help it.'

He said he wiped his face and hands with snow, but his blood-soaked hair and clothes were already frozen solid. When he touches his head, red ice pieces fall to the floor.

Seongjin roughly shook off the ice and sat down, wrapped in a blanket and holding a rock as a hand warmer.

"Okay..."

Not only the fractured side, but also the entire body was intact. Above all, it was extremely cold.

Then Max, who was whining and sniffing, quietly sits down next to Seongjin.

[Why don't you do that? Warming up your body with aura.]

'It hurts, man.'

This was the reason why I was unable to operate as an Auror at all

while I was here.

Because I used it too hard during the battle, my whole body hurt as if it were being broken just by turning my auror slightly.

It's better to be a little cold.

'It might have been better to use a little bit of the auror in the passage...'

Seongjin thought as he felt the gentle waves still lapping at his chest.

The reason he overdoes things like this every time is because the total amount of Auras he possesses is absolutely insufficient compared to the required Auras. So, this problem can be solved as long as you use the Aura of the passage.

But why?

When he started to use this, the sense of crisis that something irreversible might happen one day would hold Seongjin back from trying to pull the auror every time.

-Mores, keep in mind that when you pull the water in a channel, the things on the other side are also pulled in.

okay. Above all, that's what Seonghwang's father said.

Doesn't Seongjin know better than anyone else that his warnings should never be ignored?

'As Logan said, it's only a matter of becoming stronger. 'Let's not be too hasty.'

With the help of hand warmers and the wolf dog, the cold, frozen body slowly begins to melt.

Seongjin, feeling the fatigue from the early morning sleep coming on, slowly closed his eyes, leaning against Max.

[weird...]

Nodding.

How long had I been dozing off like that?

[...] I can definitely feel it around here, right?]

Seongjin opened his eyes to the demon king's nervous muttering.

'why? What?'

[no. I've been feeling the presence of a strange spirit since a while ago.]

The guy was bustling in and out of Seongjin's head.

[If you're this close, there's no way I wouldn't know? But why can't I see anything?]

'Where do you feel that?'

[From the items you packed earlier.]

'Hmm, really?'

Well then, shall we take a look?

When Seongjin gets up, Max opens his eyes and looks at him, then yawns and puts his head down again.

Seongjin picked up the winter clothes that had been left in a corner and searched through the frozen pockets. Then, small miscellaneous things pour down on the tent floor.

A magic stone received from Logan.

Amulet and pendant obtained from the labyrinth.

A small trinket hanging on Vajra's chest.

And a small piece of ice with a faint light blinking. A product of the symmetrical world that never melts.

The Demon King let out a laugh.

[Well, it's absurd even to look at it again. In the meantime, you had the presence of mind to take care of these things.]

Ice sculptures and Vajra's accessories.

They were items that Seongjin had stolen one by one during the battle. Louise probably doesn't know anything either.

'I especially need to take care of this.'

Seongjin responded by rolling a piece of shining ice in his hand.

Wasn't this piece of ice the reason why the battle with the Lycanslopes began in the first place?

'why? Didn't you say you wanted to take a closer look too?'

[But...]

I didn't know you would end up in such a miserable situation.

Even though the devil was grumbling like that, he seemed to be carefully examining the miscellaneous items.

[I think this is suspicious.]

Eventually, what the demon lord picked out was Vajra's accessory. A delicate work of art with bright beads attached to a flat metal plate.

Ah, this.

'Now that I think about it, I almost died because of this.'

[Then, I guess the reason you hesitated earlier...]

'Oh, right.'

When the road guy charged at him from the front, this instantly caught Seongjin's eyes.

While trying to take a closer look, I ended up accidentally allowing the guy to hit me.

'Isn't it somewhat similar to this?'

Seongjin asked as he placed the amulet and accessories side by side.

Nebraska's Summoning Amulet. This is the item obtained by defeating the boss mob in the labyrinth.

[Oh, really?]

When I compared the two side by side, it seemed even more clear. The flat plates were similar in size, and the detailed carved reliefs were also similar in some way.

The only difference was that Vajra's jewelry had beads properly attached, and the amulet was empty.

[that's interesting? This too is an item from the normal world. It's also quite high-level. Where on earth does something like this keep popping up?]

The Demon King, who was mumbling like that, pointed out a bead attached to Vajra's jewelry.

[I guess this is a bit strange. This dirty bead.]

'hmm.'

In fact, Seongjin was also curious about this bead.

Of course, it was a fleeting moment, but I remembered that when I first took off the ornament, there were clearly transparent beads attached.

But now, one of them is shining bright red-brown.

[If you look closely, this looks like the soul of the normal world. It's difficult to judge because the letters overlap so much.]

The soul of the normal world? letter?

[huh. I explained it to you once before, right? The soul of the world of normal images is very unique, unlike the world of mental images

or real images.]

Seongjin traced his vague memories and recalled the explanation given by the Demon King.

It was like that. Did you say that the soul in the normal world is not in the shape of a person, but in the shape of a sphere or crystal?

'But the soul is something that can be touched with hands.'

[Strictly speaking, it is a bead with a soul.]

'A bead with a soul... ... '

[Why, isn't it true that there are no cases where souls or thoughts dwell in objects? Since it's just a soul from the normal world, it doesn't show any signs even if it dwells in it. Because it's like a round bead.]

In other words, does this mean that even if an object is possessed by a ghost, the ghost does not appear?

'Then what are the letters talking about?'

[You already know this, right? Objects in the normal world always come with standardized explanations. That's why I can recognize things belonging to the normal world as soon as I see them.]

Suddenly, the experience in the labyrinth passes by.

A strange world where every time you touch it, a notice pops up like a game.

[Of course, it is not as clear a notice as you see in the normal world. But even in the real world, you can sense that unique feeling that remains. Even though I can't read everything, traces of the letters are visible in my spirit.]

But I'm not sure because there are a lot of things from the normal world gathered here. The letters all overlap.

The Demon King is muttering like that.

In the end, Seongjin decided to borrow the spiritual eye from the Demon King and check it for himself.

As the red light begins to blink from the pupil, a now familiar world of five colors unfolds.

'It's a notice... ... '

With those eyes, I looked closely at the objects of the normal world.

Then something strange happened. Although small, something like faint letters began to glimmer over the objects.

□Soul Stone□

□Sign of Nebraska□

Those were the letters that I finally recognized after looking at Vajra's accessories for a while. Especially in the case of those transparent beads.

□Soul Stone□

It seems like it was something that really put the soul into it.

And that reddish-brown stone that bothered me.

□Vajra's Soul Stone□

'... 'Vajra?'

Does it really have a soul? And Vajra's soul?

When Seongjin, embarrassed, turns his attention to the piece of ice he took from Vajra, this time, these letters appear on it.

□Glacier Troll's Ice Heart□

... what?

* * *

Before the sun sets, Seongjin's group, including Masain, arrived at the

forefront of the canyon.

Even while coming here, Masain was very worried. The more I imagined what would have happened to the prince who suddenly fell into the northern canyon, the more anxious I became.

But no matter what you imagined, the reality was much more.

"... ..!"

When they were guided to the ice outpost, what they encountered was Prince Mores, whose entire body was covered in blood.

Not only his shirt and winter clothes, but even his light blonde hair was soaked in blood. At that moment, Masain's eyes turned white and she stumbled for a moment.

However, the prince who discovered Masain smiled brightly and waved his hand.

"Lord Martha!"

Then, he groans and clutches his side.

"What makes you uncomfortable, sir?"

When Masain was scared and ran away, the prince lightly waved his hand.

"No, that's not important now. Do you know what I found? "Look at this!"

"It's not that important..." ..!"

"Well, what this is is the heart of a Glacher Troll. "With this, I found out what they were planning!"

So, Lycan Slopes... ..

Rod falls from the ice of the canyon... ..

The prince's chattering voice fades away, and my mind gradually becomes more distant.

-You were just caught up in an unfortunate accident, so you are told not to scold me too much when you meet me.

Sir Sharon said so.

But Masain was able to make a statement.

Absolutely not, Your Majesty.

I can confidently say that the image of him not being involved in an accident, but rather actively looking for an accident!

"Oh! And you know what? "I'm going to get a dog starting today."

"dog..."

"I'm going to properly rip it off from the Margrave, so it's like he already belongs to me. Oh, don't worry about management! Edith will take care of your food and bath, and Sir Haven and Sir Calmen will clean up your toilet."

In the end, Masain couldn't stand it anymore and gathered all the Auras in his army and shouted loudly for the guard to leave.

Teek!!!

221

221. Heart of Ice (2)

Glatzer Troll.

It is a huge ice monster that is said to be over 10 meters tall when standing upright. Bern claims to have seen something over 12 meters tall, but that bastard is just bluffing for a day or two.

They have a strange life cycle where they go into a state of pseudo-sleep in the depths of the demon world during the summer, then wake up in the cold winter and slowly begin to become active.

It moves alone, and nothing is exactly known about its population or breeding period.

It usually wanders around the deep glacier area encompassing the northern part of Salz Lake, but on rare occasions, it comes down to the border between the territory and the demon world.

In that case, if they are not subdued in time, the territory will suffer a great loss, as they attack people indiscriminately and their very existence brings severe cold damage.

It is unknown why they were named 'trolls'. Because they look completely different from the trolls that have been passed down in stories from the era of the three ancient dragons.

okay. Why is this a troll? Is it even a living thing in the first place?

Disagreements as to whether this is truly a living demonic beast have been raised consistently since ancient times, but the position of the Orthodox Church on this has always been firm.

Your Majesty, the Great Emperor, according to the children of Bern,

there is an inside story to this.

If we deny that they are living demonic beasts, we will naturally classify them as demons who make dead things alive, and at that moment, we will have to dispatch a large group of Holy Knights to subdue demons?

However, none of the cardinals have any intention of dispatching the paladins under their command. While they are busy keeping each other in check, why would they do something that undermines their own power?

Of course, Vern, who causes divisions among the cardinals and starts fights, is the worst guy.

Anyway, common sense tells us that this absolutely cannot be a living thing.

Unlike Lycanslopes, who overcome the cold with their hot body temperature, Glacher Trolls do not try to overcome the cold. As the name suggests, it has a body made of 'ice' and only moves actively in the cold.

They don't even have proper internal organs!

The heart, shining and beating in the chest, will be its only organ.

Of course, it is questionable whether it functions as a heart as its name suggests, but there can be no argument that it is at least as deadly an organ as the heart.

As soon as the heart is taken out of the body, the hard ice body, which is not easy to break, disintegrates in an instant, and eventually completely melts and scatters into the air.

-From Granius' [Exploration of the Miraculous Continent], a banned book designated by the Holy See

* * *

Seongjin received immediate medical attention. Of course, amid Masain's storm-like nagging.

While Sir Valery and Sir Sharon diligently poured divine power on him, the resident knights diligently collected firewood and scooped up clean snow. As it is not enough, I am trying to heat the bath water to wash away the blood.

'Being able to clean one's body on the front line is probably a luxury that a prince can enjoy.'

No matter what, power is the best.

Seongjin, who was sitting leisurely with Masain's nagging in one ear, suddenly looked to the side, feeling a chill running down his spine.

'... uh?'

Was it because of my mood? For a moment, it felt like Sir Sharon's eyes turned cool and flashed silver.

And Seongjin soon realized that it was not an illusion.

Neither Sir Valerie nor Sir Sharon had exceptional healing powers, and their recovery was slow. But right after that happened, the pain suddenly disappeared as if it had been washed away, and vitality surged throughout his body.

Above all, Seongjin did not miss the moment when Sir Sharon's right hand moved.

Of course, it's just a fleeting moment. Sir Sharon soon returned to her usual self.

'and... ... '

Seongjin was able to realize it right away.

'If there weren't people around, I would have had a great night!'

They said it would be difficult to come to the North for a while, and it seemed like my father possessed me for a short time and then disappeared right away.

Of course, there would have been time to hit the night. However, Sir

Sharon would not have been able to attack the prince in front of others.

Seongjin was greatly relieved.

'Okay, we've passed the critical juncture. At least by the time he returns to the imperial capital, his father's anger will have completely subsided, right?

Because he's the type of person who gets angry quickly.

Then the Demon King looked dumbfounded and said sarcastically.

[Are you relieved that you didn't get hit now? uh? Where on earth did the reflection go, reflection?]

Shut up! You nagging demon lord!

Don't you and Sir Martha think this is too much?

And that night, a large tent was erected at the guard post. This was to accommodate the suddenly increased number of people at once.

The abundant supplies that Orden and his party had prepared were also piled up on one side of the tent.

Considering that we rushed like crazy, not even eating, the preparations were quite thorough. I guess this is all experience accumulated while defending the border of the Demonic Realm for a long time.

Thanks to this, a rare and rich dinner began at the front line post.

Seongjin and his party felt relieved that they had found the prince safely, and the soldiers guarding the guard post felt a crowded atmosphere for the first time in a long time.

Everyone was excited and a quite lively atmosphere was created.

"Thanks to Prince Mores, we can enjoy all these luxuries, hahaha."

"But what happened to you that caused you to be so isolated in the

demon world? Ah yes. "I won't ask."

One of the soldiers who had been casually asking a question was startled by Masain's rapidly becoming depressed expression and changed the topic.

"Haha, by the way, the prince is truly amazing."

"You must have been very surprised, but the young prince seemed so resolute!"

"I heard you even cut down the devil's beast on your way here?"

"That's it! How thoughtful you are to be considerate of lowly soldiers like us! "I was very impressed!"

Simple compliments without any special rhetoric follow.

"When I return to the estate, I will definitely tell my son! "The prince of the theocratic empire is so great even at such a young age. Shouldn't you follow his example?"

Then Masain's face, who was listening, became subtle.

It feels good to hear the prince's praise, but since it is something I cannot agree with with my heart, my feelings are complicated in one way or another.

Of course, Seongjin, who looked neat, was moving the dishes in an ever more polite manner.

"Look at how he's acting like a fool. "As expected, our poker face is amazing!"

"Is that something you would call amazing? "Isn't he just a swindler?"

"Uh-huh! "And unless you are willing to drink a bowl of Edith's Melbourne tea, keep your mouth shut, Lord Calmen!"

"Huh. This is something that people in the monster task force are familiar with. "You have great potential."

"... Even Lord Sharon?"

The irreverent whispering next to me was a little annoying.

Uh-huh! I can hear it all, you guys!

It was around that time that Seongjin spoke to Orden about [Ice Heart].

"Are you saying the Lycanslope Lords are trying to mobilize the Glacher Trolls?"

Orden asked with a doubtful look.

"And this is proof of that?"

"okay. "You don't think Lycanslopes would carry this around for no reason, right?"

Seongjin said as he handed Orden a piece of ice that was still not melting and was still dripping cold.

Even now, using the demon king's spiritual eyes, Seongjin could clearly see faint letters. There are even instructions written in Korean.

❑ Glacier Troll's Ice Heart ❑

❑ @#Vera%d Dungeon boss, ❑❑ obtained from the Glacher Troll King. You can set the activity conditions of the registered entity and give commands with simple sentences.❑

❑ Item grade: A❑

❑ Number of objects that can be registered: 3/25❑

❑ *Current status#;aoie& server cannot be confirmed.❑

Is it because this is not a normal world? The letters themselves were faint, and various sentences were overlapped here and there. Because of that, it took Seongjin quite a while to understand a few sentences.

What's surprising is that the devil bastard can't read this at all. Since he said it's a letter he's never seen before, it probably isn't really

Hangul as it appears.

I could only guess that this was probably something that occurred in the process of processing information obtained through spiritual eyes into visual information.

"Certainly, the shape has some similarities to the heart of a glacier troll. But it's so small, and the light is still vivid. "It won't be the heart of a glacier troll."

Orden looked at the ice sculpture closely for a while and then said.

"Is it originally bigger?"

"Yes, sir. The Glacier Troll is a monster that can reach a height of 10 meters. The heart is also larger than the human head. And the moment that heart is removed from their body, it loses its luster and shatters."

"hmm... .."

In fact, this piece of ice has a strong feeling that it is a small control tower that controls the Glacier Troll, rather than the heart itself.

However, it was frustrating because there was no way to explain these letters that only Seongjin could see.

"Grand Duke, you saw it too, right? The lycan slopes of the ice wall were clearly waiting for something. "Maybe it's the Glatzer Troll."

"However, Glatute Trolls are mindless magical beasts that wander aimlessly through glaciers and snow fields. They just wander around as individuals and do not form groups. "For a demonic beast to follow the orders of a demonic beast of another species, that is also unprecedented."

"So you're saying there's absolutely no chance of a Glacier Troll appearing on the front lines?"

"yes. They don't move until mid-winter. "By now, he's probably asleep somewhere in the devil's eye."

"... .."

It certainly makes sense.

Since they are the ones who have always guarded the boundaries of the Demon World, they are probably right about the habits of the Glacher Trolls.

Even if you can see the explanation, there is no guarantee that it will function properly in the real world of Delcross.

'But since it works, wouldn't they want to use it?'

The same goes for the magic stone given by Sisley. Although it is an item from the normal world, it works well as a hand warmer.

Moreover, there were some parts of the explanation that were particularly difficult to understand.

□ You can set the activity conditions of the registered entity and give commands with simple sentences. □

According to this sentence, wouldn't it be possible to configure the Glature Troll to ignore its habits and move at higher temperatures?

'Anyway, there's no harm in being prepared.'

Seongjin came to that conclusion and gave instructions to Orden.

"First, contact the ice base. "So that we can prepare for an attack by the Glacher Troll."

Then he nodded obediently.

Although he thought it was a pointless worry for the prince, he decided that there was no harm in strengthening security.

"I understand, sir. "I will contact the ice base early tomorrow morning."

But at that moment, Seongjin felt an eerie feeling passing through his chest.

Wait, wouldn't that be too late?

"no. Send it right now."

"... yes?"

"I want you to take action right away so that we can reach the Margrave by tonight."

"... .."

Orden looked at Seongjin with a puzzled face.

However, when I met his eyes that seemed to shine unusually brighter than usual, I answered with a slightly more serious expression.

"yes. I will do that. Lowering."

* * *

"Glatcher Troll? "What is that all of a sudden talking about?"

That night. Old man Vincent asked the Margrave after checking the urgent letter from the canyon guard post.

Then Margrave Hendrick closes the letter with an embarrassed look on his face.

"It appears that Prince Mores has mentioned the possibility of Glatzer Trolls appearing on the front lines. "This is Orden's request to prepare for this."

"Why the glamor troll in late summer? Even if that guy shows up there, do you think Vincent will just let it go? Bullshit... .."

Then the Margrave's eyes deepened.

"What Prince Mores pointed out is something else. Due to the structure of the ice base, it is difficult for large troops to secure a retreat route, so they told us to prepare in advance. It's not wrong. "There is no other fortress with such a narrow entrance, other than

the Ice Wall Base of the Demon Lord."

Then the old man snorted.

"If that were true, it would be a pointless worry. Are you saying such nonsense even after looking at the height of the third ice wall? Even if a Glature Troll really comes, it can't jump over an ice wall that is over 40 meters high. "There is no need for us to retreat."

This was the reason why they leisurely gathered their troops without being overly nervous even in the face of large-scale swarms of Lycan Slopes.

but.

"Today, the third force sent by the guard commander joined us, and over 700 troops have already gathered at this base. Even if the battle ends safely, isn't it a big deal to send them all back to their territory?"

"so?"

"If the third ice wall doesn't break through anyway, I think it would be a good idea to slightly widen the entrance to the second ice wall."

When will that thick ice wall be dug up and widened? Even if construction is carried out, it freezes little by little and eventually becomes narrow! It's all useless!

Although old Vincent was grumbling behind his back, the Margrave called the night guard and ordered them to work all night.

There was nothing good about offending the prince, who had a tough personality, and he thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to prepare in advance for his return.

And at dawn the next day.

A soldier who was crossing the ice wall to change duties was caught by an uneasy feeling, so he stopped and looked at the snowy field.

Strangely enough, it was an unusually quiet night, with none of the lycanthropes that usually hang around near the ice wall in sight.

"That... what?"

After staring ahead for a while, he suddenly noticed something strange and used his aura to sharpen his eyesight.

Dream, dream.

Am I half asleep? The white snow field of the snowy field was gently shaking as if it were alive and moving.

"Hey, what on earth does that look like?"

"huh? "What is it?"

As they observed the strange horizon gradually approaching the ice wall, their eyes widened at the reality of the horizon gradually revealing its outline in the darkness.

"Am I dreaming now...?"

That's right too.

They were now faced with a strange sight that they could not even imagine in their dreams.

Ooooooh-

Oooooh-

"... Glatzer Troll... ... ?"

Surprisingly, the identity of the white things covering the long horizon were dozens of Glacher Trolls crawling forward in a line.

222

222. Heart of Ice (3)

Before the Vigilant discovered a large movement of Glacher Trolls. Fortunately, there was someone within the ice base who noticed the abnormality a little early.

"Vincent!"

Lord Ilma, who was hurriedly leaving the ice tent after receiving an unbelievable report from a soldier, bumped into Old Man Vincent.

The old man, who was already fully armed, looked in the direction of the snowy field and had a very disappointed look on his face.

"When the prince's message came, I thought it was some kind of nonsense, but I never thought the Glatzer trolls would really come."

This is Dekaron Knight's affirmation. This means that it is by no means an illusion of caution.

"Let me check the situation first."

Lord Ilma climbed the ice wall and looked at the snowy field.

Indeed, numerous Glacher Trolls can be seen covering the snowy field. It had already been over 20 years since she joined the Wolf Knights, but it was a bizarre sight that even she had never seen before.

The sight of giant ice monsters lying down all at once, writhing and crawling, seemed comical at first glance.

"This is it. "This is the first time in my life I've seen glamor trolls hanging out like that."

The white-haired old man standing next to her also rubs his eyes in disbelief.

It was fortunate that the alert was able to spot them quickly because they were large. There are still hundreds of meters away from them.

"30..."

A glamor troll with just the right numbers.

They are lined up almost symmetrically around the center of the ice wall and face straight towards the ice wall. Is it really true that someone is moving these people in an organized manner?

Suddenly, an ominous picture flashed through Lord Ilma's mind.

Even if the Glacher Troll can fully raise its body, it is nothing compared to the height of the ice wall.

But what if that kind of organized leadership is possible, so that they can keep gathering to target one point?

'It becomes a huge ice hill made up of Glaturre Trolls!'

If that number of people can successfully unite without falling behind, they will be able to reach the height of the ice wall.

It was a terrifying imagination.

'no! Now is not the time to worry about this.'

Sir Ilma shook his head.

The power of the Glaturre Troll itself is not something that can be ignored.

If they all arrive here safely and start pounding on the ice wall, it will only be a matter of time before it breaks, no matter how thick the ice wall is made.

On the other hand, the movement of the soldiers dealing with them will be extremely restricted.

"It would be best to reduce the number in the snowfield as much as possible. "I will take the quick-footed knights out and deal with them."

Old Vincent seemed to have the same thoughts as Lord Ilma.

"Don't do that. "I will help too."

While Lord Ilma hurriedly summoned the Wolf Knights and reorganized them, the soldiers' preparations were in full swing on the ice wall.

"It's an attack! "It's a Glatzer Troll!"

"Hang a pulley on the ice wall!"

"All archers to their positions!"

I was embarrassed for a moment. The soldiers, who had been trained all their lives defending the Demon Guard, calmed their minds by unconsciously following familiar tactics.

A dusky dawn with the sun still not rising.

Bright torches were lit here and there, turning the gray ice wall yellow.

"Save your arrows until they come into direct range. "Rather, the archers in the back row focus on using the pulleys so that they can pull up the retreating Wolf Knights in time!"

"Yes, Captain!"

"Archers in the front lines should be as alert as possible to Lycanslopes that may appear from behind!"

An arrow fired aimlessly in a situation where allies are mixed up is a double-edged sword.

Of course, they are not Wolf Knights who will be hit by blind arrows, but there is no need to worry about their own arrows when dealing with Glacher Trolls.

In any case, unless you had a fairly strong Aura, it was difficult to inflict any meaningful damage on the Glacher Troll with arrows.

At that time, a young Wolf Knight asked with a puzzled face.

"They are coming in completely prone. How do you deal with something like that? This is the first time so many people have come here. "There was no such case in the rules of engagement."

Originally, after forming a group and surrounding the ice monster, it was cut from the feet to reduce the area touching the floor. Then, it moves downhill, makes it lose its balance and collapses, and then targets the heart.

These were the standard rules of engagement for fighting an ice monster that was up to 10 meters long.

However, Lord Ilma dismissed the concerns with a firm voice.

"If that's the case, isn't that something to be thankful for? "If we lie down, their hearts will only get closer to our sword attack!"

"yes!"

Her abstract shouts fell one after another over the heads of the knights who were in high spirits.

"Everyone, stay alert! Don't think that they are all! "The Lycan Slopes are definitely coming after them!"

Meanwhile, Margrave Hendrick, who had been summoned by old Vincent, realized that the moment he realized the situation, he had to prepare for the worst.

"Hurry up the construction to widen the second ice wall. And send a message to the First Ice Wall to order them to do the same."

"yes? but..."

"It doesn't matter if part of the ice wall collapses. "Hurry up!"

Hendrick, who scolded the soldier like that, looked nervously at the

watchtower on the ice wall and chewed his lips.

'I don't think the three ice walls will collapse, but...'

However, these are the words of the prince who noticed the Glacher Troll's attack that no one expected. It wouldn't be a bad idea to assume the worst case scenario and prepare for it.

And around that time.

Changes have also occurred among the glamor trolls.

When the ice wall became brightly lit and the troops in the base were busy moving around, some of them seemed to have realized that they had already been caught, so they jumped up from their seats and started running towards the ice wall.

Wooooooo-

Ooooh-

At that time, Sir Ilma, who was just preparing to fall down the ice wall, suddenly witnessed a strange sight.

'... "There is a distinct time difference in the commands?'

Even as about half of the Glatute Trolls approaching from the left rise up, the ones on the right are still crawling in an awkward posture.

'At least two chains of command... ... !'

There are people somewhere checking the situation here and manipulating it. If that's the case, those Glatzer Trolls might not be what they were prepared for.

Sir Ilma, whose thoughts had reached that point, shouted at the Wolf Knights.

"All of the Wolf Knights follow me! "We must catch as many Glacher Trolls as possible in the snowy field!"

And she spoke to the old man for the last time.

"Vincent. i look forward to."

An unprecedented situation faced by Yeongji.

The most reliable force here right now was Old Man Vincent, the only Dekaron Knight.

"okay. "I will take the lead."

Old man Vincent answered like that and scratched his head.

"But it's so strange. How dare you come from a snowy field like this. I thought I was more concerned about the north somehow... .."

"Please hurry!"

"I understand!"

Whick! Old Vincent, who launched himself without a rope, slid down a steep ice wall that was as high as 40 meters.

Next, the Wolf Knights also fell one after another down the ice wall, riding on ropes attached to pulleys throughout the ice wall.

"Based on the basic training formation of 5 people, we will take out the ones on the edges one by one. It looks like it will be an unprecedented battle, so the leader of each group must be flexible in luring the guys and connect with the next group based on the situation!"

"yes!"

At that time, old man Vincent, who ran out with a fog in his eyes, collided violently with a Glacher Troll charging at the forefront.

Kuang!

One of its legs shattered, and ice shards flew everywhere.

Woooooow-

A scream, not a scream, as a signal -

"Everyone charge!"

The Wolf Knights, with Lord Ilma at the head, ran through the snow field, each doing their own shunishuhe.

* * *

"They say the ice wall base is currently under attack!"

Canyon in the north.

Everyone at the guard post woke up early because of the scorpion that flew in at dawn.

"Dozens of Glatzer Trolls... .. ?"

Orden, who received the letter, spoke in a trembling voice.

I couldn't believe it, but it really happened as Prince Mores said?

The group all looked back at the prince with shocked expressions.

"hmm?"

The young prince, who was rubbing his eyes with a half-asleep look on his face, shrugged his shoulders at everyone's gaze.

"Oh, so I told you? "It seems like the Lycanslopes are controlling the Glacher Trolls?"

"... .."

Orden and the group that followed him exchanged glances.

It was something that was hard to believe at first. This was the first time that Sigismund became the guardian of the Demon World, and so many Glatzer Trolls had never gathered in one place, and it was impossible to imagine that they would be controlled by another Demon Beast.

Anyway, what has already happened has happened.

"Grand Duke. After all, shouldn't we hurry back to the third ice wall?"

"Not only Lord Ilma but also Vincent are at the Ice Wall Base. I don't think it will fall apart easily... .."

"That's right."

While they were whispering in low voices.

Prince Mores, who looked at the area near the canyon for a moment with thoughtful eyes, called out to Orden in a low voice.

"Grand Duke."

"Yes, sir."

"How about taking all the soldiers here and retreating to the territory? "If they try to make a diversion, it would be dangerous for a small number of troops to remain at this guard post."

"diversion... is it."

If he had heard this yesterday, Orden would have confirmed it without delay. Demonic beasts, who are just beasts without reason, could never do that.

However, the large-scale attack by the Glacher Trolls, which was thought to be absolutely impossible, was confirmed to be true.

then.

'Either the demonic beasts move directly, or someone controls them from behind. 'For someone who can make such an organized movement, a bucket is definitely not an impossible task!'

Orden hypothesized that Glacher Trolls and Lycanslopes were flocking here at the same time.

The guard posts built here and there in the canyon are defense bases surrounded by fairly high ice walls on rocky highlands.

However, not all of them would be capable of withstanding the large-scale attack of the demonic beast.

'If you retreat late after assessing the situation, you run the risk of becoming isolated in one place. In that case, it would be better for us to move and join all the troops at the guard post and go to the entrance of the canyon...'

Although it was not as large as the 3rd Ice Wall, a fortress was built near the border of the canyon and the territory, with the entrance tightly blocked.

Move all your troops there and ask Sir Sebastian to send additional men.

'... 'I can endure it!'

It was about time he came to that conclusion.

Ooooh-

Suddenly, the wolf dog let out a long howl across the canyon.

Then, as if the prince remembered something, he raised his head and spoke.

"Oh, right! "There were things to check and take with me."

"yes?"

"I think it's about time we arrived. "I called you here earlier."

"... ... ?"

It was when Orden was wondering. Suddenly, through his sensitive senses, he felt a small, earth-shattering vibration.

"... ... !"

Orden was startled and stood up. This was because it was approaching at an incredible speed, and the vibrations were growing unstoppably.

Then, after a while, one of the soldiers standing guard let out a sound that sounded like a scream.

"that... "It's a Glatzer Troll!"

"What? Glatzer Troll?"

Everyone at the guard post became thoughtful and stood up.

Boom boom boom!

Just as he said, what appeared across the canyon with a tremor was a huge ice monster measuring 10 meters in height.

A dull appearance whose facial features cannot be clearly seen as it is covered in snow and ice fragments. An unrealistic yet familiar sight, with countless chunks of ice rippling like muscles in time with the movement.

"You mean it was really a bucket...? ... !"

Orden muttered helplessly.

'At least until your Majesty takes refuge in the territory, we must stop them here!'

Slurp.

When Orden steeled his resolve and pulled out his sword, he and his companions also rushed to aim their weapons at him.

It was right then.

"Oh, so that's what a Glatzure Troll looks like?"

Prince Mores stood up and spoke calmly.

"Lowering! Hurry and avoid!"

Sir Masain was frightened and grabbed him, but the prince looked closely at the approaching Glacher trolls with curious eyes.

Then, as if he were puzzled, he muttered something like this!

"uh? But one isn't enough?"

"... yes?"

"Everyone, don't worry. Those are the kids I called. "He's our ally."

... what?

As Orden looked at him with wide eyes, the prince looked a little proud and added an explanation to him.

"I told you yesterday, right? "It seems like the Lycanslopes are using this piece of ice to run a glacier troll."

"... ..!"

"If you want to prove it, you'll probably have to try it yourself. There were three entities registered in this ice heart, so I just summoned them. "But I don't know where one went."

Is that real?

While everyone was shocked, the prince scratched his cheek and said.

"Hmm, I guess I got caught on a glacier somewhere on the way."

But the words are almost over.

Thump thump! Another vibration is heard from afar.

While everyone was standing there dumbfounded, only the young prince spoke with a happy expression on his face.

"Oh, it looks like everyone is here. look. I already gave them names. "What if we call them Bingsu No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3, respectively, in the order they arrived?"

223. Heart of Ice (4)

Preparations to retreat from the guard post were quickly made.

These were soldiers who changed duty stations every few days and went back and forth between the territory and the guard post. He must have had a history of packing things easily.

After burying the remaining preserved food in the snow, the guard post was soon left with nothing but empty ice tents.

"Then, let's move on to the next guard post like this."

Orden, who completed the final inspection, reported to Seongjin.

On the way back to the territory, they plan to stop by all possible guard posts and collect soldiers. Emergency summons signals were sent to some guard posts that were too far from the route.

"But Grand Duke, how can they..." ... "

Sir Oscar was whispering next to me with a serious look on his face.

'Do you understand?'

Orden looked back in embarrassment.

There, three giant ice giants standing side by side against the backdrop of a rugged canyon are shining silver in the rising sunlight. If you didn't know that they were magical beasts, you could say it was a majestic sight.

I never thought I would face them so peacefully.

"What's wrong with you? Of course I will take those shaved ice!

"Because it is our precious power."

Seongjin, who noticed the group's shocked reaction, strongly insisted.

"My lord, I wonder when those demonic beasts will change... .."

"Don't worry. 'I'm in control."

Despite Seongjin's assurance, the group's anxiety did not subside.

In particular, from Lord Masaine's grimly stiff face, I could feel the determination to kill them right away if they were to stumble.

"Lowering! Hurry and throw away that stolen item! 'I will break it to pieces now!"

When the shaved ice first appeared, Masain literally went wild.

Well, if it were a heretic or a devil, it would have been a natural reaction for him to be horrified. Even in Seongjin's eyes, the sight of the Glature Trolls completely ignoring the laws of nature was nothing short of bizarre.

'... 'Isn't there a separate axis of strength or joints?'

Surprisingly, they didn't even have a skeleton. Let alone internal organs, there is no connective tissue that connects body parts.

It was just chunks of ice tangled together and floating in the air in the shape of a giant giant!

If I didn't know much about the laws of the normal world, I would have thought that Seongjin was the devil's work.

[This... Rather than a troll, it's closer to a golem from the normal world?]

The Demon Lord, who had been looking at them for a while, groaned and said.

'Is there really something like this in the normal world?'

[huh. There are things that move like this according to the laws that

govern the world. This is a common sight in the early normal world.]

There are cases like this not only of golems, but also of living creatures.

The Demon King added.

[It's so simple that it doesn't have volume or proper mass. It's as if only the shell of the body remains, floating and moving in the air, centered around an invisible skeleton.]

... What on earth is the normal world?

In any case, it was the two Holy Knights who calmed Masain down in a situation where he could have been stabbed.

"This Vince... The demon energy is not felt much in the field. "Hehe."

"It is said that opinions were divided from the Whales to the Inquisition regarding the Glatture Troll, Lord Martha. It is not alive, and there is no evidence that it is the work of the devil, according to 'Exploration of the Miraculous Continent'... Hum hum! Oh, of course I'm not saying I read that banned book!"

Thank you, Sir Sharon!

And Sir Valerie, how far have you read the banned books on the subject of the Inquisitor?

"Lord Masaine. It would be a huge benefit for us if these shaved ice could help us fight off the enemy Glacher Trolls. "He will jump into dangerous work first for us."

"... .."

"don't worry. We can take their hearts out at any time and stop them from working. "As long as I'm in control, I won't rebel at all."

Masain then looked suspicious and checked with Seongjin again.

"So you're saying that as long as those things are moving, you won't have to fight?"

"Uh, well. "Wouldn't that be the case?"

Only after Seongjin said that did Masain finally put Misra on his belt.

However, even after that, the discomfort the group felt from shaved ice still did not seem to be resolved.

Every time the shaved ice took a step as they walked away from the guard post, the group was visibly startled.

'If it were in the imperial palace, everyone would have done it without asking...'

Seongjin secretly yawned and thought so.

'Well, since my father is here in the imperial palace, everyone feels at ease.'

With that, the group began moving slowly towards the next guard post with huge shaved ice on their tails. It is said that there are a total of six guard posts on the way to the territory alone, so there is still a long way to go.

Beat, beat, beat.

While walking behind Masain, Seongjin occasionally played with the snowshoe marks he had left by blowing his aura to erase them. It could be seen as an application of Schneeshuhe.

"You are truly amazing, sir. Among us, you are the only one who can move without snowshoes. "You are no better than the Sigismund people."

Sir Valerie, who was watching this with curious eyes, narrowed the distance and spoke.

"Well, it's not really training..."

If I don't do something like this, I feel like I'll fall asleep quickly.

"How tired do you look?"

"huh. 'I had a bit of trouble sleeping.'"

Last night, Seongjin strained his spiritual eyes and closely examined objects in the normal world all night long.

Then I got a vague idea of how to use ice cubes. And because I was testing various things with this 'ice heart', I didn't wake up until almost dawn.

[Was there a need to investigate in such a hurry? No matter how much you go through the decision to pray, if you use the spiritual eye for that long, it will eventually take a toll on your body.]

The devil bastard lightly.

But it was unavoidable.

□Number of objects that can be registered 3/25□

look. There are already three registered on the ice sculpture, right? So, isn't it natural that you want to call it right away as a test?

'Plus, I keep getting nervous. 'I feel like whatever I do, I have to hurry.'

Seongjin's initial plan was to join the group and immediately lead them to explore the canyon. Like the Lycan Slopes, you hold a piece of ice and examine the ice in the canyon one by one.

There is evidence that they are trying to control additional entities by registering them, so wouldn't it be possible to intercept the Glacier Trolls by imitating them?

'but... ... '

When I met the group again, I realized that it was a completely impossible plan.

There is no possibility that Masain will give permission, and as long as he is tightly guarded by your side, it will no longer be possible to escape secretly.

'Well, I've been having a lot of accidents lately.'

It seemed like I needed to be a little more cautious. After the Demon Counter Incident, Masain's anxiety and nervousness could be felt.

So, instead of trying to secretly explore the canyon, Seongjin stayed up all night searching for signs floating on the ice sculptures.

❑ Glacier Troll's Ice Heart ❑

❑ @#Vera%d Dungeon boss, ❑❑ obtained from the Glacier Troll King. You can set the activity conditions of the registered entity and give commands with simple sentences.❑

❑ Item grade: A ❑

I thought it was like a game, but it was really like an item. Plus, there's a dungeon boss.

Given that it is given to you when you catch the Glacier Troll King, wouldn't it be good to assume that there are already several items like this?

❑ *Current status#;aoie& server cannot be confirmed.❑

It's a server...

Is the 'server' with this broken name also within the normal world, or is the server perhaps the normal world itself?

Does the fact that it cannot be confirmed mean that it is a world that has already disappeared, like Ionia?

It was while I was fiddling with the ice cubes and thinking about various things.

Suddenly, Seongjin felt a strange feeling as if his consciousness was being sucked into a piece of ice.

'... ... ?!'

I was so startled that I lost sight of the ice cube, and that feeling

immediately disappeared like a lie.

[what's the matter?]

'No, something...''

I held the ice cube in my hand again and concentrated, and as expected, my consciousness was sucked somewhere again.

But fortunately, contrary to Seongjin's initial worries, his soul did not suddenly leave his body like before.

Rather, it was closer to the feeling of being in a [gap]. Consciousness that exists in two places simultaneously is another type of expansion of consciousness.

'... It's a little different than back then.'

At the Scarzzapino mansion and in the world of flames created by my father.

Seongjin once felt as if his consciousness was greatly heightened and he was becoming bigger. At that time, her father definitely tried to dissuade her like this.

-You don't need to get there yet.

then.

If this was really dangerous, surely my father would come to stop me right away?

Seongjin, who came to that conclusion, closed his eyes while holding the ice cube and waited for a moment.

'... hmm. 'Father, you're not coming either.'

what. Then it's okay, right?

Only then did Seongjin feel a little relieved and surrender to the expanding consciousness. At the same time, in his spirit, thin solid lines began to appear vaguely extending somewhere from the ice

cubes.

It was as if his consciousness was marking where he should go.

'One, two, three.'

Coincidentally, there were three lines in total.

☐Number of objects that can be registered 3/25☐

This can't be a coincidence. Seongjin was able to realize it intuitively.

okay. Just like the connection with Max, Seongjin's consciousness is connected to the Glacher Trolls through the ice sculpture!

Not long after that, Seongjin felt that his consciousness existed simultaneously in the ice of a canyon, in a snowdrift in a snowy field, and at the edge of a cold, unfrozen lake.

It was a brief and faint passing sensation, but perhaps these were the Glature Trolls registered in the 'Ice Heart'.

I tried to focus my attention on them a little more closely, but suddenly countless information windows began to appear in front of my eyes. There are so many overlapping things that it is impossible to recognize them even though they are in the process of being burnt.

'I'm crazy... ..'

Seongjin had no choice but to focus his attention on one of them. The closest thing to this place is the Glature Troll in the ice of the canyon.

And only then was Seongjin able to separate meaningful text from it.

[Sleep=

☐Temperature scroll: Activity (ice separation) -/- Sleep (ice fusion)☐

☐Mode setting: *Auto* / Manual☐

'The fact that the Marquis d'Aciano is looking for the Glature Trolls means that he can control them in the real world, right? Then, can I possibly move too?'

After struggling for a while and continuing trial and error, Seongjin was finally able to put the Glacher Troll in [Active] state. I found this out by turning the mode to 'Manual' and moving the temperature setting bar randomly.

Strangely, all of these could be controlled through meditation. Although it required a high degree of concentration.

Soon, the Glatre Troll started by Seongjin began to move from the spot, grinding away the ice.

'Something is acting strangely?'

First of all, I was glad that no more information windows appeared. The text is already disorganized and complexly overlapping, so what would have happened if the selection window had appeared randomly like in a maze?

'Come to think of it, the hand warmer Sisley gave me was like that too. 'Because you can make appropriate adjustments just by thinking about the temperature you want.'

It seemed like that was the way to move things in the normal world in the normal world.

Anyway, while trying to move the guy, there was one thing that Seongjin definitely learned.

first. Perhaps there are other Glacher Trolls sleeping within the ice of the canyon.

And second.

'It must be someone other than the Marquis d'Arciano who is running the Glatzer Troll!'

Although Seongjin is not good at multitasking, he is still not much weaker than others. Nevertheless, controlling an entity with thoughts requires such great concentration.

But while you are in control of your subordinates, you connect them and the Glacher Troll again through thoughts? Is it even worth the

effort to do it through Lycan Slope, where reason is already clouded?

'Plus, they tried to connect more entities here. There is no way that many numbers could be controlled from such a distance. If they attack using a Glaturre Troll, there will definitely be someone controlling the Ice Heart nearby... ..'

In this way, Seongjin controlled the remaining two individuals and made them head towards the guard post. By then it was already early morning.

Crack, crack, crack.

Seongjin, who was absent-mindedly concentrating on the Glaturre Troll, whose movement was delayed due to breaking the thick ice little by little, suddenly thought.

Ugh, I want to eat shaved ice... ..

Then I fell asleep.

"Even former Dekaron Knight Commander Bruno can't perform Schneeschke so skillfully, right? "Your talent truly seems to be far beyond the scope of humans."

At Sir Valerie's next words, Seongjin, who had been blankly recalling yesterday's events, suddenly came to his senses.

"As expected, Sir Claudia always lives by the phrase 'our humble genius.' There is really nothing wrong with that."

"... Sir Claudia?"

"Yes, sir."

Sir Valerie nodded, rounding her eyes and smiling.

"Sometimes she is so affectionate that I feel like she is truly [attracted] to you."

"... .."

Uh, something...

It was when Seongjin was staring blankly at Sir Valerie's face, feeling somewhat unfamiliar.

Kuaaaaang!

Suddenly, there was a huge shock from behind and a thick fog rose up. The group, startled, rushes to draw their weapons.

"Oh, sorry for startling you. "Bingsu No. 3 tripped on a stone and fell."

Seongjin reassured the group with a puzzled look on his face.

It was Bingsu No. 3, a glamor troll that took a long time to break through the ice.

When I gathered three Glacher Trolls in one place, surprisingly, it was possible to make them act as a group. Thanks to this, Seongjin was able to control and move these guys without much difficulty.

But was he mistaken?

What makes No. 3 feel a bit sluggish compared to No. 1 and No. 2?

224. Air Raid (1)

Forming a formal punitive force takes more time than expected.

As it is a task that consumes a large amount of national treasury, it usually takes a year just to set goals and schedules and gather personnel.

However, in the case of the Lilium Detachment, the situation was different.

It was a unit that frequently carried out subjugation, and it was a place where fanatics gathered who would jump into the fiery pits of hell if they were with Prince Logan.

In addition, Prince Logan, who led them, was in a hurry like never before, and with the addition of the Holy Emperor's breath, the progress was truly smooth.

Chief Chamberlain Lewis wiped his cold sweat from his forehead as he prepared to see off the detachment that was leaving the imperial capital, preparing as if he was frying beans in a flash of lightning.

'A lot of things have happened recently. Something unusual is happening on the continent. Otherwise, His Majesty wouldn't be in such a hurry... ..'

There was another worry for Lewis recently.

Katrina Belpine.

The loyal knight commander known as the Emperor's Shield refused to leave the Emperor's side for several days.

He knew it well as he had been assisting the business for quite a long

time.

The only time Katrina gets so bad is when things are not going well.

just as expected.

The morning before, Seonghwang, who was preparing to attend a political meeting, suddenly sat down on a chair without saying a word. Then he seemed to fall down on the desk and lose consciousness!

When Luis ran away in shock, Katrina, who was next to him, calmed him down.

"Your Majesty, something happened and you were away for a while. Doesn't this happen often? Rest assured, Chief Chamberlain."

As she said, Seonghwang came to his senses after a while, but Lewis could not control his pounding heart.

Since he has served Seonghwang for a long time, he is not unaware of such cases. But recently, he has been leaving my body without warning too often.

Besides, a few days ago, wasn't there a time when you couldn't regain consciousness for a while after leaving your body like this?

'So, it probably started with Prince Mores... ..'

Seonghwang, who noticed Lewis' worried gaze, raised his hand with a nonchalant expression.

"It's no big deal. I came to see Mores for a moment. For some reason, he was far away from his group. "I guess you could say he was like that kid, but in a short period of time, he brought another strange beast by his side."

Apart from his slightly tired face, Seonghwang seemed to be in quite a good mood.

However, there was no way the Chief Chamberlain could not recognize the fleeting concern that flashed across his face.

"If you were going to keep watching impatiently like this, wouldn't you have told me to return to the ecliptic immediately when the Lycan Slope moves?"

Seonghwang smiled faintly in response to Lewis' question.

"If you carry a child in your arms for the rest of his life because he is afraid of falling, won't he eventually be able to learn to walk?"

"... .."

Solving the large-scale movement on Lycan Slope seemed to be a task comparable to 'baby steps' for Seonghwang.

Seonghwang said it indifferently, but there were two blind spots.

One is that the level of injury suffered by the 'child' from falling was so fatal that it was unrivaled.

Another thing is that in order to take care of a child who waddles and runs everywhere, parents must first put aside everything and follow the child around all day.

'Besides, you've been going to the prayer room too often lately!'

These days, the Holy Emperor has been going to the prayer room in the heart of the palace almost every day.

[Gaps] have opened more frequently than before, but it may not be just that. He must be moving his soul somewhere and doing something else at the same time.

Originally, he was a man with no change in expression and an insensitive face, but the fact that he had particularly dry eyes after going to the grave was not at all a good sign in Lewis's opinion.

'... This situation cannot continue forever.'

The chamberlain could understand how Director Katrina felt as she could not leave Seonghwang's side all day. She, too, feels a sense of crisis regarding the current state of the city.

And before long, their fears turned out to be real.

Seonghwang, who was walking towards the conference hall for the morning political meeting, suddenly stopped and sighed softly.

"this... .."

A strange silver glow flashes through his eyes as he gazes somewhere far away.

Seonghwang just turned away.

"Katrina, I'm going to the prayer room now."

"... Is it [niche]?"

"okay."

The loyal knight commander seemed a little surprised, but soon bowed his head and began giving various instructions to his subordinates.

Meanwhile, Seonghwang quickly gave orders to Lewis.

"Louis."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"It may be sudden, but please contact Tatyana to ask her to help with government affairs. I sent Benitus an official letter that I had prepared saying, 'Do not show off.' Delegate external matters to Capran and Cesare as before, but discuss them in advance with Cardinal Meyer if possible. and... .."

After speaking up to that point, Seonghwang paused for a moment, then twisted the corners of his mouth with a strange expression.

"If you see a guild informant who always comes here, tell them. 'I don't think I'll be able to go see 'that kid' for a while.'"

... That kid?

Before Lewis could question anything, Seonghwang left immediately

after briefly conveying what he wanted to say. Following him, the Knights of Saint Aurelion, led by Katrina, follow one after another.

Eventually, only Louis, the chamberlain, and Sir Francis, the adjutant who had been entrusted with all duties by Katrina, were left in the place.

"Phew."

Francis muttered, pushing up his glasses and letting out a small sigh.

"How long will the leader have to suffer like this? "His Majesty Mores will have to return to the imperial capital soon."

At first glance, it sounded like an unknown cause-and-effect relationship, but Lewis understood it right away.

okay. Mores is me.

This uneasy atmosphere slowly began to surface after he left.

'... But is that all?

When did all sorts of disturbances begin to occur in the ecliptic, which seemed to be peaceful and unchanging forever? When did His Majesty start to become noticeably busier?

In fact, wasn't it after the prince woke up from his fever?

'What on earth is happening to him or to this Delcross now, Your Majesty?'

Captivated by a vague and ominous feeling, Lewis stood blankly for a while, looking in the direction of the deserted prayer room.

* * *

Nate, who entered the prayer room, immediately hugged the people and slowly closed his eyes.

As always, his consciousness expanded greatly and quickly swept across the continent.

First, he looked at his son who was far away.

Would you say he is truly like that kid? With the ice monsters that I haven't seen in a day on my tail, I'm running somewhere with Masain. He should definitely not overdo it anymore.

The Liliun punitive force is heading towards Sigismund at full speed. I think Logan will make it just in time.

In a flower garden full of blue flowers, I see a girl standing in shock. Yes, you will have no choice but to do that eventually.

Nate's gaze moves south again, and towards the ecliptic.

His godson is seen chatting with barbarian warriors in front of a huge sea animal that he hunted in a swamp. It's good that he grew up to be a strong warrior, but it would be nice if he returned to the imperial capital soon.

Amelia, holding a book open, caresses a small wooden statue with a worried look on her face. She's a pretty sensitive kid, so I guess she just can't concentrate on the book.

Sisley was also seen training with the Inquisitors. Her daughter's expression has brightened a lot recently, but she occasionally looks back at her northern sky with a worried face, as if she has an unusual premonition.

Tatiana attending a political meeting, Melody sitting in the greenhouse garden and praying, and... Lizabeth.

[Good luck dad! We will not take our eyes off Mores!]

[Dad, Your Majesty! We will crack down on Arenja well, so go!]

The twins, who are the most childlike yet pretend to be more adults than anyone else, convey their thoughts to him.

Nate was a little relieved by this, and as always, he twisted the open [gap] greatly and distorted the space to face himself.

Then, beyond the sharp, tangled cross-sections of space, the aspects

he knew came to him with strong thoughts.

[You knew. Wasn't this all foreseen from the beginning?]

An old man is looking at Nate from afar.

[Now you will painfully realize how arrogant your actions were!]

Berseus holds the [Key] in his hand and smiles crookedly.

[If you change your mind at any time, come see me. Although the result may be painful, it will also be infinitely more beautiful.]

Mitra said, holding the bottle high.

[Krillarak! ㄸMae;Bttala#Gak!]

A huge stingray, which had forgotten even words, screamed as it gnawed at the [key] with its sharp teeth.

[I will never understand or admit what you did to us!]

A woman with heavy rain on her back said.

[If you can't turn it back, at least I hope your heart is at peace...]

A tree that had lived for countless years whispered.

And that concludes it.

Coo!

The alien demon king who fearlessly invaded Delcross alone revealed his gigantic form along with the entrance to the bottomless pit.

* * *

"... ... !"

"What do you think, sir?"

When Seongjin suddenly stopped, Masain looked back and asked curiously.

'what? Why do I suddenly get this eerie feeling?'

Seongjin tilted his head.

Perhaps reflecting his mood, the aura on his chest that was blocking the passage fluctuated greatly before quieting down.

"... No, nothing. "There's no time, so hurry up."

Seongjin tried to ignore the uncomfortable feeling and quickly walked towards Masain.

They had just stopped by the fourth guard post and were forcing the soldiers to retreat.

Every time I stopped by the guard post, the laughable incident of the soldiers going crazy over three shaved ice was repeated.

Still, when Orden explained it calmly, he somehow seemed to understand. Is it truly befitting of the sentinels of the devil's land to not show any agitation over trivial matters?

It was when they were about to lead the increased number of soldiers to the next guard post.

"... Grand Duke!"

Someone shouted from behind, running towards them at high speed. Instead of retreating the guard post, he was the fastest knight left to guard against the devil.

"Grand Duke! Gasp! "That Glatzer Troll!"

Hearing the driver's urgent cry, Seongjin and his party looked back at him blankly.

okay. As you can see, it's a glamor troll.

But now they tell me to call them shaved ice No. 1, 2, and 3.

However, the face of the knight who finally ran in front of the group was extremely serious. Panting heavily, he quickly reported to Orden.

"Glacier trolls, wow, on a large scale... It's an air raid! Gasp! "The number is by no means less than the Ice Base!"

"... ..!"

That wasn't the end.

"And wow, behind them are the Lycanslopes! "It seems like all the 500 animals that were thought to be heading to the snowfield turned towards the canyon!"

"this! "Was their actual target towards the canyon?"

Orden gritted his teeth and shouted.

Because most of the territory's power was concentrated on the ice wall base, the canyon fortress is currently almost empty.

"What is the distance?"

"Less than an hour."

It was hopeless.

They had already requested additional troops from the guard captain, but the enemy army was likely to rush into the fortress before they could even leave the territory.

"Let's hurry to retreat! "Send a signal in advance to the canyon fortress!"

Seongjin, who had been quietly listening to their conversation, raised his head. Soon Seongjin's urgent gaze meets Masain's nervous gaze.

-Sir Masain. You know that too, right? Maybe I can find out who controls the Glacier Trolls among them. If you just catch him, you will be able to greatly reduce the damage to your allies.

Just by looking at Seongjin's eyes, Masain knew what he wanted to talk about.

And Masain's answer to that was decisive.

-No way, sir!

Seongjin, facing those evil eyes, slightly turned his head.

okay. I thought so.

"Grand Duke. If you hurry, you'll somehow get to the fortress on time. I'm not going to go to the third ice wall, but isn't the height of the canyon fortress that high? "Once we get there, we'll probably be able to withstand their onslaught for a while."

Orden responded to Sir Oscar's words with a worried face.

"I guess so. The problem is the guard posts on the outskirts. "I sent a signal, but perhaps it would be unreasonable for them all to retreat in time."

Do we have no choice but to abandon the soldiers of the territory with whom we have endured hardships so far?

It was a time when Orden and the knights were in great agony.

Suddenly, a bright idea appeared in Seongjin's mind.

"ah! "What if it were like this?"

And after hearing his explanation, Masain and Orden's faces turned pale in an instant.

"... yes? yes?"

225. Air Raid (2)

Thump thump.

Earth-shaking vibrations approach quickly from afar.

Several soldiers who were rushing to the fortress following the emergency retreat signal looked at each other with puzzled expressions.

It's not even the time for the glamor trolls to be out and about, so what does this mean?

And they were soon able to visually confirm the identity of the vibration. This is because giant ice monsters suddenly appeared from the corner of the curved canyon.

"Ugh! "It's a Glatzer Troll!"

"escape! Run away!"

There is no way that they, who are only lowly soldiers, can deal with that gigantic magical beast.

The soldiers began to flee with all their might, using their best tactics. Fortunately, it ended quickly.

"Oh, don't go far!"

"Stop! "I am an ally of Sigismund!"

... what?

The soldiers who looked back and hesitated at the shout coming from the ice monster's eyes widened in another sense.

On the shoulder of the monster standing at the forefront, they saw the figure of someone they knew well. It was Orden, the archduke with a gaunt face.

"These are Vince... It is said that they are "We will not attack you."

bean... I beg your pardon?

"I came to help you retreat. "There's no time, so hurry up and get on here!"

"... Take a ride? "You mean the Glatzer Troll?"

"Rest assured that the prince is under good control."

It was a statement that made me doubt my ears, but wasn't it really three monsters kneeling in unison and lowering their posture?

My mouth was wide open at the unbelievable sight, but to my surprise, there were passengers on top of the ice monster. I could see the frightened faces of the prince, the knights of the Royal Guard, the Inquisitor, and even some of my fellow soldiers.

At that time, the prince who was attached to the head of Shaved Ice No. 1 poked his head out and warned him.

"At least get up to the top of your shoulders! "It's the part where the fall is the least when running!"

"... .."

"ah! Don't ride the guy in third. He fell a few times on the way there. "If you're not careful, you might get crushed by a pile of ice!"

The soldiers climbed up the ice monster's body, hesitating as if they were possessed by something. So let them settle down near the shoulders -

"Okay then, let's go."

Take the prince's words as a signal.

Kurrrrrr.

Making a heavy noise, the three Glature Trolls slowly stand up.

"Hold on tight! Don't forget to protect your head and neck with Aura!"

The prince's words were mixed with the sound of the wind and could not be heard properly. Because of the monsters' sudden acceleration, a strong wind blew into their faces.

The soldiers screamed as they grabbed random chunks of ice.

Thump thump!

Once again, the air in the canyon shook violently, and the snow on the cliff fell in patter.

'I wasted too much time!'

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who controls three shaved ice, was anxious in many ways.

Even though I now have passengers and have the hang of it, it took more time than expected to persuade the soldiers I met for the first time to get on the shaved ice.

Well, it's not something you can't understand. Because they have lived their entire lives fighting against demonic beasts in the demon world.

So, in a hurry, I let the shaved ice run at full speed, and this time the ride quality got extremely bad. Even if you keep hitting the car next to you while racing off-road, I can confidently guarantee that the impact will be less than this.

'I can't do this twice. When I was young, I had a fantasy about giant robots.'

It's a shame that he protected his body with aura, otherwise he would have suffered a concussion long ago.

"How much time is left now?"

"We only need to go around two more guard posts, sir!"

After answering like that, Orden looked at Seongjin with new eyes.

If you think about it, isn't Prince Mores the one who thought of the possibility of an attack by Glature Trolls and figured out how to control them?

Not only was the ice base able to prepare in advance, but it was also able to save the lives of soldiers it had almost given up on.

"Sigsmund owes you a great debt once again."

Seongjin made a bewildered expression at those words.

This and that are all debts. you man Then it goes bankrupt.

"What is so great about this?"

Yes, the first thought that came to Seongjin's mind was an extremely simple one.

If shaved ice measuring over 10 meters were to run at full speed, how fast would it be? Since the low hill can be crossed in one step, wouldn't it be possible to save all the soldiers who are delayed in retreating?

Even if you don't make it in time, you might be able to sneak by among the invading Glacher trolls.

Of course, the backlash against the idea was extreme!

In particular, Masain was furious and got angry at Seongjin.

"I don't even know what kind of devil's trick this is! But you are riding that suspicious thing yourself? "How will it appear to others?"

"Then, I'll take Sir Valerie with me as proof that it's okay. "What's the problem with the Inquisitor, who can be considered the spokesperson for the Inquisition?"

"yes? Why did I suddenly... .. ?"

Since when did I become the spokesperson for the Inquisition? Don't I have the right to veto?

Ignoring the red-haired Inquisitor muttering helplessly behind him, Masain's blood rose even more in his neck.

"It was only yesterday that you came back covered in blood! But you're doing something dangerous by yourself again? "I am absolutely against it!"

"Then why don't you, Lord Martha, ride with me? If I'm going to do something dangerous, I'll at least do it in front of Lord Masaine. "If something happens, you can help me appropriately, right?"

"Ugh... .. !"

Ah, Lord Masaine. Did you just do it? yes?

"... But low! Aside from us, that Vince... The question is whether soldiers who see them for the first time will ride them obediently. How did you come up with the idea of boarding a magical beast in the first place?"

"Then let's take the Grand Duke along as proof that the shaved ice is safe! The heir of a reputable territory will explain it well to them. yes?"

"... .."

No, there's something about that that I don't like," Orden pursed his lips with an expression on his face.

Where to go on the Orden topic!

The lives of the soldiers here are at stake, right? In the first place, you have no choice!

That's how we got here as a group, riding on shaved ice 1.

The control felt clunky as we had to make the three Glacher Trolls

move in unison, but fortunately, except for Bingsu 3 rolling on the floor a few times, the plan went smoothly.

Oh, except for the fact that some soldiers who were inexperienced in using Aurors were vomiting or stretched out from exhaustion.

Some time after that-

"Ahh! "It's a Glatzer Troll!"

"Relax! "It's an ally!"

"Don't ride No. 3, protect yourself with Aura!"

After repeating the process, Seongjin and his party were finally able to rescue all the soldiers at the guard post.

"Lowering. "There is no time anymore!"

Seongjin concentrated his mind on Orden's shout.

Sir Oscar, who led the rest of the party to the Canyon Fortress first, probably explained the general situation to the people. Then, even if he runs a little noisily, there won't be a big fuss.

"Everyone, hold on tight!"

At the same time.

Coo!

Three ice monsters kick off the floor and jump up at the same time. The frozen ground and the ice bridge collided violently, and small ice fragments scattered in all directions sparkled dazzlingly in the sunlight.

Hwii-

"I flew... ..!?"

With the soldiers' shocked cries.

Kwaaaang!!

The Glaturre Trolls jumped over a wide chasm in one go and began running gallantly toward the border of the territory.

* * *

At that time, at the Canyon Fortress, Sir Oscar was in the midst of an argument with the fortress's manager.

The person in charge was a fairly old knight named Sir Hans, who had retired from active duty due to an injury and was now in charge of all security around the canyon.

"So let's widen the entrance to the fortress as much as possible!"

"No, vice-captain. Does that make sense? The demonic beasts will come soon. "There isn't enough time to close the entrance and freeze it!"

"But the Archduke said he would bring back all the stragglers! "How many of them will be able to quickly climb the ice wall on a pulley rope!"

"But you can't neglect the defense of the fortress, right? "The safety of the territory is at stake."

In response to Sir Hans's awkward answer, Sir Oscar lowered his voice as much as possible.

"There is also a young prince from the Holy Empire among the group! Are you going to tell him to climb this height himself on a rope?"

"That's true, but... .."

Sir Hans picked his ears with a disapproving look on his face.

Then, boom boom boom!

A tremendous tremor began to approach from afar. The vibration was strong enough to slightly shake the ice walls of the fortress.

"Oh, look! The Grand Duke has finally arrived... ..!"

Sir Oscar's face, which had been turning around with a smile, suddenly hardened.

What appeared across the canyon were dozens of Glacher Trolls coming in droves.

It was an enemy airstrike.

"... Grand Duke!"

Sir Oscar grits his teeth with a sad look on his face.

In the end, you couldn't make it on time!

"... coming."

At that time, the exorcist, who was staring into space with blank eyes, spoke softly.

They were all members of the prince's party with strong personalities, but among them, it was the Holy Knight who tended to give off a particularly gloomy aura.

Even now, she was grinning evilly and mumbling something unintelligible in a hoarse voice.

"yes. That's right. It is as you said. Hehehe. Because Mores is Mores, right? Ah, yes. is it so. Mores is none other than Mores. "Huh."

A strange appearance, as if possessed by a ghost.

Sir Oscar was looking at her with a tired face, but suddenly Sir Claudia jumped up and shouted.

"oh! Look over there!"

She had already strengthened her eyesight with Aura.

"excuse me! "Your Majesty is coming!"

Just as she said, three familiar ice monsters appeared at the fork in the canyon leading south. That figure running with people carrying them on their shoulders.

"Lowering!"

"Your Majesty!"

However, the group's happiness was short-lived.

Coo! Thump thump thump thump!

With a strong impact sound, one of the enemy Glacher Trolls suddenly increased its speed and started running towards the fortress. The intention was clearly to notice the movements of the prince and his party and stop them!

Sir Oscar shouted in urgency.

"I'm going down! "Hurry and lower the pulley!"

"Oh, no, but... .."

But there was someone who hit Sir Oscar's player.

In an instant, a knight catches the rope in front of him and jumps without fear from the top of the fortress, which is well over 20 meters high.

It was the resident knight, Sir Maria, who usually spoke little and was quiet.

[illegible]

A pulley spinning like crazy.

The soldiers belatedly took the line, but Sir Maria, who had slipped on the ice wall as if she were falling, had almost reached the bottom.

Sniff. She jumped the remaining distance without hesitation, slowly walked forward and drew her sword. She was facing the enemy Glatzer Troll straight in the face.

Maybe it's because I'm not used to Schneeshuhe enough to run yet. However, there was a weight in that deliberate movement that strongly attracted the hearts of the knights.

Sir Oscar, who was unconsciously mesmerized by the sight, came to his senses belatedly and grabbed the next pulley.

Doo doo doo doo.

At that time, the prince's guards had almost reached the edge of the fortress. However, the Glature Troll running alone from the front was a little faster.

The ice monster did not slow down and rushed towards Sir Maria, who was blocking its path.

"Sir Maria!"

She is clearly the Greenhouse Knight of the Imperial Capital who is dealing with a demonic beast for the first time.

Nevertheless, the momentum of the high-ranking knight, who was slowly leaking a distinct external energy, was more than enough to overwhelm the momentum of the ice monster that was launched at once.

Cheoeok.

With a step taken with the weight of a large mountain.

Sir Maria's sharp sword cuts deep into the thick ice in concentric circles.

Banajas Type 5 Type 6. Bee hive sting.

Kwa-kwa-kwa-kwak!

The blade of the sword shot out like lightning, brutally stabbing the leg of the Glacher Troll that was approaching. The essence of a stab that boasts one of the most destructive powers in the standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights.

Whoops!

The monster, whose feet were blown wide open, momentarily lost its balance and stumbled. At that moment, Bingsu No. 1 came right next to the guy, lightly passed him and walked quietly behind him.

Craddangtangtang!

The huge ice monster fell to the ground noisily, momentarily shaking the fortress.

"Sir Maria!"

When Seongjin reached out for Shaved Ice No. 1, Maria quickly jumped on top of it and shouted.

"You were almost late, sir!"

"Anyway, that's true! "What on earth is this dangerous?"

The prince who was shouting so loudly had a truly angry face.

Sir Maria, who looked at Seongjin with wide eyes for a moment at that unexpected scolding, eventually let out a light laugh.

"I was worried too, sir."

"... "No, whatever."

Seongjin sheepishly turned his head and gave an awkward look.

"Lowering! "Hurry!"

"There is no time!"

At that time, I saw the group on top of the fortress stamping their feet and shouting at him.

Seongjin roughly estimated the distance to the enemy and informed Orden without hesitation.

"Time is running out. "I guess I'll have to open the fortress entrance myself."

"yes? Lowering. What are you going to do..."

Orden asked in confusion, but instead of answering, Bingsu No. 3 burst out of line from the side.

Seongjin, who gradually got a knack for controlling shaved ice, began to individually control No. 3, which was light and had no people on board.

"no!?"

Sir Hans is frightened by the sight of an ice monster approaching with terrifying force.

"Open the way, Shaved Ice No. 3!"

With the prince's orders.

Kuaang!

The mighty fist of the Glatrue Troll rushed towards the narrow fortress entrance.

226. Air Raid (3)

Cooung-

With one punch from the ice monster, a large hole is dug at the entrance to the ice wall. The entire fortress shook at once from the impact.

"What the hell is this!"

A frightened Sir Hans stuck his head out of the ice wall and screamed.

"Lowering!"

Orden, who had become thoughtful, belatedly tried to dissuade Seongjin.

Hwiik-

There was no hesitation in the movements of Shaved Ice No. 3. The fist raised high comes down and hits the ice wall again.

Quaaaang!

".....!"

Damn it.

This time, part of the ice wall cracked and the area near the entrance collapsed significantly. When Bingsu No. 3 pulled out his arm, which was stuck deep in the ice, a cave wide and deep enough to fit a wagon was created.

Crashing, broken pieces of ice fall to the floor.

"...Is that how strong the Glacher Troll is?"

The ice monster's two punches were enough to scare everyone present.

During the winter these would sometimes come down close to the border, but they never caused any significant damage to the ice wall.

'If they come all at once and keep pounding on the ice wall with that kind of force...'

Isn't it only a matter of time before the fortress falls?

Orden, forgetting to stop the prince, imagined the worst with a blank face.

In fact, this happened because it was a proper punch from someone who had fought with only his bare fists his whole life, but there was no way Orden would have known that fact.

"It would be impossible to cut through all the passageways. The lower wall is too thick."

The person who showed such terrifying destructive power seemed to be somewhat dissatisfied.

"Anyway, why are you making such a stupid face, Archduke? You need to move now!"

"...yes?"

"Take the people and hide inside there. It can't be helped that the entrance to the tunnel is a little crushed, but you will be able to clear the blockage easily."

The approaching Glature Trolls are already just around the corner. There was no time.

However, the number of soldiers rescued was quite large, and to make matters worse, there were not many people who could properly brace themselves due to the enormous forced march.

It will be difficult for everyone to enter the fortress through the entrance tunnel in time.

Seongjin, who judged that, improvised and created a space to evacuate them. While I was gathering myself one by one and moving through the tunnel, I needed a place to hide from the enemy, even if only for a moment.

"...It's clear to the outside anyway, so what's the point in taking refuge there?"

"I'll take care of that, so don't worry."

"....."

I have no idea what they are going to do. However, after catching a glimpse of the prince's confident eyes, Orden was overcome by a strange feeling that something might really work out.

"Hurry up!"

Kurrrrrr.

The shaved ice cars carrying people bow down in front of the entrance and lower their posture. Dozens of soldiers who were hanging in a huddle began to climb down the ice monster's arms.

Most of the soldiers were walking unsteadily, but there were also many soldiers who were unable to move at all.

Surprisingly, Bingsu No. 2 carefully moves his arm and brushes them away toward the pit. It was a fairly delicate movement.

Not only Sir Maria, but even Sir Valerie, who was relatively intact, jumped down and started helping the people.

"Aren't you going?"

Orden, who was carrying two soldiers who had fainted from concussion, looked back at Seongjin and asked.

"Because I have to control the shaved ice. And Lord Martha...."

He also looked at the people with the hope that he would help them, but Masain flatly refused with a hard look on his face.

"I must be by your side."

Uh, okay. I expected that.

It was when Seongjin was scratching his cheek shyly.

Kurrrrrr.

Suddenly, the enemy Glacher troll that had fallen down wriggled and tried to get up.

"...this!"

Seongjin, who had completely disengaged from the group as he was carrying out the detailed work of moving people, attempted to move shaved ice No. 3 at the same time, which he had been putting down for a moment in his haste.

Fortunately, Seongjin's will was passed on to Bingsu No. 3.

Coo!

Thanks to this, the ice monster, which almost got up and rushed at him, was quickly overpowered by Shaved Ice No. 3 and rolled on the floor. The guy wriggled violently, but Bingsu No. 3 was using his limbs to tie him up tightly, as if he was wrestling.

Orden, who was nervous for a moment, sighed in relief and spoke to Seongjin.

"Then, your Majesty, please evacuate in time."

But there was no answer back.

It has to be that way. Seongjin was already busy controlling the three shaved ices individually.

While Bingsu No. 1 lowers his posture and assists, Bingsu No. 2 carefully moves the people into the pit. And Bingsu No. 3 was

working hard next to her to subdue the enemy Glacher Troll.

So, you really don't have the energy to care about your body.

"Hurry, Archduke. I think your Majesty will only move once your evacuation is complete."

Orden, who was nodding at Sir Martha's recommendation, suddenly felt something eerie and looked at the prince's face again.

"...Lowering?"

what? For a moment, I felt like the prince's eyes were sparkling strangely.

But there was no time to delay. Orden, urged by Masain, jumped down toward the ice cave carrying his soldiers.

'weird... ... '

Meanwhile, Seongjin was thinking blankly, holding his ice heart.

He was clearly busy controlling the shaved ice with the same tricks as before. At some point, I lost consciousness and felt dizzy, and it was no longer a hassle to move them in turns.

'No, something is different.'

Right now, I am not 'manipulating' these things to move.

I feel like I have become shaved ice. I had a strange feeling, with my body and mind splitting into three branches and my vision expanding in all directions.

-The evacuation is over, sir. Now you too must move.

Masain's voice in my ear feels distant, as if a layer of veil were covering it.

Nevertheless, Seongjin clearly understood the meaning of his words and the situations occurring around him.

And what you should do now.

'Now we have to stop the ice wall, Bingsu No. 2.'

As soon as Seongjin thinks that, the ice monster closest to the entrance moves its body.

Kurrrrrr.

The large hole in the ice wall was completely covered by the body of Shaved Ice No. 2. Even though there were no specific instructions on how to move, it was done in what Seongjin thought was the most ideal form.

And before his eyes, a guide window to the world of normalcy, clearly distinguished from before, appears.

□Individual 2□

□Temperature scroll: Activity (ice separation) ----- Sleep (ice fusion)□

As Seongjin moved the scroll in thought, the temperature of the ice monster stuck to the wall dropped sharply and it began to freeze solidly on the ice wall.

Damn it.

Small ice crystals grow here and there, filling up all the gaps between the Glatute Troll and the ice wall, as well as some of the cracks.

"...What is this...."

Everyone in the fortress held their breath at the sight, which was hard to believe even after seeing it with their own eyes.

Sir Hans, who had been running wild just now, saying that the prince must have gone crazy, was so shocked that his eyes were now popping out.

"Lowering!"

At that time, Masain called Seongjin again in an urgent voice.

The ice wall has filled in before they can escape, and they are now forced to climb the ice wall on ropes.

However, even though the enemy is right in front of us, there is still no answer from the prince who holds the heart of ice in his hand.

Masain, who was shaking Seongjin with a look of frustration, suddenly noticed something on Seongjin's face and took a deep breath.

".....!"

The prince's eyes were shining strangely.

An inorganic brilliance that seems to reflect everything in the world. It is not an unfamiliar sight to Masain.

Didn't someone he knew well often do this too?

"...Excuse me, sir!"

Masain, who intuitively sensed Seongjin's condition, quickly carried him on his shoulder and looked around.

The entrance is already completely blocked with frozen shaved ice No. 2. He measured the height of the ice wall, then his face hardened and he launched himself with all his might.

Papak!

Masain jumped upwards from the head of Shaved Ice No. 1 and stepped firmly on the ice, holding on to the rope hanging on the wall.

"All, pull! Pull the rope!"

Sir Oscar, who was anxiously watching the scene from the fortress, encouraged the soldiers.

Soon, the rope that supported Masain and Seongjin's bodies began to pull upward.

"Sir! Sir, what is happening all of a sudden?"

You have to wake up first.

Masain, having decided so, called out to the prince repeatedly while holding on to the rope with one hand.

But there was still no reaction from the prince. Even though his eyes were clearly open.

-Are you okay? Lowering! Come to your senses!

And Seongjin was also keenly aware that his current condition was not normal. She was listening to Masain's voice without missing a single word.

It was just that his shouts seemed to be heard in my ears and at the same time as if they were coming from very far away.

His limp limbs were shaking uncomfortably with Masain's movements, but Seongjin couldn't even think about supporting himself.

Instead, it was shaved ice No. 1 that began to move in response to his will.

Kurrrrrr.

Bingsu No. 1 slowly stood up with his back to the fortress and stood facing the group of Glature Trolls that were right in front of him.

24 Glazer Trolls.

Including the guy who fell in front of the fortress, this is probably the maximum number that 'Ice Heart' can register.

'... Ah, yes.'

Seongjin suddenly realized.

Those are my enemies. But Lord Martha won't let me fight them anyway.

Then, isn't there someone here who is willing to fight the enemy on

my behalf?

'I already know that. 'But why would I bother to return to my body now?'

The bodies of shaved ices are huge, strong, and can be reused at any time. It's okay to run wild!

Clumping.

Following Seongjin's will, Bingsu 1 clenched his fists vigorously.

A strong fist that can crush and destroy most living things in an instant. A pleasant smile bursts out along with a refreshing sense of liberation.

'haha!'

Then, Bingsu No. 1 responded and cried out loudly.

Woooooo-

and.

thud. thud. thud.

The ice monster ran lightly with wide steps and immediately swung its fist as soon as it encountered the enemy. It was natural that they could not respond properly to such a sudden preemptive attack.

Whoa!

With a tremendous impact sound, the head of the Glacher Troll standing in the lead exploded at once.

* * *

"Lord Masaine!"

"Hey!"

Masain, with the prince around him, was able to quickly climb over the wall with the help of the group on the ice wall.

Wong wong!

The wolf dog sent to the fortress first with the group ran at them, wagging its tail vigorously as if the leash had been cut off. Sir Claudia, who was pulling the rope almost as if she was about to cry, also throws the pulley aside and hurries over.

She looked at the prince slouching on Masain's shoulder and asked with a worried face.

"Lord Masaine. Why are you acting like this all of a sudden? You're hurt somewhere..."

"No, it's probably nothing. You'll be fine, Sir Claudia."

Masaine took off his winter clothing, laid it on the ice, and carefully laid Prince Mores on top of it.

Chop chop.

The dog that came next to him kept licking his cheek, but the prince still didn't move at all. If you don't look closely, you'll wonder if he's even breathing.

The only sign that the prince was alive was the occasional flash of silver in his half-open eyes.

"...Shouldn't we call the council member right away?"

Sir Hans asked cautiously, as the situation was obviously not normal. I hope that this will be enough to cover up the crime of lese majeste that I committed when I was not in a good mood.

But Masain shook his head.

"It's okay. Rather, please help those trapped at the entrance to move into the fortress. Not only the Archduchess, but also Sir Maria and Inquisitor Valery are still trapped at the entrance."

Then he stood up and looked at the demonic beasts approaching, filling the canyon.

Dozens of Glacher Trolls approached close by, and hundreds of Lycanslopes followed behind from a little distance away.

"We need to find a way to deal with those demonic beasts right now. Didn't you just see that? If those Glaturre Trolls stick and pound properly, the ice walls of this fortress won't be able to hold out for long."

"Huh!"

"For now, our group will go outside. How many other Oryo users are there in the fortress who can fight?"

Then Sir Hans muttered with an embarrassed look on his face.

"All those with good skills have been sent to the Ice Wall base. All that is left in the fortress now is a guard for minimum security. We have requested reinforcements from the territory, but now there are four Wolf Knights, including Vice-Captain Oscar. It'll be everything."

He had strong faith in only one ice wall.

Masain was conflicted at that answer.

Isn't this a hopeless number to even call it a military force? Can't we just carry the prince around and evacuate to the imperial capital like this?

at that time.

Slurp.

The sound of a sword being drawn was heard.

"But Lord Massaine, you will still want to fight as long as you can."

As if sensing his agony, Sir Claudia spoke with a determined expression. Commander Bruno and Sir Calmen also quietly look at Masaine, clutching their swords behind her.

A steadfast gaze that does not even think of retreat and does not show even the slightest sign of conflict.

Masain suddenly felt dumbfounded, and looked down at the prince lying quietly and laughed.

'Lowering. Since when on earth did our group become so helpless that they couldn't tell what was coming and just rushed in? Isn't this all due to degradation?'

But maybe that's the same for me too. Could it be that we are becoming incorrigible like these people?

Without knowing whether the heat quietly boiling in his chest was pride or shame, Masain slowly pulled Misra from his belt.

Then, as if they could not be defeated, the Wolf Knights also bravely drew their swords.

"The Gorge Fortress is the last bastion in the north that defends the Sigismund Territory! All Wolf Knights, raise your swords!"

Sir Oscar shouted in a voice full of spirit.

"Archers, raise your bows! If possible, load up the aurors and aim at their hearts!"

That was when they steeled themselves and were about to go down the ice wall.

As they held on to the rope and looked down, they saw an unbelievable sight.

thud! thud! thud!

The ice monster suddenly rushed forward with great force, blowing off the head of the leading enemy in one blow!

Whoa!

A loud bang accompanied by a huge impact sound that shook the canyon! The Glacher Troll's head falls to pieces.

".....!"

Before they could even see the flying pieces of ice, the ice monster quickly turned around and this time raised its elbow and struck the heart of the guy next to him.

Quang!

Whoops!

The heart of the monster that was standing stupidly was torn into pieces, and the body of the huge Glature Troll collapsed to the floor, helpless.

Craddangtangtang!

Tremors strong enough to shake the fortress surround the area.

Of course, the ice monster had already turned away from him and was already moving quickly in search of another target.

"...What is this?"

"Vince... is that Vince?"

The amazing action of one Glacher Troll.

Everyone in the fortress looked down in fascination, completely forgetting the sense of crisis from earlier.

"Oh! That...!"

However, Lord Calmen, who was stupidly opening his mouth, suddenly clapped his hands as if he remembered something.

okay! Surely those movements looked a lot like someone he knew?

therefore.

The young boy who had single-handedly defeated seven capital guards.

"...no way?"

Then, Leader Bruno, who had been quietly observing the battle of the

Glatire Trolls, nodded.

"It certainly resembles his movements. It seems you are still controlling Vince."

Before he could finish his words, the four Glacher Trolls in the lead instantly became incapable of fighting.

While the panicked enemies were scrambling to find the target, Vince, who had run quickly, was now digging into the center of the Glatire Trolls.

"The Glatzer Troll... is it something that can move like that?"

Even Sir Oscar, who has been through many hardships in the Demonic World for over a dozen years, is seeing this for the first time.

While everyone in the fortress was shocked, only Sir Sharon looked into space with a relaxed expression and muttered.

"Hehehe. What is it? Mores, if your father sees you, he will definitely scold you. Yes. Hehehe. No, Mores, aren't you feeling too relaxed without your father's Majesty? It's okay. That's right. Hehehe."

227. Air Raid (4)

The northern canyon is a rugged area lined with high cliffs left behind by the disappearance of glaciers.

It is known that it is advantageous for defense because the border between it and Magyeong is relatively narrow, but it is not a space that can be blocked by a single person.

It is wide enough for giant 10-meter-long Glacher Trolls to walk side by side in a line.

Seongjin realized that even if he foolishly stood in front of the fortress, he would not be able to intercept all of this ice monster's troops.

'In that case, I'll make it so that you have to stop me from over there!'

That was the reason why Bingsu No. 1, who had destroyed those in the lead, suddenly jumped into the middle of the group of Glacher Trolls.

Puff puff!

The center of the line is greatly disturbed by Seongjin's rapid attacks. Then, they all stopped moving toward the fortress and began moving toward Bingsu No. 1 as their target.

'also... ... !'

Whoops!

Seongjin quickly shook his head, breaking the heart of one of the guys in the back line and drawing the enemies deeper.

As expected, there is only one 'Ice Heart' with 25 Glaturre Trolls registered. He's also a manipulator.

The enemy pilot, except for the one captured by Shavedsu No. 3, designates everyone as one group and manipulates them to react to one goal.

'... Besides, he's not that good at hand-to-hand combat.'

Although the glamor trolls surrounding the No. 1 shaved ice are shaking their fists in droves, their movements are so simple that they make you sigh.

If it were Seongjin, he would have focused on controlling one person and intercepting the intruder.

In any case, it was clear that the guy controlling the ice monsters was around here. Nine times out of ten, they will be at the rear of this line.

In that case, the closer Bingsu No. 1 approaches, the more threatened it will feel, and it will not be able to advance towards the fortress carelessly.

Rumble.

The pieces of ice that were shattered and scattered on the floor regain their shape and rise up. As I heard from Orden earlier, as long as they didn't destroy the heart at once, they seemed to be constantly replenishing ice to restore their bodies.

And this entire area is covered with abundant ice.

'But it's the same here!'

As soon as Seongjin thought that.

Kurrrr.

Bingsu No. 1's arm, which had suffered a major crack from repeatedly hitting the enemy, was repaired in an instant.

Seongjin spins his forearm, which is instantly covered with solid ice. Without realizing it, I raised the corners of my mouth.

'ruler. Let's see how long you guys can hold out?'

* * *

Wow-

Those who were anxiously looking out from the fortress came to their senses when they heard the pitiful howl of a wolf dog.

When I turned my head, the wolf dog that was licking the prince's cheek suddenly curled its tail and whined as if it was scared.

"...Your Majesty is smiling."

Sir Claudia said this after seeing the prince's faintly smiling face. Then he wrapped his arms around her shoulders and started shaking slightly.

"Wow, you're just smiling, but why does it feel like I'm getting chills for no reason?"

As she said, it felt like the temperature around me had dropped significantly, to the extent that it could be sensed even in the frigid Sigismund Territory.

'Well, it's not something you'll experience once or twice while living by His Majesty's side.'

After confirming that the prince was still breathing evenly, Masain turned his head again and looked at the canyon with worried eyes.

The Glature Trolls are slowly retreating, led by Vince, but is this really all the enemy has in store?

Even if that were the case, there were still hundreds of Lycanslopes camped out in the distance. After the Glacher Trolls' ranks collapsed, they stopped coming closer and just stared at the fortress with bloodshot eyes.

'Whether it's fast or late, if we want to force the enemy to retreat completely, we have no choice but to get out of the fortress.'

Masain thought like that and opened his mouth.

"As soon as the Glature trolls retreat, let's wake him up. It's true that the fortress has turned a corner thanks to you, but we can't leave him like this forever."

Then, from the side, Sir Sharon grinned darkly and added,

"Hehehe. Yes, the situation is not good for Mores. If you do something wrong, your father might leave everything behind and come back? That's right."

"....."

"Hehe. Mores needs some kind of opportunity. Are you saying that he needs someone to awaken his spirit instead of his father, His Majesty? Really."

Sir Hans looked at Sir Sharon with a puzzled expression.

For those who don't know much, she is making profane remarks about both the emperor and the prince.

"Bu, blasphemy...."

"This is not what she says, so pay no more attention."

Next to him, Director Bruno coldly cut him off.

"Bringing someone else in with you does not make the lese majeste offense you committed earlier, Sir Hans."

At those words, the aged fortress commander lowered his head in a cold sweat.

I made a mistake with my mouth for a while in my later years and things got so complicated.

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who had completely defeated half of the enemy

ice monsters, was already in a trance.

Flutter!

Damn it!

The more you break the hearts of each of them, the more your keen senses from your prime come back to life, and your expanded spirit becomes endlessly exalted.

[Lowering...]

Someone's faint thoughts that seemed to disappear tickled his ears.

It was a voice that felt vaguely familiar and extremely sad.

[I must now go a long way from which I may never return. It will be a path that cannot be told to anyone. It's a world full of regrets, and the only person here who knows me as a whole is you. Please stay...]

Faint thoughts are cut off by that.

However, Seongjin was unknowingly answering to the master of thought that he did not know who he was.

are you okay. Even if it takes a long time, you will come back here someday.

[...] Do it, repent.]

[Bethelah. Only the penance of sacrificing one's whole life...]

And after that, a number of murky thoughts disturbed Seongjin's ears.

[Repent, repent.]

[Bethelah. Only the pain that leads to death...]

It's really noisy. Look at this! The entire northern region is covered with your thoughts! How long do you plan to keep doing such nonsense?

[Bethelah. So, only when we come to full repentance...]

Don't be funny. Shall I tell you the truth?

Even in death, your suffering will never end. Another eternal pain awaits.

It was when I was laughing like that without thinking. Suddenly, someone's strong will came into Seongjin's ear.

[■■■■ ■■!]

... what?

Seongjin tensed up and listened.

Even though the words were completely incomprehensible, he somehow realized that the voice was calling him.

[Are you really ■■■■ ■■? Ah, I finally found you!]

The moment it identified Seongjin, that thought immediately and strongly clashed with my will. The surprise and joy that emanated from him were so passionate that it was extremely burdensome to face them directly.

[The moment you came to visit me, I have been calling you ever since! I was told that there was no interference from the guardian, but now it looks like a 'gap' has opened up!]

okay. I guess so.

Seongjin thought bitterly.

[Now is your chance. Come back to us quickly! We are all anxiously waiting for you!]

okay. Maybe it would be better that way.

It's this and that, let's see, it's really annoying...

That was when I thought about it.

A voice that sounded like it was ringing suddenly invaded Seongjin's mind.

[Lee Seong-jin!]

Woe!

As if cold water had been poured on me, I suddenly came to my senses.

[this! Almost done! Alas, just wait a moment! Don't close the connection! ■■... ..!]

The man's voice quickly fades away, and Seongjin's vision returns clearly.

Clumping.

When I realized that my hand was inadvertently being held tightly, I saw that Seongjin was strangling the neck of a Glacher Troll with the hand of Shaved Ice No. 1.

'... ..!'

The guy who was lifted up by the neck by Seongjin was struggling on his legs.

At least that was the only thing that moved. When I looked around, I saw the broken remains of Glacher Trolls all over the place. The number seems to be well over 20.

Sure enough, I see three or four ice monsters running away in a hurry in the distance.

Did they decide that they could no longer lose power pointlessly? In the end, it looks like they are planning to retreat operationally.

As I was looking at them blankly, a clanging sound continued in my head.

[Wow! Seongjin Lee, do you know what I just discovered? Well, I guess controlling those things is... What are you doing now?]

The demon lord who left my mind for a moment to look around came back with a decision.

And the Demon King, who was closely examining Seongjin, was frightened.

[hey! Are you crazy? Why is my soul somehow coming out of my body again? What is this guy who already has an insecure connection with his body doing? Hey, you're really going to die!]

'... ... '

Around that time, changes occurred in the enemy's rearguard as well.

There was a big commotion among the Lycan Slopes, and soon they began to disappear one by one beyond the canyon. A few surviving Glacher Trolls stagger after the group.

'It looks like the guy controlling the ice heart is hiding among the lycan slopes.'

What should I do now?

Should we reorganize the remaining guys and attack again? Or shall we try to replenish the power lost in the canyon?'

While I was thinking that, the demon lord was racing in my head and making a fuss.

[Lee Seong-jin! Seongjin Lee! Hey, Lee Seong-ji!]

'Oh, it's noisy.'

Still, thanks to this guy, I came to my senses.

At some point, the strange sense of unity as if I had become one with Shaved Ice No. 1 had disappeared. Seongjin slowly blinked his eyes, feeling his body fully awaken.

"...Lowering!"

"Sir! Are you coming to your senses now?"

The welcoming voices of Martha and Sir Claudia are heard from the bedside.

Chop chop.

When I wondered why his face was strangely sticky, Max had been licking his face ever since.

"Uh, it's okay. Just a moment."

Seongjin responded by swinging his arm and biting the wolf dog.

Maybe it's because I was the first person to enjoy shaved ice until just now, but the movements of my arms and legs are strangely unfamiliar.

He slowly got up and tried to walk, but Masain, who noticed what he was trying to do, quickly supported Seongjin from the side.

"Shall we take you to the ice wall like this?"

Seongjin nodded without answering.

Yes, the enemy has retreated, but we need to finish off the remaining ones.

So Seongjin looked out of the fortress and focused his mind on the ice heart.

As my condition gradually recovered and I was able to stand on my own, the feeling of controlling the shaved ice was back to the cumbersome way it was at first.

But there was no rush. Controlling the remaining shaved ice was not that difficult, as No. 2 stuck to the ice wall and completely stopped its activities, and No. 3 had to just roll around on the floor with the Glacher Troll tied to it.

As Seongjin carefully focused on No. 1 and borrowed the demon king's spiritual eyes, a blurry information window appeared before his eyes, just like before.

□The Glatrue Troll is in a near-death state. The connection to the existing Ice Heart is forcibly broken. Would you like to register a new object?□

Ah, it is possible to obtain an object this way too. If I had known this would happen, I would have let some of them live.

Seongjin registered shaved ice number 4 as the ice heart without hesitation.

When we let go of No. 4, who was still on the verge of being strangled and broken, he hurriedly buried himself in the remains of his comrades and began to rebuild his body.

Rumble.

Seongjin then turned his attention to the Glacher Troll that No. 3 was holding. After beating the guy hard, he quickly registered him as number 5.

□Number of entities that can be registered: 5/25□

good. It's increased.

I don't dare to control them individually, but if we move as a group, it will be a pretty good force.

Only then was Seongjin able to take a breath and talk to the demon king.

'okay. Why were you making such a fuss earlier? 'What on earth did you find?'

Since I was feeling a little grateful towards him, I tried to ask him gently, but the words that came out were very blunt.

However, the Demon King, who had been anxiously rolling around in the flame crystal until then, shouted in an excited voice as if he was excited just by being asked.

[So, don't be surprised! I think the ones controlling them are either demon species or demon contractors!]

... That is an unexpected achievement.

[Are you sure! It was beyond my range of movement, but I could definitely feel the magic energy there! It was just one guy!]

okay. Since it's the devil's job, it's probably not wrong when it comes to devils.

'Then what is the relationship between the devil and the Marquis d'Arciano? Are they one of the same? Or is it just a temporary alliance?'

From what I heard from Seonghwang's father, I thought that Berseus Dashiano, a member of the 'Council of Six', would not have openly colluded with the devil.

This would mean that there is a separate reason for the devil to reach out to the Demonic Sutra.

While he was deep in thought, Seongjin suddenly caught sight of the small window that had been blinking and bothering him earlier.

☐Object 2 is fused to ice. Do you want to separate the object?☐

☐Temperature scroll: Activity (ice separation) -/- Sleep (ice fusion)☐

okay. First, we have to get out the people trapped in the ice wall.

With that in mind, Seongjin moved the scroll around to control the temperature, and the following window appeared in front of him.

☐Object 2 is fused to a sufficient amount of ice. If the separation location is not specified by the user, objects will be separated randomly within the ice.☐

... what?

At that moment, Seongjin's mind began to spin with an eerie premonition.

'Wait a minute... ... !'

Come to think of it, wasn't the place where Bingsu No. 3 was located deep in the ice of the canyon?

'Did a window like this come to mind back then?'

Maybe it was. I don't remember much because there were so many unfamiliar windows at the time.

Anyway, at the time, I wondered how it had gotten so deep that it was frozen.

'... What if it was melted into the glacier in this way after it was formed? And what if it randomly split off in the middle of a glacier?'

Orden said that.

Glacher trolls, who cannot be seen where they are hiding in other seasons, appear from somewhere and wander around the demonic landscape during the cold winter.

'What if the temperature drops below the set temperature, and fusion naturally changes into separation?'

Seongjin set the maintenance temperature of the Glature Trolls high, making them move even though it was not winter.

This was the reason why ice monsters, which caused severe cold damage just by touching them, gave off a cold that was tolerable even when people were riding them.

'Then they must have used the same method.'

When they mobilized the Glature Trolls, were they simply trying to pound the high ice wall from the outside?

'That's not it! Perhaps the most efficient way to break down an ice wall is... ... !'

... this!

Seongjin turned away from the group with a disappointed look on his face.

"We're in big trouble! The ice base is in danger now!"

228. Defensive Battle (1)

"The ice base is dangerous!"

The group was dumbfounded by Seongjin's unexpected words.

Haven't you finally defeated your enemy and can take a breather?
Why suddenly?

However, the party could never listen to the prince's words in vain.
Wasn't Prince Mores the one who warned in advance of the Glacher Troll's attack, which no one expected?

Above all, the prince, who always had a sullen expression on his face, was rarely showing signs of great agitation.

"We must quickly inform the Ice Base of the additional dangers of the Glature Trolls!"

"What do you mean by other dangers?"

Seongjin tilted his head to one side as if he was embarrassed by Masain's question. In his eyes, the blurry text on the information window appears particularly clearly.

□ If the separation location is not specified by the user, the location of the object is randomly assigned within the ice. □

If this is used as he expected.

"...I'll show it to you first."

Seongjin said that and looked around the entire ice wall.

Perhaps, if this were a normal world, a small map would have

emerged where one could select the location of the ice monster.

However, in the original dimension of Delcross, what moves objects in the normal world is the user's strong will or strong thoughts.

So wouldn't positioning somehow work that way too?

'Somehow, I think it will work like this... .. !'

Trying to think of a specific location where he wanted Shaved Ice No. 2 to separate, Seongjin thoughtfully moved the scroll of the window.

□Object 2 is fused to ice. Do you want to separate the object?□

□Temperature scroll: Activity (ice separation) ----- Sleep (ice fusion)□

OK.

Cuckoo cuckoo.

Suddenly, with a loud noise, the entire fortress began to shake violently.

"What is this?"

Sir Hans let out a scream that was like a scream and fell to the ground. He was living a peaceful final year, but what he experienced on this day made him seem almost 10 years older.

"Look over there."

With the prince's words as a signal, an amazing sight soon unfolded before the eyes of the group.

From the inside entrance of the ice wall, which was intact, large chunks of ice suddenly separated and began to be pushed outward.

Kurrrrrr.

Large chunks of ice were pushed outward endlessly, forming a large tunnel, like a tunnel.

And they seem to roll in one place and come together, creating the shape of a huge giant towering toward the sky!

".....!"

Eventually, inside the fortress, where the tremors had subsided, a Glacher troll that had never been seen before stood proudly.

And at the end of the ice wall, which has been dug out as deeply as the volume of the giant ice monster, a large hollow ice cavity is revealed. This was the very space where Seongjin hurriedly evacuated the soldiers.

"You? What is this...?"

Orden, who had been digging an entrance with his sword inside, looked outside with a bewildered expression as his vision suddenly became brighter.

"...Unbelievable....."

The meaning of the prince's demonstration was very clear. The faces of the group members who realized this immediately turned white.

"Yes. If even one Glacher Troll touches the ice wall, the ice wall will no longer be a complete fence."

Seongjin put a wedge in their guess.

He was confident that he would pass through the shaved ice and rush into the territory without paying any attention to the ice wall blocking his path.

If only we could come up with a clear image like now and carry out careful manipulation to support it.

Of course, based on what I've dealt with earlier, I don't think the enemies are capable of such delicate manipulation.

'But even if the location is not selected and random separation is done in a crude way, the results do not change.'

Glature trolls that are fused to the ice wall can create large holes in the ice wall, depending on where they re-separate.

If we continue to repeat fusion and separation like that, the ice wall may one day become sloppy in its internal structure and collapse all at once.

On the other hand, on this side, without completely destroying the ice wall, there would be no way to fuse and attack the hiding guys.

No matter how you manage to defeat them, about 2,000 Lycan Slopes will attack the border where the ice wall has disappeared.

There is no doubt that we will inevitably lose.

"That's not possible! Until now, I've never known something like that was possible for a Glacher Troll...!"

"Well, that's probably because no one has attempted to directly control this guy yet."

Seongjin added, holding up the ice heart in his hand.

"Besides, there's no telling how many more items like this they have."

"....."

A moment of silence passed between them in the face of the overwhelming reality.

"...It may already be too late. First, I will report this to the ice base."

When Sir Oscar spoke in a trembling voice, Seongjin nodded.

"Yeah. That would be a good idea."

And Seongjin was lost in thought, touching his ice heart.

Although there are Dekaron Knights and Wolf Knights, it would probably cause great chaos if the Glacher Trolls start running amok inside the fortress.

Did the Margrave hear his warning in time? In that case, he might at

least be able to quickly retreat his troops to his territory and engage in a defensive battle from there... ..

Masain, who was looking at him closely, opened his mouth in a low voice.

"...You want to go to the ice wall base to provide support."

"Yes?"

Seongjin, slightly surprised, shook his head.

"Oh, no! I'm not that thoughtless either. Old Vincent and Lord Ilma are there, right? From anyone's perspective, the situation is better than here, right?"

"It looks like the base is in danger, so I want to go anyway, but I guess you're concerned that Sir Maria and I will have to leave the fortress following you."

"hmm....."

It was as he said. Because there are only two people here who are higher level knights or higher.

Even so, it is a canyon fortress where most of the troops have escaped, and if even these two are absent, it will surely collapse in the next air attack.

So Seongjin... ..

"You're not thinking of sending just those Vincs there, are you?"

omg! Sir Masain, is he a ghost?

As Seongjin's eyes widened, Masain's face hardened.

"I thought that would be the case. After helping you for so long, I think I now know to some extent what you are thinking."

"....."

"I don't know much about the principles of how that stolen object

works. Still, this one thing seems certain. If you send those things far away and it becomes difficult to control them, won't you try to cling to them, even if it means completely putting aside your own body like before? ?"

Seongjin was stung by the request and quietly averted his gaze.

It was true that I wondered if it would be possible to control it from a distance without looking, if only I could feel a sense of unity with the shaved ice like before.

"The ice wall base seems to be unstable..."

However, Seongjin also had some awareness of how much he had worried Sir Martha.

"Whew...."

However, Masain, who was slowly showing his sinister energy, touched his forehead and let out a long sigh.

"Take Lord Valerie with you, sir."

"...uh?"

"He is the spokesperson for the Heresy Tribunal, so even if you openly manipulate this wrongdoing, the church will not take responsibility for it."

Lord Masaine?

Seongjin blinked at those unbelievable words, but Sir Valerie quietly joined in from the side.

"Hey? So, the two of you from earlier, since when have I been the spokesperson for the Heresy Tribunal..."

"Besides, just because Sir Valerie is missing, there won't be any major vacuum in our strength."

"...No, Lord Masaine?"

The red-haired Inquisitor, who had suddenly been branded as a knight with meaningless power, raised his hand in protest, but no one paid attention.

"And it would be a good idea to take the archduke with you as well. If an outsider suddenly appears riding a demonic beast, who would easily believe that he is an ally? He will also be needed later to join and communicate with the people at the Ice Wall Base."

Orden, who had barely escaped from being trapped in an ice cave, approached with a puzzled look on his face.

"Well, what are you saying now...?"

noisy. On the topic of Orden.

Your opinion doesn't matter now.

"We will remain in the fortress with the Wolf Knights, sir. So don't worry about the fortress."

"....."

"As long as we keep the Glacher Trolls at bay, this fortress will be safe forever. No matter how many Lycanslopes come, we won't be able to easily get over this ice wall."

I thought he would be stubborn and say he would follow me wherever he goes.

Seongjin didn't know what to say to this man who seemed so determined. Her embarrassment, gratitude, and guilt all flood in at the same time, tightening her chest.

Masain smiled calmly as he looked at Seongjin's complicated expression.

"Then you won't have to completely abandon yourself like before again."

".....!"

Wow.

Regrets of conscience pierced my heart like a dagger.

* * *

[Keuuuu...]

The alien demon king groaned and tried to hold on to his fading presence.

However, from the body that was split diagonally, almost as if it had been torn in half, what little black demon energy was left was pouring out in vain.

If this continues, it is only a matter of time before the soul disappears completely.

'This is the end of this body? 'Am I, who has dominated and fused countless dimensions for so many years?'

This is a truly vain result, considering that we ran with such confidence.

When he raised his head with a somewhat sorrowful feeling, what was looking down at him were extremely indifferent silver eyes.

Just by looking at him, the Demon King felt like he was suffocating from the enormous pressure radiating from him.

'... 'Is that really just an agent of God?'

I flew away with a light heart because I was a human and proudly pretended to be the king of the dimension.

But what he encountered was something more alien than anything else in the world.

Although he is the only human among the kings, he appears more inhuman than any other king. Although he is one step away from cause and effect, he is also deeply involved in cause and effect.

okay. Just like the distant ancient gods who were in chaos did.

'How can something like this exist!'

Shouldn't humans be allowed to do that? No, something like this shouldn't exist in this world!

While the Demon King was screaming inwardly, Seonghwang suddenly raised his head, glanced somewhere, and said.

[I guess I have to end it soon. Another idiot driven by nonsense is coming here.]

okay. It's nonsense.

The idle demon lords who fell for that nice-sounding trick are probably rushing here to avoid losing the lead.

[...] Please let me go.]

The alien demon king, who was carefully assessing the current situation, opened his mouth with a nervous look.

[Let's make a deal! If you send me back safely like this, I will take revenge on those who encouraged me to invade this place! Doesn't that help you too?]

[Were you encouraged?]

[okay! It was a certain high-ranking demon lord who led me here. He tricked many people besides me! Isn't this clearly a ploy aimed at you and your dimension?!]

Then Seonghwang, who had been looking down at him for a moment, tilted his head to one side. Very puzzled.

[...] This is truly unknown. A person who personally oversees the life and death of all things in one dimension is completely unaware of the cause and effect that is connected to him.]

Apart from the expressionless face like a stone statue, the voice is somewhat sad.

[Was this dimension really the target of that high-ranking demon lord? Did the various demon lords he tempted really head here?]

[...] ... ?]

[How do they usually look at your dimension, and have they given you the order of coming here?]

[...] ... !]

... no way.

Looking down at the extremely pale and tired Demon King, Seongwang spoke calmly.

[You say you were drawn to a scent carried by the wind, but you don't know where the wind actually came from. Well, is it worth it? The intention is cleverly hidden in many stages.]

[I am... ... !]

[So you die here. Even if you return from here anyway, the only thing that will greet you will be beasts that will tear your flesh apart.]

With that said, finally.

Suddenly.

The long, white-light Auror blade cruelly cut the Demon King's head in half.

The guy who couldn't even say his last words began to slowly blur with his eyes wide open.

Pusssss.

The last remaining insignificant magical energy was scattered fleetingly between the gaps in the dimension.

It's going to be a long day.

Seonghwang sighed and gathered the salmon.

After defeating a guy who came at me to complete a hidden quest, this time he was such an idiot that he ran towards me without knowing that my house was being robbed.

Everyone is invading this place at odd times and for their own reasons, but even so, Seonghwang knows full well where this wind originated.

'And then... ... '

Before pulling into another space, Seonghwang quietly closed his eyes. This is to check on the children who were keeping his eyes on him during the moment of free time.

Seonghwang, who had been concentrating for a moment, suddenly let out a deep sigh.

'... 'Son!'

For some reason, I had been feeling uneasy earlier, as my mischievous son had just crossed a dangerous line.

-You knew. Wasn't this all foreseen from the beginning?

The old man warned me like that.

What can I do? Ever since I decided to be with that child, every moment has been like walking a very precarious tightrope.

-Ugh! Glacher trolls attack!

-Do not attack! It's an ally!

-It will pass like this, so everyone get out of the way! If you do it wrong, you might get stepped on!

Moreover, the child was currently doing something else strange.

Thump thump thump.

He was sitting on top of an ice monster that was charging at random, and was wreaking havoc on the boundaries of the territory.

As always, everything the child does is a mess.

'But son. I know that you will overcome the hardships that come your way in life.'

If so, that is enough.

Seonghwang slowly opened his eyes and aimed the salmon at the next approaching opponent.

229. Defensive Battle (2)

'... Please, there shouldn't be any trouble with Mores and Logan.'

Strangely today, the feeling of anxiety doesn't go away easily.

Amelia felt her hands shaking slightly as she turned the pages, and eventually closed the book and sank into the armchair and closed her eyes. And out of habit, she fiddles with the small wooden statue on the table.

'I should have told Mores to come back right away. No, he should have sent more reinforcements... ... '

It was all in vain.

The prince of the Holy Empire abandoning his territory in crisis. Even though he is young, what will his subjects think of him?

The same goes for reinforcements. No matter how much you think about it, you can't come to any conclusion beyond the Lilium Detachment.

"Whew...."

Amelia sighed softly.

Reason knows well that he made the right decision. But isn't that true of the heart?

Mores, that child is now in the midst of dangerous demons!

At times like this, Amelia felt regretful that she was the eldest daughter of the royal family. If she had been in the same position as Herna, she would have sent her entire knightly order to punish her

father.

"Amelia. Look at this!"

At that time, Mirabelle, the personal maid, entered the study holding a large bouquet of flowers.

"The handsome prince of Rohan sent me these pretty flowers again."

"Leonard...."

Amelia frowned slightly.

That trash bastard, who was confident that he had made a connection with himself after the New Year, is persistently sticking to the ecliptic, showing up at various banquets and social gatherings.

The reason why Amelia keeps looking at this disgusting man instead of cutting him off.

It was partly to lay the groundwork for future moves in Rohan, but more than anything else, it was to bring his hidden associates to the surface.

Romaine. A gloomy half-masked man.

Leonard's closest aide and strategist who held the royal family of Rohan in one hand and sometimes performed strange tricks.

'And the [key] that Romain had...'

A device that made it possible to control strange races of people that had never been heard of before, as if they were limbs.

If you do not find out its identity and prepare in advance, it will pose a great threat to Delcross in the future.

While Amelia was deep in thought, Mirabelle asked in an excited voice.

"Where should I put this? How about decorating it here in the study so that I can look at it from time to time while studying?"

Such a terrible sound.

"Just throw it in the trash can."

"Oh my, why?"

"It's quite cliché to see the same rose every time."

"Hoho. Young ladies are usually influenced by a gentleman's sparkling wit and rich culture. But Amelia, a true and excellent gentleman is always honest and consistent."

Amelia blinked at her subtle words.

"...Does Mirabel like him?"

"Yes. Why not? He is so devoted to our princess. The more I look at him, the more I see him, isn't he such a gentle and handsome prince? Looking at him, I think it would be okay to go to Rohan with Amelia in the future."

It was a scary sounding statement.

At that moment, the afterimage of a miserable woman covered in fresh blood vaguely overlaps the smiling figure of Mirabell, embracing a bouquet of red flowers.

-You are a terrible devil, Leonard! I curse you! Even after death, I will curse you forever! Argh!

Screaming. That scream.

In the end, his tongue was cut off and his vocal cords were damaged, and he vomited like a mere animal's cry.

".....!"

Amelia closed her eyes tightly without realizing it.

"Ah! Of course, no matter how cool she is, she's still a lot worse than our princess."

Mirabelle, who noticed the princess's blood-stained face, gave a blank

expression with a bewildered expression.

"...Yes, Mirabelle. It's a little early, but I have to stop by for lunch and then go to the Pearl Palace."

In the end, Amelia, unable to completely shake off the terrible afterimage of the past, carefully picked up the little Saint Aurelion wearing a conical hat and said gloomily:

"As expected, Amelia brought it too."

A lonely lunch with only two of the siblings left.

A small saint sitting across from us places a wooden statue on the table. She was a bald old woman decorated with white lace.

"I also felt strangely anxious today. I couldn't concentrate on training at all, so I came back early."

When I told them I was taking a break, everyone was really worried and took me outside the gym. I just waved my hand and saw him off. I thought all the inquisitors at St. Marsyas were scary, but it turns out that the people are kinder than I thought.

Sisley muttered like that.

Crunch crunch.

Even though Seo Yi-seo, in Cadmus mode, started eating next to her, Amelia couldn't willingly reach for the food for a while. Because her scary afterimages were still eroding her mind.

Sisley stared at her for a moment and spoke as if comforting her.

"Don't worry too much, Sister Amelia. Actually, I had a good dream last night."

"Nice dream?"

Amelia adjusted her posture and took a listening attitude. No one in the royal family knew about her younger brother's occasional precognitive dreams.

"Yes. It was a good dream. A bell rang above my head, and then I realized that Saint Aurelion appeared in front of me. He was wearing a red cone hat and for some reason had a long white beard. And a kind downpour of rain. There was heavy rain and laughter."

Amelia tilted her head.

Cone? mustache? Heavy rain?

Doesn't it seem a bit different from the image of him portrayed in the public eye?

"He smiled and told me that if the children of the Holy Family continue to be good children and pray hard for Brother Mores, they will soon provide him with great help."

"help....."

It was too awkward to be considered a precognitive dream. Still, isn't it a story of small comfort?

As Amelia's face turned pale, Sisley clenched his fists at her.

"Sister Amelia. And now there's me too, right? I've been hearing a lot of people say I have talent these days. I'll quickly become as strong as Brother Logan and continue to protect our entire family."

Amelia, who was looking at the fern-like white fist, eventually burst out laughing.

What on earth are you doing with those cute hands that are perfect for wielding a meat knife?

"You still have a long way to go, Sisley. You need to become stronger."

"More here?"

"So. You see the imperial palace knights every day, right? To become like them, you have to become much, much stronger than you are now."

"hmm....."

Earlier, I swung the flail and destroyed the scarecrow with just the wind pressure. The knight commander said that not only among squires but also among lower-level knights, there are not many who show such power.

However, after pondering for a moment, the little saint soon came to a clear conclusion.

Well, anyway, the stronger you get, the better it is, isn't it?

"Okay. You mean to work harder in the future, right? Leave it to me!"

The sisters smiled sweetly at each other as they shared a conversation that would probably have horrified the Knights of St. Marsyas if they had heard it.

* * *

Meanwhile, Logan, who had left for Sigismund Territory, was currently riding alone.

"There isn't much left now!"

Sigismund was a faraway place. If you travel from the ecliptic at your leisure, it will take about 15 days.

Even though he had been urging the detachment to speed up from the beginning, Logan could not hide his anxious expression from start to finish.

-Don't worry about us, go first, sir. I'll follow shortly.

In the end, the Holy Knights who set off together came to suggest that to Logan.

As the Liliun Detachment was accustomed to long periods of movement, the Paladins had excellent physical strength. If you make full use of your innate divine power and run your horse, you can move at a speed that is more than twice that of an ordinary person.

But even so, the speed was not enough for Logan.

The youngest Dekaron Knight and Sword Master in existence on the continent.

Logan's use of Auras allowed him to constantly accept and materialize the Auras around him, making it almost impossible for a horse to feel his own weight.

In addition, it constantly imparts strong divine power to the horse. That's how you can continue a long forced march without almost resting, sleeping, or eating.

-Then, let's meet at Sigismund Territory!

Normally, Logan would avoid this type of forced march, even if it meant thinking about his words, but this time, the situation was a little different.

Anxiety.

The anxiety that had been slowly growing since leaving the ecliptic had now turned into a feeling strong enough to tighten my body.

"I'm sorry, Roxana! Just give me a little more strength this time!"

When I patted its white mane as if to comfort him, his Rottweiler, which was running vigorously, let out a small cry.

'It's different from what you or Sisley feel. 'This isn't a premonition or anything.'

Logan was well aware of the extraordinary premonitions that sometimes appeared in children of the Holy Family.

I thought I was far from that, but now my heart was beating strangely fast and my mouth was burning with tension.

He knew where this feeling came from. When a large battlefield awaits right in front of him.

-If you safely bring Mores to the imperial capital, I will return all

remaining funds from the subjugation team's activity expenses as your pocket money.

Seonghwang's words, which I heard before leaving, kept lingering in my mind.

The more I think about it, the more meaningful it becomes. He clearly did not say 'help Sigismund', but 'bring Mores back safely'!

'Lee Seong-jin already has several records.'

Even at this moment, there is no telling what that guy who just left is doing.

'Please don't do anything rash until I get there, Seongjin Lee!'

Hee hee hee!

Based on the divine power pouring in once again, Roxana increased her speed even more and let out a powerful cry.

* * *

"Ouch! It's a Glatzer Troll!"

"Don't be surprised! They are our allies!"

A familiar scream followed by an explanation.

Seongjin looked back at Orden with a tired face.

"How long are you going to keep surprising us with the same situation? Didn't you contact the estate in advance?"

Then Orden cried out to Seongjin with a tearful face for the first time in a long time.

"Now we are moving faster than the entire West, sir!"

Ah, I see.

Since I was used to radio on Earth, I had forgotten about the times here for a while.

Boom boom boom!

Bingsu No. 1 was literally running without hesitation. Every time I took a step, the scenery changed quickly, and even the slight hills were a step with long legs.

"...Sir, I really feel like I'm going to die."

Sir Valery, who was constantly self-healing with divine power, groaned from behind.

Seongjin and his group, who was in such a hurry, completely covered the distance that would have taken half a day on foot in less than an hour.

"Aaaah! Glatzer...!"

With a loud scream, a narrow ice wall appeared before their eyes. While the height is almost the same as the size of shaved ice, the entrance is small enough for one person to barely pass through.

"That is the final gateway to the territory!"

"good!"

Seongjin quietly held the ice heart in his hand and concentrated his mind.

☐Would you like to fuse object 1?☐

okay!

"Stop, Grand Duke! If we continue like this, we'll collide with the ice wall!"

With the frightened voices of the soldiers flowing through one ear, Seongjin moved the scroll forward in resignation.

☐Temperature scroll: Activity (ice separation) -/- Sleep (ice fusion)☐

Quang!

As soon as the ice monster hit the ice wall, it froze and fused.

Damn it.

At that time, Seongjin and his group had already jumped onto the ice wall. The soldiers gape as they watch them gliding high.

And even before his body was pulled by gravity, Seongjin immediately started separating the shaved ice and the ice wall.

□Object 1 is fused to ice. Do you want to separate the object?□

Of course!

□Temperature scroll: Activity (ice separation) ----- Sleep (ice fusion)□

Kurrrrr!

The ice wall separates and Bingsu No. 1 reappears. As soon as Seongjin and his group landed on its shoulders, the ice monster began running like a storm again.

Boom boom boom!

"What is that...."

The dazed soldiers looked up at the ice wall.

There, the ice wall was standing empty, convex on the outside and hollow in the same shape, like the shape of shaved ice, like the mold of an ice monster.

"If the enemy can pass through the ice wall at this speed, not only the ice wall base but also the territory...!"

Orden, seeing the fearsome movements of Shaved Ice No. 1, mutters as if he is concerned. Then Seongjin shook his head lightly.

"No, that won't happen!"

The place they were really trying to attack was probably the Canyon Fortress.

Didn't they try to slowly gather the Lycan Slopes in front of the third

ice wall over several days and then concentrate all of the territory's troops on the ice wall base?

Even if they had passed through the ice wall base in this way, they would not have been able to break through the numerous troops gathered there at once.

But the situation is different in the empty canyon fortress. If we had been able to attack in this way, we would have been able to reach the territory in one go.

"But the guy who invaded the fortress had poor piloting skills, right? He must have been the enemy's main force."

"...okay."

Seongjin confidently shrugged his shoulders towards Orden, who looked much more relaxed.

I dare say, it would be hard to find someone as good at using the Ice Heart as me, right?

And they finally arrived at the entrance to the estate.

Hundreds of soldiers were lined up there, probably the fourth troop that the guard commander was assembling.

"Your Majesty!"

Although he seemed a little surprised by the appearance of the group riding the shaved ice No. 1, Sir Sebastian soon greeted the group with a calm face.

Then he delivered serious news.

"Ice Wall Base has fallen! It is said that Vincent and the Wolf Knights are currently remaining in the rear, holding back the enemies while the troops retreat!"

230. Defensive Battle (3)

The ice wall base has fallen!

At that news, there was a heavy silence among the group for a moment.

"It is said that the Glacher Trolls who attacked showed an unusual appearance. They said that they performed a trick of disappearing as if they were melting into the ice of the ice wall. It is said that they had no choice but to abandon the ice wall."

"That can't be possible...."

Since its predecessor, the Margrave, took a long time to complete, the Ice Fortress has never allowed a single intrusion by a demonic beast.

Although the possibility of being breached was considered, the shock Orden received was beyond words. Because it was a barrier that had already been standing strong even before he was born.

"The entrance to the ice walls looks like that. Is the troops retreating well?"

On behalf of the frozen Orden, Seongjin, who had maintained his composure, asked a question to the guard captain.

"Fortunately, the second ice wall was expanded last night by order of the head of the family. Although it is slow, the retreat is proceeding smoothly. It's just...."

After speaking up to that point, Sir Sebastian's gaze caught a glimpse of a group of soldiers passing by.

They are each holding tools such as pickaxes, hammers, and chisels

and are moving around at a pace. At a glance, I could tell what they were moving for.

"In the case of the first ice wall, work was still in full swing, so it appears that the troops gathered there are stranded. We are currently working on expanding the entrance on both sides simultaneously."

Still, it seems that Margrave Sigismund did not heed Seongjin's warning in vain. Seongjin breathed a sigh of relief.

"Anyway, it would be unreasonable to send support right away from the territory."

"Yes, sir. It is difficult for the retreating soldiers to move now. I just hope that the remaining Wolf Knights in the rear will hold out well."

Sir Sebastian's voice as he answered like that was extremely calm. Even though his wife, Sir Ilma, is fighting a difficult battle in the rear.

Maybe deep inside you want to run alone.

However, now that the Margrave and the Wolf Knights are away, the only person responsible for the safety of the territory is Sir Sebastian himself.

Seongjin thought as he looked into the guard captain's steadfast black eyes.

'The more I look at her, the more I think Louise takes after her father.'

Louise.

As my thoughts naturally turned to her, I suddenly remembered a faint thought that had passed me by like a dream while I was piloting Bingsu No. 1.

-Lowering. I now have to go a long way from which I may never return.

Was that really Louise's voice? This is unknown at the moment.

Perhaps it was simply an auditory hallucination created by Seongjin's premonition. When she left for her flower garden, she had a strange feeling that if they parted ways like this, they wouldn't be able to see each other again for a long time.

'But if it was really Louise... ... '

They said they would come right away after confirming the reality of the flower garden, but then suddenly they have to go somewhere?

What on earth did she see there?

'... no!'

Seongjin shook his head and stopped his thoughts of going the other way.

'Louise, I'm the type of person who knows what to do. For now, we must first solve the problem facing the territory!'

Seongjin looked around and cleared his head.

"Are they the fourth troop that was supposed to leave today?"

"Yes, sir. As soon as I heard the news of the base's fall and retreat, I decided to build a new defensive position here. It's something I'm not used to, so I need some guidance."

As the guard commander said, the hastily conscripted soldiers were forming a textbook defensive formation under the instructions of several senior soldiers.

Since they had been accustomed to fighting on ice for a long time, it was like their first time facing a magical beast on flat ground.

Some troops are building low log fences, while others are diligently clearing ice and snow with shovels. Perhaps it was because I heard that the Glatute Trolls were fusing with ice.

Still, under the command of Sir Sebastian, preparations to face the enemy are progressing steadily. In this situation, what Seongjin could do was decided.

"Grand Duke. Hurry up."

Seongjin said, patting Orden's shoulder, who was still in shock.

"We can use Bingsu No. 1 to widen the ice wall at once. The retreat of the troops will be even faster. After that, let's immediately support the remaining Wolf Knights in the rear."

"Lowering....."

"The reason the Wolf Knights decided to abandon the ice wall was probably to fight them in places without ice. As long as they move away from the ice wall, they are still just regular Glature Trolls."

Then Sir Sebastian looks at Seongjin from the side with an expression of surprise.

what? why? what? If you guessed that, shouldn't you have told this guy a long time ago? Because he's just watching, this simple guy thinks the whole world has collapsed.

"Furthermore, even if it fell to the enemy, it would not be easy for them to completely collapse that thick tertiary ice wall. There is absolutely no way a few Glacher Trolls could handle the volume of ice."

"That means...."

"Even if there is a hole, it is only a small part of it. The large army of Lycan Slope will not all cross the ice wall and flock to the territory at once."

At that explanation, light slowly returned to Orden's eyes.

"Yes, that's right. Just as you said!"

"If you understand, move quickly!"

Then the red-haired inquisitor who was watching next to me grinned and waved his hand.

"Then, I will stay here and take care of the injuries of the retreating

soldiers. May the Lord's blessings be with you both as you carry out this important mission! I hope you return safely."

Of course, before I could move a few steps, Seongjin caught me by the waist and dragged me away.

"Where are you running? Spokesperson of the Heresy Tribunal. I need to serve as proof that our shaved ice No. 1 is harmless."

"...Please save me, my dear."

* * *

Before the ice wall base fell.

The Wolf Knights, who faced the Glacher Trolls in the snowy fields, initially formed in groups and dealt with them smoothly.

In particular, old Vincent, who had been on the battlefield for the first time in a long time, flew around the battlefield as if he had wings.

Flutter! Flutter! Whoops!

The ice monster's body is cut into pieces by the old man's powerful sword strike.

Wooooooo-

The Glacher Troll, which was struggling as it quickly lost ice, eventually laid down on the snowy field with its heart exposed and defenseless. And with her single sword, my heart was shattered and I remained silent.

"Go for it as much as you want! Wahahaha!"

The old man's loud laughter echoes through the snowy fields.

In that way, they quickly reduced the number of glamor trolls. Soon, seven out of thirty were completely unable to act, and the Wolf Knights were dealing with the remaining ice monsters without much trouble.

So they didn't care when a Glacher Troll got close to the ice wall.

Anyway, it is a huge wall of ice that is more than four times the height of the body. When you reach the bottom, it is a thick barrier that is just over 15 meters wide. No matter how hard you hit something, it's probably going to crack.

The strange thing happened then.

Ugh.

This is because the Glature Troll that touched the wall became one with the ice wall and froze.

Although he had lived dozens of lives guarding the boundaries of the demon world, old man Vincent had never seen anything like this.

"Ugh?"

The old man's eyes widened, and Sir Ilma shouted as he ran towards him.

"Vincent! I guess there's a reason why the Lycan Slopes put Glacher Trolls at the forefront! Could it be that they're trying to gather together on the ice wall and create a bridge to cross over?!"

"what?"

The old man, who had a puzzled expression on his face, soon burst into laughter.

"Hahaha! Even so, it's all useless! All you have to do is cut it all up before it comes together properly!"

Rather, wouldn't it be a gentle target because it's frozen?

"I'll cut your heart out in one fell swoop like this!"

In this way, Dekaron Knight's sharp sword mercilessly cut into the frozen Glacher Troll.

All of the giant figures clinging to the wall were cut off, and the

surface of the ice wall regained its smooth appearance in an instant.

however-

"...doesn't exist?"

The ice heart that should be inside the guy's body is nowhere to be seen.

Kuuuuuung-

It was then that a small vibration occurred.

"...no?"

A battlefield where gigantic beasts run rampant. I could have just dismissed it as nothing.

'No way?'

Dekaron Knight's keen senses recognized that the vibration was coming from deep inside the ice wall.

At that time, a Glacher Troll ran past the old man and stuck to the wall again.

Ugh.

The startled Dekaron Knight hurriedly cut down the giant, but as expected, no heart was found in its body.

"What the hell is this...."

And one. Another one.

While the old man and the Wolf Knights were panicking, there was a gap in their defense and several more ice monsters were frozen on the ice wall.

If you rush over and cut it open, you still can't see the ice heart. As if it had completely melted into ice.

"no way.....!"

Lord Ilma took a deep breath as he remembered the creepy family. The fact that they completely melted into the ice wall...

And unfortunately, her ominous imagination quickly became reality.

Kurrrrrr.

The top of the ice wall seemed to be shaking, and then suddenly, a huge Glacher Troll rose from the top of the ice wall.

Woooooo-

The soldiers, who were standing dumbfounded by the sudden situation, were thrown down the ice wall like fallen leaves by the arms of the ice monster, which was swinging at random.

What awaits them is ice 40 meters below.

"Aaaahhh!"

"Aaaah!"

Thump thump thump.

Soldiers hurriedly rushed to the ladder to avoid the demonic beast stalking the ice wall.

However, as people began to hang on to the ladder indiscriminately, the ladder lost its balance and fell to the floor along with the soldiers.

Pow! puck!

The eerie sound of something breaking reverberates one after another.

Coo! Boom!

The vibrations from the ice wall also began to gradually increase. Now, all the Wolf Knights in the snowfield can feel it.

Ooooooh-

To make matters worse, a series of long howls rang out from the

chippy leaf forest in the distance. The units of the Lycan Slopes, who had been holding back until now, began to move in unison.

It was a nightmare.

"The ice... Ice, which had been a strong defensive wall until now, is now becoming a greater threat than anything else!"

Sir Ilma's decision was quick.

"Vincent! Matriarch! We must move our troops to a place where there are no ice walls! We must go to a place where there is no large ice where they can hide!"

When the Wolf Knights, who had lost their ropes and pulleys, managed to climb up the ice wall on their own and move inside the base, the Glacher Trolls, who now had no hesitation, crossed the snowy field and started slamming into the ice wall as much as they wanted.

Coo! thud!

Following the one wandering around on the ice wall, ice monsters wandering around inside the base soon began to appear one by one.

When the Wolf Knights attacked all at once, they were able to quickly take care of him, but other Glacher Trolls, who sensed his presence, clung to the ice wall again and hid themselves. And it appears again in a completely unexpected place.

Several unlucky soldiers fell victim to the ice monster's fists again.

"If we replace our troops, we can somehow survive. But if things continue like this, there will be too much unnecessary damage!"

The Margrave also quickly came to a conclusion. It would be much more advantageous to deal with them if they retreated and dragged them to the rear.

But it was not easy to retreat.

Although the entrance to the ice wall was widened overnight, it was

still not enough for a force numbering over 700 to move quickly.

It was a time when we were supporting the slow retreat and struggling to deal with the Glacher Trolls who had come and gone for a long time.

They received incredible news.

"Matriarch! The first and second ice walls have completely collapsed!"

... what? how?

And they were soon able to see the answer with their own eyes.

Boom boom boom!

In the narrow retreat road leading to the second ice wall, a huge Glacher Troll proudly appeared.

"Aaaah! The Glature Troll is attacking! It's in the direction of the territory!"

"Has the territory been hit? Is it an enemy bucket!?"

and.

"No!"

"It's our troops! Get back now!"

They hear a somewhat familiar voice explaining this.

"...Grand Duke?"

"To the lowest level?"

A person is riding a Glature Troll? It was a sight that I could not easily believe even when I saw it with my own eyes.

However, the Glature Troll that rushed into the base quickly calmly crouched down and stretched out its arms to the floor. From anyone's perspective, it was a meticulous move to safely disembark the people on board.

"Am I dreaming right now?"

Old man Vincent mutters with a lost expression.

Hwiik.

Prince Mores, who jumped off the ice monster, approached him with an angry face and shouted.

"You frustrating old man!"

"...what?"

As an old man who had been revered as a Dekaron Knight and a great general of the Empire his whole life, it was an insult I had never heard before.

"This brat is actually a prince...!"

However, Seongjin shouted at the old man, Vincent, who was in tears.

"Are you doing this right now? Shouldn't we catch the guy who controls them first! Why is Dekaron Knight doing such a foolish thing?"

"What...?"

The old man's eyes widened at the unexpected words, and the prince seemed frustrated and pointed his finger at one side of the cliff surrounding the base.

"You really don't know that?"

".....!"

Only then did the old man open his eyes wide.

On the cliff the prince is pointing with his hand. In the dark shadows of the trees.

Dekaron Knight, whose senses were sensitive enough to catch demons even without divine power, immediately identified a suspicious

presence when given the opportunity.

That ominous and evil feeling.

Just like that of a demon species.

"...How on earth?"

Does that kid know of a sign that even he couldn't catch?

Then the young prince gave a firm command to Dekaron Knight. A strange sense of intimidation, one that was difficult to resist, enveloped her entire body.

"What are you hesitating about? Catch that guy right now!"

231. Defensive Battle (4)

The total number of Glaturre Trolls registered in the Ice Heart is five.

So at first, Seongjin thought about taking two shaved ice with him. Of course, it was canceled due to Masain's strong opposition.

Perhaps he had figured out that the prince's condition would become more abnormal as the number of individuals controlled increased.

'The guy controlling the Glaturre Trolls may be closer than you think!'

Thanks to this, Seongjin had a lot of free time and was able to continue thinking about various things while moving Shaved Ice No. 1.

'Sir Sebastian said so. Old Man Vincent and the Wolf Knights are currently fighting fiercely against them within the base.'

That would mean that the person controlling it is seeing the situation inside the base with his own eyes.

Not only are they dealing with the Wolf Knights, but they are also dealing with the Dekaron Knights. How can they survive even for a moment with such clumsy control?

'Then he can never be beyond the ice wall!'

Unlike the canyon fortress, which is lined with high cliffs, the ice base is an open area with a snowy field in front of it.

And an ice wall over 40 meters high is blocking the base. It is impossible to visually see the situation inside the base from the rear.

'The only suspicious area is probably the cliff surrounding the back of

the base... ... '

So is it okay to be a little optimistic about the situation? There's Sir Ilma and Old Man Dekaron Knight at the Ice Wall Base, right?

Maybe I'll find him before I get there...

Then, the devil bastard gently scolded me from the side.

[Lee Seong-jin, do you think all people are like you? Expecting your level from others is too much to ask.]

'hmm... ... '

Well, I was recently aware that my senses had suddenly become much more sensitive. Maybe even more so than during my Hunter days.

Since when did that start? Was it after capturing the Demon Tree? Or was it after drinking medicinal tea?

Anyway, recently, there were many cases where Dasha's presence was detected faster than the former Dekaron Knight, Leader Bruno.

And those senses were fully utilized to conceal their presence. Thanks to the greatly improved 'Auror concealment', wasn't there a time when he escaped from the base without Director Bruno's knowledge?

Of course, it was a secret from Dasha.

"Sir! We're almost at the base!"

At that time, Orden hinted to Seongjin.

Then, facing the front, he vigorously shouts the phrase he had been repeating over and over again.

"Don't be alarmed! These Glacher Trolls are our allies! We're here to provide support!"

Boom boom boom!

They were currently stuck to one side of the retreat road and running

quickly against the movement of the troops. It is like facing the people who are retreating from the front.

Thanks to this, while running here, Seongjin was able to fully encounter the raw emotions on the soldiers' faces.

The fall of the third ice wall, which was thought to be a perfect defense shield. The intense fear, anxiety, and despair that surged from there.

For Seongjin, it is a distant yet not unfamiliar sight.

In the early days of the gate incident, these were the facial expressions the hunters had to face every time they were dispatched. Even those are facial expressions that we haven't seen since humanity was almost extinct... ..

'... 'Is it really worth despairing like this?'

In fact, Seongjin was looking at the current situation quite positively.

I was worried that they would struggle to hold out until the ice base was destroyed, but I guess the leadership's decision was quicker than expected.

The troops are almost intact, and the rear is tightly blocked by the Wolf Knights. But why is everyone making faces like the world is ending right now?

""

However, when I arrived at the ice base and saw the damage with my own eyes, the story changed a little.

Horrible corpses that appear to have lost their lives in a fleeting fall. There are still countless corpses being trampled upon by the Glatre Trolls.

Even though the Wolf Knights were struggling, it seemed that it was not enough to completely stop the ice monsters that were appearing here and there in the ice-enclosed base.

While numerous troops are blocked on their retreat, casualties are steadily accumulating in real time.

"this....."

Additionally, as Seongjin expected, he felt suspicious eyes staring at this place from a cliff not far away. He must be the one who created that mess.

However, old Dekaron Knight was completely unaware of this and was busy chasing after the Glatre Trolls who were repeatedly merging and separating on the ice wall!

Seongjin felt something rising inside him.

'It wasn't supposed to get to this point!'

Was the leadership's decision quick?

No, that's not enough. You could have been faster.

"Am I dreaming right now?"

The old man is even dazed as he looks at shaved ice No. 1. Before he could even recognize it, harsh words came out of Seongjin's mouth.

"You frustrating old man!"

You damn old man, do you really not know that?

You're a Dekaron Knight!

Couldn't you have sensed the danger a little earlier and bitten the soldiers off the ice wall?

Or maybe we couldn't have found the guy controlling all of this a little sooner!

What are you doing so stupidly?

[...] So, not all Dekaron Knights are all-powerful. You shouldn't force your standards or your family's standards on others.]

The Demon King sighed, but Seongjin didn't even seem to hear him.

"What are you hesitating about? Catch that guy right now!"

When I shouted at him like that, old man Vincent protested with an uncharacteristically depressed expression.

"Even if that thing is really a demonic species, isn't it just one guy? It's just spying on this place. If I leave this place now, the damage will only increase..."

"I'll take care of this, so leave it to me."

"No, how could you...."

But when Seongjin glared at him with his eyes wide open, the old man trembled as if he was startled by something. Then, for some reason, he slightly avoids his gaze as if it is difficult to face him.

"...No, I understand."

Whisper, thump!

Old Vincent disappeared over the cliff in an instant with nimble steps. The amount of auras he had and his skill at Shuni Shuhe were talents that were still difficult for Seongjin to imitate.

"Okay then."

Seongjin held the ice heart and concentrated his mind once again.

Now that we've solved the most important issue, let's organize this place.

Kurrrrrr.

Bingsu No. 1 wakes up in response to Seongjin's thoughts.

The feeling coming from the heart of ice is quite light. Even though I don't feel a sense of unity like before, I am confident that if I focus on one animal, I will be able to demonstrate quite decent combat power.

"Then, I'll go first, sir!"

Orden, with his sword drawn from behind, shouted as he ran toward one of the enemy Glatzer Trolls.

And the unique variation of Banajas 3, which unfolds simultaneously with Baldo.

Took!

Part of the ice monster's leg explodes, and the Wolf Knight, who was being pushed back badly, regains his stance.

"Your Majesty!"

"Don't be distracted and focus!"

"...yes!"

The red-haired Inquisitor also began to move his body.

"Sir. Me too first... ugh!"

"Ah. You can rest there, Sir Valerie."

You need to take good care of your condition.

Because you will be enjoying shaved ice with me a lot for a while.

"Suddenly a chill...?"

Seongjin caught a glimpse of him trembling with a pale face-

Cooung- Boom! thud!

Bingsu No. 1 began to move vigorously. Then, he mercilessly grabs the scruff of the neck of the nearest Glatute Troll.

Pow! Knock knock!

As it fluttered in the air and struggled, the Wolf Knights, who were struggling due to injuries, turned their heads in surprise.

"Lowering!?"

"You guys, go back for now."

Then, Sir Ilma looked back from afar and showed a tearful expression.

Even during battle, she always looked after her junior knights, but during a battle like this, she couldn't afford to help them all.

☐The connection with the existing ice heart is forcibly disconnected. Would you like to register a new object?☐

I didn't even have to rip off his arm and give him a few blows, but soon a welcome information window appeared in front of my eyes.

okay. I'll register, so just lie here quietly.

☐Number of entities that can be registered: 6/25☐

After roughly throwing the guy away, Bingsu No. 1 turned and ran quickly toward the ice wall.

Boom boom boom!

And then it rushed at a Glacher Troll that was continuously stepping on the corpses of already dead soldiers.

Flutter! Pow! Wow!

After hitting it with his fists a few times, he threw it on the floor and stomped on it with excitement, just like he did.

Sure enough, not long after that, an information window pops up.

☐The connection with the existing ice heart is forcibly disconnected. Would you like to register a new object?☐

Ugh, I hate this guy.

Let's just end this guy here.

... Damn it!

When the exposed chest is struck mercilessly, the heart is broken into

pieces and the ice monster falls limp to the floor. The ice that made up its body also lost its focus and collapsed.

"What the hell is that...!"

While everyone in the base was surprised, Seongjin began moving Bingsu No. 1 in search of the next target.

How much time has passed like that?

As the Glacier Trolls that had been appearing sporadically were eliminated one by one, the Wolf Knights were gradually able to concentrate their power.

The process of subduing them accelerated, and soon most of the ice monsters moving within the base lost their hearts and fell to the ground.

Now, the only remaining Glature Trolls were those who were repeating separation and fusion within the ice wall, and those that Seongjin had subjugated, including Shavedsu No. 1.

□Number of entities that can be registered: 8/25□

There are three additional ones registered in the Ice Heart.

Although the number was small compared to those whom Seongjin personally killed, it was decided that there was no need to leave behind those who had committed mass murder.

Anyway, moving just one shaved ice more efficiently can help with power.

"How on earth...?"

As the retreat became relatively leisurely, suspicious views towards Seongjin naturally began to surface.

Gossip and gossip.

"Taming a demonic beast, I've never heard of such a thing."

"How on earth does Prince Mores control the Glacher Troll? It could not be the devil's...."

Isn't the suspicion gone with just one Inquisitor?

Well, I guess it's not unreasonable. These are the magic beasts that had driven them into a hopeless situation just a moment ago.

It would be difficult for anyone to understand this situation, as those giant ice monsters were sitting calmly on the ground at the young prince's command.

"If you have time to talk nonsense, find at least one more injured person!"

At that time, Lord Ilma scolded the soldiers.

"There are still those guys left inside the ice wall! Thanks to you, we only saved an hour, but you never know when they might attack again like they did before!"

Re-raid.

Towards the people who were fading just by imagining it, Orden, whose spirit had become ferocious, issued a threat.

"You are a great benefactor of our Lord Sigismund! Anyone who dares to show disrespect to a member of the Holy Family will be dealt with severely!"

... That Orden guy somehow feels like he has accumulated one more debt in his heart.

Anyway, as Lord Ilma said, I couldn't let down my guard just yet.

thud. thud. thud.

Intermittent vibrations were still reverberating within the ice wall. This probably means that work to weaken the ice wall is continuing.

Occasionally, the surface of some ice walls broke and fell. If things continue like this, it will only be a matter of time before a hole

appears somewhere.

Oooh.

Crumbling.

They seemed to think so too. The Lycan Slope unit, which had been gathered in the chippy leaf forest, has now arrived at the very edge of the ice wall. Their number is approximately 1,500.

'Is old Vincent still there...?'

Seongjin tried to raise his spirits, but there was no sign of both the devil and the old man, as they were far away.

Maybe he had already started running when Seongjin pointed to his location.

'If we can't kill him right away, there's still a way to find another guy instead.'

Seongjin held the ice heart and opened his spiritual eyes to the fullest.

Then, suddenly, a slight pain arose in my eyes.

[Don't overdo it, Seongjin Lee. You've been up most of the night with your spiritual eyes open since yesterday, right? It's no longer possible. No matter how much help you get from the flame crystal, what you share is my sense!]

The devil notices Seongjin's abnormality and quickly warns him.

'are you okay.'

Because I will do as much as I can.

After responding like that, Seongjin looked around the five-colored world he was now accustomed to. A world that the Demon King is probably looking at, but is sure to be a little different from his perspective.

'My meditation decision transforms the information I receive through my spiritual eyes into a complete perspective. So, to me, the connection between thoughts appears in vivid colors.'

Indeed, Seongjin was able to discover thin solid lines extending from within the ice wall.

Five lines lead from the snowfield and two lines lead into the canyon. Perhaps it comes from two hearts of ice.

It is said that the first one that attacked was thirty, so it was clearly the two Ice Hearts that attacked.

'The canyon is currently being pursued by old man Vincent. then... ...
'

Seongjin confirmed that the solid lines leading straight to the snowy field were coming together and touching a small dark green shadow.

An aura that was too far away to be detected as a presence, probably belonging to the second Glacher Troll operator.

'That one must also be related to the devil.'

Because energy mixed with black usually means it contains demonic energy.

[Lee Seong-jin.]

'If you follow that line, you can see where the Glacher Trolls are within the ice wall and where they will separate. Of course, that doesn't mean you can attack blindly. Because the ice wall will be damaged as well. Is there really no other way to prevent the ice wall from collapsing than to hit the guy controlling it?'

[Hey, Seongjin Lee!]

'I guess I'll have to go out of the ice to catch that guy. If one of them is caught in the hands of Old Man Vincent, that side will not hastily approach this side and will instead focus on replenishing the Glacher Trolls.'

Squeaky.

Seongjin was making those calculations while caressing his temple where the pain was getting worse.

Sigh!

Suddenly, I felt empty in my head and the world instantly returned to its original state.

All of the five colors seen through the snowy field disappear, and a colorless ice barrier blocks the gloomy vision.

".....?"

... Devil?

I raise my head in confusion.

[you idiot!]

The echoing voice, full of venom, hit me directly in my mind.

[What do you mean you only do as much as you can! You're not in a perfect state right now! If you keep doing this, I will never make your decision again! I don't even eat bear meat! No matter how delicious it is, I will never, ever eat it!]

... uh?

232. Defensive Battle (5)

'Why are you doing this all of a sudden? Now is a golden opportunity to find out the enemy's identity!'

Seongjin became impatient and tried to appease the devil, but the bastard was still stubborn.

[Promise me you won't open your spiritual eyes today! Otherwise, you won't be able to enter the nest, no matter how beautiful, wonderful, and hard to see again!]

... It seems that he liked Yeomsang's decision more than he thought.

'wait for a sec. It only takes a little while, right? Once this work is over, I will rest for a while, eat a lot of delicious food, and play a lot with you... ... '

[...] Hmm! If you thought you could tempt someone with something to eat, you were sorely mistaken! This body is not that clumsy beginner devil! He is the great Demon King of Gehenna!]

The Demon King emphasized that even a special bear meat steak with a fiery taste would be of no use.

In the process, specific foods such as lamb and lemon pine appear. These are probably the things that left a particular impression on him.

First, Seongjin roughly put the food pouring out at random into his head and then spoke.

'Even if you don't tell me, I'm taking care of my condition.'

[You are so real! Is this how it is managed now?]

'Anyway, there's no difference if I use my spiritual eyes for a little while longer.'

[Do not be ridiculous! Do I not know you? Are you the one to end it with that? Don't you plan on moving the Glacher Troll by pulling out its soul like before, just to kill it right away? Or are you planning on sneaking out on your own later using Auror concealment and killing them?]

'... ... '

Seongjin was speechless at the devil's reply. Because his guess was exactly right.

Then the Demon King became angry.

[It's someone else's territory to begin with! Why do you, who have nothing to do with anything, have to sacrifice yourself for those pathetic bastards?]

'... what?'

sacrifice? who?

Seongjin, who was confused, immediately put on a pitiful expression and looked into the sky, where he thought the Demon King was.

'Am I crazy?'

What nonsense are you talking about?

This is not something incomprehensible like sacrifice or altruism. It's just a pure pursuit of profit for myself.

[...] profit?]

okay. Think about it, devil.

All people of Sigismund are subjects of the empire. They are precious beings who protect the territory of Delcross and enrich themselves by paying taxes to the Margrave, who will continue to rip them off from me.

In other words, they are my father's property, and at the same time, they are the property of our royal family.

[Eh?]

In other words, their lives are all 'mine.'

I'm trying to save some of my things, so what's the problem?

[What on earth is that sophistry?]

The Demon King responded shakily, but Seongjin fiercely opened his eyes and glared at the shaking ice wall.

'And the most important thing is that I feel very uncomfortable right now.'

I never let people touch what's mine. I think I should vent my anger in moderation.

We'll have to finish off the manipulator, or at least get one more Glacher Troll from them.

Otherwise, I feel like I'm going to die of fire at any moment!

[Tsk tsk, so what can you do with that dirty temper...]

'What, man?'

However, Seongjin could not argue with the devil for very long. This is because Lord Ilma, who had roughly summarized the situation, came to the side with a worried expression.

"Sir, I've prepared a cart, even if it's not perfect, so please come on up."

"huh?"

"Your help has been more than enough. We, the Wolf Knights, will finish the rest. For now, please return to the territory with the Archduke."

When I turned my head to see what she said, I saw that a Wolf Knight

was indeed pulling something that looked like a cart. It's big enough to be called a handcart, but small enough to be called a rear carriage.

Perhaps because it is an ice base where horses cannot communicate properly, it seems to be one of the main means of transportation used here.

Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows slightly.

"I'm fine, Lord Ilma. We can walk together."

The intention of giving special treatment to the prince is good. Just imagining riding something like that is shameful.

"But, sir, you don't look that good right now."

"I'm a bit motion sick. It'll get better if I walk."

To be honest, wouldn't it be strange if I didn't get motion sick after riding on that big drop of shaved ice for half a day?

"Besides, isn't it too unsightly? I'm done with it. What kind of idiot in this world would ride something like that?"

"...It's one of the carts that the head of the family usually rides around in."

"Huh. This cushion is really nice."

Seongjin quickly sat down on the cart and said.

[...] Why are you acting so suddenly like me? Change everything you say.]

'There is no need to cause trouble with the Margrave now. He still has a lot to take in.'

I was willing to endure a bit of embarrassment for the immediate benefit.

Rattling rattling.

Just like that, the cart Seongjin was riding began to move. As Orden

and Sir Valery followed him, they naturally joined the ranks of the retreating troops.

Bingsu No. 1, No. 6, 7, and 8, roughly designated as a group, also slowly follow the troops.

Thump, thump, thump.

The soldiers, who were startled by the sound of those heavy footsteps, occasionally glanced sideways at the cart that Seongjin was riding.

However, even though the base was getting farther and farther away, Seongjin couldn't take his eyes off the ice wall due to a sense of regret. Orden noticed his gaze and opened his mouth implicitly.

"Sir. Those hiding in the ice wall probably won't come out any time soon. There is no other way than to abandon the base, retreat, and reorganize a new front line. The number of Glacher Trolls has decreased significantly, so now the rear is completely left to the Wolf Knights. You can."

"hmm....."

That's true though.

Seongjin quietly looked at the occasionally shaking ice wall with a sulky face.

'If I had killed the pilots while I was at it, I could have preserved the base like this...'

Because I don't have the strength.

One step.

Because just one step is not enough.

"You have helped the territory enough. Aren't the Liliun Detachment and Prince Logan joining us soon? The situation doesn't seem to be that bad."

No, Sir Valerie.

Thinking that this is not enough is the same as feeling deep inside that it is not enough.

We could have had a much better outcome.

"I owe you an immeasurable amount of debt. I don't know how I can repay it all. I'm in no mood right now, so I'm saying foolish things, but soon the soldiers will realize how much of a favor they have been to you."

Orden, you simple bastard. Are you planning on digging up the entire territory and dedicating it to me?

You should learn from your father's clever side. Aren't you the next Margrave?

I was thinking about this while absentmindedly listening to the regular footsteps of the shaved ice makers, but at some point, I suddenly started to feel drowsy.

Well, I definitely feel a little more tired than usual.

'Even though you have a younger body, you can't lie about your age. I stayed up all night and suddenly got a ticket like this, won... ..'

As I was blinking, the two people's voices ringing in my ears began to fade away.

-Grand Duke. Those Vines, by the way. How about putting on the Sigismund family insignia? The hostility among soldiers will be greatly reduced.

-That sounds like a good idea. It would be good to distinguish it from the enemy Glacher Troll. I will take action immediately when I return to the territory. By the way, how are you feeling?

-I took light action using divine power, but it might be better to show the priest right away when I return. Wasn't it a difficult run for you and me? I don't know how you, a novice Auror, have survived so far.

Then Seongjin unconsciously snorted in his sleep.

'Don't be funny, you kids. You guys are still a long way off compared to me. How dare you compare? Comparative quality. At least 640 more years... ..'

That was the last conversation Seongjin remembered.

Using the rocking of the cart as a lullaby, Seongjin fell asleep.

* * *

Deep coniferous trees beyond the snowfield.

A huge lycanthrope was looking down at a woman and growling. He was none other than Berseus, who borrowed the body of a new relative after losing Vajra.

[How can this happen? Isn't it very different from the first story!]

Although his new main body was not a descendant of Nebraska, it was a useful family member with a decent lineage.

The sharp nails, like the blades of a wild beast, put terrible pressure on the woman, who looked infinitely thin compared to the lycan slope.

[Didn't your master definitely say that? You can attack the empty canyon fortress, attack the territory, and use the momentum to attack the ice wall base from both inside and outside! Sigismund will be engulfed in flames at once!]

However, the woman did not even blink at the terrifying threat.

"Bethelah...."

Red lips draw a long arc under a deeply pressed hood.

"What he said was not wrong one bit. The canyon fortress was empty, and although the number was less than expected, the Glacher Trolls were well prepared."

[But why... ... !]

"What do you think is the reason why the plan went so wrong? Berseus. I think it's because someone lost both the family and the 'Ice Heart' at the same time, and it ended up falling into the hands of the enemy."

[...] ... !]

"Who did you hand it to?"

Of the 25 Glature Trolls she collected over a long period of time, she only has 4 left.

The woman continued speaking while carefully rolling her 'ice heart' in her hand.

"You should know that it was a very important variable. So tell me, Berseus. Who on earth stole it from you?"

[...] The kid said he was of Nebraska descent.]

Berseus answered in a slightly uncertain voice.

When I think of that little bastard who mocked me for being a mudblood, my head still bleeds. But this incident was clearly his mistake.

But the woman who heard the answer tilted her head.

"A descendant of Nebraska? Well, I wonder what it will be like...."

[I could clearly feel the presence of Nebraska in him. Don't you trust me?]

"No, I don't think you missed the Nebraska trail. That's a different matter."

The woman continued her explanation, holding up her ice heart in front of her eyes.

"As you know, this is a product of the normal world. However, since

this is not the normal world, unless you have spiritual eyes, you will never be able to recognize this. Controlling it is also completely impossible."

[morning eyes...]

"Not only that. He must be able to strongly interfere with the 'ice heart' with just his thoughts. This means that he is someone who possesses spiritual eyes and can freely move his thoughts to the point where he can create specific flame images in an instant."

[...] ... !]

A person who has spiritual eyes and is free from thoughts.

As far as Berseus knew, there was only one such person in Delcross.

[Has the guardian already returned?!]

But the woman shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"Is that possible? You can't even guess how much effort the master has put into this matter. The Guardian has been successfully defending the defense so far, so it seems like he has forgotten for a moment, but the 'gap' is not that easy to deal with. no."

[if?]

"The cause and effect was greatly distorted somewhere we didn't expect. Originally, the Sigismund Spirit should have completely turned into a sea of fire right now. If you are the one who moves that cause and effect and controls the thoughts, isn't there only one left?"

Berseus does not specifically understand the 'thoughts' and 'images' that this woman speaks of.

However, when it comes to disrupting cause and effect, he also knew one thing.

[...] That evil thing intervened.]

"That's right. [The Reserved One]."

Berseus remembered the face of the boy who had stopped him and cut off Vajra's head with a single sword. Those cool gray eyes.

[okay. I said I'd seen it somewhere before, but that kid was the blemish on him.]

Berseus growled, showing his sharp fangs.

[I knew very well that he was a terrible libertine, but how dare he mess with Lycanslope's bloodline to create a child!]

"hmm?"

[...] hmm?]

And for a moment, Berseus and the woman tilted their heads side by side.

for a moment.

If she is the mother of 'the one prepared', isn't she definitely the daughter of Grand Duke Asein? Could it be the lineage of Lycanslope?

After a moment of awkward silence, the woman sighed softly.

"Put aside that Nebraska thing for now. I don't have time to focus on anything else right now. After all, once you start, you have to see some meaningful results, right?"

[If so, what do you plan to do now?]

"You continue to attack the ice wall. If my men go as planned, the third ice wall will collapse sooner or later. Then, you can lead the Lycan Slopes and attack the territory as is."

[What are you doing?]

"In the meantime, I will harvest additional seeds planted by my master for future all-out war."

Berseus clicked his tongue as if he was dumbfounded.

[After digging like that, there are still Glacher Trolls left?]

"Hehe."

Then the woman looked at Berseus and let out a light laugh.

"My master, the great [Sowing], there is no place in the world where he does not sow seeds. How can I possibly fathom all the innumerable arrangements. Bethelah...."

233. Defensive Battle (6)

[Gap] is a type of distortion created when space is forced into space.

So, when you go inside the gap, you can see the randomly interlaced and curved sections of the world spread out in all directions like broken stained glass.

Each of these sections becomes an intersection between the gap and the world.

So what happens if we look at that intersection from outside the gap?

If it were possible to accurately grasp the singularity that interfered with space from the outside, it would not be impossible to glimpse the gap beyond a cross-section of the world.

Like right now.

[How long has it been since Seonghwang's father has been away, and now he's looking for a gap on his own? I was so shocked that I thought I was going to lose my mind!]

The blue bead that was bouncing around in front of Seongjin's eyes spoke as if he was blaming him.

huh? But isn't your soul already gone?

[Dad, there is a reason why His Majesty was so worried. How long do we have to follow you around? You need to get your night's pay from now on.]

The pink orb sitting quietly on my shoulder chided me gently.

Isn't it time for you to respect your elders in a way that befits your

age?

And Seongjin thought blankly.

'But who are you? Why are you following me? Do you know me?'

Then the blue bead bursts into laughter and vibrates slightly.

[Mores does that all the time! No matter how much I tell you, you leave only what you need and forget everything on your own, right? How many times has this happened?]

The pink orb also let out a small sigh and moved as if it were tapping its shoulder.

[Mores may be selecting things in his own way so as not to offend cause and effect. Let's stop talking nonsense and go see your Majesty. That's what you came here for, right?]

'... ... '

Seongjin felt the doubt and was convinced at the same time.

okay. It's as they say.

As if repulsing the sense of déjà vu that something like this had happened at some point, the thought of what can be done about it raises its head.

In this way, Seongjin began to fly in the night sky with the two beads in an awkward state.

[Now we're there! Mores.]

[It's right here! Mores.]

The two small beads guided him to a place with a small window showing a dim view.

It is a diamond-shaped thing floating in the air without a wall or window frame to support it. Perhaps, rather than a window, it can be called a small hole in the world.

When he looked there as if fascinated, a small space that Seongjin had seen before was revealed to his field of vision.

'... gap.'

[That's right, it's a niche that Seonghwang's father left in the imperial palace.]

[Dad, His Majesty was there all day today.]

[I like it when Seonghwang's dad is in trouble, but at this point, we're starting to get worried too.]

[Dad, I like it when His Majesty is in trouble, but I don't like it when it happens because of other people.]

Oh, that's right. It did.

Until now, Seongjin had been subconsciously looking for Seonghwang's whereabouts.

Didn't a lot happen today?

While I was controlling the shaved ice, my soul seemed to be escaping, strange thoughts were clinging to me, and my body, which had been overworked all day, had reached a point where I could never say it was okay.

This is a repeat of a situation where I would normally have looked into it many times, even if I had to force myself to do so, but strangely, there has been no news from that person.

I'm worried that something might have happened.

[It's only been a day since Seonghwang's father opened his eyes, Mores.]

[If you're going to find your Majesty like that, why did you leave the imperial capital?]

Make a lot of noise, you devils!

Can you even imagine the weight of what has been placed in my hands?

I'm not doing this for nothing. If you keep getting on my nerves, as soon as I return to the ecliptic, I will destroy the entire chess board!

[Wow! Mores is too much! Mores idiot!]

While the two beads were shouting together and running wild, Seongjin focused all his attention on the sight seen through the gap through the window.

I thought the view would soon change, but before I knew it, a vast volcanic area covered in lava spread out before my eyes.

And Seongjin was able to find the person he was looking for there.

'father!'

The Holy Emperor, holding a white-light Auror blade, was emitting a white light that was clearly distinguishable even in the thick volcanic ash.

Seongjin, who saw the familiar robes and golden crown, smiled and focused on him. Then, the scenery is pulled in as if a flower was being pulled, and the sight of the emperor becomes even closer.

- This is nonsense!

At that moment, Seonghwang was in the middle of a confrontation with someone.

The opponent was a man wearing fancy armor that seemed unlikely to exist in reality and wielding a greatsword with a strange center of gravity.

He doesn't seem to have much expertise in swordsmanship, and is swinging his weapon loudly in a strange form with unnecessary movements.

-Mr. How is that a boss mob? Even though it's a hidden quest, what's the point if the level of difficulty is this high?

The man shouted at Seonghwang.

Although he couldn't actually hear the voice, Seongjin was somehow able to understand the entire conversation between them.

Fortunately, thoughts do not hit your head at the same time without any chronological order, like in the gap. It seems that the only time the sense of time becomes tangled is when there is a gap.

-shit! Does this make sense? I am ranked 5th in the entire Pangea Chronicle server ranking!

As the man struggled and sweated, Seonghwang looked at him and nodded.

-If you do that, there is nothing to feel unfair about. All those who claim to be in a higher state than you have lost their lives to me.

-What? Is it even data accumulation? Shit! How do you catch something like this!?

And then there was the neat sword strike.

-Ugh!

The man died without any resistance and screamed.

At that moment, the volcanic area suddenly turns gray, and a large window appears above the fallen man's head.

□GAME OVER□

The place where Seonghwang stands began to change.

The volcanic area receded, and the hundreds and thousands of spaces he must have passed through so far were pushed back, like turning the pages of a book.

The sight of the world of images, images, and real images all coming together and mixing together was majestic at first glance.

Among them, especially in the normal worlds, without exception, the

following characters come to mind.

□GAME OVER□

□GAME OVER□

□GAME OVER□

□GAME OVER□

.

.

.

Seongjin suddenly felt heartbroken.

What is all that?

All of those things so far?

-... ... !

Seonghwang was startled and turned his head, wondering how he had noticed Seongjin's gaze.

When he made eye contact with him, Seonghwang smiled, looking a little embarrassed, but at the same time clearly happy. For some reason, it felt like he was more expressive than usual.

-What are you doing? Go back quickly!

He waved his hand in silence and turned his head back to face the front.

Just like that, one world was far away, and another world was coming closer to his nose.

What opened the entrance this time was a black hell covered in fog.

As a gigantic monster with a vague shape slowly raises its head from the sea of fog, the Holy Emperor quietly waits for it, aiming his silver

thorn as always.

[They came here at the same time, but since they are under the rule of the prosperous father, they have no choice but to follow his lead.]

[After going back and forth with Delcross for a long time, His Majesty Dad learned how to properly use the distortion of time.]

As the kids said, Seonghwang looked very tired, but he never felt like he was going to lose.

All of these things are properly controlled under his rules forever.

-Do whatever you want to do. If you wish to correct the absurdity, it will be done.

Suddenly, something I heard from Seonghwang not long ago comes to mind.

And now Seongjin wanted to answer him like this.

'Do whatever you want to do. If you wish to protect it somehow, everything will be done that way.'

and.

'No matter who they are, I will make sure that those who disturbed Delcross pay the price.'

Seongjin is different from the kids.

I didn't want Seonghwang's father to be in trouble, I was very worried about him, and I also hated the guy who made him do that.

Wow.

A strong thought wave suddenly arose from Seongjin, and the small beads were startled and began to spin around him.

[He's really angry again! Look at the window shaking!]

[Then tear open the gap and enter. Tell them to wake up quickly!]

Anyway, what kind of kid are you? How long are you going to harass people? Are you going to slowly kill his father?

Do it in moderation. If you don't, I'll grind it all up and drink it for you later, without leaving even a single bone meal behind!

[Wow! Sir Sharon!]

[wow! Brother Masain!]

Noisy! Don't disturb me!

First, I have to go find who that guy is and see for myself with my own eyes... .. !

As he was grinding his teeth, someone suddenly shook Seongjin violently.

"...under."

wait. Once I find out who did it, I... ..

"Lowering."

Shoot!

At that moment, I felt the scenes of the gaps in my mind slipping away like the ebb and flow. In addition, emotions and memories become blurred, and an urgent sense of crisis arises, as if everything is lost at once.

No, wait, wait!

"Lowering!"

omg.

When he opened his eyes, he saw the knight's face looking down at him with concern.

"...Lord Martha?"

"Yes, sir. It is me. Why are you sweating so much?"

".....?"

... Uh, well?

It feels like I was dreaming something.

Seongjin slowly let out the breath he had been holding and looked around.

The place where he lay was a dark and shabby private house. Instead of a candle, there was a torch hanging near the entrance.

Strong.

The moment I looked at the torch, a slight pain arose in my eyes. As the devil said, his eyes didn't seem to be in very good condition.

"Please lie down a little longer, sir. I'm still receiving treatment. Hehe."

Right next to him, Sir Sharon is holding Seongjin's hand and pouring out divine power. Looking at those dark eyes, it's the usual Sir Sharon.

Somehow, I felt lighter than before.

"What about the Canyon Fortress?"

Seongjin slowly got up and asked.

Well, the fact that Masain and the rest of the party are here probably means that things have become more relaxed enough to vacate the canyon fortress.

"It's safe. Maybe it's because of the Glature Trolls placed in front of the ice wall, but they weren't able to attack easily. It seems like they thought they could move again at any time."

Oh, that's right. Just in case, I lined up shaved ice numbers 2, 3, 4, and 5 at the entrance to the fortress.

The shaved ice seemed to have done its job well.

"We went out of the fortress and had a small skirmish with the Lycanslopes, but the Glacher Trolls did not attack again."

"okay?"

"Yes. Soon after, reinforcements arrived. Sir Sebastian sent quite a number of troops with the Wolf Knights. So I switched with them in the afternoon and came here."

Seongjin nodded.

"But where is this place?"

"It's a private house near the front line. The owner of the house has evacuated to another place. Currently, all the troops in the territory are confronting the Lycan Slopes who came over the ice wall."

For a moment, Seongjin was at a loss for words and stared at Masain.

Instead of evacuating the prince, who was unconscious and unable to fight, to the rear, he stayed at the front line?

Masain, who realized the meaning of that gaze, answered awkwardly.

"Ah, I was waiting because I thought he would want to move Vince as soon as he woke up. Everyone in the group is ready to go to the front line now."

"....."

"The situation on the front is not very optimistic. We will probably need your help."

Did you think I would be so excited that you were preparing to go to the front line a long time ago?

Seongjin felt his conscience pricking his lungs sharply.

Sir Masain. I really feel sorry for you.

As he left the house following his guidance, an unexpected sight awaited Seongjin.

"...this?"

After telling them to follow him as a group, he fell asleep, but the shaved ice seemed to have followed Seongjin on their own. All four cars were standing tall and waiting near a private house.

But aren't all the shaved ices wearing the Sigismund family insignia like a cloak?

Since the shaved ice was so huge, no matter how big the badge was, it looked like a small cape that barely covered the back.

It looked like knights lined up in a row, so it had a pretty grandeur to it.

Additionally, there is black paint smeared on their chests.

Two crossed swords and the sun surrounding them.

Although it was a little crooked and crude, it was undoubtedly the symbol of the main god and a symbol of Delcross.

"Haha, what do you think of my work, sir?"

Sir Valerie, who had just finished drawing a pattern on the chest of Shaved Ice No. 7, smiled cheerfully and said. He hung a rope around the necks of the shaved ice and used pendulum movements to draw patterns.

"Because appearances are quite important in all things."

As he said, the soldiers' faces looking up at the shaved ice showed signs of anxiety.

"Now they will be accepted as the Lord's soldiers in name and reality."

As Masain said that, his face also became relaxed. He was always disgusted by anything that was wrong, but that one symbol seemed to give him some peace of mind.

Seongjin reflected greatly.

'I can't believe I emphasized the importance of propaganda and fabrication to Sisley, and then missed this important detail.'

In my rush to help the ice base, I forgot an important lesson.

'If you want to cheat, you have to fool your allies first!'

[...] You don't really think that's a lesson, do you?]

The demon king, who had kept his mouth shut until then, eventually couldn't hold back and attacked Seongjin.

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234. Defensive Battle (7)

"Someone masterfully controlled the Glature Troll? And you suspect that it was the work of [The Reserved One]...."

An old house in the suburbs not far from the Imperial Capital.

In a place that was sometimes used as a meeting place for seditious people, an old priest was staring into space with a bright green glow in his eyes.

He is [Sowing].

He was the Demon Lord of [Disease], who had been making good use of the poor Dark Church's old priesthood as a contractor ever since he was transferred to it by Romaine.

"It seems like it will be more difficult to take control of the northern region than I thought..."

Eventually, after finishing contact with his subordinate, he grumbled and returned to the living room.

As he casually sat down on the old sofa, acrid dust rose up everywhere.

"...Was the [Reserved One] involved this time too?"

[Greed], who was sitting in the living room, asks first. As always, she looked like a small girl with braided hair.

"Yes. I think so. I really don't know. I have no idea what it's working for."

"That's right, we are moving for the ultimate destruction of Delcross.

It's obvious."

"Is that really true? Even if it's not exactly what Romain said, these days, I'm increasingly having strong doubts about the meaning of [The Reserved One]'s existence."

When Pa Jong pouted his mouth uncharacteristically, Greed stared at him.

"Anyway, I didn't know that you would put an end to that guy's nonsense."

Berseus Dashiano is a member of the 'Council of Six' and the owner of the [Key].

It is an existence that cannot help but be in eternal opposition to the Demon Lords, who are only looking for an opportunity to divide not only the northern part of the continent, but also the entire Delcross dimension.

Then, Pa Jong lifted the wrinkled corners of his mouth and chuckled.

"We can cooperate for a while for what each person wants. Just as [Repentance] supported Sigurd Sigurdson to liberate those who were reserved, we will join forces with Berseus and the abandoned 'Doll' to take over the northern part of the continent. I'm raising my hand."

Well, the guardian of Delcross may not be so gentle.

Pajong added that.

"Berseus's wish is nothing but a vain delusion. In the end, he will be sanctioned by the 'Council of Six'."

"Well, guess what? As you know, their rules are quite ambiguous. What they consider most important is maintaining a balance between cause and effect."

A perfect world that was once paired with Delcross.

This is because the [catastrophe] that completely destroyed Ionia was originally caused by an imbalance between cause and effect.

"So they are shackling the hands and feet of the guardians who are trying to protect the continent, and are actually turning a blind eye to the dark church's moves to harm the continent. As long as it is done in the hands of 'humans'."

Pajong continued speaking, leaning diagonally on the sofa.

"Greed. [Cause and effect] is the only thing and everything for people like us. What is the reason for going all out to expand the church without invading the dimension from the beginning? We can exert maximum influence on the world without touching that cause and effect. "Isn't it for unfolding?"

"....."

"Oh, that's right. You don't seem to be interested? Because I don't raise a religious order or anything like that."

Ignoring the criticism thrown as a joke, Greed asked a question with an expressionless face.

"I know that you planned something by gathering the demon lords of the world of the real world and the real world. But how on earth does the normal world work? I didn't know that you could even exert influence on those strange worlds."

"Oh, that?"

Then, Pajong smiled somewhat secretly, then suddenly turned his face towards the girl and lowered his voice.

"Haha. Don't be surprised, Greed. It's [Ayeol]. The hidden Ayeol has appeared!"

"...Painful."

"Yeah. I was wondering what he was preoccupied with these days, and he was completely absorbed in playing around in the world of reality."

"....."

"So, I asked if he could help me gather the forces of the normal world, and he quickly created something called a [quest]. With just that, a huge number of normal worlds were born in an instant! Isn't that really like him?"

Greed slightly furrowed his brows as he heard Pajong talking excitedly.

"Vanity, vain! No matter how many clumsy kings of that dimension attack, do you think any of them will be able to defeat the guardian of Delcross?"

"ha ha ha."

Pa Jong smiled with a confident face.

"That is what one knows and the other does not know, greed. No matter how strong a person is, there is a limit to the human spirit. If you continue to face countless difficulties, you will eventually be used up and worn out. So, try to help him as much as possible. ... hmm?"

After speaking up to that point, Pajong suddenly frowned and trailed off.

"...But I don't know why I've been getting chills like this since a while ago. Is it because I changed my body so quickly because I have an old man's body?"

The devil of disease catches a cold, something embarrassing like that shouldn't happen.

I'll have to find a new, healthy contractor soon.

Pa Jong muttered while rubbing his goosebumped arms.

Meanwhile, there was another person who experienced a sudden chill at the same time as planting: Romaine, who was lying in the streets of Bertrand.

"Fouechwi!"

He sneezed so hard that his half-mask bounced up and down his face.

Thanks to this, Leonard, who was rolling around with a bottle of alcohol next to him, wakes up in surprise.

"What is it? Romaine. Can a body other than the main body catch a cold or something?"

"...That can't be right. It's nothing."

Big. Romaine cleared his throat and asked the prince.

"Anyway, what do you think of the princess's reaction recently, Leo? Did she seem interested in a national marriage with Rohan?"

"Well? I'm just diligently sending flowers right now...."

Leonard turned over and rested his chin crookedly.

"First of all, I think there will be progress only when Prince Mores returns. The princess never shows her face at trivial banquets. She is just like my father when it comes to being expensive."

So, I plan to ask the prince to create a position with the princess in earnest.

The prince added and took a sip of his drink.

"...You mean Prince Mores?"

Will he return safely to the imperial capital?

Romaine was arsenic.

Prince Mores was 'prepared' by the Dark Church. This was information I obtained after offering an offering to a high-ranking demon king some time ago.

If everything they said was true, the one who was prepared would become a big obstacle in Leonard's path in the future. It is something that should never be left behind in the world.

That's why I worked hard to convince the high-ranking demon kings

that he should be eliminated.

"However, we cannot wipe out the entire Sigismund Territory with overwhelming force. This task requires an appropriate balance."

"Why is that again?"

Romain's mouth twisted at Leonard's innocent question.

"You're not really asking this, right? If the Sigismund Territory is easily defeated like this, then the next place the demonic beasts will target is definitely Rohan."

"ah."

In fact, Rohan, which has a part of its border with Lake Salz, is greatly benefiting from the Sigismund Territory.

Romain sighed towards the prince who nodded with an idiotic expression.

"Didn't you have Princess Amelia in mind? If you want to truly capture her heart, it would be a good idea to build up your common sense and culture right now. Rumor has it that the intelligent princess is already helping her father look after state affairs even at a young age."

"Hmm. Really?"

Leonard, who frowned and pondered for a moment, soon shook his head.

"Common sense and culture lose their luster in front of a brilliant appearance. I will just approach her with the image of a quiet man with a nice smile."

"...Ah yes."

You're trying to hide your ignorance by sparing your words.

How far can I go with this person?

Romaine let out a long sigh and suddenly turned his gaze to stare at the distant northern sky.

"By now, it is time for an all-out war to break out. The fate of Sigismund will soon be decided."

* * *

Seongjin was moving along with the group and chewing preserved food.

I had to put something in my mouth whenever I had free time. When I think about it, I barely ate anything all day due to various events.

'how is it? I think it's delicious.'

It was a special preserved meal prepared by the imperial palace, so the taste wasn't that bad. It has less of a unique unpleasant taste, and if you chew it for a long time, the taste of high-quality seasoning comes out.

When I diligently shared that feeling with the Demon King, he grumbled in a slightly calmer voice.

[joy! Even so, it's no use. I won't be opening my spiritual eyes anymore today!]

'Uh, okay.'

While Seongjin was sleeping, fortunately, the demon king calmly returned to his decision to burn. So Seongjin decided not to provoke him anymore and tried to calm him down.

'I understand what you mean. But you know that, right? If my father fixes it, these abnormalities will disappear as if they have been washed away. Now is the time to focus all your energy on more important things rather than dwelling on petty ideals.'

For some reason, I can't see him today, but won't he come here someday soon, borrowing Sir Sharon's body? Then you will recover quickly.

When I explained it like that, the demon lord sighed deeply, and eventually started clicking his tongue.

[You are a human. Sometimes he seems like he's thinking deeply, but then he acts like a completely thoughtless idiot. Have you ever thought about changing your perspective on that situation?]

'huh?'

[What about your father himself, who can heal you so well? Just because he gets better quickly, what if he tries to take on difficult tasks on his own or gets seriously injured? But can you tell me it's okay because you will recover soon?]

'... uh?'

A flash of light.

A faint image of Seonghwang's back passed through Seongjin's mind. It looks like it's glaring somewhere while aiming a silver thorn that shines white.

The image disappeared in an instant, but strangely, it left behind a heartbreaking impression.

what? I feel like I can't remember anything...

[Do you understand? You troublemaker! You should be lucky that all your mistakes are forgiven with just one night!]

'hmm...'

Seongjin, who was in a solemn mood, no longer tried to persuade the Demon King to open his spiritual eyes.

Anyway, I knew very well that if I made a request in a truly urgent situation, he would act like he couldn't win.

thud. thud. thud.

Fortunately, there was no need for a spiritual eye right now. Even without any special commands, the shaved ices followed Seongjin on

their own.

It appears that the command to 'follow' is still valid.

"Sir, we're all here."

When they arrived at the camp prepared at the entrance to the territory, the front line happened to be in a moment of lull.

Lord Ilma, who was in the midst of reorganizing his troops, greeted Seongjin with a happy face.

"The ice wall lasted quite a long time, but in the end, all of the Lycan Slopes climbed over the ice wall before the sun set. There have been a total of two clashes with them so far."

"Right."

Seongjin nodded and looked at the enemy lines.

The sun has completely set and the surrounding area is dark, and the wide slope leading to the ice base is covered in the light of hundreds of stars. If you think that each starlight was the eye light of a wild beast, it was a very scary sight.

Not to be outdone, numerous torches were lit within the camp to brightly illuminate the surroundings.

When I saw those moving flames, a sudden pain in my eyes that I had forgotten arose.

It looks like the devil is right when he says that his eyes aren't in very good condition.

Even though Sir Sharon and Sir Valerie took turns pouring divine power on him, he has not yet fully recovered.

This may mean that it is not just fatigue of the optic nerve, but also permanent damage to the tissue.

'If my father finds out, he'll be really angry.'

Something is already making my forehead hurt.

"By the way, what happened to the old man who chased away the devil?"

Did old Vincent catch the guy who was controlling the Glatzer Troll? In the end, seeing as the ice wall collapsed, it may have been a failure.

Then Lord Ilma answered with an ambiguous expression.

"Well, it's not like you missed him, but should I say you caught him...?"

".....?"

"First, I will take you to the command barracks. We can talk in detail there."

Originally, Seongjin, who was an outsider and was young, would never have been invited to the command barracks.

Perhaps it was because of the power of the shaved ice shown while saving the ice wall base, but everyone was naturally treating Seongjin and his group as an important force.

When Seongjin arrived, a meeting was in full swing at the Margrave's barracks.

"They will try to compete at night as much as possible. No matter how much humans strengthen their eyes with auras, their night vision cannot keep up with the Lycanslopes."

Sir Sebastian explained calmly.

Lycanslopes have superior physical strength and are superior in numbers. They even use Aurors like humans.

There weren't many people who could properly deal with them in the dark of night.

Nowadays, thanks to those with superior military power, such as Old

Man Vincent, Sir Ilma, and Sir Sebastian, the delicate balance is maintained.

But this balance of power will not last long.

"hmm....."

Seongjin, who was listening to their serious meeting, touched a small stone in his winter coat pocket.

Before leaving here, a magic stone given to Logan to prepare for an emergency.

[What are you going to do with it?]

The demon lord asked vaguely if he sensed an ominous feeling.

'Well, just watch.'

Seongjin raised the corners of his mouth.

If my eyes hurt, isn't it natural to want to make my enemy's eyes hurt too?

235. Defensive Battle (8)

Among the objects in the normal world, many of which were known to have utility even in the real world, mostly operated according to simple algorithms.

For example, consider 'heart of ice'.

Would people in the real world be able to guess the purpose of this complex object that cannot even be seen without spiritual eyes?

In that sense, the 'magic items' piled up in the imperial palace treasury also had a simple operation method.

Things that can be used simply with just a little thought. In short, they are objects that can move only with 'origin'.

The night before.

While searching through his spiritual eyes the items he had from the normal world, Seongjin naturally took a closer look at the items his brothers and sisters had gifted him.

□ Luminous stone: A stone that generates as much light as the user desires □

□ Heating stone: A stone that generates as much heat as the user desires □

An extremely simple operating principle that just happens as much as you wish.

Therefore, even people who do not have spiritual eyes would have been able to use it freely until now.

So what is the range of 'as much as the user wants'?

Since there is no separate temperature setting scroll, it was necessary to be clear about its limitations.

So Seongjin first tested it with a rock that Sisley gave him. I pictured in my mind the lowest and highest temperatures imaginable.

First of all, in the case of the heating stone, it did not become colder than room temperature. Well, if it had the function of lowering the temperature, it wouldn't have been a heating stone.

'Then what about high temperature?'

Then, a lava pool instantly formed around the heating stone placed on the ground. Even Seongjin, which I had secretly assumed would be the case, was even the flagship.

'... 'There are no limits at all?'

And the same goes for the luminescent stone tested subsequently. I was afraid that there might be radiation beyond ultraviolet rays, so I stopped the test halfway through.

'The only thing necessary for things in the normal world to move is [conditions].'

Seongjin thought as he rolled the stone in his hand.

Anyway, since it worked, there was no longer any point in worrying about what the energy source was or how it worked.

Meanwhile, the Margrave and his party were busy talking about the upcoming battle.

"Is that what Lord Ilma thinks?"

"Yes, matriarch. Until now, it felt like we were assessing this side's strength before launching an all-out war. But won't the next conflict be different?"

"Take advantage at night. It's a simple idea without a strategy, but it's

also very clear. It's hard to believe that you're dealing with ignorant beasts."

"They have already shown cleverness in using Glatzer Trolls to cross the ice wall. Also, through two engagements, didn't we see how perfectly they are under control?"

Then Hendrick Sigismund rubbed his temples with a tired look.

"Yes, that's right. Is it because of the existence of the Lycan Slope Lord that was observed earlier?"

The Lycan Slope Lord they are talking about is probably Baz, who died at the hands of Seongjin.

However, Seongjin did not think it was necessary to mention it separately.

Anyway, I assumed that as long as Berseus Dashiano was around, another family member would become a Lord and perform the same role.

"They are located on relatively high ground compared to us located in the basin. Plus, they have a physical and numerical superiority. They set up a hastily constructed camp in one day, and I don't think they will bother to make it past today."

Sir Sebastian's words cast a gloomy shadow over the people's faces.

It is an unfavorable fight that must be fought head-on right in front of the territory. This is not a situation where you can think of it as a trick or something.

The only reinforcements that can be expected are the Lilium Detachment, and it would be fortunate if they had left the imperial capital by now.

"I never thought we would lose the ice wall like this!"

Old man Vincent lamented in a sad voice.

As the person who completed the three ice walls, it would be difficult

for him to easily accept the current situation.

"If there's a variable here, it's if they have another strategy worth giving up the nighttime advantage. The Glacher Trolls might show up again somewhere. Or..."

In the quiet barracks, only Sir Sebastian's low voice flows calmly, with an ominous resonance.

"Another demon contractor, or the demon himself, may be involved."

As soon as those words were finished, everyone's eyes turned to a spot in the corner of the barracks.

And Seongjin, who followed them with his gaze, was able to understand why Sir Ilma had given such an ambiguous answer to his question earlier.

There was a severed human head lying around. The head is discolored black and distorted, making it impossible to recognize the original face.

'... corrosion!'

The guy hiding on the cliff was a devil contractor.

"I couldn't capture him in the end."

Old man Vincent shouted angrily, perhaps feeling that Seongjin's words were blaming him.

"It's not my fault! When I caught up with him, he was already half eaten by erosion and dying! Do you know how much trouble I had to go through just to cut off the head of a corpse so contaminated with demonic energy?"

"....."

"Are you listening? How far did I have to chase that guy to catch him like you said...!"

The old man's unfair complaints continue one after another.

However, Seongjin was listening to the devil's explanation coming from inside his head, with his voice flowing through one ear.

[That guy was probably slowly eroded while still alive. This may be because he was a devil contractor and used his spiritual eyes for a long time.]

'Is this because of spiritual eyes?'

[Ordinary people are different from you, Seongjin Lee. Borrowing directly from the devil's senses means being exposed to terrible magical energy. Even you couldn't have lasted much longer without the help of the Flame Crystal, right? There is no way an ordinary person could endure that.]

He was probably already half dead, and the devil had descended and was moving his body.

'I thought I could run away from Dekaron Knight for quite some time...'

Only then did one small question that had been floating around in Seongjin's mind from a while ago finally resolved.

Why couldn't the Glacher Trolls who broke down the ice wall follow us here?

'Then does that mean there is a high possibility that the one remaining has already died from erosion by now?'

[Probably so. Unless he really is a demon. After the devil has completely descended on the body, it is impossible to distinguish between the devil and the devil contractor using magic alone.]

Right.

Seongjin, who nodded, looked back at old man Vincent, who was jumping up and down, and asked.

"Did he have a 'heart of ice', old man?"

"...Ice heart?"

When Seongjin wordlessly took out his own item, the old man's expression suddenly became confused.

"Ah, that ice. Come to think of it, I did have one that looked like a chunk of ice."

"Did you bring it?"

"...Did you have to bring it?"

I just thought he was going to make one last effort. I thought he was holding the ice to throw, but does that matter?

Seongjin touched his forehead, leaving behind the old man who was mumbling something with an anxious face.

okay. Because you didn't know what this was. The one who was chasing him must have been surprised enough by the sudden erosion.

I understand. I understand...

"Why do I feel like there's nothing I can do by entrusting something to that old man?"

Dekaron Knight looked very hurt at Seongjin's muttering.

"Uh, how can you say such rude things to this body...!"

Gagging.

The shocked old man stumbled, but Seongjin had no time to pay attention to it. Because there was one more thing that caught me up earlier.

A guy who might die at any time due to erosion was pushed alone into the enemy camp? Maybe we won't be able to retrieve the Ice Heart?

'Do they still have enough hearts of ice and demon contracts left to deal with this?'

Moreover, the person who attacked the canyon fortress also did not

They knew better how unfavorable this fight was, as they were bearing the brunt of the unstable atmosphere of the front. So they couldn't understand it even more.

"...How can you do that?"

okay. How can you be so calm?

The soldiers squinted in disbelief at the boy standing in front of them.

The young prince, standing at the forefront of the battle line and quietly glaring at the Lycan Slopes.

"You must leave on time, sir."

"I know, Lord Martha."

Seongjin was now standing at the forefront of the camp, riding alone on his horse.

It was not to advance quickly, but to quickly retreat to the rear as soon as they encountered them. It was only after confirming several times that I would run away immediately that I finally received permission from Masain and the others.

"I don't know if it will work out as you said."

Next to him, Lord Ilma, who had drawn his sword, also made a request to Seongjin with a nervous expression.

"You must move your horse before the second row of spears all hit them."

"Don't worry, Sir Ilma. Just remind the soldiers one more time not to forget what I said."

Meanwhile, the Lycan Slopes were getting closer at a rapid pace.

The guys ran down the mountainside in one fell swoop and quickly came within range of the archers.

"Shoot!"

At Sir Sebastian's shout, the archers in the back row simultaneously released their bowstrings.

Puff puff puff!

Kyung!

Wow!

Those hit by arrows stumble for a moment. However, even though the arrows loaded with Auras were hitting them indiscriminately, their momentum did not decrease in the slightest.

Since they have excellent regeneration, they cannot cause significant damage unless one of their limbs is completely cut off.

Pow!

Of course there were exceptions. Sir Sebastian, who pierced the heart of Lycan Slope with an arrow filled with strong external energy, raises his bow high and encourages the archers.

"Shoot! Shoot! Don't spare your arrows until they reach the fence!"

Whirring, whirling. Hwiik.

Amid a rain of arrows, Lycan Slope, who was running at the front, approaches only a few meters ahead.

Doo doo doo doo.

The rumbling of the ground became stronger, and the wooden fence slightly shook.

"Everyone, get ready! You! I need you to step back!"

When Sir Ilma raised his hand, Seongjin pulled the horse's reins and made him take a step back little by little.

Masain blocks his path and aims directly at Misra.

And with the cry of Lord Ilma.

"Row 1!"

Plop! puck! puck!

As the spears rose from the wooden fence all at once, the Lycanslopes jumped head-on and were skewered.

Kyung! Keke! Cough!

Behind those who were pierced by spears, spraying fresh blood, another lycan slope floods in.

The soldiers holding the spears were pushed back helplessly by the heavy weight of the demonic beasts that attacked one after another with all their might.

"Row 2!"

Lord Ilma's instructions continue.

The Lycan Slopes that had surpassed the first row were pierced by the newly raised spears in the rear row and were crackling violently.

"Lord Masaine!"

It was then that Seongjin gave a signal and turned his horse.

After confirming the prince's retreat, Masain nodded and shouted.

"Everyone close your eyes!"

Boom boom.

At the same time that the voice of a high-ranking knight filled with Aura swept across the battlefield, the luminous stone left Seongjin's hand and rose high in the air.

"Shine!"

Flash!

A white flash swept across the sky of the battlefield.

The light coming through tightly closed eyelids was so powerful that Seongjin suspected that he had made a mistake in his control at the moment and was emitting radiation.

Kyung! Keke! Kyung!

Lycan slopes with night vision activated rolled on the ground, screaming desperately. This was the moment when their charge was stopped for the first time.

Of course, there was no damage to our troops.

"Kwaaaaak! What is this? Oh my, my nuuuun!"

As Dekaron Knight screamed in a voice full of Aura, my ears rang.

Seongjin clicked his tongue slightly as he ran his horse. It appears that the blow was not easy as he had strengthened his eyesight as much as possible with a strong aura.

'No, I told you to close your eyes. 'You foolish old man!'

What if the person who should be at the forefront right now is rolling around on the floor with the Lycan Slopes?

"Now! Strike them all!"

Fortunately, Sir Ilma, who faithfully followed Seongjin's advice, raised his sword and shouted. At her cry, the Wolf Knights drew their swords and rushed towards the helpless demon beasts.

Suddenly!

Sharp swords clad in external energy cut off the heads of those rolling on the floor without hesitation.

thud. thud. thud.

The next ones to appear at the front line were the four shaved ice that Seongjin had previously released on the slope.

The sight of them walking slowly, waving their short capes, is

majestic, like giants from legend.

It was an army made up of the miracles of the god, without a doubt, with the clear symbol of the god engraved on its chest.

"Lord..."

The soldiers, mesmerized by its majestic majesty, unconsciously make the sign of the cross and mutter.

□ Mode setting: *Auto* / Manual □

Since there was no one to delicately control them, Seongjin had already switched them to auto mode. Of course, she had to persuade the demon lord for a while to borrow his spiritual eye for a while.

When Seongjin repeatedly promised that he would not go directly to the front lines, the Demon King reluctantly accepted Seongjin's request.

'Anyway, this guy and that guy are so anxious because they can't get me back!'

Seongjin grumbled inwardly as he rode backwards. He was still holding the ice heart in one hand.

What shaved ice players needed now was not precise control. A strong thought that only specifies a goal.

'good! The Lycan Slope in front, they are all our enemies!'

With Seongjin's instructions-

Whoa whoa-

Ooooh-

The giant ice monsters let out a dull roar and began charging towards the Lycan Slopes at once.

236. Defensive Battle (9)

Buuuung-

A massive arm, like a piece of heavy equipment, swings wide horizontally.

Wow! Kyung! Hehe!

The pitiful screams of the lycan slopes rang out here and there.

The power of the shaved ice was truly overwhelming.

With one step, the sea full of demonic beasts splits helplessly, and with a single wave of the arm, a dozen Lycanslopes fly helplessly into the air.

There was no need for delicate manipulation.

In a place where lycan slopes were spread all over the world, all the shavers had to do was swing their limbs at random.

Flutter! Flutter! Crackling.

The situation was even worse for the lycanthropes lying on the ground.

The demonic beasts that were blind and unable to avoid them were trampled by the shaved ice's footsteps and were instantly reduced to mush.

Even after being crushed by an ice monster weighing tens of tons, there was no room left for regeneration. The path along which the shaved ice passed was completely covered with the fresh blood and flesh of the lycan slopes.

"...I've only heard about it, but seeing it with my own eyes is truly amazing."

Overwhelmed by its power, Sir Sebastian stopped swinging the sword and admired it.

If even the serious guard commander is like that, what about the single soldiers who witnessed this miracle?

"iced coffee!"

"Apostle... I am the Apostle of the Lord!"

The look of despair disappears from their faces.

When the ice wall base was helplessly attacked, weren't the Glacher trolls like demons that came out of hell?

But when the monster became my ally, I couldn't feel so reassured.

'Even without ice walls!'

'... Maybe we can stop it!'

The morale of the soldiers began to soar.

"Let's go! The blessings of the Holy Family are with us!"

"The Lord has not abandoned Sigismund!"

Wow!

Soldiers vigorously jumped into the lycan slopes, waving their weapons.

* * *

Meanwhile, the face of the person who actually created such a miracle was not that bright.

"not good....."

Seongjin frowned and muttered.

He was currently in the rear with the Margrave. Because it was on a low watchtower, the battlefield was somewhat visible at a glance.

At first glance, it looks like we have gained the upper hand, but this atmosphere will not last long.

The initial strategy only slightly made up for the numerical inferiority, but there were still a huge number of lycan slopes remaining on the mountain slope leading to the ice wall.

"They recovered faster than I thought."

Already, people are coming out one by one to pull themselves together.

I had heard that it had good regenerative powers, but I had no idea that even the eyes could be that strong.

"Couldn't you try the method you used earlier one more time, sir?"

Seongjin shook his head in response to the Margrave's question.

"No matter how foolish they are, they will never suffer the same thing twice."

Of course, there was no way to retrieve the magic stone that was thrown in the middle of the battlefield.

"We were so unprepared for this situation. We had a high ice wall, so even though the territory was growing rapidly, we didn't think of putting up a decent wall around it. It's all my fault!"

At first glance, Margrave Hendrick's face looked sad as he lamented like that.

But Seongjin had no idea that he was telling the truth. His dry, dry eyes still looked busy with various calculations.

And that thought was correct.

"This situation is an exception among exceptions. Rather, it is highly likely that the activities of demonic beasts will be reduced in the

coming years due to this latest movement. There won't be enough money to rebuild the territory this year, so it would be beneficial in many ways to simply repair the ice wall stronger. Rather, it would be better to use this incident as an opportunity to increase royal support... ..'

Seongjin glanced at the Margrave, who was shaking his head, and clicked his tongue.

I think I know what this author is thinking, because things in this world rarely go as expected.

If things continue like this, I might regret it greatly someday. I don't know why I have that feeling.

Feeling uneasy, Seongjin turned his attention back to the battlefield.

Meanwhile, the front line had been pushed quite a bit towards the mountainside.

"The Wolf Knights' dance is truly amazing. It's just as I heard. Of course, I was a little disappointed with the Dekaron Knights."

When I blurted out this while glaring at old Vincent who was staggering from afar, Margrave Hendrick smiled with a good look on his face, pretending not to notice.

"How could this be possible with just the power of the Wolf Knights? All of this is thanks to you, who brought the Glacher Trolls."

"hmm."

"Besides, Lord Masain's inaction is truly unbelievable! They say he is the youngest captain of the royal guard, and he is indeed a member of the royal family."

As said, a bright golden aura flashed brilliantly from time to time at the forefront of the battle line. Needless to say, he is Lord Martha's Auror.

Wow.

Seongjin's hand caresses the handle of the nutcracker, and without realizing it, strength goes into it.

I decided that it would be more effective to release four shaved ice than to run around alone, so I quietly retreated, but I felt like jumping in there right now.

"Sir, the activity of the auror is very unstable. It is impossible to move now."

Manager Bruno, who was next to him, must have noticed Seongjin's nervousness and gave him a firm warning.

Currently, Director Bruno remains as Seongjin's escort. This was a measure taken by Masain, who judged that it would be advantageous in many ways for him to go to the front.

If we can't keep the prince somewhere, let's take the first step and get the job done as quickly as possible. Perhaps he had been thinking this way recently.

'Is it because of me that even Sir Martha got involved?'

I can't believe that a man who would have lived a respectable life as the youngest captain of the Royal Guard ended up having such a rough time on the front lines.

While I was silent for a moment, the demon lord was making sarcasm in my head.

[Don't act like you regret anything, Seongjin Lee. You're going to quickly forget it anyway and get into trouble again, right?]

'... shut up!'

People are just reflecting!

Meanwhile, old Vincent, who had been rolling around on the floor, finally returned to the front line.

Although his vision was still blurred, he was pushing himself up and swinging his sword. This is because he had some awareness of his

current position.

However, the two eyes that had not yet recovered were bloodshot, and tears like a waterfall were pouring down non-stop.

"Ouch! I was just wondering what you were going to do! I thought I'd be fine since I was protected by an auror!"

Anyway, it was all my own fault.

The old man pursed his lips as he endured the stinging pain and cold sensation.

Of course, he thought he had completely lost face, but this also had an unexpected effect.

The figure wielding a sword with bloodshot red eyes and a very distorted face is literally a demon that crawled up from hell. It was so ferocious that even the lycan slopes who had no sense of humor were startled.

"Why are you guys moving already? I'm still sick!"

As if the old man was taking out his anger on the guys, he belatedly dug deep into the wire and started running wild.

Seongjin diligently checked on the safety of his party scattered throughout the front lines.

The group was doing better than expected.

Not to mention the performance of Sir Maria, a senior knight, Sir Claudia and Sir Calmen, who are faithful to the basics, are also mixing in among the soldiers and steadily cutting down the demonic beasts.

They were knights of the imperial capital, called greenhouse knights, but as they gradually became accustomed to dealing with magical beasts, they all began to demonstrate their skills to the fullest.

Sir Valery, who was criticized by Masaine as 'out of his power', is doing his job well.

"Hehehe!"

Sir Sharon, wielding a curved sword with a grinning face, was somewhat creepy.

In particular, the chemistry between Sir Claudia and Sir Calmen was unexpected. The two were continuing an organic battle, going back and forth, giving and receiving.

"Hoo."

Director Bruno stroked his mustache as if wondering.

"...It's as if they've been fighting back to back for a long time. I know they don't have a very close relationship, but it's really surprising."

"I know?"

Of course, the one that stood out the most was Masain.

Hissing-

I heard that a long golden afterimage is cutting down the lycan slopes.

Quaaaang!

Soon it explodes with a powerful explosion. A group of demonic beasts at the front split up and down and died.

Auror explosion.

It is a very unfamiliar yet beautiful technology to the Sigismund people.

As the Wolf Knights pushed in in time, the front line was quickly pushed back to the mountainside.

But even so, there was no sign of nervousness on Seongjin's face.

'When will you come...?'

They still have a hidden history. I had that feeling.

And in such cases, Seongjin's premonitions were usually correct.

just as expected.

Thump thump thump.

After a while, instead of the vibration of the shaved ice, a new vibration was detected approaching from far away. The sound of the footsteps of dozens of giants.

"That...!"

It didn't take long for our soldiers on the front lines to sense the anomaly.

An ominous vibration shaking the ground.

The Sigismund soldiers who had guarded the Demon World for many years could not have known the cause of the tremors.

"no way....."

"Gravure Troll...?"

Above their pure white heads, on the gentle ridge leading to the ice wall base, dozens of ice monsters soon appeared.

25 Glatzer Trolls.

A scale that immediately overshadows the majesty of four shaved ice. It was clearly the maximum number that could be used with an ice heart.

"As expected, the guy who targeted the canyon fortress came here!"

Seongjin quickly opened his spiritual eyes and controlled the ice heart.

☐Mode setting: Auto / *Manual*☐

Seongjin separated Bingsu No. 1 from the group and slowly steered him toward the slope.

It's too far to control from here, but if you run wild in a melee, you might end up stepping on an ally.

In that case, it would be better to just jump into the middle of the enemy lines, even if your movements become a little slower... ..

Then Seongjin suddenly felt an eerie feeling and turned his head towards the north.

'... uh?'

When I listened closely, I realized that the vibration was coming from more than one direction.

Thump thump thump.

A new sign appeared on the northern road leading to the canyon.

As I continued to stare, to my surprise, about a dozen more Glacher Trolls appeared there!

The canyon fortress was in the way, so it was a direction I didn't expect to be attacked from.

"Could it be that the fortress was attacked...?"

It was a reality I did not want to believe. But strangely enough, that is not the end.

Thump thump thump.

This time it was southwest. As expected, about a dozen Glacher Trolls appeared, climbing through the tall coniferous trees.

Didn't they say there's a huge lake and cliffs over there that demon beasts can never invade?

'A total of 50 Glature Trolls? And from three directions?'

Holy shit... .. !

Seongjin gritted his teeth.

[for a moment! Seongjin Lee!]

The startled Demon King tried to dissuade him, but Seongjin's strong will forced him to share his senses.

It's a disaster.

Soon his spiritual eyes open, and a vision filled with five colors of light unfolds.

'How many people are there? How many people control the Ice Heart?'

Squeaky.

Sungjin, enduring the pain that was getting stronger, opened his eyes wide to find the thoughts of the Glacher Trolls.

Fortunately, the effort was not in vain, and Seongjin eventually succeeded in finding faint lines of thought among the dizzying Aurors on the battlefield.

But the results were unexpected.

"no way....."

[Hey, Seongjin Lee! You have eyes!]

Surprisingly, all of the glamor trolls' thoughts were connected to one point.

And what is at the end is a powerful, dark green flame!

According to Seongjin's will, the field of view rapidly expands, and the sight of the mountainside quickly approaches.

What was there was a woman wearing a large dark green robe.

She held an ice heart in each hand. He is truly moving 50 magical beasts by himself.

'That guy is the devil! I'm not a demon contractor!'

Seongjin knew right away.

[aha?]

At that time, the woman must have felt Seongjin's gaze and looked up into space.

Under the deeply pressed hood, bright red lips draw a long arc.

[Someone said it and it turned out to be you. You are prepared.]

... Those who are prepared?

[I haven't heard that you have spiritual eyes. Indeed, it seems you were the one who stole the ice heart from the canyon. My master will be very interested if I tell you this.]

Stop talking nonsense, devil!

You die by my hands today!

thud! thud!

Bingsu No. 1 responded to Seongjin's will and started running. I paid no heed to the Lycanslopes or the Glature Trolls, and only aimed for that dark green ominous flame.

[Hehehe, where!]

Wooooooo-

Glacher trolls tried to get in his way, but Seongjin ran while dodging them. The strange sense of unity he had experienced once before, as if he had become the number one shaved ice, came to him again.

Only the headache and eye pain that had been getting worse from earlier were preventing his soul from completely separating from his body.

Squeaky.

Suddenly, my vision became blurry and I felt something flowing down my cheek.

[Lee Seong-jin! stop! It's impossible now!]

I know it's impossible, devil.

But if we can't kill that guy here, the territory will be over anyway.

[Don't be hasty! If you lose your mind here now, then your territory will be over!]

But, devil, if we leave it like this, we cannot guarantee our safety. Not only Lord Martha, but also the resident knights will be killed or injured.

Besides, I can tell. For the sake of Delcross, we must protect the Sigismund territory now. If we get pushed back here, we won't be able to control it from now on.

Now take one step.

If only I could take one more step.

Bingsu No. 1 covered the ridge with terrifying momentum.

[Uh, how... .. !?]

Only then does the devil startle and take a small step back. It seems he never thought that the glamor troll Dangi would break through all these obstacles and run toward him.

'It's almost now! Got it... .. !'

It was then.

Huh.

Suddenly, my vision becomes blurry and my vision becomes dark.

'Holy shit! Just a little more, it's already been a while!'

I desperately rubbed my eyes, but once my vision was gone, it did not come back.

It wasn't just the vision that was wrong. Along with a tremendous

sense of exhaustion, the fatigue from up until now washed in like a tide.

'I couldn't reach it this time either. Just one step is not enough... ... !'

All strength is lost from my body and my body suddenly tilts.

Then chin.

Someone caught Seongjin's falling body. It was a somewhat familiar sight.

"Are you okay, Seongjin Lee?"

".....!"

uh?

For an instant, Seongjin's head went blank.

why? How far is it from the ecliptic to here? Why is he here?

"Stay still. Your Auror flow is messed up right now. Why are your eyes like this? Blood is flowing from them."

A warm energy flows into the eyes along with a calm voice. It was divine power.

"Why are you doing this here? What on earth is going on? Brother Masain?"

Unbelievable. It's really Logan!

Seongjin blinked his invisible eyes and tried to focus.

"...Logan? How are you here now...."

"Ah. I saw something flashing in the distance, and I thought it was unusual, so I stopped talking and ran right away. I wondered if there was anyone else who would do something like this other than you, but I really didn't expect you to be here. What was that bright light from earlier? "

What was it? It was the rock you gave me...

Seongjin, who had been thinking absently, suddenly came to his senses.

... devil!

"Logan! Logan!"

Seongjin fumbled with his hand and grabbed Logan's sleeve, which was covering his eyes.

You can be sure.

After waking up in this Delcross dimension, other than Seonghwang, Seongjin is the only one who has no idea how to deal with him.

This guy can do it!

"There is no time for this right now! This is something only you can do. You must catch him!"

"Are you saying you know what you look like now? If you leave this alone...."

"You idiot! That's not important right now! If we don't catch him, at least half of the people here will die! The damage to the territory will grow out of control!"

"....."

"Listen carefully. Beyond that mountainside, there's a devil! He looks like a young woman wearing a hood. We have to catch him now! If we don't...!"

"Whew...."

Seongjin, who had been talking frantically, was startled. Because in that soft sigh, I felt a deep sense of anger like never before.

But after all, Logan was Logan.

He quickly got over his agitation and asked in a calm voice.

"Okay. Just calm down and speak slowly. What should I do?"

237. Sword Master (1)

Flash!

When an unidentified flash of light flashed in the sky, Logan happened to be not far from Sigismund Territory.

"Pfft!"

The light was so strong that in an instant the night sky turned white and my eyes were blinded mercilessly.

Logan, who had been strengthening his eyesight with Aura to run at night, suddenly lost his vision completely.

Hee hee hee!

The horse, so startled, raises its front paws and lunges.

Logan let go of the reins for fear of harming the horse and fell off the horse.

Fortunately, the Sword Master's senses far surpass those of humans, and he was able to land safely on the floor even with his eyes completely closed.

"Roxana!"

Hee hee! Hee hee hee!

Logan ran to his frightened horse, which was jumping up and down, and grabbed the blurry reins. His powerful divine power was already gradually restoring his eyesight.

"Wow."

After carefully checking the horse's condition and patting its neck and back several times, Roxana smelled the familiar scent of her owner and soon became quiet. She eventually regained her composure and gently surrendered herself to the hands of Logan, whose words poured divine power into her eyes.

He looked after the horse like that and still looked at the northern sky with gloomy eyes.

'... Seongjin Lee?'

Why?

For some reason, Logan was caught up in the strange belief that the light from earlier had nothing to do with Lee Seong-jin.

The only strange thing is that the light erupted from a direction that was much more biased towards the territory rather than towards the demonic realm.

'It's clear. 'Something unexpected has happened in Sigismund!'

The commotion in the air is already unusual.

Logan's sensitive senses were already sensing the unique, tingling tension emanating from the battlefield.

The Lee Seong-jin he knew would never try to get out of such a dangerous situation alone. And Brother Masain will not leave Lee Seong-jin like that either.

In that case, for the safety of the two people, Logan had to go to the place where the light flashed right away.

'But Roxana is already so tired. It would be faster if I ran alone.'

He took a moment to take stock of his surroundings.

Fortunately, there are no signs of demonic beasts around. The wolves wandering around the area must have moved to northern Ortona by now.

Moreover, Roxana was also a fairly trustworthy partner who knew what to do.

Logan searched through the horse's luggage and took out the insignia of the Order of St. Bastian, which had the imperial family's emblem engraved on it. He unfolded the cloth and carefully wrapped it around the horse's neck and body.

Don't let any unscrupulous people mess with Roxana.

"I'm sorry, Roxana. Please rest here for a while. I will come look for you as soon as possible. Or, can you come find me at Sigismund's estate as soon as you feel better?"

The intelligent beast that had been working with Logan for quite a long time understood his master's intentions with just that one word.

The horse stared at Logan with wise eyes and nudged him with its head, purring and snorting.

"...Good guy."

Logan patted the bridge of Roxana's white nose with affection and tried to keep his steps steady.

Although he wanted to avoid the situation of leaving his Rottweiler alone in a remote place, if possible.

'but... ... '

Somehow I feel so anxious.

Seonghwang's words from earlier, 'bring back Mores safely,' were stuck in my mind and wouldn't leave.

'If I had known it would be like this, I wouldn't have sent it alone from the beginning!'

It would have been better to have followed him proudly without paying attention to what the Margrave thought. No, it would have been better to have kept Lee Seong-jin from going.

I regretted it later, but it was already too late. Logan chewed his lip and immediately wrapped his legs around the Auror and started running at high speed.

Before I knew it, only a slight soreness remained around my eyes, where my vision had been severely damaged.

* * *

The Sword Master, who moved faster than horses, quickly reached the battlefield.

"What the hell is this...!"

And when we arrived, the battlefield situation was much worse than expected. Sigismund's soldiers were having a hard time surrounded by countless Lycanslopes.

Additionally, the newly appeared giant monsters were also a problem.

The ice giants that Logan encounters for the first time. Dozens of demonic beasts, probably Glacher Trolls, are flocking towards the battlefield at once.

thud. thud. thud.

A look of despair appears on the soldiers' faces.

It was obvious that if they entered the battle like this, the barely balanced battle line would be greatly shaken.

'The demon beasts crossed the ice wall? how?'

At first, such doubts came to mind, but Logan put them aside for a moment and ran through the battlefield, chasing the presence of Lee Seong-jin, who he had already become accustomed to.

I felt puzzled at the fact that his presence seemed faint, as if it would break off, unlike usual.

Why does it look like this? Did you get hurt somewhere?

".....!"

And Logan, who finally found him at the watchtower in the rear, couldn't help but be speechless for a moment.

Situation at the front? The soldiers' despair?

No, Logan could be sure that nothing in this world would be as bad as Lee Seong-jin's current condition.

He was leaning against the watchtower, and red blood was flowing from his eyes, wondering what he had done.

Moreover, the aura flowing out of the body was so unstable that if left alone, it seemed like the entire body would disintegrate and scatter into the air at once!

Logan, the flagship, hurriedly ran over and caught Seongjin's body, which was about to fall.

"Are you okay, Seongjin Lee?"

And as soon as I caught him, I could clearly feel that he was not okay at all.

This is because Logan's sensitive sense of auras immediately grasped what was currently happening in Seongjin's body.

'... The flow of auras was so weak that it seemed as if every single strand had been cut off!'

There is no separate path for aura to flow through the body.

However, if you practice Aura for a long time, something similar to a habitual channel of Aura will develop. Something like a shortcut or circuit.

However, in Lee Seong-jin's body, those paths were not only broken, but were completely cut off at times. It was as if his entire body was covered by external energy at once.

-You would be really surprised to know how much he can control his

aurors. Not long ago, I almost died because I ignored the exercises and stirred up my body.

It was exactly what I heard from Amelia.

'I had to scrape the auror to the bottom several times. I did something that couldn't be handled by the total amount of aurors of a low-ranking knight, and before I could recover, the same situation was repeated over and over again!'

As the body was forced to deplete the aura, and then the aura was quickly pulled out, all the tissues in the path through which the aura flowed were damaged.

So, even though Dantian's aura is recovering now, the aura is not flowing properly along the path and is running rampant in the wrong place.

"Your Majesty Logan? How come here...."

The Margrave and Leader Bruno, who had been dumbfounded by the appearance of the Glatrue Troll, finally noticed Logan and their eyes widened.

But there is no time to reply one by one. Logan ignored them and began to pour divine power into Seongjin's bleeding eyes.

Currently, the only person here who knows exactly what Seongjin Lee's condition is is Logan.

This is because Aurors basically have the property of protecting the body. Is it any wonder that the aura that should flow for beneficial effects actually damages the body of the aura user?

"You received treatment from the Holy Knights earlier, but your condition has not completely recovered."

Even former Dekaron Knight leader Bruno said the same thing.

Although he came with a very worried face, it was a face that said, 'The prince must be very tired, for the auror to become so weak.'

That meant that this guy's current condition was unusual.

"Stay still. Your Auror flow is messed up right now. Why are your eyes like this?"

Logan tried to calm Seongjin, who was struggling as if embarrassed, and stabilize his condition. At the same time as he sheds his divine power, he guides the Auras of Seongjin, who have lost their way due to external energy and run rampant, to the right path.

Normally, there would be no way for him to be unaware of the existence of aurors interfering from the outside, but right now, Lee Seong-jin was just blinking blankly as if he felt nothing.

"Why are you doing this here? What on earth is going on? Brother Masain?"

Although he tried to remain calm, Logan's mind was extremely anxious.

Can this guy's condition ever recover? Wouldn't it be like I'm going to become a wreck forever like this?

What if this guy who loves sword training so much never gets to hold a sword again...

I don't know what he was thinking at that time, but Seongjin suddenly got startled and fumbled with Logan's sleeve.

Aside from being blind, it seemed like he was currently unable to feel any sensation in his hands.

"Logan! Logan!"

Logan also knew this symptom well.

The final battle on the Plains of Andres where he met his end.

When they fought against the onslaught of a large army for several days without eating, sleeping, or resting, Dekaron Knight's mighty aurors were also exhausted in the end.

Because of this, he had to force himself to scrape off even the slightest bit of aura and use it all.

In the end, he couldn't even feel the hand holding the sword, and he had to die at the hands of Captain Silas after overworking his body to the point where his entire body's circuits were torn apart.

'Even if I had saved my life at that time, I would have ended up as a ruined person.'

Dekaron Knightzoja, who had perfected the balance of the Aurors, had also reached that point.

But Seongjin Lee. You are not who you were back then.

Why did you end up in this situation when you have no country or compatriots to protect?

"There is no time for this right now! This is something only you can do. You must catch him!"

But it seemed like even that wasn't enough for Lee Seong-jin. Logan's voice rose higher without my knowledge at his urgent words.

"Are you saying you know what you look like now?"

However, while criticizing Lee Seong-jin, his heart was filled with self-destruction.

I shouldn't have taken this guy for granted when he asked me to come over.

If you had immediately summoned Lilium after receiving the letter without hesitation, or rather, if you had just rushed here that evening.

"You idiot! That's not important right now!"

I am angry at Seongjin Lee for not taking care of himself to allow this situation to happen.

"If we don't catch him quickly, at least half of the people here will

die! The damage to the territory will grow out of control!"

But more than anything, I was angry at myself for keeping my eyes open and allowing this situation to happen.

On the other hand, I also had this thought.

What on earth do they say to you?

'... Why on earth is this happening?'

Even I, the prince of Delcross, can't shake off my resentment toward the empire whenever Ortona's memories come to mind. I can't help but think that everything is a retribution that they must bear.

I thought that since I was born as a prince, I would fulfill my duties accordingly. But now, Logan was feeling extremely skeptical about him.

'But Lee Seong-jin, you're actually from a different world, right? What does their well-being matter to you?'

Lee Seong-jin, whether he knew what was going through Logan's mind or not, was quickly pouring out what he had to say.

"Listen carefully. Beyond that mountainside, there is a devil! He looks like a young woman wearing a hood."

If we don't do something about him, Sigismund... ... !

Logan, looking at that desperate face quickly explaining what he had to do, suddenly realized.

Ah, yes. Actually, I know why you do that. I already knew it for a long time.

Although he pretended not to be, Lee Seong-jin was a very kind guy.

Although he has a sullen face that seems uninterested in everything, you can tell that he is always watching the situation around him without missing a single detail.

Otherwise, Amelia and Sisley's faces wouldn't have brightened up so much recently.

Even Seonghwang, who I thought had no idea what was going on, has been changing little by little lately because of you.

-But you already gave your life! So what else should you do then?

Above all, who else in this world could be so genuinely angry on his behalf?

What did Logan say to Lee Seong-jin?

-If Mores comes back... Can you promise me that you'll give him his body back?

What did Lee Seong-jin respond to such a cruel request?

-Yes, it won't be difficult. I'm dead anyway.

What happened to my mind?

How could he say such scary words to this guy so easily?

"Whew...."

Suppressing the anger welling up from deep inside, Logan sighed deeply.

"This is amazing."

I need to find Mores.

Now, he couldn't tell whether he was anxious that he wouldn't be able to find Mores' soul, or whether he was afraid that he would suddenly return and Lee Seong-jin would disappear without a trace.

But at least one thing was certain.

Logan cannot afford to lose Lee Seong-jin like this.

-I am not sure whether the value of the republic is worth all these sacrifices. However, I can become the sword that realizes the will of

the prince who is certain of this.

Logan once said that to his close friend Benicio.

And even at this moment, he felt that way.

'I have no idea that this empire is worth that much. But still, Seongjin Lee, if you want to sacrifice your body to protect Delcross, at least I can be the sword that will make your will come true.'

That's why Logan answered Seongjin Lee like this.

"Okay. Just calm down and speak slowly. What should I do?"

238. Sword Master (2)

thud! thud! thud! thud!

Fifty ice monsters lined up and narrowed the distance from all directions.

"iced coffee....."

"Lord..."

There were helpless sighs here and there, but Lord Ilma couldn't even think of encouraging them.

Thanks to the power of the four Vincas controlled by Prince Mores, the numerically inferior force was being pushed back with evil force.

As their morale was high, their appearance was doubly fatal. The powerful force that had overwhelmed the enemy had turned into a force that was more than 10 times stronger and had come back intact.

"Okay, it's over! It's all over now!"

"How dare the Lord abandon Sigismund!"

The soldiers, very frightened, take a step back one by one.

Cheoldeokdeok! Tang Gang!

Some of the stupefied soldiers even slipped their weapons from their hands.

Sir Ilma, startled by this, came to his senses and belatedly raised his voice and shouted.

"Why are you looking at me so foolishly? Quickly reorganize your ranks! Glacier trolls are coming! Are you going to just watch your territory being trampled by them like this?"

But even her fierce cries were not enough to wake up the soldiers.

Why not?

"Captain! I guess this is...."

Even the Wolf Knights, who are said to be able to fly long, are so intimidated by the enemy's majesty that their hands are shaking.

Crrrrr-

In the meantime, the Lycan Slopes, who had fully recovered their eyesight, readjusted their stance.

Clutter. Coo.

Over the wounds from cuts and stab wounds, heavily contracted muscles cover and the bleeding stops.

The soldiers' eyes were filled with fear as they looked at the demonic beasts that quickly began to move normally. I was well aware of their regenerative power, but has it ever been so threatening to me?

'Is that large number too much for me?'

Sir Oscar, who had been with Seongjin and his party at the Gorge Fortress, looked back with a despairing expression.

When Vince suddenly lunged at the enemy with terrifying force, I secretly expected the prince to show the same action as before.

However, the hope was short-lived, and now Vince has disappeared between the enemies and has not been seen at all. It was probably caused by enemies.

thud. thud. thud.

The Glatute Trolls narrowed the distance with slow steps.

Of course, the reason was that it was difficult for the manipulator to specify the group goal at once, but to the Sigismund people who had no idea about this, it seemed like they were already showing off the composure of a winner.

The worst of them were by far the ones that appeared from the north.

The fist of the leading Glacher Troll is covered in traces of blood and finely chopped meat that cannot be hidden. The truth that this meant was one thing.

"...It looks like the Canyon Fortress has been completely hit, Captain!"

"We were wiped out in an instant without even having time to make contact!"

Even though sufficient troops were stationed, they were unable to stop their attacks.

Well, if Prince Mores had not been there in the first place, this fortress would have fallen long ago.

"As it is...."

Crack.

A rough grinding sound escapes from Lord Ilma's teeth.

She now had to make a decision.

It's not enough to block the Glacher Trolls coming from the front, but if they don't block the other direction, they're likely to collapse from the rear.

Right then.

"I'm coming, Captain!"

Suddenly!

Old man Vincent, who cut off the head of the Lycanslope that rushed at him, shouted in excitement.

In his eyes, whose red color was still not gone, a fierce fighting spirit that did not fade easily was burning brightly.

"The Wolf Knights must never leave this place. Once they are pushed back, they will get out of control! I would rather block the north alone, so the guard commander will lead his troops to the southwest now!"

It was thought that demonic beasts could never invade, so the southwest, where barriers and defenses were the most neglected, was a top priority.

Sir Sebastian, who understood what old Vincent meant, nodded with a stern expression and turned around.

however.

"...ok?"

The body of the old man, who was looking somewhere with wide eyes, suddenly became stiff in shock.

"What is it? Who on earth would have that kind of momentum...."

Old man Vincent mutters in a trembling voice.

At the same time, the fighting spirit that had erupted like a volcano clearly began to subside. Although it was something that could not possibly happen to him as a Dekaron Knight, the very intimidated old man looked as if he was scared.

"...Vincent?"

And they soon found out the answer.

Boom!

A chilling blue aura suddenly erupted from the direction the old man was looking.

It was a flash like dawn that tore through the darkness.

".....!"

That destructive light instantly pierced the heart of the Glacher Troll approaching from the north.

Kurrrrrr.

The ice monster, unable to even utter a loud scream, loses its shape and collapses into a small block of ice. A thick ice fog rose.

"...With one blow?"

"What is that?"

Surprisingly, the surprise did not end there.

Whirly, whirly!

With a sound that is infinitely light compared to its power, a silver-blue vortex rises, wrapping around the arm of another ice monster.

Fight! Fight!

After the storm-like whirlpool passed, the monster's ice arm fell down in chunks, showing a smooth cross section.

"...Auror Blade!"

The group could not believe their eyes.

It was hard to believe, but it was clearly the vivid sword energy swinging from someone's sword climbing the monster's arm.

It had a strangely wide range that made it hard to believe that it could be swung from an ordinary sword.

Whilick-

The Auror Blade quickly cut the ice monster's arm into pieces and stopped moving for a moment when it reached the monster's shoulder.

And I thought the vortex of sword energy suddenly narrowed to a

single point...

Boom!

It pierced right through the giant's chest and shattered his heart.

The giant's body, which had lost its power, stumbled and soon collapsed to the floor like a wooden doll with its strings cut.

Kukukuk!

A chunk of ice weighing tens of tons hit the ground, shaking the entire area as if there had been an earthquake.

".....!"

While everyone was dumbfounded and opened their mouths, there was someone who managed to recognize the owner of the auror.

"...No way, Prince Logan?"

A unique silver-blue aura completely combined with powerful divine power.

There was no way Masain wouldn't recognize it. Isn't this the Auror of my younger brother who has always been with me in the Blue Rose Labyrinth since childhood?

'I don't know how you're here now... ... !'

Masain quickly gathered his thoughts and shouted.

"Lord Ilma!"

Although he was worn out from the intense battle that lasted for a long time, the knight's eyes were shining brightly like never before.

"Prince Logan is here! If he is here, we don't have to worry about the north anymore. We just have to defend this place and defend the south thoroughly!"

"...yes?"

Lord Ilma asked in great confusion.

"How can the owner of that Auror be His Highness Logan? At first glance, he appears to have reached the level of Dekaron Knight."

Yes. Unless someone is in perfect balance of Aura, how can they pour out such incredible external energy multiple times?

However, although Prince Logan is a genius, he is still a young boy who has not even reached the age of birth.

However, Masain's face was full of confidence as he shook his head.

"Anyway, it is impossible for Sir Sebastian to block the south alone. No matter how many soldiers you bring, it will only be enough to slow down those magic beasts for a while. So, it is right for you, Vincent and Sir Sebastian, to block the south together!"

"....."

"Trust me! That Dekaron Knight is definitely Logan."

"but....."

"Even if it's just my imagination, it won't change anything since he pointed his sword at the Glacher Trolls, right?"

There was nothing wrong with what he said, so after hesitating for a moment, old Vincent turned to the south with the guard captain.

"Let's focus on protecting this place like this!"

Masain, who shouted like that, thought as he rushed towards the Lycan Slopes.

Could Logan be Dekaron Knight?

Yes.

It was difficult to explain, but Masain had a certain confidence.

Since childhood, Logan has always shown himself to be a great genius, garnering praise from those around him.

Nevertheless, Masain had a vague guess that that was not all, that her mature cousin was hiding something more.

It has to be that way. Didn't she spend all her childhood with him, hanging out with him all day long, in the labyrinth of the mayor?

The talent that this humble boy freely displayed to others was in fact nothing more than a smokescreen covering up something even more extraordinary hidden beneath it.

-Brother Masain. Haven't I told you several times that it's still too dangerous for you? 'Aura explosion' seems to be a technique that requires extreme auror control. Even if the operation is slightly clumsy, the aurors will explode from your grasp.

When Masain was clumsily imitating Seonghwang's techniques due to his childish mind, his younger brother watched from the side and tried to dissuade him with a worried look.

Still, as he stubbornly kept vibrating the external energy, Logan reluctantly sighed and tapped Masain's arm and sword.

-Here, here, and here are also disheveled.

And then, like a lie, the Aurors would regain stability.

The fact that Masain was able to use Aura explosions more skillfully than other knights was probably based on Logan's help.

Of course, Masain at the time couldn't even imagine how great it was.

However, if I think about it now, Logan, who skillfully controlled other people's auras from outside the body, has already far surpassed the current level of Masaine since then.

-your majesty! Prince Logan is a sword genius like no other in the world. Are you going to let that precious talent go like this? Director Bruno! Although he is a Dekaron Knight, he is still not good enough to be the prince's swordsmanship teacher!

I remember that Balthazar, the greatest knight on the continent, who recognized Logan's qualities at a glance, appealed to the emperor

several times, saying that he wanted to make the prince his disciple.

At that time, Masain clearly heard Seonghwang muttering softly next to him.

-Who teaches whom? Useless words. There is a clear difference in rank among sword masters.

At the time, it sounded like even Balthazar was not satisfied with teaching his genius son, but now that I think about it, it was probably not what he meant.

'His Majesty has known from then on how extraordinary Prince Logan was. Rather than Mr. Balthazar, who enthusiastically interferes with his student's training, Director Bruno, who has a moderately limited personality, is more suitable as his teacher.'

I guessed that there were many practical reasons why Prince Logan hid his true skills. That's why, even though Masain knew, she was pretending not to know about him until now.

but.

'His Majesty Logan has decided not to hide his limitations any longer!'

Just realizing this made Masain feel a shiver run through his body.

So what will the boy who cannot understand the depths show them?

* * *

'It's just as Lee Seong-jin said. These guys are very slow in reacting to identify attacking enemies.'

Did you say that since the person controlling them is grouping them and moving as a group, it would be difficult to respond to rapid changes in the target?

It was difficult to fully understand the explanation that Seongjin gave him, but anyway, following his advice, Logan was able to take down the three Glatzer Trolls in the front row in one go.

Ooooh-

The remaining Glature Trolls are confused and hesitate.

While leisurely looking around at those guys, Logan raised Arjuna toward his next target. Then, at the sight of a familiar figure approaching from behind, I turned my head and smiled for a moment.

"Ah, Archduke Sigismund."

"Logan... you! How on earth...."

Orden's face was gaunt.

He was the first to witness Logan's inaction, as the Glacher Trolls appeared from all directions and ran blindly north.

And the sight was so amazing that it was terrifying.

"That's Prince Logan's true skill!"

Only then did I feel like something clicked into place.

That inexplicable sense of discomfort he felt every time he faced Prince Logan.

It felt like I was looking at the calm surface of a lake, but the moment I stepped into it, I was afraid of being dragged into the deep sea with no end in sight.

'Prince Logan was a Dekaron Knight!'

He always maintained a slightly lower level of Auror activity than his own.

okay. Of course it has to be!

Since the Auras have already been completely balanced, isn't it natural that you can create them as you wish!

"I'm glad I met you at the right time."

Prince Logan, who soon smiled, looked at Orden, who was engulfed in an internal storm, and spoke.

As the inertial laughter disappeared, the slightly drooping eyes gave off a strangely cold impression.

"Could you help me with the nearby knights? I heard that the Wolf Knights work in groups when dealing with Glatute Trolls."

"...Yes that's right."

A heavy sense of intimidation that he had never felt from the prince, who was much younger than him, or even from his grandfather, was conveyed.

When I answered with some sense of discipline, Prince Logan nodded.

"Good. I'm trying to clear this place as quickly as possible. I'm planning to leave one or two Glacher Trolls behind. Can I leave it to you?"

"of course!"

"Yes. You are trustworthy. Then I will trust you."

Logan, leaving Orden behind, leaped forward and rushed towards the next Glatute Troll.

Ooooooh!

Jumping lightly to avoid the swinging fist, he scattered his sword energy and instantly turned the monster's fist into ice powder.

Kwakwakwakwa!

The sharp auras overlapped quickly, and at once a large silver-blue flower appeared to have bloomed on the guy's fist.

-Listen carefully, Logan. Now you are the only one here who can sense and track his demonic energy.

While slaughtering the demonic beasts, he slowly repeated in his head the words that Seongjin had advised him to do.

-I almost caught the devil, so he's probably on high alert by now. There is a high possibility that he hid himself somewhere else from the previous location. He won't be able to come to the forefront again without suffering some serious damage.

It was not unusual for the hands holding the sleeves of my clothes to tremble. But regardless of his condition, Seongjin was busy emphasizing to Logan what he had to do.

-First of all, let's reduce the number of glare trolls as much as possible. Then, if you happen to catch a glimpse of him, then you just chase after him, even if it means making all the sacrifices. If things don't work out, I'll help you.

-you?

-huh. Unfortunately, it looks like Bingsu No. 1 has been completely destroyed by them, but the other Bingsu are still under my control.

Vince? what is that?

-Shaved ice! I'm raising a Glacher Troll, and I'll give one to you later.

-... No, that's okay.

Logan couldn't understand what Seongjin Lee was saying.

I just felt a little sad, wondering if I couldn't rest comfortably even at this point.

-You idiot. Who is helping whom with this situation?

Seongjin Lee must have felt the sadness in Logan's voice, and he raised the corners of his mouth. Even during this time, she was so overconfident that her smile became even more sinister.

-Don't worry about me at all. It was like this before, but my father completely corrected it.

This bastard is saying that now!

Stop talking nonsense and lie down like you're dead!

Although he pressed Seongjin's head down like that, Logan felt a little relieved for a moment as if his words were not in vain.

Come to think of it, I heard that something like this happened when a monster appeared in the imperial palace. Then maybe Lee Seong-jin can recover!

Only after being so forcibly convinced did Logan manage to take a step that did not fall.

And soon I came to a realization.

'If I hadn't thought that Seonghwang could completely heal Seongjin Lee, would I still have moved like this while leaving that guy behind?'

When I thought about it, I found myself relying on the Emperor of Delcross for a surprising number of things.

Because I don't want to take responsibility for Ortona's destruction. Still, I don't want to be indebted to him for not being able to be his real son.

So, I subconsciously tried to keep some distance from him. I thought he had a pretty strong emotional wall around him.

'Am I a fool...?'

There was laughter.

Did you not know that pocket money has been secretly increasing recently under various pretexts?

Have you not noticed that when something big that you can't handle happens, the first thing that comes to mind is Seonghwang's face?

If this isn't foolishness, what is it?

239

239. Sword Master (3)

"...Logan seems to be doing well."

Seongjin muttered softly.

The air on the battlefield changed.

Although he couldn't see, Seongjin could feel it.

Morale, which had hit rock bottom, was revived and the atmosphere was dramatically reversed.

"But that alone is still not enough. I have to open the way for Logan..."

"Sir! Say no more!"

Director Bruno, who carried Seongjin down the watchtower, spoke urgently.

Strangely enough, the prince's condition is getting worse by the minute.

'Why on earth?'

All the prince did was stand still in the watchtower. Even though he looked extremely tired just a moment ago, it wasn't much different from how the prince usually looked.

But why is blood suddenly flowing from his eyes? Also, why is the current state of the Aurors becoming more and more blurry, as if they are all dying?

"Lord Saron...."

Director Bruno, who was urgently looking around to find an exorcist, soon shed a bitter smile.

If you think about it, there were times when she was so upset that she didn't want to go to the monster task force at all. But lately, whenever something happens, people are looking for her.

"I will bring the priest. Please stay here for a moment, sir!"

After taking off his winter clothes and wrapping them around the prince, Director Bruno left with an anxious expression.

"I have to move the shaved ice...."

[Didn't you hear what the idiot said? Don't talk and keep your mouth shut, you idiot!]

The devil bastard cried in Seongjin's ear.

[Ugh! Why on earth did this happen? Aside from the eyes, why is my physical condition suddenly like this?]

'Oh, I see.'

Seongjin was equally puzzled.

I thought I was taking good care of my body this morning, but why did I suddenly become like this?

To be honest, Seongjin's condition now was much worse than when he fought the Lycan Slope Lord. Obviously, my father treated me completely once, but why?

'... Just because you abused the spirit eye?'

The day before, I stayed up all night and used my spiritual eyes, but in the morning, there was nothing wrong except that my eyes were a little tired.

Moreover, I cannot understand the state of his body, which seems to be completely torn apart by auras.

Of course, while running around on shaved ice all day, I overused my Aura, but that wasn't the first time it happened.

That alone couldn't fully explain my current physical condition.

'shaved ice... ... '

okay. shaved ice.

Seongjin's head, which had been dull due to lack of energy, slowly began to turn.

'This is the third time in total that I've felt such a sharp decline.'

Once at the Canyon Fortress, once at the Ice Wall Base, and the last time when I was just trying to chase down a demon.

This happened right after controlling the shaved ice all three times.

'no way... ... '

Seongjin, who had been unconsciously releasing aura as a habit from the hand holding the ice heart, realized.

I'm finally getting the hang of it.

'When controlling the shaved ice, I felt a sense of unity as if I was moving my own body.'

While Bingsu's body was running wild like that, what if the aurors inside his body were running wild along with him?

Didn't his Auror reflect Seongjin's will so easily that he could easily react even unconsciously? So he warned Logan several times to be careful when moving his Aurors.

If a thought was strong enough to move the shaved ice with just a thought, it would not be surprising at all if the auror inside the body also shook in concert with it.

'Then everything fits together, doesn't it?'

So, after fighting at the canyon fortress, my condition deteriorated

rapidly. And after going overboard once again to catch the devil here, it was now difficult to keep my body in check.

'Is it a big deal? I think I still need to move the shaved ice one more time.'

If it continues like this, your body might not be able to withstand it.

Seongjin thought as he tried to strengthen the hand holding the ice heart.

'What if it's just a moment? I need to clear the way for Logan to catch the demon. The only person here who can do that right now is me...
... !'

[...] huh?]

At that time, the demon king who was whimpering screamed loudly.

[Are you thinking about something strange right now? What are you thinking? Why do you think you can't hear me? Are you planning something bad again?]

Oh, actually, the devil. I thought about it for a moment.

Isn't the fact that I unconsciously moved my body's aura because my soul couldn't completely leave my body?

[...] What are you thinking?]

But if I could leave this body completely.

If only I could control shaved ice like that.

[What are you trying to do now!]

If only I could separate my soul far enough so that my body would not be guided by thoughts.

If that happens, eye injuries will no longer be a problem. I will be able to see ahead with my soul without having to borrow your spiritual eyes.

Once my thoughts were organized, the rest was simple.

Recalling his previous experience of flying to the border of the dimension, Seongjin carefully asked the Demon King.

I ask you to call Seongjin's spirit from far away. So that he can leave his body as easily as before.

[Are you crazy?]

It was natural for the demon lord to jump around in his head, trying to break his crystal clear.

[You man, do your work! Completely separating the soul from the body? You're really going to die like this!]

That's something you don't know, devil.

I'm doing this so I don't die. If I make the Aurors run wild one more time, this will really be the end of this body.

[no! I absolutely hate it! Do you think I will do that?]

Don't worry too much. Because I will definitely come back to this body.

There are still many faces to see. Do you think I will die easily by then?

[Hey, Seongjin Lee!]

Or do you really want to let the Aurors run wild once again and watch this body be torn to shreds?

Is that the result you want?

[you... you... ... !]

The demon king, who was trembling, immediately said, "Aaaah!" He let out a scream and flew out of his body.

'But I can't think of any other way.'

Seongjin thought as he closed his invisible eyes. She wanted to concentrate as much as possible.

Then, the blood pushed out of my eyelids slowly flows down my cheeks like tears.

'good. I definitely have a decision to make. The fact that it can be stimulated with medicinal tea clearly means that it is functioning autonomously to some extent.'

I can hear it.

I can hear the devil calling.

I am the next generation oracle. There is nothing in this world that cannot be accomplished through my thoughts!

How many times did I repeat that?

The effort was not in vain, and soon really faint sounds began to be heard through Seongjin's crystalline flame.

[...] Repent! Repent!]

[Where are you? If you can hear my voice, please respond... ..!]

These guys are still doing this.

I want to ask a serious question. Isn't life a waste?

[Ugh! Seongjin Lee! See you later! I will never forget today! Sigh!]

Ah, I found it.

hmm. Devil, I actually feel quite sorry for you.

While Seongjin is concentrating all his attention on the devil's call, suddenly the loud voices of some children ring in his ears. The voices were somehow familiar.

[Good luck dad! Happy Dad! Look at Mores! Sir Sharon!]

[Dad, Your Majesty! Daddy, Your Majesty! Mores is dead! Sir

Sharon!]

what? Why is it so familiar?

For some reason, it seems like this has happened often before.

'Don't cry, you guys. Everything will be okay in the end.'

I can clearly see that.

With that last thought, Seongjin's consciousness quickly left his body.

* * *

Wedge! Wedge!

A brilliant silver-blue aura is quickly struck in large concentric circles.

The beautiful sword energy flowing along the sword's trajectory spread delicately in the air, like flower petals embroidered stitch by stitch.

Kwa-kwa-kwa-kwak!

A quick sword that stabs into the top again and again.

The overlapping and overlapping lights scatter brilliantly and spread in all directions like fluttering flower petals.

Rumble!

Another ice monster collapses helplessly where the flower had bloomed.

But this time there was no loud impact sound like before.

This was because Logan had already ground all of his limbs, except for the center where his heart was, into small pieces, in case there was any harm to the knights following him.

".....?"

Logan, who was taking care of Arjuna, glanced up into space as if wondering.

Of course, there was nothing there, but strangely enough, Logan felt that someone's curious gaze lingered there for a moment.

'What on earth?'

But there was no time to think for long.

Wooooooo-

This is because the Glaturre Trolls, who had finally identified their target as Logan, rushed towards him, screaming all at once.

Thump thump thump thump!

Several giants rushing towards him at the same time.

It wouldn't be difficult to deal with them one by one, but if he dodges, the remaining demon beasts will definitely rush straight towards the troops following behind.

then.

'Cut it into small pieces.'

All the directions they were running towards, the ice pillars coming in at various angles, each side without any gaps.

Hwiik-

The silver-blue aura emanating from Arjuna spreads wide like a fan.

At first glance, it looked like it was swung wide and sideways, but each one was a fatal ray of light that came from a quick stab.

The closest extremities of the Glaturre Trolls are temporarily sealed.

'Chop it into small pieces again.'

All surfaces surrounding the pole are sealed.

'Split it.'

The axis of movement that leads to the extreme point is fundamentally sealed.

Clap la la rock.

Countless fleeting fragments that have been broken into pieces that are difficult to perceive with the mind.

In the Sword Master's thoughts, all the things that have stopped are listed in a series of continuity. It unfolded before his eyes, one by one, and finally began to come alive in his thoughts.

Arjuna's traces engraved on each fragment also continue, and eventually become one will that overcomes everything.

Puff puff puff!

The legs of the five glamor trolls running side by side exploded at once.

Finely broken pieces of ice flew up, and a shock wave was strong enough to shake the entire basin.

"I can't believe it...!"

Old man Vincent, who was running south with Sir Sebastian, stuck out his tongue.

Dekaron Knight's eyes were able to carefully examine the prince's sword even from a distance.

And the results were truly shocking.

'How can the sword of a prince who is only a young boy contain such deep thoughts!'

Because he was a Dekaron Knight and had not yet become a sword master, he was able to recognize Logan's sword more clearly than anyone else.

That sword contained everything he didn't have. It is a sword that is capable of reaching the principles of the world.

"I thought it was only Balthazar."

The old man pursed his lips in exasperation.

Aside from Seonghwang in this Delcross, I thought in my heart that the only person who would be able to attack me was Balthazar in the Imperial Capital.

His level is nothing compared to this!

For the second time in his life, the old man felt the huge wall in front of him.

'It wasn't just a success!'

Many years ago. The day when the young emperor unexpectedly visited Lord Sigismund and took away Princess Amelia.

After experiencing the fear of near-instant death in front of him for a moment, old Vincent never set foot in the imperial capital again.

It was a shame, but it was because he was so afraid of meeting Seonghwang, who was much younger than him.

When I first met Prince Mores, what was the reason why I committed the crime of lese majeste? Isn't it because I felt a vague fear of the majestic spirit that I could never capture at that age?

But here is another one of the same thing!

Isn't this really crazy and jumping around!

"These people are like monsters. Are all the people in the Seonghwang family monsters like that...?"

Sir Sebastian glanced back at the complaint and said calmly.

"The prince is a sword master."

"Yeah, I see."

The old man nodded with a worried expression.

Sword Master.

This was the moment when, in name and reality, the youngest sword master on the continent was officially born.

* * *

Logan, who quickly cleared out the northern Glacher Trolls, headed to the center of the battle line, leaving one or two demon beasts for the knights.

And around that time, he began to feel a faint magical energy in his energy.

A dense vortex of darkness that was clearly distinct from that of the demonic beasts.

'Lee Seong-jin was right. There must be a devil beyond that mountainside!'

he said

Pursue that first, even at all costs.

Logan caught a glimpse of the Masain and Wolf Knights struggling on the front lines, then jumped up and jumped into the middle of the enemy lines. Like this, he planned to run straight towards the mountainside.

However, the situation that followed was worse than expected.

Crumbling!

Kkkkkkkk!

As if by some order, the Lycan Slopes began to flock towards Logan.

That's not all.

The Glature Trolls spread evenly across the front line all turned to look at Logan. This meant that the enemies had identified Logan as

the top priority for elimination.

'It's going to take more time to break through than I thought. Maybe I'll miss the devil.'

Logan swung Arjuna sharply out of urgency.

Squirt!

All lycan slopes within the wide attack range of the Henesys long sword were instantly cut in half and killed.

At that time, without missing the opportunity, a Glatzer Troll rushed towards Logan.

Boom boom boom!

This was when Logan was reflexively aiming Arjuna at the guy.

Coo!

A Glatute Troll suddenly appeared from behind, blocking his path and swinging his fist.

Cluck!

The Glatute Troll that was charging at Logan was hit with a counter, and its head and neck were instantly torn apart.

".....!"

Logan blinked for a moment at the shocking sight.

"...Lee Seongjin?"

For some reason, I suddenly remember what Lee Seong-jin said.

-If things don't work out, I'll help you.

No, no matter what. no way?

But then the ice monster, which was quickly ahead of Logan, collided with another Glacher Troll running from the side.

Kuaang!

Tens of tons of ice monsters collided with all their might. There was a terrible noise and an enormous shock wave.

"Is this really Lee Seong-jin? Is this what you call Vince?"

No matter what anyone says, the intentions of this Glacher Troll were clear.

Before Logan becomes a single target and is checked, he wants to draw attention to himself first.

At that time, Logan's eyes briefly fell on the Sigismund family insignia, which was surrounded by an ice monster.

It looked comical because it was covering its back vaguely, but it was also a sight that felt somehow familiar to Logan.

An image of Mores running through the Blue Rose Labyrinth with a red cloak clumsily tied around his neck flashed through his mind.

"haha."

Strange.

I've thought about this sometimes, but why do I keep thinking that Lee Seong-jin resembles Mores from his childhood?

Whoa whoa-

At that time, the Glacher Troll blocking the enemy turned to look at Logan.

Although the ice monster had no organs that could be called eyes other than the imperfect outlines of its features, Logan still felt that the Glature Troll was staring at him and giving him all the attention he could.

-good! Hurry and chase after the Magi!

Yes, Seongjin Lee. Of course I intend to.

Logan, who smiled unconsciously, lightly lifted his body up.

And, using the power of kicking one of the lycan slopes as the driving force, it began to shoot forward with great force.

240. Sword Master (4)

Director Bruno, who had left Seongjin behind, soon returned. He was accompanied by Gustav, a priest who specialized in healing.

"I mainly focus on trauma, so my divine power itself is not strong. If you don't have any special trauma, wouldn't it be better to bring in another priest?"

Gustav said with a disapproving look on his face. There is a feeling of dissatisfaction with the outsider who bothered to drag him in while there were urgently injured people one after another.

How could the prince, who was surrounded and protected by knights, be in a hurry to find a priest?

But Bruno's attitude was firm.

"There is no time for that. Please hurry."

Prince Mores looked exactly as Bruno had seen him reclining under the watchtower. Just the fact that his head was hanging down was quite ominous.

Gustav, who then realized that the situation was unusual, straightened his expression and hurried his steps.

"Lowering."

Bruno approached cautiously and shook the prince. But didn't the body that was shaking helplessly collapse into Bruno's arms?

".....!"

The prince's face, revealed as he collapsed, was as pale as a dead

person.

Bruno's heart sank.

"Lowering!"

They quickly laid the prince down on the floor and checked his condition.

"Why is there blood...."

Although he was greatly embarrassed by the sight of the prince's face, blood dripping from his eyes, Gustav soon came to his senses and began to pour out his divine power.

Fortunately, the heart did not stop at all, and the pulse was regained occasionally.

However, it was too precarious to be a proper beat; it seemed as if it was nothing more than a meaningless contraction of the heart, which was bound to tremble intermittently just before it stopped.

"What on earth happened to you? In order to treat, we need to know the cause."

Bruno shook his head in confusion at Father Gustav's question. Because no matter how much I thought about it, I had no idea.

It was just that my condition had been steadily worsening since morning, so I just assumed that my fatigue was building up.

"It's not enough for me alone. I think my heart will stop soon. I think I need the help of other priests."

At Gustav's serious voice, Bruno nodded and tried to get up to ask for help.

"omg.....?"

And I was so startled that I sat down. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a woman covered in blood was staring down at them.

Blood was even dripping from the ugly curved sword she was holding.

"...Lord Sharon?"

Bruno barely recognized the familiar figure. It seems that she was so distracted that she didn't realize she was approaching.

Because she was covered from head to toe in the blood of a demonic beast and I couldn't even sense her presence, even if it was just for a moment, I really thought she was a ghost.

"iced coffee.....!"

But the exorcist did not answer his call.

Sighing softly, she threw the curved sword on the floor and grabbed the prince's hand. My face, which was already pale, turned pale like never before.

"Mores, Mores, what should I do with you? Mores, Mores, maybe I like you?"

Seeing him repeating himself frantically in a thin voice, Priest Gustas' eyebrows rose.

However, Bruno realized that she was currently channeling and asked urgently.

"Lord Sharon. Your condition is strange. Could you please ask Your Majesty for help?"

Then, Sir Sharon looked up into space for a moment with a blank expression on his face, and then shook his head.

"Your Majesty cannot respond now. We must do something from here."

It was her clear voice that Bruno rarely heard.

Lord Sharon spoke in a calm voice as she poured divine power into the prince.

"Brother Gustav, please request more brothers with strong divine power."

"No! I-I'm going!"

Before the priest could move, Bruno jumped up from his seat and shouted.

"It would be much faster if I went. There's nothing I can do anyway, right? So in the meantime, priest, I hope you can use your divine power a little more....!"

Then the sharp voice of Sir Sharon stopped him.

"Stay here, Captain Bruno!"

".....!"

Looking at her with wide eyes, the exorcist's black eyes, which always looked blurry, were staring at Bruno with strong will.

"Absolutely not. Do you really not know? Your role here is the most important!"

"I... you mean?"

When I asked in a confused voice, she nodded.

"Yes. Please hold my hand. Please stay by my side! Please use your kindness to hold me here firmly so that he does not leave somewhere else again."

Cause and effect.

Before Bruno could even properly understand those words, he hurriedly grabbed the prince's hand.

'I heard it from Arenger! Did you say that my cause and effect definitely belongs to you?'

I don't know exactly what that means.

However, from Sir Sharon's desperate voice, Bruno sensed that the

cause and effect was more important than the priest's divine power.

"Lowering....."

Wow.

Bruno, who was holding tightly to the small hand that could feel its faint beating, realized something again. He wondered how small and childish the trustworthy boy he was relying on was actually.

"Ugh!"

Then a new regret arose. I should have helped the prince a little better!

'I thought I was serving you with all my heart, but in the end, I was just enjoying my life as I pleased!'

I was able to focus on regaining my level of prowess, and later I fell in love with the fun of coaching Calmen.

If there was something I didn't want to do, I didn't have to follow the prince around, all I had to do was stay in Jinju Palace and savor quality tea to my heart's content.

How in the world can a life like this exist as a gift?

'It was all thanks to you.'

The ranch the prince had prepared for him was so large and free that he even forgot for a moment that there was a fence protecting it.

"Father Seonghwang can't move yet. We have to move Mores' heart. Fast, fast, fast!"

Meanwhile, Sir Sharon was constantly muttering incomprehensible sounds.

"Daddy, we can't just wait for His Majesty. Let's slow down Mores' time. Slow, slow, slow!"

But is it because of my mood?

With her words, the prince's spirit, which had been dying out, felt like it was coming back just a little bit.

In desperation, Bruno grabbed the hand that had a weaker warmth than before.

'You have given me so many things, but what have I really done for you?'

He is not yet the Dekaron Knight he used to be. Although he maintained his Auric balance, albeit imperfectly, he still could not surpass Sir Martha Yin or Lord Maria in terms of sheer force.

Where is that?

He said he would be a bridge to Arenja with his poor channeling skills, but his skills are far inferior to that of Sir Sharon, the exorcist. At this distance from the ecliptic, isn't the only way to receive the strong thoughts they send out?

But Sir Sharon smiled slightly at Bruno, wondering how he knew what he was thinking.

"Don't blame yourself for nothing, Leader Bruno. Your mere presence will be of great help to me."

"Lord Sharon...."

"Your Majesty would not carelessly throw away his life, even to protect what belongs to him. Don't you know that he would never do that?"

".....!"

okay. Although we didn't spend a long time together, it was still enough time to get to know the prince's personality.

Trying not to miss the slow beat of his pulse, Bruno lowered his head and quietly shed a tear.

* * *

Kwasik! Wow!

Pow! Rumble!

The change that occurred when the Sword Master and a Glaturre Troll jumped into the battle line was dramatic.

Boom boom boom!

In particular, the performance of Glaturre Troll Vince was outstanding.

Vince, wearing Sigismund's insignia, races towards the mountainside, with all the Glacher Trolls on the front line on his tail. He doesn't forget to beat up those who follow him whenever he can and destroy them step by step.

"It's him Mores! He's controlling Vince!"

Sir Oscar, who had already witnessed the action once at the Gorge Fortress, shouted excitedly.

With some of the Lycan Slopes rushing towards it, the front line was now much more relaxed. This allowed Lord Ilma to withdraw some more of his forces and send them to the relatively vulnerable southwest.

Old man Vincent and Sir Sebastian were leading the troops, but they still seemed to be struggling quite a bit.

"This is the difference between Dekaron Knight and Sword Master!"

Lord Ilma inwardly clicked his tongue.

Dekaron Knight is the one who achieved balance among the Aurors.

And those who put their thoughts into the completed Auror Blade and are able to penetrate the laws of the world are called Sword Masters.

"How could His Majesty Logan have achieved a level that surpasses Vincent at such a young age!"

In any case, morale began to rise again at the front.

Only on Lord Martha's face, which occasionally glanced at Vince, was there a look of worry that could not be hidden.

This is because I remembered that the prince's condition was unusual when I was controlling Vince at the Canyon Fortress.

"Lord Ilma. I think I will have to go see you as soon as the front lines are stabilized. Is that okay?"

"Yes, of course, Lord Masaine. Thank you for your help so far!"

Ilma hastily nodded.

Lord Masain is by far one of the strongest forces here. It was a matter of gratitude that the knight who never left the prince's side fought on the front lines for such a long time.

Meanwhile, Logan, who was running alongside Vince through enemy lines, thought.

'Even if I wasn't there, wouldn't Lee Seong-jin have been able to stop them alone?'

Vince's performance was so great that it made me think that way.

The ice monster that had defeated the seven Glacher Trolls straightened up and swung its shoulders.

The sight of him confidently fluttering his badge made Logan secretly laugh, as he seemed to be looking at Lee Seong-jin with a shrug.

But there was no more time to waste.

Now that the eyes of the enemy are focused on Vince, it will be a long-awaited golden opportunity for him.

Logan passed through the enemies quickly, leaving no trace.

The Dekaron Knight is capable of performing world-class tricks with its enormous amount of aura, but it is also capable of completely

erasing its presence and easily hiding anywhere if it wants to.

And before long, Logan was able to face the devil hiding among the thick bushes.

As Lee Seong-jin said, she had the appearance of a young woman wearing a dark hood.

[...] no?]

Before the devil even noticed his appearance, Logan's powerful sacred barrier captured the devil.

Granius defense barrier, type 0.

It was the most basic form and at the same time a flawless barrier that completely surrounded the enemy with divine power.

[this! In what gap?]

The devil, who was instantly surrounded by a curtain of silver light, had a look of disappointment on his face. Then he immediately looked at Logan and tilted his head.

[iced coffee? Where are you... ... ?]

However, as if he soon realized something, he regained his composure and curled the corners of his mouth.

Even though he was surrounded by a sacred barrier that could burn him at any moment, the devil smiled as if he were possessed, paying no heed to it.

[Whose soul shines so brightly? Indeed, the last sword of the East is you!]

A term that undoubtedly refers to Gael Bertrand.

Logan asked in surprise.

"Do you know me?"

[Of course, you know. Cluck cluck!]

The devil changed into a calm and weak attitude and shouted confidently.

[I've seen you up close! It was clearly an offering meant to be offered to the Penitent! My master was very sad, but how could I not be happy that he was hiding so well!]

A penance offering?

It was the first time. Is what the devil is talking about really his past life?

Logan answered with a doubtful expression.

"I just died in a civil war. I don't know anything about sacrifices to the devil."

Then the devil let out an unpleasant laugh.

[Well, guess what. Saying you don't know is such a naive attitude. There was more at stake in your death than you thought! Even if the Guardian hadn't stolen you, a lot would have changed now.]

truth.

Logan frowned and glared at the demon.

[What do you think? Won't you let me go? If you do that, I will give you important information.]

lie.

The devil is just trying to avoid this situation. He has no intention of saying anything.

"I ask you just one question, devil."

Logan's eyes stared at the woman with a cold, cold light.

"Was it the work of demons that destroyed my homeland, Ortona?"

[Well, human affairs intervened here and there, but ultimately it can be seen as such. How do you feel? Do you want to know more?]

Of course I wanted to know.

Even so, there were things I learned while leading the punitive force for several years.

Why is evidence of long-standing devil worship found throughout Ortona?

Perhaps there is something deeper hidden in Ortona's dissolution.

As Logan was lost in thought, the devil seemed to think that his words were working and subtly coaxed him.

[Now, tell me anything. You are a soul whom my master truly admires. If you stand before my master with me, he will grant you whatever wish you wish.]

It's a wish.

A bitter smile appeared on Logan's lips.

"Then is there a way to bring back my destroyed country?"

[...] what?]

"Can you give me my country back?"

The devil paused and then laughed bitterly.

[haha. You're using nonsense. How can you bring back something that has already been sacrificed and disappeared? Creating a human kingdom requires enormous human effort. It is not something my master should get involved in lightly.]

truth.

Logan nodded.

"Then there is nothing more to hear."

Wow!

As Logan clenched his fist-

Logan, who was tilting his head, slowly picked up a piece of ice. Then, the black magic energy wrapped around the piece tried to wrap around Logan's entire body.

This is an item that the devil had. It is contaminated with terrible demonic energy, so a normal person would have been eroded immediately just by touching it...

This had no effect on Logan, who possessed great divine power.

'Is this an important item? 'What is this that I held on to so carefully until the end?'

Logan carefully rolled the ice cubes in his palm.

The decision was quick.

'Shall we take it as evidence? If it's nothing special, I'll just give it to Seongjin Lee. 'It's going to be boring to lie in the hospital bed for a while, so I guess I should at least try playing with this.'

Logan painstakingly purified the ice heart with divine power and then quickly put it in his pocket.

Of course, until then, he had no idea how happy Seongjin would be upon receiving that gift.

241

241. Return (1)

"Kwak?"

The little girl narrowed her eyes at the strange scream that came from the old priest's mouth.

"What are you doing here? Stay safe."

"No, can you please stop looking at me with those disgusting eyes? It's probably going to hurt me."

Pa-jong waved his hand and continued speaking with a serious face.

"My family just died. How can this be? What happened?"

He was quite capable and useful, but he died in vain like this?

Greed glared pitifully at the high-ranking demon king who was making a fuss that was unbecoming of him.

"Is there anything he left behind?"

"Um... not at all?"

Pajong tried to focus his mind towards the north, but all he could sense was a very faint residual thought.

[Ah, I must quickly tell my master about this...]

It was truly a useless dying message.

What do you know?

Who the hell killed you?

"Has the Guardian returned? I didn't sense it."

It was not unreasonable for Greed to think so.

The force prepared to attack Sigismund was on a scale that would never have been possible if the Guardian had not come in person.

But Pa Jong shook his head.

"No, the guardian of Delcross has not returned from the gap yet. Well, nothing is going as expected."

The guardian of Delcross, who was originally held captive, was forced into an urgent situation and tried to induce him to break the [agreement].

Pajong scratched the top of his head, which was starting to empty out.

"If I had known this would happen, I would have done things a little more moderately. Ae-yeol committed it much more violently than I expected."

Who would have thought that such a powerful guardian would create so many dimensions that he would be held captive all day!

Thanks to this, their plan ended up going nowhere.

It was not enough to conquer Sigismund territory, and it was not enough to bring down the guardian of Delcross.

"ah!"

At that time, Pajong was suddenly startled and shouted.

"Ice hearts! What should I do with them? Ae-yeol said she wanted to return them."

What did they say? That server... It is an extremely rare item in this world.

I heard that they spent all their money to sweep it all up.

"How many did you borrow?"

Gluttony, who knew well that his passionate nature was not normal, showed signs of discomfort on rare occasions.

"Five. I trusted my family members to be quite capable, so I entrusted them all to them, but they died without a word. Now, how do I get them back?"

Thinking that Ae-yeol would definitely get the full price somehow, Pa-jong sighed deeply with a gloomy face.

* * *

After catching the target demon, the next step was a breeze.

Logan unfolded his sword generously on his way back to the front lines. Because he no longer has to hide anything.

Along his path, the ice tombs of Glature Trolls were piled up one by one, and the corpses of hundreds of Lycanslopes were lying around.

Meanwhile, Logan witnessed an unexpected sight.

In the middle of the slope, Vince was standing there blankly, looking into space.

"...Lee Seongjin?"

There was something unusual about the atmosphere.

Even though a half-broken Glature Troll was swinging his fist, Vince was not responding in the slightest. It was as if his soul had escaped.

After staring at Vince for a moment, Logan hurriedly found the Wolf Knights.

"Since when has it been standing like that?"

The Wolf Knights were momentarily taken aback by the young Sword Master's question that suddenly appeared. But soon Lord Ilma stepped forward and answered calmly.

"It hasn't been long. The movement has slowed down little by little, and it is in the same state as before. The situation on the battlefield has been somewhat resolved, so I guess you have stopped controlling it?"

"okay?"

Logan's face became serious.

You were having so much fun just a little while ago, but you're quitting right now just because you have some free time? That guy?

'It can't possibly be like that.'

It's definitely true. Something was wrong with Seongjin Lee.

"Holy shit!"

Logan ran quickly toward the rear without even pretending to see the Lycan Slope charging at him.

Please, please, nothing should happen!

* * *

Sniff, sniff.

A small cry is heard from somewhere.

Seongjin walked absent-mindedly, listening to the song as if it were a song he always heard.

[Lee Seong-jin, you idiot! I knew it would end up like this.]

The owner of that voice was a small soul.

The soul, whose red light was blinking in sync with the whimpers, continued to cry as it followed behind Seongjin.

[How long did you think the soul would last after leaving the body? You don't even think about the future, do you? Your father isn't coming, so how are you going to go back now?]

'... ... '

Seongjin carefully held the devil's dusty soul.

Even in his grip, which was much smaller than before, his fragile soul was only a handful away. He has become so insignificant and weak that he can no longer be hated like he used to be.

[Maybe it's better now? Sniff, sniff.]

Why are you so sad, devil?

Seongjin thought curiously.

You said we were planning on doing this from the beginning, right? He would have been caught up in Gehenna's terror and his soul would have been completely scattered and he would have died.

[It's different now from then. In the past, you thought it was okay, but now you want to go back.]

Do you want me to go back?

[You really wanted to stay in that world.]

Well, maybe so.

But devil, why are you crying so sadly? Even when you became a lost child in another dimension in the past, I don't think you were that sad.

[That's because you're sad! Giggle.]

'... ... '

... is it?

Actually, I'm not sure right now.

[Mores! Mores! Come back quickly!]

[Mores! Mores! Don't go far!]

look. As always, I can hear the voices of noisy children in my ears. But I don't think anything.

Anyway, these guys. Please don't repeat the same thing over and over again. That's quite annoying and annoying.

[Sir, please come back. Please do not abandon this Bruno!]

Someone's earnest request can also be heard from afar.

Oh, that's right. There remains a cause and effect that belongs to me.

He has been exiled from the world for a long time, so he probably won't be able to set foot in the world anymore without me. I really can't leave it like that.

'But it is a very weak manpower to dwell on.'

That too.

Seongjin's steps slow down a bit.

I didn't really feel like I had to go back, but I couldn't help but feel heavy in my heart.

[Lowering! Lowering! Please open your eyes!]

At that time, the urgent voice of the driver is heard.

Seongjin stopped walking and looked back.

Sir Masain. He is someone who is always in a lot of trouble because he has to follow Seongjin around. If we broke up like this, I would be very heartbroken.

'Maybe it would be better to let go now.'

okay. Maybe so.

What kind of trouble is this for both of us?

I'm thinking about it now, but it seems like living as Mores was a bit of a struggle. There are so many more things to worry about than

when I was alone.

It was time to start walking again.

rattle. rattle.

Suddenly, a bell sound was heard overhead.

'... ... ?'

[Whoa whoa whoa!]

Heavy rain? what? Who's smiling?

While I was wondering, something new fell from above my head.

If you look at the light movement, it was a light gesture like that of a fairy. It's just that the subject is a bald old man wearing a red hat.

[...] what? What is this inspiration?]

The demon king, who had been sniffing, stopped crying and asked in bewilderment.

[Hoohoo! Where are you going, kid!]

The old man shouts and easily lands in front of Seongjin.

and! Sister Amelia! Check this out! It's amazing that dragons are real, and there really is a Santa in this world!

Even when I was young, I never believed in it, but I think innocence is something I need to protect and observe.

Then the old man frowned and shouted, wondering how he knew what Seongjin was thinking.

[This! Do your best! I am not that Santa!]

Oh, is that so?

When I looked at the inspiration carefully, it was a little different from the Santa I remembered.

Although he wore a red cone and had a white beard, his appearance was somewhat poorer than that of Santa.

Moreover, what he was wearing was not a red coat, but a fancy priest's uniform with the red god's symbol engraved on it.

huh? Priests?

[Yes! This person is the famous Saint Aurelion!]

At the old man's confident self-introduction, Seongjin looked at him with a bewildered expression.

Hey, do you usually call yourself an adult? By the way, it's very different from the images you read in children's books, isn't it?

Then the old man glared at Seongjin with a disapproving look on his face.

[Isn't this all because of you? Ah! Tsk tsk tsk.]

Are you saying it's because of me?

[Yes, child. What did you think when you first saw me?]

Seongjin thought carefully about the events that had happened not long ago.

So, it was probably in a big city called Regina that I really came into contact with Saint Aurelion.

I thought that the small dolls densely displayed at street vendors looked like the mass-produced Santa dolls I saw in stores when I was a child.

... Huh, Santa?

[Do you understand now?]

So are you saying this is because of me? Because you think I'm like Santa?

Then the old man beat his chest and lamented.

[Of course it's because of you! After sending it away with such a strong flame, and all the people who received it pouring out strong wishes on top of it, is it not possible for the flame to become stronger and stronger?]

A wish?

[okay. Go back and try to stop your family. In particular, I'm telling you to do something about your father! If you receive blessings from God's representative every day, your meditation will become more and more powerful. What if my image turns into that of a pot-bellied old man?]

hmm. That might be a bit troublesome.

But at least you will avoid going bald...

While Seongjin was thinking such rude thoughts, the old man continued to grumble.

[By the way, take care of your family! Ah! The wish of the best children is to save the worst! Tsk tsk tsk!]

No, old man. If you say you're not Santa, why are you a good boy?

Also, why am I the worst kid? Still, I did my best for this unfamiliar world!

Then, Old Man Aurelion opens his eyes darkly and glares at Seongjin.

[If a person who drives nails into the hearts of his family, especially his parents, is not a bad child, then what is he?]

'... ... '

At that moment, Seongjin felt something welling up in his chest.

... parents?

To me?

As I was standing there dazed by the complex emotions that suddenly

came to me, the old man cleared his throat loudly and pointed somewhere.

[Now, look over there. I think you've forgotten something, so I've come to teach you.]

Forgot something?

As I turned my head to follow the old man's finger, I saw something like a faint line in the distance.

It was just a thin thread, but the son-in-law was shining alone in the dark, giving off a strange presence. Seongjin suddenly felt a small curiosity in her.

[Sniff, slurp.]

The devil started whimpering again.

[...] What is it, inspiration? He's a pretty good guy.]

In addition, the voice that was constantly talking in my ear became even louder.

[Nooooooooo! Bald old man! thank you! Everyone made fun of us for doing something stupid, but from now on, we will also make a big cone on your head!]

[No, I told you not to do that! Since your wish has been granted, let's end this!]

[Nooooooooo! Bald old man! thank you! I thought what a waste of money that was, but I'll prepare flowers and lace to decorate you right now!]

[No, I'm asking you to leave me alone! How long are you going to pamper me?]

Leaving behind them, Seongjin approached the sparkling thread.

And I inadvertently touched one spot -

-He lifts his sword and sings-

A strange song comes from the room.

hmm? What is this?

Seongjin listened quietly as he stepped on the long thread.

-Olivier, the moon nymph, raises his sword and sings-

ah. I think I know what this is.

Seongjin slowly began to thread the thread, feeling a strange sense of déjà vu. Then her thread began to make happy humming sounds.

-The whole world reacted to this and swore that they would not dare to infringe on his journey.

okay.

Sister Amelia was right.

This was really the first pitch. It wasn't a curse.

But it's okay, sister. It doesn't matter if the angel is a little less dexterous.

[Please come back safely, Mores.]

The earnest thoughts mixed with the song are conveyed.

Seongjin hesitated for a moment.

When I opened my eyes in this world, the first person to hug me was my sister.

If I let this thread go, wouldn't she be very sad?

therefore...

"under!"

"Lowering!"

... huh?

Seongjin slowly opened his eyes at the sound calling him in his ears.

Then, out of the corner of my blurry eyes, a vaguely familiar figure appeared. Seongjin, who was staring at him with narrowed eyes, opened his mouth.

"...Ah, brother Masain?"

"....."

okay. It's my brother.

I always said I would become a knight to protect the Blue Rose Labyrinth.

Then the knight's eyes turned red as he looked down at him. His face looked like he was about to burst into tears at any moment.

Tuk.

At that time, someone's hand covers Seongjin's eyes.

"It's not all better yet, so I'm keeping it closed a little longer."

I feel a warm energy seeping into my eyes along with a familiar voice. It was a powerful divine power that was rarely seen.

"Logan."

"...okay."

"Did you catch the devil?"

"....."

There was a moment of silence.

But soon, a voice as calm as usual answered.

"Of course. What are you looking at me for? The matter of the Sigismund estate has been resolved, so don't worry about it and go to

sleep."

"hmm....."

okay. I thought so.

Ever since Logan came here, he had a feeling that everything would work out okay.

"Damn, that's reliable...."

It's your brother, man.

Hearing the faint answer, Seongjin surrendered himself to the rushing waters.

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242. Return (2)

After a long, long night, the faint morning sunlight finally came over the ridge surrounding the basin.

The front line once reached a desperate situation. However, by dawn, the war situation had completely stabilized, and Sigismund's soldiers were able to completely drive out the demonic beasts from the territory.

There were corpses of demonic beasts all over the place.

Some of the surviving Lycan Slopes were busy running away, and the soldiers, who had regained their composure, went around mopping up the Lycan Slopes who were still alive.

"It is the Lord's help, otherwise...."

Sir Ilma, who had finally taken a breather, suddenly looked up at the sky that was turning red and muttered.

Why not?

The number of Lycanslopes that attacked the territory was approximately 1,500. However, those who were currently able to move their bodies and run away over the ridge only had spirit.

On the other hand, Sigismund's damage was not as great as expected. This was truly an unbelievable achievement, considering that he thought at some point that he would not be able to avoid annihilation.

"There will be a localized war of attrition for a while, but there will no longer be an all-out war like yesterday."

As she was quietly watching the retreating Lycan Slopes, Sir Sebastian came up behind her and said.

"Do you mind if I don't chase after you?"

"We don't have the strength to do that either. It's hard to catch up with Schneeshuhe. Lycanslopes are faster than most horsemen."

The guard captain slowly wrapped his arms around Ilma's shoulders and continued speaking.

"There's no need to rush, Ilma. For now, let's gather up the tired soldiers. Why don't you take a break and eat something? There's a smell of onion stew coming from the village square. It looks like Hans is cooking up another bland stew. "

"Ahaha."

For the first time, a gentle smile appears on Lord Ilma's tired face.

"I always think you have a really good nose. You can smell this bloody smell well in places like this."

"Why not? It's all about making a living."

After responding like that, Sir Sebastian buried his nose as if leaning on his wife's shoulder.

"Let's hurry up and clean up and go home. If we do well, we'll be able to see my daughter's pretty face by lunchtime."

"Okay, let's go back. Louise is probably very worried about us, guarding the house alone."

Lord Ilma also leaned into the arms of her trustworthy husband and closed her eyes. Little did they know the tragic news that would soon come to them.

It was a moment of peace.

* * *

"Sigismund never gave in even in the face of great adversity that suddenly came upon him. That's all. He clearly proved to be a strong protective shield for the empire that guards the border of the Demon World. This includes not only the Wolf Knights but also the armies of demon beasts, where he never backed down. "The hard work of the Yeongji soldiers who fought bravely is great."

Margrave Hendrick, who returned to the Count's residence, looked around at the people gathered in the study and calmly praised them.

"butler."

"Yes, matriarch."

"We must comfort all those who died in battle, and provide appropriate compensation to those who have made meritorious contributions."

"Yes, I will follow your orders."

"Let's just go."

The old butler bowed his head respectfully, and Orden, who was listening next to him, opened his mouth.

"Have you forgotten one thing, matriarch?"

"What is that, Orden?"

"The people who have contributed the most are definitely Prince Mores and Prince Logan. Why is there no mention of them? If it weren't for you two, we would never have seen the sun this morning safely."

Orden insisted on pointing out the facts. The truth that everyone in Sigismund wanted to avoid.

"I know very well that you take great pride in having protected your territory on your own for generations without relying on outsiders. However, if you have received great help, shouldn't you acknowledge it and first express your sincere gratitude to them?"

"....."

"We can't just end it with light compensation like we did for the soldiers of the territory. Don't you know this well, Matriarch? Sigismund owes the Holy Family a great debt."

"Big, big!"

Old man Vincent cleared his throat with an uncomfortable look on his face, but Orden's attitude did not waver in the slightest.

Margrave Hendrick, who had been quietly watching him, moved away.

"Father. I would like to talk to Orden alone. Could you please leave for a moment?"

"I understand. Hmm!"

When only two people remained in such a large study, Margrave Hendrick opened his mouth with a disapproving expression.

"Orden."

"Yes matriarch."

"You are so easily assuming something that hasn't even happened yet. Of course, it is true that His Majesty the Prince provided help to Sigismund. But even if such assistance had not been provided, why would we not have been able to get through this crisis safely? ?"

"...yes?"

Orden was taken aback for a moment.

"But, matriarch, if it weren't for your help, we would have definitely suffered great damage...!"

"Of course, there is a possibility that you suffered some damage. However, how can you be so quick to judge the big or small of something that did not happen in the end?"

"....."

The Margrave sighed softly as he looked at his son who was stiffening.

"Haven't I been warning you all this time? How can someone in your position so easily bring up the term 'family debt'? Why don't you know that your every word is directly related to the profits and losses of the territory? !"

"Does the mere knowledge of being favored require such calculation?"

"That's natural! Even if what you say is right in principle, the moment you become the representative of the family, you have to be careful and prudent. Didn't you learn much from being with His Majesty Mores?"

Even the young prince tried to negotiate with himself, calculating profits and losses as if he were breathing, but in comparison, his upright son was extremely unreliable.

Hendrick furrowed his eyebrows and met Orden's defiant gaze.

"Listen carefully. As you know, the imperial family and our territory have a strong cooperative relationship that has been built over many years. It has been this way since Sigismund once existed as a single kingdom and not as part of the empire."

Such cooperation is like an invisible roof, and can only be maintained if there are two pillars that are strong and of equal height.

"It is a relationship in which both parties have similar needs and each party is not inclined to one side at all. The more inseparable the relationship, the more careful each party must be in expressing their official positions."

"What do you mean by being cautious?"

"Even if you express gratitude, it means that it must be done completely behind the scenes."

Now, how much will that cunning Prince Mores try to rip off himself

using this as an excuse? Just imagining it made the Margrave feel a stabbing headache.

"but....."

"You're probably tired too, so go back and get some rest."

The son wanted to protest further, but the Margrave looked away and waved his hand. It was a clear order to congratulate guests.

Orden, who was biting his lip and turning around, suddenly stopped and asked.

"Matriarch. I would like to ask you one last question."

"What."

"So, was the deal the head of the family had with the Milo merchants in that context?"

As the air became heavy, Orden's sharp voice filled the study.

"You knew that the medicinal tea they were distributing was clearly harmful to the territory, and you left it alone in order to get compensation for it?"

"....."

"You know that not only the occupants of the Count's mansion, but even your mother and family have been drinking medicinal tea for years."

"...What does that mean?"

I thought I had been caught off guard, but the Margrave's face as he faced Orden showed not a single sign of agitation.

"You are still too soft and lacking, Orden. Now you are definitely the son I am proud of and closest to my heir."

Hendrik Sigismund's face as he uttered the word 'proud' was extremely cold.

"So, keep this in mind. The virtue required more than anything else from the head of the family is not strong military power, but a cool-headed judgment that allows you to look at everything in the territory objectively. This is the part where your younger siblings sometimes show more talent."

Look at it objectively and consider the profit and loss?

Even when the safety of your mother and family is at stake?

Seeing the deep agony in his son's eyes, the Margrave added one more thing.

"Keep this in mind. I am giving this advice because I care about you in my own way. Do you understand?"

"...Yes, matriarch."

Orden nodded with a calm face. It is the expression of frustration and resignation revealed by someone who has no choice but to fail over and over again.

Sometimes, when dealing with his father, Orden felt that there was a high wall between him and himself that could never be broken down.

He and the Margrave are very different people. No matter how hard you try, you probably won't be able to close that gap for the rest of your life.

He was just about to close the door to the study.

"Ah, by the way, Orden."

The Margrave looked around carefully and tilted his head doubtfully.

"I wanted to ask you something earlier. Did someone clean the study while I was away?"

"yes?"

"Somewhere in the study... No, no. Nothing has changed, but I guess I was oversensitive."

Margrave Hendrik tilts his head slightly.

For some reason, the face of Prince Mores, who was confidently handing over confidential documents, came to mind, but Orden first pretended not to notice and kept his mouth shut.

He bowed his head once to the Margrave and then quietly left the study.

"Ah, Brother Orden!"

As he was gloomily walking down the hallway, he heard a cheerful voice calling him from behind. It was his younger brother, Emmett.

"What is it? They said the prince who was in the rear was brought in in a fit of pain, but your brother is actually fine with no injuries? Did he participate in the battle?"

"Emmett."

"Oh, don't look at me like that. That doesn't mean I wanted you to get hurt. I was quite worried after seeing you like this."

Orden's eyes fell on his brother's arm. The arm is completely wrapped in bandages, but it doesn't look like there is any discomfort in moving it.

"Oh, this? Haha. As you know, I fell from a horse a few days ago and got seriously injured. I had a strong desire to help in the face of crisis in the territory, but unfortunately, I couldn't hold a sword with my arm. It's hard to say that it was a substitute, but my mother and I "We worked hard together to take care of the house."

"....."

"Thank you, brother. By the way, are you coming from the study? I want to meet the matriarch. Is he in the study now?"

"...Okay. Go right away."

Orden walked down the hallway diligently, leaving behind his younger brother, who was especially unpleasant to see today.

After an intense day, he just wanted to rest, but he still had places to visit.

It is said that the condition of Prince Mores, who was at the crossroads of life and death, finally stabilized around dawn.

"You regained consciousness for a moment. Now you are sleeping in much improved condition."

While listening to Priest Gustav's explanation, Orden carefully opened the door.

Indeed, Prince Mores is lying quietly in the middle of the bed. For some reason, he looked like he had a bandage wrapped around his eye.

But the prince was not alone.

There are large armchairs close to either side of the bed where he is lying. And aren't Prince Logan and Lord Martha leaning there, each leaning deeply into a deep sleep?

Neither of them had even disarmed and looked clearly tired. This is proof that he came here right after the battle and never left the place even for a single moment.

"Are you and Lord Logan feeling uncomfortable in some way?"

Since both of them were in an unusual state, it was unusual for them not to wake up even when a person came so close to them.

In particular, in the case of Prince Logan, he has the stamina of a sword master and even monster-like divine power.

Then, Priest Gustav, who noticed Orden's puzzlement, quietly whispered.

"His Majesty Logan has been constantly pouring his divine power on Prince Mores just now. So, he is bound to be exhausted. If you had not come here, Prince Mores' life would have been in great danger. The priests would have been there to interfere. "It was a divine power so powerful that it was almost impossible to overcome."

In other words, Prince Mores' condition was that serious.

'I'm sure they would have taken him to the rear, but why did this happen?'

Anyway, what happened in the process of trying to help Yeongji.

Orden's heart suddenly became heavy as he remembered the conversation he had with the matriarch.

"I'm sorry, sir. You have shown me such a great favor, but Sigismund can't even express his gratitude to you."

Of course, there was no answer from the prince. Judging by his still pale complexion, it appears he is not fully recovered.

This is truly amazing.

Yesterday's prince led the Wolf Knights and the Glacher Trolls with a strange sense of intimidation and defeated the enemy. It seemed infinitely more reliable and steadfast.

But doesn't the prince lying like this just look like an ordinary boy for his age? It was hard to believe that he was carrying such a huge burden on his young shoulders.

Wouldn't that have been too burdensome for the prince?

"....."

Despite such worries, for some reason Orden seemed to the boy to be the happiest person in the world.

A boy who is loved by everyone in the royal family.

A boy who receives the love of Princess Amelia.

He couldn't help but feel that his taste buds suddenly became bitter.

* * *

Pangea Chronicle Free Bulletin Board

= = = = = = = = =

Isn't this an error in the hidden event that happened yesterday?

= = = = = = = = =

Is this true? Has Impulse Soft finally ceased operation?

Yesterday, I received an event notification and thought it was a good thing. There wasn't enough time until the desert dragon raid.

So I roughly equipped it and went in, but the event zone was a map I had never seen before in the game.

I watched in fascination, wondering if it was a dictionary update. and... The graphics were so elaborate that there was an active volcano erupting and red lava stretching all the way to the horizon.

But as soon as I entered the battle zone, my head dropped. And then he gets kicked out of the game right away.

At first I thought there was an error. But when I replayed, there was a death penalty and two of the red lion sets were gone.

To be honest, I still don't know what I cut. I am confident that I am a top ranker, and my defense/resistance combination is also excellent.

Fuck, is this a normal event? I think there was some kind of error.

Is there any way to recover some items? It's clearly a mistake on the part of the game company.

Can I contact the customer support bulletin board?

-First, verify the ranking.

-Customer support bulletin boards are all useless. Impulse Soft's operating policy has remained the same since beta testing. There is absolutely no recovery, and all answers are famous for running macros.

□Are we all getting along well and joining the ranks of the dead? lol

□ You are real! Among the lion sets, the red lion set is the king of protest!

-I was online all day yesterday, but there was no such event? Just a little bit of work.

□ Kkkkkk I don't know about the connection time limit? You are the real deal ㄴ ㄴ

□ ????

□ What disease? This guy doesn't know about hospice mode?

□ Sookyeon (_)

-Suzaku ㅇㅈㄹ What kind of hidden event is this? I'm not at a low ranking either, but I died with a single sword and dropped a full-strength weapon. Fancgal is also on fire due to the event.

□ They keep bringing up rankings, but verify the rankings first.

ㄴㄴㄴ Certification for full steel weapons ㄱㄱㅋㅋㅋ

□ You said you dropped it --;;;

-Stannis, ranked 3rd, just turned on the broadcast. There's a lot of swearing and fuss about the hidden quest.

□ Isn't that a streamer in Poland or something? How does he know Polish and that it's a swear word?

□ I'm screaming and smashing the keyboard. If this isn't swearing, what is it?

-I've lost my original intention for Impulse Soft these days. If you have time to do an event like this, please do something about the ice heart drop rate. Aren't there too many items for sale? How is it that even a few months after the dungeon came out, there are no items for sale at the auction house or commodity exchange?

□ Is this an important item? I've never heard of it.

□What is that? It's a trivial drop item without context. Fuck ah

-There is a rumor that it is a must-have item for changing Ice Heart Hidden Jobs. Isn't it at least related to a legendary or mythical class?

243. Return (3)

Quang!

The old man stood up in shock at the appearance of the intruder who had pushed his way into the space.

Nate was furious as he defeated hundreds and thousands of people who invaded the dimension in one day.

As if to clearly reflect his low mood, the materialized white aura trembled with a sinister force.

[Please convene a meeting of six people, sir.]

The old man blinked his eyes in embarrassment at his words, which he spat out so casually.

So suddenly?

However, it is a very legitimate request from the sponsor.

[...] What is the agenda?]

[This is a matter of depriving Berseus of his race representation.]

What is coming has come.

The old man closed his eyes in despair.

Although I thought that the two would clash in a big way at some point, I still hoped that the boundary between the dimensions would remain stable for as long as possible.

[What is the reason for his disqualification?]

[He caused a needless conflict that took the lives of many humans and inflicted a blow that led to the near annihilation of his remaining species. Is that it? By causing a great uproar in the northern part of the continent, it brought about a serious distortion of cause and effect in this Delcross dimension.]

[...]]

[Also, by inducing the current Delcross guardian to violate the agreement, he dared to overthrow the entire dimension. So how can we say that this is not a dangerous molecule causing harm to the dimension?]

Then, the pupils of the old man facing Nate contracted vertically.

[Do you even know about the results? If even one seat for the race representative becomes vacant, the barrier in this dimension will become unstable.]

Then Nate smiled so brightly that his teeth were exposed. Of course, her eyes were not smiling at all, which made her look even more creepy.

[It doesn't matter, old man. No matter who invades and by what means, we will protect the dimension as we have done so far. Unless someone does something useless to my child.]

Then the old man's eyes fell on Nate's sleeve. To be exact, on the left sleeve, which was soaked in blood.

Unlike his right hand, which is holding a white sword, his empty left hand is so tightly clenched that it is almost digging into his palm.

The old man was speechless.

This probably means that the guy who can recover from any fatal wound in an instant thanks to his powerful divine power has been clenching his fists until his sleeves have reached that point.

[If you're that worried, why not go now?]

The old man asked, unable to see Nate chewing his lips nervously.

[Anyway, there is no other way to help the child if we go back right now.]

[...] okay. I guess they are just killing time here to quickly stabilize the situation.]

Nate spent almost the entire day in the crevice. Even if he returned directly to the Del Cross dimension, there was a high possibility that he would suffer from motion sickness for a long time and not be able to control his body.

He will probably have to put all his strength into taking good care of his son, who is currently lying in a hospital bed.

However, if you do such a thing while still a soul, you cannot know what terrible consequences it will lead to.

This time, causality is completely overflowing. Not only he but his son will pay the price.

In the end, the only way is to borrow Sir Sharon's body, and then wouldn't the poor exorcist also suffer from the same symptoms?

'So even if we go to her now, it will be difficult for Sir Sharon to remain possessed for long.'

Nate was fully aware that he would have to wait a little longer.

Apart from the fact that his heart is burning hard right now.

[What are you hesitating about, old man?]

Instead, Nate decided to use this waiting time more meaningfully.

To instantly defeat his enemy, a dangerous molecule that threatens his child.

[I have no objection. That guy was seriously unqualified to begin with. He doesn't mean we don't have an alternative.]

Mithra said, tipping his drink.

The fact that Lord Nebraska's lineage had been discovered was already an open secret to the members of the Council of Six.

[I don't like how you do things arbitrarily. However, it is a well-known fact that a person who puts one's own race in danger cannot be recognized as a representative of the race. This time, I vote in favor.]

The woman who was covering an island with strong winds spoke.

[At least I hope your mind is at peace...]

The huge old tree also gave its opinion without hesitation. The only problem was that, as always, it was a random thing.

Still, there was someone who interpreted the meaning perfectly.

[Thank you for your approval.]

Nate nodded politely towards the tree.

no? You, now...

While the old man was panicking -

[Kryabbillarak! @#Diasim;Serak!]

A huge stingray bit the [key] and shouted an incomprehensible sound.

[Lord Manta also agrees. Now, if only the elderly agree, it will be unanimous.]

This time, Nate continued to lie without changing his expression. For a moment, the old man opened his mouth in bewilderment.

No, hey, you! Still, haven't we maintained our standards so far?

[Wrong, old man. Don't you know that guy's condition right now? Aren't you so angry that you can't see anything at all?]

Mithra chuckles as he takes a sip from his bottle.

[If anyone objects, be prepared to cut us all down with a single sword!]

[...] ... !]

Indeed, Nate does not deny this and calmly faces the old man.

In the end, the old man had no choice but to make up his mind and call Berseus.

[I knew you would come out like this! Such a clever and arrogant thing!]

As soon as Berseus, who was summoned to the old man's [Gap], saw Nate's face, his fever rose and he began to run wild.

[Okay, since when did you start preparing? Are you trying to seize the [Key] of the race by stealing the lineage of Lycan Slope? Also, what race of blood did he secretly steal? Surely they didn't touch the Manta race that lost their senses?]

[????]

[Everyone, take note! That mysterious bastard fooled us all! He used his 'mongrel' child to steal the race key and try to monopolize the power of the 'Council of Six'!]

The members were quite taken aback by Berseus' unexpected force. Nate, who was actually involved, was just quietly glaring at what he was doing.

Nevertheless, members felt that his mood was getting worse. Although it was a space where the normal laws of physics did not apply, it felt like the surrounding temperature was clearly dropping.

Only the excited Berseus didn't notice it at all.

[under! Do you think you don't know who you plan to nominate as the next representative of your race after you drive me out? Isn't he your troublesome son? What on earth are you planning to do by manipulating your 'mongrel' son and taking the Lycan Slopes into your hands? Huh?]

[No, Berseus. What on earth is that... ... ?]

While all members of the six-member council were dumbfounded, Nate declared in a low voice.

[Now, as everyone can see, the author is no longer of sound mind. In the end, isn't your mind completely consumed by the demonic energy of the Demonic Sutra? It is no longer possible to leave one axis of the dimensional boundary as is. So, please seal the key right now.]

A strange silver chill appears in the dry gaze looking back at the members.

Under that heavy pressure, members began manipulating their [keys] one by one. In response, the [Key] of Berseus also gradually lost its luster.

Berseus, holding the key that was being sealed, struggled with a despairing expression.

[That's what I'm going to say, you unrivaled libertine in this world! Someone like you, who created chaos by giving birth to 'hybrids', dares to call yourself the guardian of this world! I cannot tolerate it!]

At that time, a cry like frost rang out toward Berseus.

[Shut up, mudblood!]

[!!!!]

It's a disaster.

A cold aura spread as if ice water had been poured over his son, and Berseus froze on the spot. Even though his struggle had already completely broken, Nate's pressure on him continued.

It was accompanied by unpleasant sarcasm.

[How dare you call something like this a 'mongrel'! hybrid!]

Was this friend like this?

After becoming involved in the meeting of the six, he never once uttered a harsh word while dealing with numerous mixed race people on matters related to Ionia.

While the members who had completed the sealing were widening their eyes, Nate walked up to Berseus and grabbed him by the collar with one hand.

[Gasp!]

After screaming, the clan key that was in his hand had already been taken away.

Then, pressure like a mountain falling down.

As if he were a mouse facing a wild beast, unable to move and gasping for breath, his cool eyes with flickering silver-gray light quietly looked at Berseus.

[Listen carefully. Do you know why I don't kill you right away, despite your unseemly atrocities?]

[Oops! Wow!]

[Because you still have some usefulness left in you.]

And Nate whispered in his ear in a low voice. It was a soft tone that could be felt as kind.

[So go. Just like this, go back to Old Dacia and live struggling in the mud. And in the end, die as a handful of dirt that forms the floor for my child to walk on.]

With that said.

Easy profit-

Berseus's new form loses its shape and falls apart. He lost the key and is being expelled from the [Gap].

[Ugh! Wait, wait... ... !]

The sound of his scream also quickly faded away.

After a while.

The half-appearance of Lycan Slope Road had completely disappeared. Only the sealed race key was left where he was.

There was a moment of heavy silence within the [gap].

[I am once again caught up in your rhythm. Uncomfortable. It's really unpleasant...]

Eventually, the woman with the storm on her head made up her mind, manipulated the key and disappeared in the [gap].

[Haha, whatever. Who can stop the will of you, the representative of God?]

Mithra, with moonshine in his mouth, also shows a self-mocking smile and disappears into his own territory.

Then the tree, and then the stingray...

In the end, when all the members made the space leap, only Nate and the old man were left in the gap, just like at the beginning.

The old man, who had not been able to hide his despairing expression until then, soon let out a deep sigh.

[I tried to stop it somehow, but in the end everything turned out the way you wanted. How about it? Are you satisfied now?]

[To what extent are you going to blame me? He simply received back the cause and effect he had created.]

Nate answered coldly without even looking at the old man.

Of course it is.

The problem is that he could have guessed all of this. Isn't this the Oracle who is said to have stolen God's eye?

[Isn't his disposition also approved by everyone? Are you now going

to say that it is my dogma?]

[No, that's not true.]

[Then that's it. I'm going back now, so if you have any business, please tell me now. As of today, I will not be responding to calls from the 'Meeting of 6' for a while.]

[Why is that so?]

Nate didn't answer, but the meaning in his cold eyes was clear.

I would rather spend more time with my children than have any more time taken up by you guys.

[Hey, Nate.]

As he turned around without any regrets, the old man stopped him.

[You knew everything. Don't deny this either. Wasn't this all foreseen from the beginning?]

[I just follow my child's choice.]

[You will respect its choice?]

The old man laughed as if it were absurd.

[Don't say things you don't mean! Fortunately, we made it through safely this time, but what would you have done if it really had left this dimension?]

[...]]

[You must have brought it by force, even if it meant going against the law, right? In the end, wouldn't I have repeated the same mistake? So, what will it cost you this time? I can no longer dwell on past relationships. I can't do this to you or to it.]

Then Nate turned around and spoke like he was chewing.

[I won't ask you to understand everything I do. However, there are some choices that you can never understand without experiencing

them. Of course, this is a bit presumptuous to say to an elderly person who has lived for a long time.]

Nate's eyes glowed coldly as he glared at the old man one last time.

[You don't have any children, do you? Have you ever been in a relationship in the first place?]

[...]]

* * *

It was late in the morning, nearing lunchtime, when Seongjin came to his senses again.

[You finally woke up! Are you okay now, Seongjin Lee?]

The demon lord, who was wallowing helplessly in the flames of flame, greeted him with a happy voice.

"....."

Without answering, Seongjin slowly raised his hand and traced the area around his still burning eyes.

I felt like my eyes were stuffy for some reason, and the bandages that I once got tired of wearing were now wrapped around my eyes again.

At the same time, aching pain and a stabbing headache attacked him.

That state meant only one thing.

'Father hasn't come yet.'

Rather than feeling sad, I was more worried.

There's no way this guy hasn't been seen yet. Has something happened?

"Ah, Seongjin Lee, are you coming to your senses now?"

At that time, Logan's voice was heard next to him.

I was startled and quietly felt the presence, and it seemed that not only Logan but also Lord Martha was nearby. She seemed to be just tired and fell into a deep sleep.

Anyway, it seemed like his physical condition was not normal and his senses had become quite dull as he didn't notice their presence first.

"You could sleep a little longer. I tried as hard as I could, but it was impossible to fully recover. You may have permanent aftereffects."

Logan, who immediately placed the blanket over Seongjin's chest, continued speaking as if he was worried.

"Anyway, what happened? Do you remember why your body became like that?"

"No, Logan. That's not important right now."

"huh?"

When Logan asked curiously, Seongjin swallowed his saliva.

"Actually, Logan, I have something important to talk to you about."

244. Return (4)

-I'm bored. come over. It would be better if you bring the Liliun Detachment.

From the time he first sent that prank-like message to the imperial palace, Seongjin had always kept this situation in mind.

This is because I wanted to tell Logan as soon as I met him.

It's still too early to be sure, but it may be that the Mores that Logan is desperately looking for is him, which means he won't have to worry about the soul of the missing Mores.

"Okay. What are you talking about?"

But when Logan sat down and took a listening position, his hair suddenly turned white.

'Wait, how should I explain this?'

Let's think about it carefully.

-You know, Logan. Actually, not long ago, I ate something wrong and lost my soul. So I went to a new dimension created by my father. They say our father is the king of another dimension. Isn't it amazing? And what I heard from my father there was that I might actually be Mores himself. huh? Oh, you couldn't give me a completely clear answer. That's a deal that can't be said lightly. what? evidence? So, there isn't really any evidence...

No, not this one.

No matter how much of a bully Logan is, isn't it too much to ask you to believe such crazy nonsense?

"What's wrong? Lee Seongjin. Are you still uncomfortable somewhere?"

As I groan and touch my forehead, Logan asks in a worried voice.

"...No, it's nothing. Anyway, I'm sorry. I think I lost the magic stone you gave me."

After struggling with internal conflict, he suddenly came to his senses and found that he was saying completely wrong things to Logan.

"It worked well as a flashbang, but the situation was so urgent that I didn't think about recovering it."

"....."

"I gave it to you as a gift, but I'm sorry I couldn't protect it properly."

Then there was a moment of silence, and then a low laugh was heard.

"Haha, what do you mean? I didn't give it to you to keep, I gave it to you to use well. It's really fortunate that it helped you even in that way. Thanks to that light, I was able to find you in time, right?"

"uh....."

"So don't worry about that anymore and focus on your recovery, Seongjin Lee."

Oh, as expected, Logan was a good guy.

Except sometimes he wants to be treated like an older brother.

So I wanted to tell you more.

"...Okay."

Logan looked at Seongjin, who suddenly seemed lethargic, as if he were curious, and said.

"I think it would be best to rest a little more. I'll ask your maid to bring you something to eat, so lie down."

Clap, clap, clap.

As Logan got up from his seat and started walking, an unfamiliar friction sound of metal clashing against each other was heard.

'I haven't even taken off my armament yet.'

The same goes for Lord Masain, who is curled up next to him sleeping. I did something stupid for no reason and everyone was wondering why I was going through so much trouble.

I suddenly became solemn and began to reflect.

However, just before leaving the door, Logan stopped for a moment and hesitantly asked.

"By the way, Seongjin Lee."

"huh?"

"Do you remember? When you woke up briefly at dawn, you called Brother Masaine."

"Lord Martha?"

".....,"

Seongjin tilted his head.

Did you do that? Now that I think about it, I think I saw two people in my sleep. I'm not sure?

What did I say then?

"...Well, if you don't remember, that's fine. Just rest."

Logan left the room.

Percussion.

Even after the door closed, Seongjin sat blankly for a moment, turning his head in the direction he had disappeared into.

what? Something leaves me with a very uncomfortable feeling.

'Hey, devil. Do you know what he's saying? Did I do something wrong to Lord Masaine in my sleep?'

Then the Demon King, who had been silent for a moment, answered awkwardly.

[It was something I always talked about in my sleep. Well, you always talk a lot in your sleep.]

... okay? is it?

* * *

When Edith brought the meal, Logan woke Sir Martha and dragged her out of the room. While gently coaxing the stubborn man who said he would stick with me even if he died soon.

"If you stand next to me like this, the patient won't be able to rest even if he wants to, brother."

Seongjin added that he was bothered by the sound of clanking armor, and only then did he reluctantly stand up with a dejected look on his face.

"Okay, go ahead and close your eyes properly."

"I'll be back soon, sir."

"No, Sir Martha. That doesn't matter."

Seongjin, who was barely left alone, ate with Edith's help. This time, Orden and Herman came to see Seongjin together.

"Are you coughing? How are you feeling, my lord?"

"As you can see. It's completely fine."

Seongjin took a bite from Edith, who was feeding him stew next to him.

Maybe it's because my insides have been completely torn up by the

aura, but I can't digest anything and have no appetite.

"I'm sure you're curious about the results of the last battle, so I've come to give you a brief report, sir."

Judging by the brightness of Herman's voice, I felt like I knew the result even without hearing it.

As expected, the damage from Sigismund was less than expected.

Even after Seongjin completely lost his mind while moving the shaved ice, Logan and others seemed to have managed the situation well.

Meanwhile, Seongjin heard an unexpected apology from Orden.

"...So, it seems that the achievements of you and Prince Logan have been greatly reduced and made known to the public. They are truly dishonorable."

"uh....."

Seongjin blinked his eyes under the bandages.

What is it, Margrave Hendrick?

It's pretty good, right? I really understand what I want. I know that you want profit more than fame.

'No matter how much I rode with Inquisitor Valery, it wouldn't be good for it to be widely known that I controlled the Glacher Troll, known as a demonic beast.'

Considering these and other circumstances, he thought that Seongjin would be willing to sit at his negotiating table.

Even if Seongjin had to pay a little too much in return, he probably decided that protecting Yeongji's pride would be beneficial in the long run.

So-called giving flesh and taking bones.

'The only thing that can comfort Sigismund's current wounds is pride at best. Moreover, let's say that the safety of the territory cannot be guaranteed without great external help. 'How anxious must the people of the territory be?'

If you think about it, it was a territory that could never be said to be in a good location.

A harshly cold land with no notable specialties. A land that is invaded by demonic beasts whenever the opportunity arises, and where one must constantly be on guard against demonic forces by building deformed ice walls.

This level of development is being achieved because old Vincent's contribution to the empire was greatly increased in the past, and the margrave who succeeded him was very resourceful.

'If you want to run a business in a land like that by constantly comforting and chasing down the residents, you might risk your life for something like your own pride or cause.'

Well, it wasn't such a bad story for Seongjin. In any case, the Margrave doesn't intend to just talk things over.

Moreover, if it is possible to reduce the damage that would have occurred without Seongjin's assistance, it means that it is also possible to increase it to an unreasonable degree at Seongjin's discretion.

'I may not show it on the outside, but I'm sure you're burning up inside right now, right?'

A person as high as the Margrave would never know that. Perhaps they are prepared to have their subsidies drastically reduced or suffer other disadvantages.

Seongjin thought he was somewhat satisfied.

There is a saying that you can pay off a thousand debts just by speaking well, right? But what could be better than giving money without saying anything?

"I'm truly sorry, sir."

But Orden is feeling too guilty. Seongjin clicked her tongue slightly.

You simple ignorant bastard. So, how are you going to inherit and run the territory later?

If I leave it alone, I feel like I'll be losing money endlessly, so it makes me secretly worry about the topic of Orden.

"It's okay, Grand Duke. It's not like I don't understand the Margrave's position."

Mumbling.

Seongjin nodded while chewing something that came into his mouth.

"Thank you for your words, sir...."

"It's okay. You are the heir of this place. Then, you should put aside the small things and think about Young Ji-min's position first."

"Young Ji-min's...."

"okay."

gulp.

Seongjin swallowed his food and nodded.

"You must be careful with your every word and action. You must look at the possibility of each word affecting the territory from various angles, and always make a cool-headed judgment."

"that....."

Orden is startled and blurts out his words.

Of course, it was because he had heard advice in a similar vein from the Margrave earlier, but there was no way Seongjin knew about that fact.

Seongjin, who was tilting his head at his strange reaction, took the

stew into his mouth again and ate it.

Yum Yum.

But then Orden suddenly asked a question. It was an unusually angry voice.

"Do you think so too, Your Majesty? That we should always look at profit and loss objectively and make a cool-headed decision? To achieve this, even if Young Ji-min or his family suffers some damage, we should deal with it calmly?"

"hmm?"

Seongjin was a little embarrassed, but quickly swallowed his food and answered.

"Well, it's not wrong to say that you have to look at it objectively, right? It's also true that there are times when you have to take some damage. If you think about the profits and losses of Young Ji-min and your family as much as possible, won't there be times when you inevitably have to make a cool-headed decision?"

Orden asked back in a dumbfounded voice.

"What about Young Ji-min and his family's profits and losses?"

"Yes, Young Ji-min and his family's profits and losses. You want to achieve the best results at every moment, but that doesn't mean everyone can see the best interests, right? That's the way it is in the world. In that case, you must calmly evaluate the profits and losses. Isn't it the job of you and the Margrave to make the most appropriate decisions?"

"....."

Then Orden, who had remained silent for a moment, answered with a slightly trembling voice for some reason.

"...Yes. Is that so? How can perspectives and goals be so different? Even though the advice is similar, your words have the power to touch our hearts."

... ok? okay?

Well, I don't know, but I'm saying you were quite moved by that, right?

After all, there is a reason why everyone in the imperial palace asks me for advice. It's because I have an unconcealable energy of contemplation that comes from my years of experience.

While I was thinking that proudly, the demon lord sighed until the flame crystal disappeared.

[They say illusions are free, but ugh... ..]

Why is this guy suddenly having a fight?

Seongjin stuck out his mouth, took another stew that came close, and asked.

"Well, the Margrave has expressed his intention to make appropriate compensation, so don't apologize to me anymore. Instead, think about the benefits you will gain from it."

How about taking this opportunity to show off Sigismund's power to the entire continent?

"How good is it? We defeated the great army of demonic beasts with our own power! The pride of the people in the territory must have boiled over?"

Then Orden answered in a stern tone.

"Thank you. But Sigismund's pride is not so light that it can be swayed by such bravado, sir."

"hmm....."

Well, okay. One spirit is good.

Even though it's stupid, it seems like I'll do well somehow.

Mumbling.

Then Seongjin suddenly realized that something was strange.

... huh?

"What are you doing now, Hermann?"

"Oh, did you get caught? This doesn't work well the second time. But you've already emptied half the bowl."

Hermann laughed out loud and rattled his spoon.

"You need to eat better when you're sick, sir."

Oh my gosh, this can't be possible! I can't believe I was fooled by this guy again!

While Seongjin was making a sullen face in anger, Orden quietly added a word from next to him.

"How about just one more spoonful?"

... Why is this guy like this?

Now, please take one more bite, sir.

Oh, clean it up!

It was a time when the two people were arguing fiercely.

"hmm?"

Orden, who felt the sudden popularity, raised his head in surprise.

"Why? Who is it?"

Even with Seongjin's dulled senses, he sensed something familiar. Someone silently approached the open door.

"Lord Sharon? What's going on? Why didn't you say anything...?"

Only then did Seongjin realize who the other person was after hearing Herman's words.

It's definitely familiar, but it's also completely different from her usual appearance. Seongjin said, unable to hide his joy.

"Lord Sharon, I have something important to discuss with you. Can everyone please leave for a moment?"

With that, Hermann and Orden, carrying bowls of stew, left the room.

Then, as if she had been waiting, Sir Sharon, or rather, Seonghwang, who possessed her body, approached with unstoppable steps.

Since the rush seemed unusual, Seongjin quietly made up his mind. First of all, I was expecting that I would get hit hard.

'This time something big is coming!'

Seongjin narrowed his eyes, expecting a big shock.

however.

'... uh?'

Wow!

Before I knew it, Seongjin was in the arms of Sir Sharon.

".....!"

His arms were shaking quite a bit, clearly showing how shaken he was.

[Again twice.]

And it was a voice of resignation that Seongjin had become a little accustomed to, as if it was ringing directly in his head.

[Now don't do such a dangerous thing again. Do you understand?]

"....."

Seongjin didn't know what to do and just kept his mouth shut.

Me, father. I rescued Sigismund. If we hadn't moved first, the damage would have grown out of control.

I definitely had a lot to say, but I couldn't get my mouth to speak easily.

However, Seonghwang, who knew how he knew what was going through Seongjin's mind, soon added a frightening warning.

[Remember, Mores. Even if you go out of your way to save this world, the moment something happens to you, this world is as if it no longer exists.]

For a moment, a chill ran down my spine.

A declaration made by the oracle of this era. Indeed, the weight is bound to be different.

But wait a minute. The story this man is talking about now...

[Do you understand? If you truly want to protect this Delcross, you must keep in mind, and keep in mind, that you must protect yourself first.]

"...sorry."

Seongjin, who was afraid of being punished, finally apologized.

Because I understand, father.

Please stop saying such scary things and calm down.

245. Return (5)

For a long time since then, Seongjin was buried in a waterfall of divine power.

My body became normal in an instant.

It was said that the ark of power was indeed different, and it was such an enormous divine power that it made the efforts of Logan and the priests who had worked hard since yesterday become insignificant.

But for some reason, even after I got better, the waterfall of light never seemed to stop.

'How long... ... '

Seongjin felt a little uncomfortable.

Isn't this truly a meaningless waste of a 'miracle'? It's a little embarrassing because it looks like he's being hugged by a woman he didn't trust.

However, Seongjin decided to let Seonghwang do whatever he wanted for a while.

This was because the more divine power was poured out, the tremors felt in the arms were noticeably decreasing.

[I'm sorry, son.]

Eventually, Seonghwang let go of Seongjin and opened his mouth in a slightly calm voice.

When he hurriedly removed the bandage from his eye, the usual calm

glow had already returned to his eyes.

[I thought I wouldn't leave you alone forever, but I ended up just neglecting you during the most difficult time.]

Nevertheless, his gloomy expression was conveyed without filtering, and Seongjin could not help but secretly smile.

"It's not your fault, father. Has a gap opened up in the imperial palace? Whatever it is, an urgent situation has arisen that cannot be avoided?"

[...]]

"Rather, it was my fault. I was managing my physical strength in my own way, but my health suddenly deteriorated so rapidly that I had no idea what to do."

Then he looked down at Seongjin with an unreadable expression.

Looking at the silver eye light that flickered from time to time, it seemed like he was quickly scanning something that others could not see.

[...] okay. Once the aurors started to become entangled, they suddenly became uncontrollable.]

Finally, Seonghwang sighed and stroked Seongjin's head.

Tuk-tuk.

[Should I say that I learned it too well or that I have too much talent? Because we deal with thoughts and thoughts as naturally as breathing, these side effects also occur.]

As expected, the cause was that the aurors in his body moved freely according to Seongjin's will.

As his body was shaken several times, the aura that was unconsciously protecting his eyes became entangled, and the condition of his eyes deteriorated rapidly.

"So what should I do now?"

[There is no other solution. The only way to do this is to carefully learn how to consciously separate thoughts through practice.]

For a moment, a faint, bitter feeling appears in his sunken eyes.

[One, once you get used to it, what else will you do based on it?]

"hmm....."

Seongjin, who was avoiding his gaze for no reason, suddenly had a flash of something in his mind.

"Oh yeah. That was it!"

Seongjin suddenly became excited and opened his arms wide in a slightly exaggerated manner to brighten the mood.

"By the way, Dad, I found a really cool souvenir!"

"souvenir."

"Yes! Don't be surprised when you see it. This can truly be said to be Sigismund's specialty! Where else can you find it?"

Seongjin quickly walked to the side of the bed and proudly took out the ice heart he had stored in the corner. Three small ice cubes that emit a faint light.

"Do you know what this is? It's a controller that lets you control a Glacher Troll!"

"Glacher t....."

"I even gave it a name. It's called shaved ice! I'll take a bunch of shaved ice to the palace for each member of my family! If each family member leaves one in the palace, it will be really cool even in the summer. What do you think?"

"....."

Seonghwang was silent for a moment, then slowly raised his hand

and touched his forehead.

[Yes, shaved ice...]

Wow, as expected, father!

Is this the first time I've seen someone pronounce shaved ice's name properly here? While his eyes were sparkling with admiration, Seonghwang sighed softly and asked.

[Did you want to take them to the imperial capital?]

Of course, it was natural that Seongjin nodded vigorously.

"Yes, I would like to do that if possible. I especially want to show it to Sisley. He has always been curious about the real Glacher Troll."

A thrilling battle between the Wolf Knights and the Glacher Trolls.

Perhaps this is the only part that the little boy likes in the [Delcross Chronicles] that had been bothering him all along?

Then Seonghwang's eyes turned a little more serious. He seemed to be thinking deeply about something.

[...] If you take it as is, Benitus will go on a rampage.]

Oh, is that really true?

[But I think it would be okay if we reduced the size a little.]

"Huh? Is that possible?"

[possible. I'll find some time soon to teach you how to operate it. Don't just try to do it on your own.]

The sheep who said that looked like she was about to leave at any moment, so Seongjin asked with wide eyes.

"Do you have to go already?"

[okay. There are people who do not view my stay here very favorably.]

Now that I think about it, it certainly seemed like Seonghwang was trying to minimize the time he was possessing Sir Sharon as much as possible. Did he say that the northern people are lacking?

[And since we're here, there's a place to take a quick look.]

Seonghwang, who was staring somewhere with blurred focus, finally patted Seongjin's head.

[See you again soon. Don't you think you'll return to the imperial capital soon without doing anything else?]

"Yes, father."

When Seongjin nodded with a confident expression, Seonghwang raised one corner of his mouth.

[okay. Then it's done.]

So you just moved on like that?

no. Before leaving the room, Seonghwang slapped Seongjin on the forehead and disappeared.

Sigh!

"Kkuek.....?"

It was just strange that this time it didn't hurt as much as it sounded.

Seongjin, who was rubbing his forehead in a strange feeling, soon put the ice heart back and lay down on the bed.

[Surprising? I thought you were going to test it right away as soon as your father left?]

The demon lord muttered as if he were puzzled.

Didn't you just hear that, devil? Didn't your father tell you not to try it on your own?

[You hear that? Lee Seong-jin of the world?]

'of course.'

From now on, I will try to be a good son in my own way.

[Wow, your topic is really great...]

'shut up!'

* * *

Meanwhile, Logan, who had finally disarmed himself and was sitting across from Masaine at the table, carefully studied his cousin's expression.

"Aren't you a little disappointed?"

"What do you mean, you're sad?"

"Mores refers to you as his brother again as before."

Logan's attitude was cautious.

I had known for a long time that Masain had a special regard for Mores.

Since he was young, he followed Masaine a lot, and since he was the younger brother who took more effort than the more mature Logan, he probably took care of various things and became attached to her.

However, even though he was called "brother" at best, his title went back to Lord Masain again.

But Masain's reaction was unexpected.

"Ah, don't worry about that, my lord. Prince Mores sometimes talks in his sleep like that."

"...yes?"

"You sometimes talk in your sleep at night."

Masaine calmly explained to Logan, who was confused.

"The reason I found out was a tip from a dedicated maid. It happened after she suffered from a serious fever, so at first I was worried and started looking for her often at night."

So, was it from the day Seongjin secretly left the imperial palace for the first time? From then on, Masain carefully observed the prince's bedtime for a while.

There were times when I unintentionally interrupted his rest. Because Prince Mores had unusual senses, he often woke up no matter how carefully he looked.

"You often call me that."

Brother Masain, he said.

Logan's face hardened as he listened.

"But the next day, you don't remember anything at all."

"You... can't remember?"

"Yes, everything, including waking up and meeting me."

When Logan's expression became somewhat serious, Masain reassured him with a faint smile, wondering how he was taking it.

"Don't worry too much. This happened repeatedly for a few days, but there were no signs of any abnormality in your health. That's what I thought. Even though you lost most of your memories due to the fever, you still have some of them somewhere in your subconscious. "I wonder if there's anything left."

"memory....."

"Yes. I consulted with Dr. Ninias at the Jinju Palace and he said that. Sometimes, patients with amnesia may partially recall forgotten memories when a specific trigger arises. Of course, in the process, they may forget new memories instead. "I do."

".....!"

Logan's face blanched.

Masain's words reminded me of a new possibility that I had never thought of before.

"...Your Majesty? My Majesty, why are you acting like this all of a sudden?"

Because the words Seongjin said when they first met were completely sincere, it was a possibility I had never thought about before.

'Lee Seong-jin said that he is not Mores and that he does not know where Mores' soul has gone. But what if Lee Seong-jin actually didn't know about his own condition?

Do Mores' memories remain in Lee Seong-jin's unconscious? And there are times when you think of it in your sleep?

That wasn't all. Why did Lee Seong-jin think that the only thing he could forget was the memories of his 'Mores days'?

This is Logan himself, who has full memories of his past life.

'Could it be that a person named Lee Seong-jin is actually Mores' past life? What if he was reincarnated as Mores and forgot about it, but was reminded of his past life by a fever?

And what if, instead, you forget the memories of living as Mores?

Then, all questions raised so far will be explained.

Sometimes, Logan gets to see Mores's childhood through Lee Seong-jin.

And Seonghwang, who obviously knows about Lee Seong-jin's existence, is leaving him alone.

'but... ..'

Nevertheless, Lee Seong-jin's presence is completely different from Mores. There's no way I'm confusing that. How on earth should we think about that?

It was a time when Logan was immersed in deep confusion.

Suddenly, an unfamiliar figure entered the restaurant where they were sitting. He was such a natural killer that even Logan, the sword master, could not sense his approach.

"Ah, Lord Sharon."

".....!"

When Masaine called him with joy, Logan tensed and looked back.

I was caught behind? To whom?

And he came face to face with the familiar yet somewhat unfamiliar figure of the exorcist.

"...Lord Sharon?"

It was like that. On the outside, it clearly looks like Sir Sharon.

But the silver-gray eyes give off a strange glow. There was no way Logan wouldn't recognize those familiar yet unique eyes.

'Abama?'

Then the exorcist opened his mouth. It was a strange voice that felt as if it was echoing directly from within my head.

[Logan, if it's okay, would you mind walking with me for a moment?]

* * *

Logan was never unaware of the presence of the Exorcist, who frequently saw his face while involved in the work of the monster task force.

But what about the exorcist who is now striding ahead?

'At first glance, I thought it was a success.'

So, I followed his suggestion obediently.

However, if you think about it, the presence felt from that exorcist right now was not completely the same as that of Seonghwang.

Where is that? Minor changes in posture or stride length due to physical differences are also noticeable.

Nevertheless, there was one thing that never changed.

It is the unique atmosphere that surrounds the calm and orderly aura. A movement that is almost ostentatious and exudes its own presence, as if it does not feel the slightest friction from the air or the ground.

"Are you drinking it, Abama?"

Logan, who had been walking along for a while, asked. He thought it was a strange question, but he couldn't help but ask it.

Then the exorcist answered without looking back.

[Did you recognize it?]

"Yes. But you look a little different."

[Yes, he is there.]

The exorcist, no, she was probably in a good mood, spoke in a calm tone.

[Do you know, Logan? There are many factors that determine a person's presence. Among them, memories and experiences have a great influence on the appearance. It's just that human experience rarely loses continuity, so it rarely changes in a short period of time.]

And Seonghwang said something unexpected.

[Your presence is the same.]

"yes?"

[It changes several times a day. It's just that the difference is not that big and people just ignore it.]

Logan was perplexed and his mouth was twitching, but Seonghwang

finally stopped walking when he reached an ambiguous point.

The entrance to the estate.

It was a messy place with the corpses of demonic beasts still scattered here and there.

The soldiers who were beating down the persistently regenerating heart of Lycan Slope recognized the two people and lowered their heads in sorrow. There was no way they wouldn't recognize the prince's group, who showed outstanding performance yesterday.

'But why a place like this?'

Logan is wondering-

Tuk-tuk.

Seonghwang said, tapping the floor with his toes.

[Okay, Logan. You definitely have something you want to ask me.]

This is what I was waiting for.

"Yes, actually, it is."

Logan straightened his posture and looked directly at the Holy Emperor.

246. Return (6)

"Abama is...."

At first glance, tension appears on Logan's face as he opens his mouth.

"Did you forcibly take Lord Sharon's body? What happened to her soul now?"

[...]]

Seonghwang opened his eyes slightly wide and looked at Logan. It seems to have been a quite unexpected question for him.

But for Logan, it was a natural question.

It hasn't been long since I heard that Cadmus, the first saint, had taken the bodies and extinguished the souls of past saints. He is still manipulating the body of Saint Seo Yi-seo as he pleases.

Therefore, from Logan's point of view, who did not know about psychic powers or the decision to burn, he might have wondered whether Seonghwang had also done the same thing to Sir Sharon.

[...] okay. I understand what you are worried about.]

Seonghwang answered bitterly and once again tapped the floor with his toe.

[Not like that. It's just that Sir Sharon has special abilities that are different from ordinary people, and I'm just borrowing them for a little while. Currently, her spirit is alive and well, and everything I do is done with her consent. So you can rest assured.]

It was unfamiliar to hear a voice filled with thoughtfulness, but Logan still felt that his words contained a ring of truth.

"Of course, I honestly thought that Abama would have done such a thing..."

Logan, who had been flustered without knowing that the atmosphere of the festival seemed to have become gloomy, soon closed his mouth with a cold expression on his face.

What kind of useless excuse are you making? Isn't it true that you doubted him?

Although I have always thought highly of the Emperor's personality, haven't I always reminded myself that I must never let down my guard since I am the emperor of the empire?

[Is that all you're curious about?]

Seonghwang asked again in a somewhat casual voice.

'What on earth does this person want to tell me?'

Logan, who was furrowing his brows inexplicably, suddenly remembered the explanation that Seonghwang had given in passing when he arrived here.

-There are many factors that determine a person's presence. Among them, memories and experiences have a great influence on the appearance.

If it were a coincidence, wouldn't it be truly unfortunate?

It was as if he knew that he was worried about Mores' presence.

'... no. 'It's no coincidence.'

Logan realized that Seonghwang was still staring at him.

It was the gaze of someone who was called the representative of God and feared by everyone. Eyes that scatter a deep and sharp brilliance that seems to instantly see through not only a person's thoughts but

also the subconscious beyond that.

'I really want to tell you about Mores!'

As expected, this scary person doesn't know anything.

But Logan felt a sense of welcome rather than fear. Aren't you grateful that you deliberately lead people to ask questions that are usually difficult to ask?

He decided not to miss this long-awaited opportunity.

"Yes. There's something I've been curious about for a while. I heard that a person's soul can be seen intact through Abamama's eyes. Is that true?"

okay. As Lee Seong-jin said, if you can't tell if he is a soul, how can you not suspect that someone who looks so different is an evil spirit? How can he treat me like his real son?

-Do not sin. God's representative sees through your polluted souls!

This was one of the sermons priests enjoyed preaching during mass, but Logan thought it was simply a convenient slogan to edify his subjects.

That thought changed, probably right after meeting Lee Seong-jin.

-Yes, you. You don't really think that guy doesn't know that you're not an ordinary person, do you? That man is a man who sees the soul with his eyes.

Seongjin Lee also said something like this.

-Of course, the guy was presumptuous because he said he had to die to find out, but I think it was difficult for him to answer so he changed the subject. Why not? Sometimes, he's staring at the top of my head for no reason. What else is that but seeing souls?

However, when asked that question, Seonghwang also seemed to think of the same person.

[okay. I guess I know who I heard it from.]

Seonghwang smiled softly and nodded.

[There is no mistake about that. I can clearly see the human soul in my eyes.]

"If you do it, Abama."

Feeling his throat burning for no reason, Logan continued his question with difficulty.

"Mores now... is he really Mores?"

Although it was a bit of a strange question, Logan was careful not to accidentally mention the name of 'Lee Seong-jin'.

If Seonghwang really doesn't know of Lee Seongjin's existence, this question might reveal his identity.

'If you scratch it, it might turn into crumbs. but... ..'

Even if it meant taking some risk, there was something Logan needed to confirm from the Holy Emperor.

It would be perfect if Lee Seong-jin were Mores himself, but if not, how does Seong-hwang plan to treat him, an evil spirit?

'If they want to get rid of Lee Seong-jin right away, how can I persuade that person?'

Even as he waited for an answer, Logan's mind was spinning in confusion. Seonghwang's expression as he looks at him also becomes more subtle.

[okay. You've been like that since 'before'. I always worried about other people's positions before my own. It was definitely a virtue that deserved praise, but it sometimes seemed foolish.]

... Previous?

Logan responded cautiously to the subtle nuance.

"As a member of the royal family, it is natural to put the well-being of your subjects before your own. Abama."

[...]]

Then Seonghwang lowered his eyes and quietly looked down at his feet.

Tuk-tuk.

With a light kick, the dirt soaked with the demonic beast's blood bounces up little by little.

[good night. Let's talk about Mores. Didn't you all grow up together in the Blue Rose Labyrinth since childhood? So, I thought that if there was anyone who would be the first to have questions about that child, it would probably be you.]

Logan listened to what he said, looking at the small hole that was gradually taking shape.

[But I waited to see when you would ask me, but even though you had the chance, you never asked me anything.]

"that....."

That's because I wasn't sure how you would react if you found out about Lee Seong-jin's existence.

But there was a more important, more fundamental reason than that.

'Maybe I still can't fully trust you.'

And that person probably doesn't know it either.

Scrunch.

At that time, Seonghwang, who had roughly pushed the excavated dirt to the side, raised his head and stared straight at Logan.

[Is that really all you ask? You probably have a lot of questions about yourself, too.]

".....!"

For a moment, Logan's face hardened.

The meaning of Seonghwang's gaze was very clear.

-I knew I was looking at your soul, so why don't you ask about yourself?

But, why now suddenly?

Haven't we been getting along well up until now, pretending not to know each other? There is no particular reason for that person to suddenly bring up that issue.

'... ah!'

And then there it was. The occasion.

-I've seen you up close! It was clearly an offering meant to be offered to the Penitent!

The devil started yelling something incomprehensible as soon as he saw Logan.

If the person who said those words wasn't a demon who could be back-summoned to the Demon World at any time, Logan would most likely have captured him and interrogated him for the whole story.

-There was more at stake in your death than you thought! If the Guardian hadn't stolen you, a lot would have changed by now!

Okay, does that person already know that?

So, can we reach the answer? The inside story of Ortona's destruction, the devil's dirty tricks, and even his own unexpected reincarnation.

Do you want to tell me all that?

'but... ..'

Still, Logan couldn't bring himself to open his mouth.

Seonghwang, who was carefully examining the complex emotions in his eyes, finally sighed softly.

[People rarely change. You always neglected yourself and tried to trust and understand even those who tried to harm you. Even if there is a risk of being betrayed by them in the end.]

The 'before' you are talking about is Logan's childhood or Gael Bertrand's life.

Logan still vaguely remembers Gael's final days and the events beyond death. The white light that surrounded me and the sweet voice that rang softly in my ears.

-You worked hard, son.

If you think about it, how many people in this world will call me their son?

But how could it be you? Back then, you must have been as young a boy as I am now.

[But as your father, I hope you take care of yourself a little more from now on.]

And at that moment, Logan realized what he had been doing all along.

The same reason why I hesitated to ask about Lee Seong-jin.

By facing that question directly, I thought that the present might collapse in an instant. I was scared that this current relationship might turn into something different.

'I couldn't be this man's son, but I also didn't want to be no family at all!'

The complex thoughts that have been suppressed unconsciously burst out from within as if they had been waiting the moment you recognize them.

Seonghwang nodded, catching a glimpse of his eyes shaking

anxiously with a mixture of conflicting emotions.

[okay. It seems that it is not the time yet.]

With those words, the Holy Emperor waited in silence until Logan regained some composure.

Knock knock.

I didn't forget to touch the ground under my feet every now and then.

It was a meaningless movement, but at this point, Logan couldn't help but feel a little concerned about his toes.

How much time had passed? Seonghwang glanced somewhere in the distant sky and opened his mouth.

[Now it's almost time. First, let me answer your question. People sometimes look in the wrong place for what is right in front of them.]

Seonghwang did not say anything definitive. Like 'Lee Seong-jin is your younger brother' or 'Lee Seong-jin is actually Mores.'

I just said this in a roundabout way, as always.

[Do you understand? You don't need to look for that child anywhere else.]

".....!"

But still, that was enough. The resonance of that answer was the truth, and that fact meant only one thing.

When Logan looked at him with wide eyes, Seonghwang smiled faintly.

[Logan.]

Even though his eyes were sparse in warmth, they contained a kindly light. It was probably the look in his eyes that Logan had always shown since he first met him.

[You safely saved Mores. You did really well.]

Tuk.

And a hand unknowingly rises above the Sword Master's head.

It was such a natural movement that Logan realized too late that he was tapping his head like a child.

[I will increase your pocket money as promised.]

Those were the last words Seonghwang uttered.

"Ugh!"

The exorcist stumbled for a moment, then bent over and retched violently.

And any sign of prosperity disappeared in an instant.

"...Is this Lord Sharon?"

"Ah, yes. It's me, sir. Hehe."

When the exorcist raised his head, his eyes had returned to their original black light.

However, while she was smiling with her lips parted, she covered her mouth with her hand again and let out a low moan.

"Ugh. Anyway, the aftereffects of the gap are so severe. At least it has improved a lot, so I don't know how your Majesty usually tolerates things like this."

"aftereffect?"

"Yes, sir. I would like to talk more, but honestly, I feel like I am dying, so I need to lie down somewhere right now."

As if those words were not empty words, Sir Sharon was breaking into a cold sweat.

"Then I'll just leave."

The gaunt-faced exorcist staggered and left the scene.

But suddenly something caught Logan's attention. This was the place where Sir Sharon was standing.

A part of the ground that was soaked with the blood of the demon beast was dug quite deeply. This is an area that Seonghwang has been kicking as a habit since a while ago.

'... ... ?'

But I saw something strange inside.

'For some reason, I felt like I was doing something I wasn't supposed to do, but there must have been a reason!'

Logan knelt down and hurriedly dug through the dirt. Then he noticed an object that looked familiar and he took a deep breath.

Buried in the dirt was a small stone that glowed yellow.

'This... ... !'

The magic stone that Logan gave to Seongjin Lee.

It was the same stone he was disappointed to have lost as soon as he woke up.

* * *

"No, sir. Is that really true? A Glatzer Troll?"

"Even so. I saw it clearly with my own eyes!"

"Oh, no way. Military poetry is based on glorification and exaggeration, but isn't this a bit too much?"

Then Sir Oscar glares at the young bard.

"You don't believe me? Why on earth would I glorify and exaggerate the actions of foreigners in our territory?"

"Oh, yeah, well, that's right."

Laurent pondered with a sad expression on his face, then began to

sing, plucking the strings with his hands.

Tiriring.

The prince raised his fingertip and pointed to the white horizon.

Behold those cold invaders! That is our old enemy!

At that light gesture, the mountain-like ice monster rose up... ...

Ting.

Then, the ground disappeared and he sighed.

"After all, it won't sell, right? It's too much of an exaggeration, so I'm glad it doesn't get laughed at."

"But is that the truth I see? Isn't that just a bad tune?"

"Is melody a problem now? Put your hand on your heart and think about it, knight! This is not the era of the three ancient dragons, so if you sing something like this oral myth, will it be acceptable to the people?"

"hmm....."

It's definitely overly large and grand. It's not very balanced to decorate the beginning of a hero's biography.

If you just look at the lyrics of the song, isn't it likely that it will be an epic story that far surpasses that of the first Holy Emperor?

"Then how about this? Turning Prince Logan's activities into a song?"

"Oh, what else has he done?"

It was a rather tempting offer.

Prince Logan is the fruit of the love achieved by the main characters of 'The Wandering Prince and the Blue-Eyed Maid.' I'm sure it could make for an exciting sequel.

But that expectation was fleeting.

"No, you should exaggerate to a certain extent, knight! How can a person who has not yet completed his terms become a sword master!"

"That's because it's real."

"Is it fun to play a prank like that on an artist desperate for music? Yes?"

After arguing for a while, the two people noticed a boy approaching at high speed from the other side.

"uh?"

It was Prince Logan, the main character of the topic.

Sir Oscar asked, hastily straightening his posture.

"Prince Logan! Where are you going in such a hurry? If you don't mind, please talk to this friend...."

"Yes, you guys do a good job too!"

But the prince, who gave a wrong answer, quickly disappeared into the count's mansion!

"...What the hell is going on?"

The two looked at each other in confusion.

* * *

Wiggle wiggle.

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who was lying in bed, was unable to calm down and was becoming impatient. The demon king couldn't see this and scolded him.

[I knew it would be like this. I knew it. I was a fool to believe that you would have the slightest patience. How long has it been since your father was gone?]

No, I'm really going to hold back this time. I won't even look at a heart of ice.

I promised. Never try to do it alone.

Seongjin closed his eyes tightly, frowned, and tried to think of something else.

'Okay, let's just meditate!'

Because I'm so busy these days, my Auror training is slow. That was when Seongjin finally forgot about his icy heart and started concentrating.

Quang!

The door was violently opened and someone came running in.

It was Logan.

"ok?"

Seongjin opens his eyes wide and stands up, but Logan strides towards the bed with a stern expression on his face.

"Logan? What happened...."

But Seongjin could not finish speaking. This is because Logan, who came close in an instant, wrapped one arm around Seongjin's neck.

Wow.

"Kkuek?"

Crack.

The neck was pulled so hard that a strange sound came from the cervical spine!

Seongjin was scared.

"Hey, man! My father barely healed me and left. What on earth are you doing?"

But Seongjin, who was patting Logan's back, realized something strange. This was because the body of the guy who had his head

down while holding her in a headlock was trembling slightly.

Wait, why is this guy suddenly acting like this again?

"...thank god."

And a voice that sounds like a mumble.

"huh?"

"I thought I might never find your soul again."

At that moment, Seongjin had an intuition.

This guy found out something.

"uh....."

I was panicking, not knowing how to react, but my shoulders soon started to get wet.

"I'm so glad, Mores."

247. Soul Stone (1)

It took quite a while for Seongjin to be released from Logan's arms. Because this guy couldn't calm down easily.

"...Hey, are you crying?"

"What nonsense. No."

Wood clatter.

At the same time, he kept putting on a headlock without raising his face, and I felt like I was going to die.

Seongjin, who couldn't stand it anymore, said, 'Hey, my neck vertebrae are now out of alignment,' and now he's silently pouring out his divine power to break his neck!

As if they were father and son, what they both did was exactly the same.

"How did you know? Did you just meet your father?"

Tdu-duk-duk.

Seongjin asked, turning his now free neck around. Even so, the words Seonghwang said as he was leaving continued to be bothered.

-Now that we're here, there's a place to take a quick look.

I think it refers to this guy.

"huh."

Finally, Logan bowed his head and answered.

"Yes. You already knew that. Well, I guess so."

The unusually droopy appearance looked so pitiful that Seongjin couldn't think of anything else to say about his crooked neck.

Still, when I see the red, swollen area around his eyes go back to normal in an instant, I can feel how great this guy's divine power is.

'I'm a bit envious of that, don't you think? If I had that kind of ability, I would be able to use Aurors more easily.'

I was thinking that if Seonghwang had known, he would have called, but Logan's expression hardened and he looked at Seongjin.

"But when did you find out? Why didn't you tell me right away when you found out?"

"hmm....."

Seongjin scratched his cheek with a troubled expression.

"I also heard something vaguely from my father a while ago, so I wasn't sure how to explain it to you. This is something I can't provide evidence for."

"But if you had told me, maybe I would have believed it."

"Uh, okay."

Seongjin's face became a little more serious.

you are a bitch What kind of pride can you be proud of?

"And again...."

"huh?"

'You're so kind even when you don't remember, why did you hate us so much before? 'Why did you hate me so much?'

Logan wanted to ask that. However, he opened his mouth silently and then closed his mouth firmly.

Why are you asking such a question now? Mores, who has no memory anyway, wouldn't really know the reason.

More than that, there were things that Logan had to apologize to his little brother, whom he had finally found.

"I'm really sorry."

"Huh? What?"

"I couldn't find an answer to where your soul went, so I thought it might never be possible to find it. If things continue like this, Mores might have completely given up on you without knowing anything."

In Logan's eyes as he said that, there was a deep sense of guilt that could not be hidden.

"Plus, I thought that if Mores returned to his body, Lee Seong-jin might disappear, which I somehow didn't like."

Seongjin was taken aback.

'No, I'm Seongjin Lee anyway.'

Doesn't that mean you were worried about me? Why are you apologizing for that?

But as I was watching, I noticed that this guy started digging deep into the ground on his own.

"Besides, I told you to return Mores' body. It was no different than telling you to die obediently. What on earth did I do...?"

".....?"

Seongjin couldn't understand Logan's way of thinking at all.

'So you're saying you were worried about Mores? So actually, I... Mores... 'Is that it?'

What on earth is this guy thinking so complicated? Why are you sorry about that?

However, Logan's digging continued, and he finally reached the boundary between the mantle and the outer core, reaching the pinnacle of digging.

"I'm sorry for doubting you from the beginning. I'm sorry for not recognizing you right away! Can I still proudly call myself your family? I really have no shame."

"...Hey, what happens to me if you say that!"

I didn't recognize anyone at Seonghwangga! I had no idea who I was until my father told me!

Plus, I kept telling you that you weren't Mores! Don't you remember that?

"Mores. So I...."

"Oh, you're so loud. Shut up!"

This time it was Seongjin Lee's turn to twist Logan's neck.

Tdu-duk-duk.

"Kek! Hey!"

So stop being rude and stop meaningless drilling! Even if oil comes out anyway, there is no place to use it here!

Fortunately, Seongjin's strong punishment seemed to have been effective. After fluttering around for a while, Logan finally got free, completely shaking off the gloomy expression he had just had.

Instead, he looked at Seongjin with new eyes and called.

"Mores."

"....."

"Mores."

"Um, uh, well...."

Seongjin reluctantly and awkwardly raised the corners of his mouth.

Well, I thought I would do that when my father called me, but now that Logan calls me Mores, it feels really weird.

But Logan, who sensed Seongjin's nervous mood like a ghost, smiled slightly.

"You still find the name Mores awkward."

"Um... actually, yes."

If you think about it, isn't Logan the only person other than his father who knows that Seongjin is 'Lee Seongjin'? There is a difference between being called Mores by other people and being called Mores by Logan, as big as heaven and earth.

Then Logan nodded.

"Yes, I can understand. There was a time when I too had a hard time enduring the fact that I was no longer 'Gael Bertran.'"

hmm. It certainly is.

Seongjin also remembered the confusion and anxiety he felt when he first arrived here. If it weren't for the demon lord making noise next to him, he probably wouldn't have adapted so quickly.

"Dad, you probably knew. I wish I had consulted with him from the beginning."

"Do you think so?"

Logan, who was letting out a soft laugh, suddenly made a strange face.

"Well, it's really surprising. You, who you thought was a completely different person, trust and follow him more than me, who was born as your son."

"Your father is a good man, Logan."

"Yeah, I think so too."

After responding like that, Logan seemed lost in thought for a moment and then cautiously opened his mouth.

"Do you still want me to call you Lee Seongjin?"

Seongjin widened his eyes. Because it was an unexpected proposal.

Oh, that's right. I think it would be more convenient that way.

"But are you okay? You wanted to find Mores from the beginning, right?"

Then Logan smiled brightly like never before. Instead of his usual smile that made him look somewhat sad, he had a smile that seemed genuinely happy.

"Don't worry about that. It doesn't change the fact that Lee Seong-jin is also my brother. Just like Gael Bertran has always been Mores' brother."

".....!"

It's a very obvious and plausible statement, something typical of a guy.

However, it seems that such flashy words can sometimes be of great comfort. Seongjin suddenly felt a strange feeling in his heart, and was caught up in the atmosphere and asked without realizing it.

"Would you like me to call you Gael when we're alone?"

"It's okay. I've been Logan ever since I met everyone in the Blue Rose Labyrinth. Besides, as your senior, it's not difficult to be considerate like that."

Then Seongjin's eyebrows went up.

What, man?

"Wait a minute, what do you mean you're older than me? You should

say it right away. Didn't we just decide to acknowledge each other's past lives? Then of course I'm your older brother! Besides, your birthday is less than half a year before me, right?"

"What do you mean, Seongjin Lee?"

Logan had a stern expression on his face and spoke in a tone of admonishment from a superior.

"You were in your 60s and I was in my 70s. There is clearly a 10-year difference."

"What? This kid, you still haven't given up on inflating your age?!"

"Inflating means who inflated it?"

"Who is it? You are Logan, the sword master who swept the battlefield with just a sword at the age of 70!"

He was a famous person whose biography has been written about several times, so why are you trying to fool him like that?

Then Logan made a very disapproving face.

"You're all grown up now, right? When you were little, you always called me 'big brother'."

what? How could that possibly be the case?

"You man, are you ignoring me just because you don't remember anything? Is this a fabrication?"

Seongjin, who couldn't bear it anymore, rolled his eyes and broke Logan's neck.

Crunchy.

"Ugh! Hey! Do you want to keep acting like this? If you're my younger brother, act like your younger brother!"

Logan, whose neck has turned, groans and raises his arms, wrapping them around Seongjin's neck.

Tdu-duk-duk.

"You should not be pushy and admit what you have to admit!"

"Ik! Leave it when you have something nice to say, Seongjin Lee!"

"Hmph, do you think you'll let go? You bastard! Give up and accept it! I'm telling you to admit right away that you are my younger brother!"

Seongjin and Logan, who had been back and forth for a while, suddenly felt eyes staring at them and only then raised their heads.

"...Your Majesty, what are you doing now?"

".....!"

Masain was looking down at them with a bewildered expression. Masain, who had undressed and finished eating, became worried and went to Seongjin's room again.

"It's nice to remember the time when you were fighting in the Blue Rose Labyrinth when you were young, but why do you really need to foster brotherly love in a place like this? What on earth would the people of Sigismund think of you two?"

Seongjin narrowed his eyes and glared at Logan. Look, who called you brother?

Logan, whose face is noticeably red, quickly lets go of Seongjin's neck and steps back.

"Anyway, how are you feeling, sir? Are your eyes okay now?"

Masain sighed lightly and asked as he picked up the loose bandages on the table.

"Wouldn't it be better to avoid the light for a while? Just cover your eyes for a few days..."

Eh? no!

I know clearly that I'm fine, but I don't really want to do that. It's quite frustrating!

Seongjin was scared, but fortunately, Logan came to his side. Not only did I know that the Holy Emperor had already gone, but I also felt that my auror activity had completely returned to normal.

"Don't worry, Brother Massain. Mores' eyes have fully recovered."

"Is that true?"

Masain's eyes widened at the rare, decisive words. Then Logan smiles and looks back at Seongjin.

"Because Brother Lee treated me properly. Right, Mores?"

Seongjin looked at him blankly for a moment.

Until now, Logan had avoided calling his name in front of others as much as possible, and even if he did, he felt awkward. But now, Logan looked very relaxed.

I couldn't help but chuckle as I realized that there were a lot of things I had been paying attention to, whether I knew it or not.

"Yes. For the first time in a while, I benefited from my younger brother who has strong divine powers."

"...You're so persistent."

Logan and Masain stayed in Seongjin's room for a while. And for the first time, Seongjin heard the story about sleep talking in detail from the two people.

"Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

Masain looked a little embarrassed at Seongjin's question. I was worried that she would get on my nerves if I found out that she was even talking strangely in her sleep, even though she had no memory of it.

'But wait a minute, wouldn't the devil have been listening anyway?'

So, after the two finally left, Seongjin started to press the devil. Why did this guy know but keep his mouth shut until now?

After several interrogations, what the demon king revealed was unexpected.

[At the time, I thought you were increasingly being consumed by the memories of 'Mores'.]

Come to think of it, the possibility that Lee Seong-jin was the real Mores was never explained in detail to the Demon King, so he might have thought so.

[But at first, you mistook the language of Delcross for the language of Sigurd District 34, right? And sometimes, when I dreamed, I would see Mores' point of view. So, I thought that being aware of that would only accelerate the process of being consumed by memory.]

'hmm.'

[But as it was repeated every day, I eventually got used to it. Afterwards, I thought it was no big deal.]

Well, I had a conversation like that with the demon lord before.

-If you repeatedly mistake her feelings for yours and her knowledge for yours, won't you often end up mistaking yourself for Mores?

Certainly, from then on, the Demon King expressed such concerns. It will become increasingly difficult for Lee Seong-jin to exist as 'Lee Seong-jin'.

-You may have to come up with some special method to protect your identity as [Lee Seong-jin] in the future.

At the time, I thought it was a pointless worry. Because it hasn't been that difficult so far.

However, even Logan, who was the only person in this world who called himself 'Lee Seong-jin', no longer distinguishes Seong-jin from 'Mores'.

Although I said I would call him 'Lee Seong-jin' when it was just the two of us, the boundary will become increasingly blurry in the future.

'It might not make much of a difference anyway. I guess I am Mores himself after all.'

But why? Seongjin suddenly had this thought.

I feel like I shouldn't lose 'me' until the end. If I don't get someone to call my name properly, I end up... ..

'Hey, devil.'

Seongjin, who was thinking deeply, called the devil.

[huh?]

'Anyway, I will always be [Lee Seong-jin] to you, right?'

[Of course.]

The Demon King smiled and smiled.

[I met you because you are 'Lee Seong-jin'. Past life or reincarnation, it has nothing to do with it. From now on, you will only be Lee Seong-jin to me.]

'... okay.'

Only then did I feel reassured.

Seongjin, who had become more relaxed, closed his eyes and spoke kindly.

'Anyway, what should I eat for dinner? Should we ask for bear meat steak?'

[what? really? Really? Yay!]

The demon lord was so excited that I felt like my whole mind was shaking.

[Bear meat, bear meat, bear meat with a strong aroma and spicy

taste~]

Would that be that good?

Listening to the Demon King's sloppy song, Seongjin, dumbfounded, shook his head.

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248. Soul Stone (2)

After confirming that Seongjin woke up safely, Logan and Masain rested for a while and then left the count's residence again. This is because Sigismund was still in disarray.

The major battle was over, but a sluggish clearing operation remained. In addition, we had to chase down the lycanslopes that were running away.

There was a lot of work to do, but there was an extreme shortage of workers.

Seongjin's companions also joined forces to help Yeongji. Only Captain Bruno, who had volunteered to guard Sir Sharon and Seongjin, who had suddenly lost their health, remained at the count's residence.

'Shouldn't I do something too...? ... '

Seongjin thought so, but there was no room for him, who came back from almost death, to intervene. When he started to feel itchy and tried to sneak out of his room, Logan and Martha were staring at him side by side.

"Would you like me to let you sleep well so that you can rest comfortably today?"

Logan asked grimly, kneading his fists.

Wait a minute, does that mean you're going to give me physical therapy instead of sleeping pills?

"Sir, why don't you just cover your eyes? You'll sleep better."

Masain also thinks it's time to put on a bandage and asks.

Although he is said to have recovered, he seems to be bothered by his eyes, which were bleeding profusely only yesterday.

In the end, Seongjin had no choice but to raise both hands and feet.

"Okay, okay. Just stay in your room."

However, contrary to the atmosphere that seemed like they would gather their troops and pursue Lycan Slope at any moment, there was no news that the pursuit party had left until late afternoon.

And Seongjin was able to hear the reason from Edith, who brought dinner.

Sir Ilma and Sir Sebastian, who should be the mainstay of the pursuit party. This was because, except for old man Vincent, something big had happened to the two who could be said to have the greatest power in the territory.

"run away?"

"Yes, I say so, sir."

Their only daughter, Louise, disappeared from the estate without leaving behind a letter.

This is roughly what Edith was told.

-Father, mother. Recently, with the help of the two of you, I was able to safely settle down as a servant at the count's residence. But is it a young idea? I felt like I wanted to further explore the many possibilities that were still hidden within me. I want to travel around the continent and experience more things. So, neither of you, please don't worry too much and wait for me at the estate.

Seongjin clicked his tongue inwardly.

Louise, you have a very thorough personality even at such a young age. Ever since he decided to face the Lycan Slopelord, he had even considered the possibility of being defeated and not returning.

"But it's such a strange thing, isn't it?"

Edith tilted her head.

"I've only known Louise for a few days, but she never seemed like that kind of person."

"okay?"

"Yes. If you spend even a moment with her, you will know. Ms. Louise is a person who makes plans down to the minute. While helping me, she said how thorough she was in everything she did. That Ms. Louise is somewhere without a plan. "I never even imagined going on an adventure."

"....."

Suddenly, the image of Louise neatly taking off her shoes and putting them neatly in her backpack comes to mind.

Seongjin knew that she was actually heading to the [Hwawon], which is located in the center of the Demon World.

-Sir, I must confirm the reality of that [Painter] with my own eyes.

It was only at that moment, but I had a feeling that I wouldn't see her for a long time.

Where is that? Although she was busy controlling the shaved ice, Seongjin could hear her faint thoughts coming from her.

-I now have to go a long way from which I may never return. It will be a path that cannot be told to anyone.

Did Louise arrive at the [Painter Garden] safely? What on earth happened there?

-It's a world full of regrets, and the only person here who knows me as a whole is you. Please stay... ..

That was the end of what was conveyed in resignation, but Seongjin somehow felt that she had made a final request to her parents.

'They don't want their parents to come into the demon world looking for them.'

That's why he hid his whereabouts by leaving a letter.

Seongjin thought for a while.

'Sir Ilma and Sir Sebastian have the right to know about Louise.'

But why? Even if the two of them chased her daughter into the demon world, it was unlikely that they would be able to meet Louise in the end.

In that case, wouldn't it be better for the two of them to believe that they are wandering around a safer continent rather than the Demon World?

Seongjin couldn't make up his mind for a while. This was because she could not dare to imagine the feelings of her parents who lost their child.

'But I'll be back.'

Even if it took a long time, I had a feeling that Louise would return here someday. In that case, it would be better to allow her parents to remain at her estate and welcome her.

After thinking for a long time, Seongjin finally made a decision to keep quiet about her.

[Wow! Bear meat, bear meat~ delicious bear meat~]

Still, he couldn't help but feel heavy, and while the Demon King sang excitedly, Seongjin mechanically ate his dinner without even thinking about tasting it.

Rattling.

What caught Seongjin's attention was the gorgeous tea tray that came into the room following the meal.

"...What is this, Captain?"

Seongjin asked, puzzled by the perfect tea set he hadn't seen in a long time.

Then, Manager Bruno, who was dragging the tray, stroked his mustache with a puzzled look on his face.

"Yes, sir. This is a tea time set for you."

"So why is the leader bringing that to me?"

You are, after all, an external agent of Arenja, and serving tea is not your main job.

Then, Director Bruno spoke with an even more serious expression.

"No, sir. From now on, everything I can do for you will be my job."

"huh?"

"Through this incident, I have clearly realized that my sincerity in serving you is still lacking in many ways."

"....."

It was embarrassing to hear that he had come to an epiphany out of nowhere, but Seongjin could clearly tell how sincere he was about this matter.

This is because the angle of Director Bruno's mustache was just right, and it was sharply stretched out in perfect symmetry like never before.

"hmm."

Seongjin frowned and thought about what to say for a moment before opening his mouth.

"That's not enough, you've been doing well enough so far, Commander."

"Oh my God...."

"Just like before, the leader will work hard to restore his previous

status. That is the leader's job. By having Dekaron Knight become my person, the leader is doing everything he needs to do. Don't you understand that?"

Director Bruno seemed to be roughly convinced.

Nevertheless, his expression was dark, as if he was not satisfied with something, so in the end, Seongjin had no choice but to add:

"If you really want to do something more, you could teach Calmen more properly."

That guy's 'brightness' is very unstable compared to other resident knights. He already has anger management problems, and his skills aren't that great, so how can I take him around comfortably?

Then, wondering how he received what he said, Director Bruno looked at Seongjin with a deeply moved face.

"I am only now learning why you were so attentive to my Majesty, and it is a case like this that I wasted so much time. It is truly shameful."

"ok?"

"I will definitely live up to your expectations! How can I be the only Kalmen? Apart from regaining my status, from now on, I will properly train all the resident knights of Jinju Palace. From now on, I will make sure that there is no shortage of service to your Majesty!"

"...Uh, yes. Okay."

Seongjin, who could not bear to stop the overly motivated man, thought while breaking into a cold sweat.

It's good to be overly motivated, though.

'Everyone must be enjoying the honeymoon right now because Sir Masain is not there, but now we will be returning with two tiger instructors.'

This is it, won. Unless the knights' salaries are greatly increased, who

on earth would want to stay at Jinju Palace?

* * *

From then on, the evenings at the count's residence went by in a boring yet peaceful manner.

Wong wong!

Except for Max breaking into the room after escaping from us on his own, there was nothing to disturb Seongjin's rest.

So, Seongjin spent his time meditating or observing objects in the world of images with his spiritual eyes.

Perhaps because he ate a lot of bear meat steaks, the Demon King was very cooperative in using his spiritual eyes.

'hmm.'

It was inevitable that his eyes would occasionally fall on the ice heart next to him, but Seongjin tried to suppress his curiosity with unprecedented patience.

The promise to the Emperor was also a promise, but the more I looked at it separately, the more I realized that it was not an ordinary thing.

'Until now, I've only used it when I was in a hurry... ... '

I felt it every time I used it, but it seemed like the ice heart could have a greater impact on the user's mind or soul than expected.

If we continue to manipulate the Glatrue Troll in the same way as we have done so far, we may one day cause irreversible problems.

'Your father was like that too, right? 'Don't just try to do it on your own.'

Since he is a man who allows Seongjin to do what he wants, it is definitely not a warning for no reason.

'When I felt a sense of unity with shaved ice, I felt a little like my soul was moving away from my body. If you do something wrong, your soul might fly somewhere else.'

The events that occurred immediately after the soul left the body were now a blur and I could barely remember them. The only vague impression that remains is that I heard a strangely kind sound of laughter accompanied by the sound of bells.

But even so, there was a level of awareness that the task was not usually dangerous. I wonder why Seonghwang, who was always calm, seemed so agitated.

'I don't want to worry my father anymore.'

So Seongjin spent time mainly looking at the accessories he got from Vajra and the Nebraska amulet.

Among them, what particularly caught his eye were several small, round soul stones.

□Vajra's Soul Stone□

Seongjin thought as he removed the bright red-brown soul stone and played with it.

'It definitely wasn't this color before Vajra died. It was a transparent bead no different from other soul stones.'

So, does this also contain the soul of the dead Vajra?

[It's a bit unclear whether it's his soul. The feeling is similar, but when I first saw it, the lycan slope clearly had the soul of the real world. However, what is contained here seems closer to the soul of the normal world.]

The Demon King looked at the soul stone for a while and then said.

That means that the soul of the normal world has been converted into the soul of the normal world, or that what is in this world is not actually Vajra.

But is that possible? What if the soul of the normal world dies and becomes the soul of the normal world?

'And look at this, devil.'

Seongjin held up Nebraska's summoning amulet. Small grooves that were supposed to have been filled with jewels, but are now empty.

'Don't you think it would be perfect if a soul stone were put in here?'

[hmm? They're definitely similar in size. It seems like that.]

'Then shall we try it?'

So Seongjin took out an empty soul stone and slipped it into the groove of the Nebraska Amulet. OK-

Sweet!

Isn't the soul stone in the groove sticking firmly, as if it were being sucked in?

'... ... !'

And immediately a faint message appears before my eyes.

☐List of spirits that can be summoned as summoned beasts 2/4☐

[One. ☐☐☐☐ (inactive)☐

[2. ☐☐☐ ☐ (inactive)☐

☐3. Hayes Martin (active)☐

[4. Red (active)☐

☐Would you like to choose your soul?☐

☐Accept/Reject☐

'This... ... !'

I had seen it once before.

A choice that came to mind after defeating the Lycanslope Lord in the labyrinth and just before returning through the portal.

When I returned to this world, it was a window that would not open again no matter what I did. Since I couldn't see it with my spiritual eyes, I wondered if there was some other condition, but was it really that I needed a soul stone?

[omg?!]

But Seongjin was not the only one who was surprised.

In the labyrinth, it was a spear that only appeared to Seongjin, who had acquired the amulet, but now that they share the same spiritual eye, the devil can finally see the spear as well.

[cow... Summoned beast? Red?]

And the shock of the demon king who read the contents was enormous.

[Lee Seong-jin, what is this? Maybe I saw something wrong? Could it be that this guy here, the one in red, is referring to me? Is that it? Moreover, this body is not recognized as the great Demon King, but as a cow, a summoned beast, etc.?]

'... ... !'

[This great Demon Lord of Gehenna was finally fixed on the name Red? How could this happen... ... !]

The Demon Lord, who was muttering helplessly, began to cry at the end.

Sniffle.

'hmm.'

Well, Seongjin felt that it was a name that suited the devil's insignificance perfectly, but since he was so discouraged, he had nothing to say.

'Anyway, I think I'm getting a sense of something.'

When he first showed the Amulet of Nebraska to Seonghwang, didn't he explain it to Seongjin like this?

-Perhaps it is the kind of thing that fundamentally changes the soul. It's clear that it's valuable, but it would be a good idea to be a little cautious when using it.

It fundamentally changes the soul.

In other words, does this mean that it is possible to change the soul of the normal world into the soul of the normal world?

'Then shall we give it a try?'

Maybe it's red... No, because it would be difficult if the Demon King suddenly became trapped in the Soul Stone.

Then there was only one choice.

☐3. Hayes Martin (active)☐

☐Would you like to choose your soul?☐

☐Accept/Reject☐

Hayes Martin.

A priest of the Dark Church who opened the gate to the Heresy Tribunal and died at the hands of the Holy Emperor.

I couldn't figure out why the alternative interest rate was on the list.

'But there is no soul better than this to give a rough test.'

What happens to his soul is none of my business. Seongjin, who thought so, clicked on the option without hesitation.

☐*Accept* / Reject☐

Right at that moment.

Sigh-

The transparent soul stone instantly turns black.

'... ... !'

When I checked with my spiritual eyes, I found that the name of the soul stone had changed.

□Hayes Martin's Soul Stone□

Ah, as expected.

249. Soul Stone (3)

Hayes' soul stone.

As he looked at the orb stained with an ominous black light, Seongjin naturally had this question.

'Demon King. Is the guy inside here a devil?'

Because the demonic energy I saw with my spiritual eyes was always black. However, the demon lord's reaction was not very encouraging.

[...] hmm? Sigh, okay? I don't really feel any magical energy, do I?]

'really?'

[huh. Sniff, I guess this is just the color of the soul of this guy named Hayes. Isn't he just a black guy on the inside?]

That's not all.

Along with the change in the soul stone, the message that appeared before my eyes also changed.

☐Summoner Hayes Martin☐

☐Summon / Cancel☐

And the number of souls listed on the amulet was reduced by one.

☐List of spirits that can be summoned as summoned animals 1/3☐

[One. ☐☐☐☐ (inactive)☐

[2. ☐☐☐ ☐☐ (inactive)☐

□3. Red (active)□

I felt like I knew something.

So, an activated soul is a soul that can be used right now. In other words, he has already died and only his soul remains.

The Demon King originally only had a soul, so he was active from the beginning.

'Then there's a possibility that the two whose names I can't read are still alive somewhere.'

Of course, this is assuming that they are human.

But since there are probably more than one dead person in this world, why does this particular soul come up as an option?

'Could it be that they, like Hayes, were remnants of the Dark Church? Or are you a devil worshiper?'

Then the Demon King, who had completely stopped crying, answered.

[Probably not a devil worshiper. Anyone who is somehow connected to the devil, such as a devil worshiper or devil contractor, will be immediately taken to the demon world where the devil resides the moment they die.]

This is because as soon as they face death, their souls become subordinate to the contracted devil.

'Well, let's call him and ask him first.'

There is a limit to what you can guess if you think about it alone. It would be quicker to hear from the person involved.

After making that decision, Seongjin moved the spear with his thoughts.

□*Summon* / Release□

And I immediately regretted that decision.

Shuaaaa-

Suddenly, with tremendous spiritual pressure, an ominous black fog began to rise in front of Seongjin's eyes. It was ominous just to look at it.

".....!"

Wiggle, wiggle.

At some point, the black smoke that was spreading across the floor began to coalesce in the center as if it were alive, and then began to form an elongated human shape.

Seongjin was scared and slowly retreated behind the bed.

I didn't expect to see an ordinary ghost from the beginning, but that doesn't seem like a proper spirit!

'Demon King, look closely at that! 'That's not really the devil?'

Does anyone look like a devil worshiper or the devil himself?

[I'll say it again, I don't feel any magic.]

The Demon King answered like that and tilted his soul. I also seemed to be puzzled by something.

[But the atmosphere is really good.]

Hehehehe... ..

Now, eerie cries can be heard from the black fog.

As Seongjin, embarrassed, was hurriedly looking for the release button, a black figure rose up, taking the shape of a proper human being.

Shooooooooo-

Eventually, a middle-aged man wearing a black priest's uniform

appeared.

The skinny body and lanky cheeks are definitely the same as the Father Hayes I saw before. Only the dark circles and bloodless gray skin made him look even more gloomy.

[at las... ..!]

Flashing.

The black evil spirit opened its eyes and let out a trembling thought.

[You finally called me! He called me!]

The evil spirit shouted an incomprehensible sound and distorted its face. It is a strange expression that looks either painful or happy.

[Aaaah... ..!]

Perhaps it was because he was an evil spirit that he had summoned, but Seongjin was able to directly feel the emotions coming from Hayes.

What he was showing was not the bitterness or regret that an evil spirit would normally show.

Only joy.

Only joy so intense that it shook the soul was completely consuming the evil spirit.

'Anyway, it's bloody!'

Black tears flow from the evil spirit's distorted eyes, and black smoke billows out every time its pale lips open.

As Seongjin took a step back, breaking into a cold sweat, Hayes' evil spirit stumbled and bowed. Then, she fell flat on the floor and bowed her head politely towards Seongjin.

[I was waiting for the day you would call me, only this day.]

The hands that were reverently raised above the head as if in worship

were trembling.

[O Lord of my soul, Archbishop of Rest!]

... what?

* * *

It was an unusually clear night sky, shining as if stars were pouring down.

An old shaman with gray hair and a bent back was looking up at the northern sky, feeling the Odokani wind.

Her white-covered eyes could hardly detect the light of the world, but the shaman could still feel the faint warmth of starlight from the wind blowing from the meadow.

"Lord of my soul...."

The wrinkled mouth bends and a faint voice escapes.

"Nazranka."

Then someone called her name. The shaman slowly turned to face her friend approaching behind her.

"You were here alone. Now all the elders have gathered. The tribal leader is looking for you."

"Chigudanka."

The shaman folded his hands over his chest and showed proper courtesy to the eldest son of the tribe leader.

Then, suddenly, he felt another presence and turned his head towards the tall young man standing next to him.

Although her distant eyes were shaking in the air without focus, the capable shaman nevertheless recognized the person standing in front of her.

"...Owen of Delcross."

"It's been a while, Nazranka."

He is a young hunter of the Empire who has been going smoothly recently.

His hair, like the sun setting under the night sky of the grassland, was decorated with the newly expanded cormorant feathers.

"Yes, it is the same. If it is a sudden summons of elders, it cannot be anything other than about you."

The shaman's eyebrows furrow in disapproval.

She was one of the few elders of Volanta who maintained a neutral stance.

Because her antipathy toward the empire and the Holy Emperor was quite deep-rooted, everyone found it surprising that she did not show any strong opposition.

-The Great Spirit wants me to do so.

The answer to those who asked why was always the same.

In any case, she did not like Owen, the prince of the empire, very much from the beginning. She firmly believes that he has a hidden agenda.

"Owen, why are you disturbing our peaceful Volanta? Why did you come to the land of Volanta?"

Then the young hunter answered coolly. This was the answer I always remembered when standing in front of the elders of Volanta.

"As a friend of Volanta, I have come to expand Volanta's horizons."

"There is no need for such flimsy excuses. Just tell the truth before the great soul!"

Chikudanka, who was listening to the shaman's sharp reaction to his friend, quietly intervened.

"Nazranka. Owen proved his favor by destroying all the Nurumachi in the plains. That's all. Recently, he also dried out all of the Coratla seeds."

""

"Now crocodiles and fish will return to our rivers."

"It's pointless, it's pointless. How can you not know that all of this is nothing more than a bad joke...."

The shaman lamented as if muttering. Her discolored white eyes rested for a moment on Owen's invisible bright red pendant.

"Yes. Now that I think about it, it's strange. It's truly strange. How could you, who are not of imperial blood, suddenly get involved in this game?"

Then the eyes of the two young warriors met.

'Have you ever revealed to anyone that I am your father's godson?'

'No, I swear by the earth and heaven of my ancestors, I have never done anything like that. But it's not something she can't understand. Nazranka is Volanta's greatest shaman who listens to the sound of the ancient winds.'

'... okay. 'I trust you.'

Chikudanka, who had been observing his friend for a moment, realized that Owen wanted to talk to Nazranka alone to find out the source of the information.

It wasn't difficult to step aside for a moment. He turned to the tribe's camp and quietly gave a warning to the shaman.

"Come to the meeting on time, Nazranka. Everyone in Volanta needs your wisdom."

Owen and Shaman, who were left behind, looked at each other for a moment and were awkwardly silent.

"...I guess you have something you want to ask me, Owen of Delcross."

"First of all, I salute the wisdom of the great shaman, Nazranka. How much do you know about my father?"

"Which father do you mean? The one swept up in the flames, or the one entangled in the empire?"

"....."

"Do you wonder how I know? As an imperial citizen, you may not easily believe it, but the shaman of Volanta gains wisdom from the wind."

And the shaman raised his white eyes and looked at the distant northern sky.

"You're such a thorn in my eye, but I guess it's okay. I need someone to share the joy in my heart right now. One of my brothers has just found rest."

Brother finds rest?

Owen, puzzled, quickly looked back to see if there had been a funeral for anyone in the Volanta tribe recently. Either way, Nazranka's peaceful voice continued.

"It's really funny. Even though I was the first servant beaten by the Master of All Souls, I had already given up. But something like a dream really happened."

The first servant accepted by the Master of all souls.

Owen couldn't help but ask because of the unfamiliar tone.

"Doesn't Volanta serve the great spirits of its ancestors? Who do you mean, the master of all souls? If I lack understanding of Volanta's customs, please teach me, Nazranka."

Then the shaman burst into laughter.

"Haha, foolish. It is the red weasel that hunts the opossum, but above them all there is also a black eagle flying. Above the souls of our great ancestors, there is an even higher being. He is the master of all souls."

A seemingly relieved smile appeared on Nazranka's wrinkled face.

"We are all quietly waiting for him to come."

* * *

[Have you finally found me, master of my soul... .. !]

The evil spirit of Black Haze was somehow very friendly to Seongjin.

But regardless of his attitude, I couldn't help but feel goosebumps all over my body as I looked at the guy with black water flowing down his face.

'Wow, there's no such thing as a horror movie!'

[You've been like that before. Are you scared of something like that when you've died once? That's just a simple evil spirit.]

Oh, it's not scary. Really.

It's just that I don't know how to deal with things like that. As I said before, punching doesn't work on evil spirits, right?

[Try it. What if I hit it once?]

Seongjin thought for a moment due to the devil's evil temptation. Should I really hit it?

But somehow, it felt uncomfortable to treat a soul that looked at me with earnest eyes.

'Now that I've brought you here, let's ask what we can.'

After making that decision, Seongjin carefully asked the guy a question.

"But who is the owner of your soul?"

[Of course it is you, master of the soul.]

"Why did you open the gate to the imperial palace on your own the other day?"

[Of course, it was your order. Lord of the soul.]

"...So who am I?"

[Great Archbishop of Rest, Master of Souls!]

Ah, the Dark Church.

Seongjin touched his forehead and sighed.

"...I'll have to ask first and then decide what to do with you. I'm at a loss for words."

Then Hayes asked curiously.

[Lord of my soul. Who in the world can control your steps?]

"Yeah, I'd like to ask my father."

[yes? Father... no way?]

Wow!

At that moment, the guy let out a horrifying scream. The spiritual pressure surging from him was enough to make Seongjin's hair flutter.

Above all.

'scared!'

Not a single scene in a horror movie would be that intense!

Seongjin, with goosebumps running down his spine, takes a step back.

[Lord of the soul! Noble archbishop! Apostle of rest!]

"....."

[You have to run away from him right now! He is covering the owner's eyes and blocking his ears!]

"no....."

[You must make a decision quickly before it is too late! Lord of the soul!]

It was no longer possible to ask something to an evil spirit that was going crazy.

More than anything, it's so, so creepy.

□Summon / *Release*□

Seongjin closed his eyes tightly and chose to cancel.

[Owner... ... !]

Then, Hayes struggles and is sucked into the soul stone. The joints that move as if squirming are literally the image of a demon being dragged into hell.

Shuuuuu-

Eventually, all the black fog disappeared, leaving a heavy silence in the room.

Seongjin thought as he wiped his cold sweat from his forehead.

'Let's ask my father first. 'What should I do with that strange guy?'

Well, since your father killed Hayes, you must have a clear idea about what to do with the remaining soul.

250. Soul Stone (4)

[...] Shouldn't I have asked something more?]

After a while of silence, the Demon King broke the silence and opened his mouth.

[I think the evil spirit said something very important. The Archbishop of the Dark Church and the Apostle of Rest? He is the master of souls? Isn't this normal?]

That's right.

Seongjin picked up the amulet with a shocked expression.

[Mores' past, which you don't remember, clearly has some kind of connection with the Dark Church. Let's call again and ask in more detail.]

'hmm... ... '

That is correct in every detail.

But why? I felt like I didn't want to dig too deeply into what that guy said.

'This feeling isn't all that new, though.'

Since first waking up in Delcross, Seongjin has an unusual record of overlooking many things. Despite her inability to contain her curiosity.

At first, I thought it was simply because everything was annoying and that such things were not important in a life of extras.

'But my father said that all of these are defense mechanisms that I unconsciously use to stay in Delcross.'

If so, shouldn't we know the details?

So, wouldn't receiving biased information from evil spirits also prematurely define me? Just by thinking that way, your relationship with the Dark Church may deepen.

[If you think that way, that's even more of a problem... ..]

The demon lord pondered something and added in a worried voice.

[Is it really okay? Talking to your father.]

'huh?'

[Somehow, I feel like the Dark Church is actually a group that serves the devil. Just look at the 'Repentance' church that attacked the merchant hall on the way. As far as I know, there actually exists a high-ranking Demon King with the name 'Repentance' and the attribute of 'Penance'.]

'hmm... ..'

[Those claiming the name of the Demon King even summoned the 'Demon Beast', how could that not be related to the devil?]

The Demon King said that he suspected that all sects of the Dark Church were actually groups that served high-ranking Demon Lords.

Considering the fact that they enjoy slowly encroaching on the world before a full-scale invasion, what better and more reliable method could there be than underground religious activities?

[What are all those high-ranking demon lords? They are the complete opposite of your father. Wouldn't it be good for the evil spirits of the church that serve those people to know that you have a connection?]

Regardless of the fact that Hayes doesn't feel any demonic energy, the connection between him and the devil is certain.

[If that evil spirit was something that could be tolerated, would your father have killed it in the first place? therefore... ..]

The Demon King, who was continuing his heated explanation, suddenly became startled and asked Seongjin.

[huh? Seongjin Lee, why aren't you saying anything?]

Seongjin scratched his cheek with an embarrassed expression in response to the devil's question.

[...] Hey, you really?]

'Um, well... ..'

[Did you guess everything? Are you doing this knowingly?]

Why not, devil? No matter how much you try to pretend not to know, there are things you can guess at this point.

Why is Mores receiving harsh looks from the Inquisition and high priests even though he is a prince? Why does Cadmus not acknowledge Seongjin as a descendant and gets irritated by criticizing him as 'a fraud'?

'and... ..'

Why has my father strictly restricted entry to Jinju Palace for high-ranking priests and holy knights?

[...] But you still want to tell him?]

'That's why we need to consult even more.'

There is one thing I have realized while experiencing this world so far. When it comes to the world, it is right to judge everything based on success.

'It's not simply because my father is God's representative and oracle.'

This is because he knows very well that the judgments he makes are for the benefit of everyone in the Seonghwang family. Including

Seongjin, of course.

'So, if my father finally decides to give up on me, it probably means that there is no other way.'

If he really wants to get rid of me, it probably means that I would be doing the world a favor by dying.

Then the Demon King closed his mouth as if speechless, and then the flame crystal disappeared and he sighed.

[...] Hey, you idiot.]

Um, whatever. If I die, you will die too. Still, I won't particularly take your opinion into consideration.

I'm sorry, but please be my companion on the road, devil. Since you also had me as your companion on Earth, I believe you will have no regrets.

[...]]

The demon lord was in a depressed mood and stuck to making a decision. However, there was no way that Seongjin, who had provided the cause, could say anything comforting to the bastard.

Seongjin, who was a little distraught, had just sat down on the bed.

Crackling.

Suddenly, the sight of a familiar dog quickly approached us from outside.

'... Max?'

Even without Schneeshuhe, it was as fast as the wind. The wolfdog ran down the hallway without hesitation and soon reached the door and immediately began vigorously scratching at the door.

Buck, buck, buck.

Wow, the door is going to break!

"Max!"

I quickly opened the door and saw a wolf dog with something in its mouth and vigorously wagging its tail.

Immediately after the battle, it was tied up in a kennel to keep close to Seongjin, but from then on, it started biting its leash and trying to escape here.

"Yeah, I didn't have time to take care of you. I'm sorry, Max."

Seongjin, who saw the dog's somewhat resentful eyes, patted the dog's head.

"Don't worry. I'll definitely take you with me when I go. Lord Masain will take good care of you if something happens to me. The Jinju Palace has a large garden and a dance hall, so I'm sure you'll like it too."

By the way, I have to negotiate with the Margrave to formally receive you, so what if I damage the door like this, huh?

Seongjin, who was struggling like that, suddenly caught the eye of the object the dog was biting.

'... shoes?'

At first glance, they were ordinary leather shoes. It's not particularly luxurious, but it's not too old either.

But its size and shape seemed familiar.

no way.

"Max, are these by any chance Louise's shoes?"

Then Max put his shoes on the floor and barked loudly at Seongjin.

Wong!

"No, why do you have this? Where on earth...?"

Then Max tilted his head and shook his tail vigorously.

Like, did I do a good job? Did you do well? Seongjin patted her dog's head.

"Max. Do you know where Louise is? Is she around here? Can you guide me there?"

Then the wolf dog looked up at Seongjin blankly.

Don't say such unreasonable things. Seongjin felt like he could hear Max's voice directly, so he apologized obediently.

"Oh, sorry. It's far away after all."

Anyway, it's really interesting that it's an imprint of a family member. It feels like we can communicate like this.

Then the Demon King, who had been silent until then, muttered darkly in his head.

[Damn, that annoying mongrel dog...]

'...'

Is it because of my mood? It seems like the demon lord especially hates Max.

'Anyway, maybe a pair of these shoes would be nice?'

Perhaps it would be best to give it to the parents.

But if I pass this on to Lord Ilma and his wife like this, wouldn't they mistakenly believe that Louise died in an accident somewhere?

Seongjin thought about it and put his shoes down on the table. Then Max, who followed him into the room, sticks his nose on the table and sniffs. This was where Nebraska's jewelry and soul stones were placed.

"Careful. That's not for eating, Max."

Wong wong!

Then Max looks at Seongjin with dissatisfied eyes, and sticks his nose

into one of the soul stones again. It was a red-brown soul stone containing Vajra's soul.

"...Are you curious about this?"

Wong!

"okay."

Seongjin was lost in thought.

If I put a soul stone into the amulet, would I be able to summon Vajra from Vajra's soul stone just as I summoned an evil spirit from Hayes' soul stone?

Not on the list, if that's possible.

'Perhaps I can find out about that place called [Painter] through Vajra...'

The worries didn't last long. There is nothing to lose by trying it.

Seongjin immediately pushed Vajra's soul stone into the empty slot of the amulet.

Then click.

As expected, the soul stone sits properly in the groove and sticks. A new information window also appeared before my eyes.

☐ Summoned Beast (Temporary) Vajra ☐

☐ Summon / Cancel ☐

☐ * Summons that are not dependent on the user are greatly limited in their ability expression. ☐

It was a slightly different message from Hayes.

okay. You're saying you're not a soul dependent on me?

'On the other hand, Hayes' soul is truly subordinate to me.'

Seongjin, whose thoughts went that far, immediately shook his head. Let's not think about this any more.

Shuuuuu-

When I pressed the summon button, a strong spiritual pressure spread like before and a fog-like thing began to form in the room. Dark red smoke gathers together and soon creates the appearance of a huge beast.

It was almost the same phenomenon as Hayes, but this time Seongjin was able to observe it calmly. This is thanks to having already experienced the worst case.

'No matter what comes out, it won't be as scary as before.'

What eventually appeared was a red lycan slope that was roughly 4 meters high.

Overall, it was similar to the Vajra we met in the canyon. However, the appearance of her wearing clean cloth and colorful accessories here and there gave the impression that she was a highly intelligent life form, unlike before.

[...]]

Leaning over the ceiling, Vajra's soul looked down at Seongjin in silence for a moment. Unlike in her canyon, it was an intelligent look that even felt wise.

After a while, he nodded and spoke in a low voice.

[...] I see, you weren't Lycanslope after all.]

Oh, that's right.

Until just before I was taken over by Berseus, Vajra completely believed that I was a half-breed of Lycanslope. I was so happy that I even shed tears.

[We thought they were our complete kin. I guess I was mistaken because you had great Nebraska heritage.]

"Nebraska Heritage?"

[The amulet used to summon me.]

Vajra's voice was calm, and there was no significant change in expression on his red-furred face.

Nevertheless, a deep feeling of sadness was conveyed through his thoughts, and Seongjin made an excuse without realizing it.

"I didn't deceive you on purpose."

[Ah, I have no intention of blaming you. As a result, it is true that my soul was liberated from Berseus.]

"....."

[But it looks like the rest of my compatriots weren't so lucky. It must be the price you pay for losing Lord's last will. In the end, there was no salvation for us. I should have taken the last opportunity given by the representative of the '6-person meeting' at that time... ..]

His sad gaze briefly looks towards the entrance of the estate. A place where the clearing of the Lycan Slopes is probably nearing completion.

It seemed that once you become a soul, you can know many things without any major limitations, even if you don't see it with your own eyes.

Anyway, Seongjin had a lot to ask him.

"I heard from your father that you came from Ionia to escape [the disaster]. But why do you have items from the normal world? Items such as ice hearts and soul stones."

[...]]

"And how can a soul enter an object from the normal world and change into something from the normal world? As far as I know, Ionia is the original world like Delcross. Am I wrong?"

Then Vajra nodded with a heavy face.

[okay. Since I received some help from you, I should answer as best as I can. exactly. Ionia is the original world, and our people came from there.]

And Vajra slowly began to explain.

Ionia has long achieved high levels of spiritual and technological development. And the essence of the technology they created. About the grand rules that structure and manage the world.

"Build and manage the world?"

[exactly. The world that was created through the power of those perfect and beautiful rules is the 'normal' world. Things that were created as a mere image and would have been scattered fleetingly began to exert a powerful force that penetrates the world through that rule.]

However, because the tone of the world was so different, the laws of the normal world could not function properly in the real world.

Then, in order to apply those laws to their world, Ionian engineers set out to deliberately break down the boundaries of dimensions.

[Disaster] occurred unintentionally in the process. It was a terrible disaster that took away everything in Ionia.

[In this way, the boundaries of the world blurred uncontrollably, and the effects eventually reached Delcross.]

'That's why things from the normal world come to function here, albeit imperfectly!'

While Seongjin was lost in thought, Vajra spoke in a sorrowful voice.

[Lastly, the item that would have saved the people was also from the Gyu-Sang World. At that time, I had to take the lives of my compatriots with my own hands and store them in the soul stone! If I had the chance, I would have been able to travel to a new normal world and dream of another home for my people. But Berseus, I got

over his trick and stopped... ... !]

Since he seemed to be extremely discouraged, Seongjin added in a hint of consolation.

"Ah, but the other party you saw back then was actually your compatriot."

[...] ... !?]

"Louise, she really is of Nebraska... something. I guess."

Then, for the first time, a meaningful change in expression occurred on Vajra's face.

His wide-open eyes go from suspicion to astonishment and finally joy, and a strong spiritual pressure covers the room.

[He is our new Lord! Where on earth is he?]

Vajra looked at Seongjin with eyes so intense that it seemed as if sparks would fly.

The silent thoughts that came from him shook Seongjin like a thunderstorm.

[I have a favor to ask! Kind human being! Could you please send me to him?]

251

251. Soul Stone (5)

[Please, human! Hurry and bring me to Rod!]

Coo!

The incorporeal spirit knelt down, and for a moment it felt like the room was shaking. That's how strong and powerful the spiritual pressure emanating from Vajra was.

Seongjin asked while quietly looking at the huge lycan slope bowed in front of him.

"...But you're already dead, right? What are you going to do by going to Louise's side?"

[Thanks to you, I was born as a new soul. I have been given the opportunity to serve Rod once again! If he is a descendant of Nebraska, if he is a true Lycan Slope, he will naturally know how to use my soul stone!]

"hmm."

[So please help me live for him!]

Every time Vajra shouted a word, strong spiritual pressure swept over Seongjin. That probably means that your feelings are desperate.

However, from Seongjin's perspective, it was pitiful and annoying at the same time. I feel like I want to pass it on to Louise right now.

"But that kid went to the demon world a long time ago. He must have already gone deep into it. How can I find him and give him your soul stone?"

[With magic? Why?]

"Have you forgotten already? Louise said she would help you. She left for the [Flower Garden] to find the source of the flower scent that clouds the minds of the Lycanslopes."

[Hwawon... ..!]

Vajra's eyes widened in shock.

I thought I would finally meet the true Lord, but unfortunately, the request he earnestly asked for from Seongjin and Louise during his lifetime ended up getting in the way!

-Please destroy the [flower garden] of those flowers deep in the demonic realm. Otherwise, the future of our people... ..!

Ah, remembering the words he had said, Vajra closed his eyes and lamented.

[Did the Lord go there to save his people?]

Wooooow-

As Vajra's soul becomes violently agitated, the red energy in the room resonates with it.

Guilt, sadness, gratitude, joy. All of the intense emotions were swirling together, and the density in the room suddenly increased.

[He rose up to save our poor people! You will finally avenge your compatriots on the blasphemous demonic prison guards!]

Bloody tears suddenly flow from Lycanslope's eyes, distorted by all kinds of emotions.

Rubbing.

'omg!'

As a scene from a horror movie started again, Seongjin took a step back, breaking into a cold sweat.

Unlike Hayes' evil spirit, I thought he showed a very detached attitude, but in fact, he seemed to have given up on everything until now.

By the way, why are all souls like this? There is no middle, there is no middle!

'Should I just cancel the summons right now?'

While Seongjin was experiencing serious internal conflict, fortunately, Bajra slowly began to calm down. The hair that had grown up calmly fell down, and the distorted face returned to normal.

Of course, the bloody tears flowing from the corners of my eyes were still there.

[I'm so glad you're mixed race. There is no pure-blooded lycan slope who can maintain their sanity even for a moment in a place covered in ominous blue flowers.]

"So Louise is safe there too?"

Then Vajra shook his head with a serious expression.

[That's not true, human. As long as Lycanslope's blood flows, the influence of flowers cannot be completely avoided. If exposed to that scent for a long period of time, even mixed-race people will probably have problems.]

what? Then it's a big deal.

[That is why I must help him! I, who have truly become free from the flower through the death of my body, must be by his side!]

Bara looked up at Seongjin with pitiful eyes. It was difficult to ignore Max's eyes as if he were begging for a snack.

"...Even after all this, I am a person of quite high status in Delcross. I can't use the demonic spirit on my own."

Sneaking out with Aura concealment is only possible at close range.

You have to go into the center of the demon world, right?

Plus, there's Logan here. Although Seongjin's auror concealment skills had improved dramatically recently, he was not confident in avoiding the eyes of the continent's youngest sword master.

"Still, if I insist on going, a large-scale search team with a vague purpose will probably be formed. The Sigismund Territory will not leave it alone. Of course, if we happen to encounter Lycanslopes on the way to the garden, we will wipe out the barely surviving compatriots. As expected, it will be done neatly."

That was the reality.

Moreover, I have a strong feeling that even if I somehow arrive at the [Painter], I won't be able to meet Louise.

'And now I really want to go home.'

Seongjin thought so in a daze.

I took the souvenirs and reached an amicable agreement with the Margrave regarding the medicine cart, so I don't want to get caught up in anything anymore.

[that... ! Is there really no way? Hehehe! Hehehehehe!]

Then, bloody tears started pouring like a waterfall from Vajra's eyes. It's a shame because she is a soul and has no substance, otherwise she would have been overflowing with blood in the room a long time ago.

The red energy on the floor also fluctuates, representing his sadness.

'... That's why I don't like this!'

No, wouldn't I want to do that? I want to quickly hand these haunted items over to someone else!

Wong!

At that time, Max, who saw that Seongjin was disgusted, blocked the

way and barked loudly at Vajra.

[...] hmm?]

Surprised, Lycanslope stopped crying and looked down at the dog with dumbfounded eyes.

"Max?"

Wong wong wong!

Although it is said to be a wolfdog larger than a normal dog, it is still not even a handful in front of Vajra, who is 4 meters tall.

Nevertheless, Max's attitude was nothing short of brave. She was devastated because Vajra was a spirit, and if she were alive, she would have attacked and bitten her at any moment.

Crrrrr-

I am strong! I am huge!

Vajra was startled and asked Seongjin.

[Wait a minute, human! Is this wolf really an Ionian wolf?]

"Huh? This isn't a wolf, it's my dog."

[A dog, that can't be possible! I definitely feel a connection between that dog and me that cannot be expressed in words! It's a close connection, like a bond between family members!]

This time it was Seongjin's turn to growl at him.

"What? Are you coveting my dog now?"

[No, that's not what I mean, human! Don't misunderstand!]

Seeing Seongjin's unusual change in attitude, Vajra quickly waved his hand.

[I'm just talking about that wolf's bloodline! It means a deep connection between races that has been passed down from generation

to generation, like the wolves of Ionia!]

"....."

[If I had to say it, it goes back to the mythical era. Originally, the wolves of Ionia have been faithful companions and members of the Lycanslopes for a long time. As a human being, you would not even be able to guess the infinite possibilities they have.]

Speaking of possibility, it reminds me of Max at the time when Louise was controlling him. Are you talking about becoming one with your family and transforming into a huge person?

-okay. Was it the blood of the Ionian wolf? Although it is a clumsy hybrid, it is probably a bloodline rarely seen in this dimension anymore.

Come to think of it, it seems like the Berseus guy in the ice canyon also said something about the bloodline of the Ionian wolf to Max.

'Come to think of it, that bastard also coveted my dog!'

Where did you say it? Did he say he was an old lord again? When we meet again, only this time I will drink you to the bone!

As I was feeling indignant again, Vajra's face suddenly brightened.

[Ah, everything is resolved! Leave my soul stone to this dog! I'm sure you can take me to where the Lord is!]

"what.....?"

Seongjin blinked.

"Wait, what on earth are you talking about? What are you asking Max to do?"

Send a small puppy like this to a magical world where glamor trolls and lycan slopes are rampant? Alone?

"Are you out of your mind? No!"

When Seongjin firmly refused, Bajra beat her chest in frustration.

[So, you, a human, don't know the true power of this wolf! It's just a simple errand and there won't be any problems!]

Seongjin was about to get angry again, but Max barked vigorously as if he had been waiting.

Wong!

".....?"

I looked back at Max, feeling anxious, and saw the dog barking confidently, wagging its tail at Seongjin.

Wong wong!

"No, but Max is an ordinary wolfdog...."

Wong!

you can do it! Because I am strong and huge!

"So you can't transform right now...."

Max, my father is trying to flatly refuse an inappropriate request, so what happens to me if you leave here like that?

However, it was difficult to ignore Max, who was staring at him with bright eyes.

"Keu...."

I guess it's because he's a puppy. Why is my child so immature?

Seongjin, who had been holding his forehead for a while, had no choice but to pick up the Amulet of Nebraska. Well, I don't have a bad feeling, and Max even asked for Louise's shoes.

"I hope the soul stone is delivered properly without falling into Max's stomach."

[Ah, thank you! Thank you so much!]

Wong wong wong!

... These are noisy.

"Oh, right!"

Before extracting the soul stone from the amulet, Seongjin asked Vajra one last time.

"Now that I think about it, I've been curious about something for a while. Who is that devil you mentioned?"

Apparently, in the ice canyon, Vajra had said this.

-Are you trying to get rid of that devil's [flower garden]? Are you going to become the last hope of your poor, deluded compatriots?

Did you say that the blue flowers growing wild in Magyeong suddenly increased explosively? As the word [flower garden] literally means, doesn't it mean that someone is deliberately growing those flowers in the magic garden?

Then Vajra answered with a dark face.

[I don't really know what that person is. I vaguely remember meeting with Berseus, the prison guard of the Demonic World, a few times.]

Seongjin nodded, but it became difficult to manage his expression for a moment as he continued his words.

[It seems like Berseus calls him 'Puppet Master'.]

".....!"

* * *

That night, Logan and Martha, who finished work late, stopped by Seongjin's room.

"As expected, the Margrave seems to be avoiding me."

Logan said with concern in his voice.

"Isn't it just a coincidence?"

"No, Brother Martha. Sir Vincent has retired from the front lines, so you might think so, but isn't it strange that it's so hard to meet the Margrave face-to-face even though he continues to participate in sweeps?"

It was worth it. Margrave Hendrick had previously refused to allow Logan, who was returning from a subjugation, to stay in his territory.

It's just that the fact that he received help is clear and there is a relationship with Seongjin, so they can't just throw him out like before. Instead, she seems to have decided to avoid Logan herself.

"Why on earth do you find me so annoying?"

I know. I thought the negotiations on the drug cart issue were roughly over, but is there something more left?

While Seongjin was lost in thought, Logan spoke.

"Well, there is still plenty of time to find out. The Lilium Special Forces will arrive soon."

Since I was officially dispatched from the Imperial Capital under the pretext of helping Lord Sigismund, I don't think the Margrave can do anything about me staying here for a while.

"Why didn't you come with me?"

"They must be riding as fast as they can. I'm just faster."

Seongjin once again realized how ridiculous Logan had been.

It took Seongjin and his party more than 15 days to reach Sigismund Range. Let's not even put aside the fact that we defeated the demon beast in the middle.

When I looked at Logan blankly, he smiled proudly.

"Now have you realized how grateful you are for this brother?"

"What are you talking about? Don't talk nonsense, little brother."

When Seongjin frowned and replied, Masain next to him made a face that said, 'It's the beginning again.'

"Anyway, when the special forces arrive, don't hesitate. Let's pack our bags and leave here right away. There's no time to waste. Now, let's go home."

"....."

But there was no response from Logan, who thought he would say, "I'm your older brother."

"what's the matter?"

When Seongjin asked curiously, the light returned to the eyes of Logan, who was blankly looking at Seongjin. His face seemed to have realized something again.

"house....."

Yes, home.

I responded with a sullen expression, and only then did the corners of Logan's mouth curve slightly. It was a very cautious, yet very reassuring smile.

"I see, I should go home. My sister and Sisley are probably waiting for me right now."

252. Attic (1)

The news of Sigismund was delivered straight to the imperial capital through Arenger. It had been less than a day since the fastest dispatcher left the territory.

It goes without saying that Amelia and Sisley were greatly relieved by the good news that Chamberlain Louis had hinted at. Lunch at Jinju Palace, which had been lonely until now, was unusually lively that day.

"Logan must have been in a hurry. So you two will be back soon, right?"

"Yes, Sisley. Perhaps we will reach the ecliptic within a month?"

The little saint looked puzzled at Amelia's answer.

"Huh? It's all over. Aren't you coming right away?"

"I heard that the territory was once very dangerous. In such a situation, the two of you will not leave right away. The scars from the large-scale battle are bigger than you think. The aftermath will not be resolved so easily."

The work of the Liliun Detachment began now. Suppression of the sea beasts and demonic beasts was also subjugation, but healing the wounds of the affected subjects and helping them rebuild was even more important.

"But you said Brother Mores and Brother Logan did a great job? That's enough. The rest can be left to the Sigismund people. Why wait another month?"

"It's not that simple, Sisley. Unlike the subjugation that Logan usually planned, this time the Lilium Detachment was officially dispatched with the clear purpose of 'rescuing the Sigismund Spirit.'"

Although it was hasty, the budget was executed through formal procedures. For that reason, it is highly likely that he will remain in the Sigismund Territory for some time in order to show acceptable results to the administration and the Church.

There is probably a mountain of work to do in the estate.

In order to focus on reconstruction for a while, we need to use momentum to drive out the demonic beasts deep into the demon realm. We also need to treat the wounded and pay tribute to the dead.

Lilium's paladins are capable of both.

Sisley sighed slightly after hearing Amelia's calm explanation.

"Then I guess I can't help it. I wanted to quickly show the two of you the results of my training so far..."

Sisley has now learned how to wield the flail quite convincingly.

Then Amelia smiled softly at her very disappointed sister.

"You just have to train harder for another month. Wouldn't you be able to surprise them both by becoming even stronger?"

"is it?"

"Of course. Besides, you know how serious Mores is about his training. If you want to surprise him, no amount of training will go a long way."

"Yeah, that's right."

After all, if it's not hard, it's not proper training, right? But I never get tired. Should I just increase the intensity and time of my training?

I'm thinking that the Inquisitors of St. Marsyas would have been

horrified if they had found out, but Amelia added quietly to Sisley.

"Furthermore, most of Sigismund's soldiers will be focused on repairing the ice wall. Although it collapsed once, there is no other defense that can be made faster and stronger than that to guard against the demonic realm."

"I see. So even if you chase after the demon beasts, you won't be able to go on horseback, right? Because on the way back, you'll have to climb over the ice wall without moving on a pulley. It might take longer than you think."

"That's right. You know a lot about ice walls, Sisley?"

"Yes, I read it in a book."

Sisley nodded hesitantly.

In fact, it is not a book on the market, but a book I read in my dream. In Volume 1 of [Delcross Chronicles], which features Orden as the main character, this ice wall was discussed in detail.

"But why doesn't Margrave Sigismund build a proper gate in the ice wall?"

This was something I was very curious about when I read the chronicle.

Can't we just build a door? Isn't it extremely inefficient to deliberately climb over an ice wall using a rope?

"That's strangely because of the magic's special ability to make ice grow little by little. The ice grows even in places where there is no water. No matter how big you break through the ice wall and create a door, everything freezes over after a while."

Amelia sipped some after-dinner tea and smiled slightly.

"So in the end, all that remains is a narrow tunnel that can barely fit one person through."

What was even more surprising was that the ice no longer grew after

such a narrow tunnel was created.

"But isn't that strange?"

Sisley, who had been calculating in his head for a moment, tilted his head.

"Ice grows so fast that it blocks the castle gates, so why doesn't the ice in the canyon keep increasing? They say the Demon World has already existed since the era of the three ancient dragons, right? So now, after so many years, it has crossed the Sigismund Range and covered the continent with ice. It wouldn't be surprising if I said that."

"If you think about it that way, the existence of the Demon Lord itself is a mystery."

"hmm....."

"Just as no one knows the reason why the demonic landscape is frozen in the cold all year round, no one knows the reason for the phenomenon. It's just that stories like this have been handed down for a long time."

Amelia's gray eyes sink deeply. It's about revisiting old memories that have now faded away.

A long time ago. When she was finally able to run without falling, she heard someone's voice whispering in her ear.

-A long time ago, an old wizard who lived during the era of the three ancient dragons found a beautiful flower field in the forest one day and made a wish. Please make sure that no one enters or enters this secret land except me... ..

"...I hope that there is no existence other than me. So that this place is protected forever from the world. And I hope that it becomes my own paradise that no army can invade."

The girl's dreamy, blurred eyes slowly regain focus.

"It is said that his words became a curse, and from then on, the forest

became a magic world covered in a cold blizzard. I heard that from then on, the magic world does not allow intrusion from the outside and opens the way only for that wizard."

I flinch.

Seo Yi-seo, in Cadmus mode, who was moving the dishes by herself, stopped her hands and slowly raised her head.

"Really? There is such a story. It's fascinating."

The little saint tilted her head.

It was a story that was not told anywhere, let alone in the [Delcross Chronicles].

"I heard it when I was too young, so I don't really remember the source. I think someone read the book to me."

At that time, Cadmus tightened his slitted pupils and asked Amelia.

[How do you know this, descendant? Who heard that from?]

"...yes?"

[The crazy old man asked from whom he had heard the curse on the Demon Lord.]

Cadmus the insectivore's face was extremely serious. Amelia met Sisley's gaze for a moment and calmly answered him.

"Like I just said, I don't remember exactly because it happened when I was young. Did someone tell me a story or read a book to me?"

[You read it in a book? That can't be possible! There are very few people who know about it, so it's unlikely that anyone left it in writing.]

Cadmus' bright golden eyes sparkled and shined.

[Where on earth did you pick this up and read it? Descendants. Think about it carefully. Is this something like < Exploration of the

Miraculous Continent > written by Granius? From what I heard, the book contains all kinds of miscellaneous stories from the continent.]

"I don't remember very well, but I think that's probably not the case, Cadmus."

Among Granius' many works, <Exploration of the Miraculous Continent> is the only book banned by the Holy See.

All of the books Amelia encountered as a child belonged to Count Sigismund, so there was no way such a thing as a banned book could have existed in such a place.

Then the little saint warned Cadmus with a cold face.

"You should not mention a banned book designated by the Holy Assembly so easily, Your Majesty the First Holy Emperor. Don't end up causing trouble to Amelia and Seo Yi-seo by saying such things carelessly."

[...] No, descendants. I just... ..]

"If you are borrowing someone else's body as you please, shouldn't you at least distinguish between words that may harm her?"

The meaning of the cool gray eyes staring at him was clear.

-If you've ate that much, shouldn't you take care of that much yourself, you useless glutton?

Cadmus, who was very fond of Sisley, looked deeply hurt by her cold attitude, especially towards him. Then, he suddenly pouts, and the color of his irises returns to dark brown.

"Huh? Mr. Sisley? What is this...."

Seo Yi-seo was in a daze, unable to realize that her body had suddenly been returned. She then found the exquisite feast spread out before her eyes and shed tears of joy.

"Ba...Baab!"

Wagu wagu.

The fake saint's second storm of food inhalation began. It is somewhat understandable that her rich priestly clothes have recently started to become more and more tight to her body.

"...I guess I'll have to go a little late with Seo Yi-seo because it's like this. Don't you have an appointment today?"

"Okay. Then I'll wake up first, Sisley."

A sight that has already become a daily routine for the sisters.

Amelia said goodbye to the two lightly and stood up.

After leaving the Pearl Palace, Amelia headed straight to the Silver Rose Labyrinth.

Recently, I spent most of my time at the main palace assisting Seonghwang with government affairs, but today afternoon I was looking forward to meeting Lady Chloe.

"I am still young, so I was not able to attend this birthday banquet, but I think I know very well what the Breton people looked like when they showed up to the imperial palace banquet, Your Majesty."

As always, Chloe, who had brought in a Breton periodical to study foreign languages, grumbled with a dissatisfied face as she carefully sipped her Melbourne tea.

"My goodness, do you know what the streets of d'Este are like these days? Young people, both men and women, paint their cheeks red and stick out their red lips like bird beaks!"

"haha."

Amelia smiled with an embarrassed face.

"I heard that applying blush to your face is all the rage in Brittany right now, Chloe. Even at your birthday party, people said you looked like you had a healthy complexion and it was quite well received."

"Huh? Are you really saying that nobles showed up to the banquet hall looking like that?"

Chloe raised her eyes wide, then frowned and frowned.

"Isn't it so unsightly? I really hate that clown-like blush, my dear."

Chloe was astute in her behavior for her age, but she had recently been frequenting the Silver Rose Palace and her guard had been lowered.

In particular, she was gradually opening up to the noble princess who treated her younger self with respect as a lady.

That's why I feel comfortable making complaints that I would never do outside.

"Although my family's roots are in Brittany, I actually don't like the pretentious atmosphere that's unique there. I don't know what an advanced culture is, and I especially wish we could avoid that kind of clown culture."

Amelia felt something new as she looked at the little girl pouting her lips.

-I would like to ask my father to ban cheek rouge altogether, sister. If I imagine the Imperial Palace Guards all lined up wearing red cheekbones, I think I'll have a nightmare right away, even tonight.

At that moment, I remembered my younger brother, who had been complaining with a sullen face not long ago, and I couldn't help but laugh.

Needless to say, as soon as she felt that she resembled Mores, Amelia's intimacy with Chloe skyrocketed.

"That's because Brittany is a country where performing arts and arts are as developed as its food culture, Chloe. There are many theater actors who are extremely popular there. People look up to them so much that they end up wearing excessive makeup like theater actors. It is said that this has become a trend."

"Oh, is that so?"

Yes, Lady Chloe.

Therefore, it is best not to be too dismissive of other countries' cultures just because they seem ridiculous. The future Minister of Foreign Affairs chosen by my younger brother.

Then Chloe blushed and expressed admiration.

"I always think about you, the princess. You are truly amazing. How do you know so much about countries outside the empire? There are stories that not many people know about and that are not even in books."

"Oh, no. That's just what I heard from someone, Lady Chloe."

Even as she answered like that, Amelia was secretly curious.

'I know. 'Who on earth did I hear this from?'

Until now, I thought it was nothing special, thinking I had read it in a book somewhere.

However, after listening to Cadmus' question and thinking about it carefully, he had no recollection of reading a book with such content.

At that time, someone's voice faintly appeared in Amelia's mind again.

-That word would mean something like 'deep and deep' in the imperial language. And there might also be the word 'angel'. Let's see, what's another word with Arrhc in it...?

Who is it? Who would have told that story to their younger self? No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't figure out who it was.

However, despite the vagueness, Amelia felt a sense of nostalgia somewhere, and kept tilting her head.

* * *

Max's errand didn't take as long as expected.

The next evening.

When I let the dog in, scratching at the door, Max ran towards me with his tail wagging, and then carefully placed something he was carrying in front of Seongjin.

It was Louise's remaining pair of shoes.

"...You really met Louise! Well done!"

Seongjin guessed that Max had somehow delivered the soul stone properly. Louise must have sent the one remaining pair of shoes in response.

'Anyway, Louise must have gone a long way barefoot in the end.'

Seongjin gathered his shoes neatly and placed them on the floor.

This is the last trace of my daughter, so I need to properly convey it to Sir Ilma and Sir Sebastian. I must tell them that I think Louise left it at the Count's residence.

"Good job, Max! That's amazing."

When Seongjin praised the dog and rubbed its head, the dog started wagging its tail and barking vigorously.

Wong wong!

[joy! Still, that mongrel dog will not be your last companion!]

At that time, the devil suddenly spoke in my head as if grumbling.

'... 'Did you still keep it?'

Is that important anyway?

[Of course, heng! Because only this body in this world can do it!]

The mood of the snorting Demon King became much brighter.

Well, I'm glad you're feeling better. Why do you take such pride in such a strange place?

And that night, the Liliu detachment finally arrived at Sigismund Territory.

253

253. Attic (2)

The Lilium Detachment, which spent the night near Sigismund Range, confidently entered the territory the next morning.

Seongjin and Logan left the Count's residence to greet them. It was a half-joking letter, but in any case, it was he who had called them here.

"But if we had arrived last night, wouldn't it have been better to just come into the estate and rest?"

Logan slowly shook his head in response to Seongjin's question.

"You only know one thing and you don't know the other, Lee Seongjin. You should also consider the circumstances of the count's residence, which suddenly has to welcome a large number of guests in the middle of the night."

What is there to know about the Count's circumstances? They owe us a lot anyway. Anyway, that guy has too many thoughts about various things.

Seongjin was thinking that with a sullen expression on his face, but Logan looked back and smiled knowingly.

"Besides, entering the Holy Knights in a good manner is the most important thing. Outsiders may not know this, but the first thing you learn when you join the Holy Knights is how to properly dress up and conduct a review ceremony."

"...A four-line ceremony? It's not swordsmanship?"

"Yes. In a way, it is an insight into the essence of the Holy Knights. In

order to spread the Lord's will to the world, 'showing off' in a good way is more important than using 'force'."

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

Show it off nicely.

"Isn't it a bit unsightly to be considered a Holy Knight's duty? What is it?"

"Who cares if it helps your subjects in some way? Moderate display and boasting can sometimes be the solution to solving many problems in advance without making a fuss."

After explaining that, Logan slightly raised the corners of his mouth. It was a smile that seemed somewhat self-mocking.

"And as you will know from experience, people find more comfort in these show-off events than they think. Even though they know deep down that they have no substance."

They believe that the proud appearance of the Holy Knights is proof that the power of the Lord is fully present on this land.

Although they are suffering from the misfortune that is right in front of them, they still try to believe that there is someone's hidden meaning behind their suffering.

"...Then you think there is no God's will? You are a paladin who serves the Lord?"

"Well, guess what?"

Logan simply answered with a calm expression.

"How can I, a mere human being, guess about God's grand plan? Just watching the refugees in my country suffer for a long time makes me wonder what use it is to have someone else's plan based on their sacrifice."

"....."

"...No, I said something unnecessary. Don't worry about it."

On both sides of the wide road leading from the entrance to the estate to the count's residence, more people than expected were out to see the famous Lilium Detachment.

Although they could not hide their haggardness in the chaotic atmosphere, the faces of the people in the territory were still glowing with a faint sense of relief and hope. I felt like I knew what 'comfort' Logan was talking about.

And then the Lilium detachment, slowly riding along the road, came into view.

"hmm."

Indeed, it is as Logan said. The knights, dressed in clean white uniforms, all looked strong and proud.

It's only been six days since we left the imperial capital.

Considering that they must have raced like crazy to get here, they look incredibly undisturbed.

'hmm? Come to think of it... ... !'

Even after running at crazy speed and getting knocked down in a tough battle, there was one more neat guy.

When Seongjin looked at Logan with new eyes, he asked back as if he was puzzled.

"why?"

"Uh, it's nothing."

Is it possible that the next thing Paladins learn after the parade is laundry?

Seongjin could barely swallow the question that was stuck in his throat.

"Lowering!"

At that time, the Paladins of Liliun who came close to them all stopped talking and jumped down.

The people who had kept their mouths solemnly shut when they entered the territory could almost feel their expressions brightening the moment Logan looked at them.

chuck!

The look in their eyes as they show respect by placing their hands on their chests is not only brilliant but also very burdensome.

"Sir Otto, Sir Ely, Sir Duchamp."

Logan spoke brightly as he approached the three people in the lead.

"Everyone had a hard time rushing along to meet my greed."

"This is nothing, sir!"

"Yes. Can I ask you to be a little sorry? It was a long journey without rest, but I think we will have to join the chase team right away without a break. The damage to the territory was considerable, and a considerable number of Lycanslopes safely escaped to the Demonic Land. ."

"What can I say? I'm sorry! I can only thank God for giving me this precious opportunity to serve His Majesty Logan and his subjects!"

and.

Seongjin took a step back with a tired look on his face.

I've thought about it before, but aren't these guys just big Logan fans?

'But it seems like it's not just empty words to say it's okay.'

The paladins checking the crossdressing moved more energetically than expected. It did not feel the slightest bit of fatigue from the trip, and it was truly a special unit renowned for subjugating demonic

beasts.

They even managed to safely retrieve Logan's beloved horse, which he had no choice but to leave behind.

"Roxana!"

At Logan's happy shout, a snow-white horse approaches him at a fast gait. It was a beautiful horse wearing the insignia of the Order of St. Bastian.

Ta-bak-ta-bak.

With its long legs and elegant neck, it looks like it can run as fast as the wind at a glance.

The horse blinked its long eyelashes and stared at Logan for a moment, then lowered its head and rubbed its forehead affectionately against his chest.

"You arrived safely. I'm really sorry for leaving you here alone."

When Logan tapped his neck, the horse purred and snorted softly.

The eyes were full of affection for their owner, but at first glance they seemed very gentle... ..

'It seems like he has a tough temperament.'

Is it just my mood? As I was tilting my head, the quiet Demon Lord intervened.

[what? He's a strangely pretentious guy, isn't he?]

'okay? 'You feel that way too.'

[joy! It's exactly the same feeling I got when I saw that mixed breed dog. A person with a bad personality only shows off in front of his master!]

... But why does this guy hate Max so much?

* * *

Afterwards, the organization of the chase team accelerated.

From the ice wall base to the battle near the territory. The Wolf Knights, who suffered major and minor injuries, found it difficult to fully demonstrate their usual capabilities.

In the meantime, the joining of the Lilium Detachment was bound to be like a sweet rain in a drought. Among the paladins, they were the only unit with a lot of records of subjugating demonic beasts, and they were also the ones who performed the role of healing priests in times of need.

Therefore, Margrave Hendrick, who did not like Logan and the Paladins, would have had no choice but to accept them without hesitation.

Of course, there were also hidden difficulties for the couple who took the lead in the affairs of the estate.

Although the whereabouts of their only daughter, Louise, are unknown, there is no time for Sir Ilma and Sir Sebastian to be lost in their sorrow. They were people who had a very heavy responsibility on their shoulders to sit down due to personal reasons.

However, he couldn't abandon Youngji's work and run out to find his daughter.

Sir Ilma silently organized a pursuit party, hiding his sorrow, and Sir Sebastian also gathered his troops and repaired the boundaries of the ice walls and canyons that had once collapsed.

"Edith, did you get the shoes to Sir Ilmar?"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay, whatever you say?"

"He just said he was grateful for being friendly with Louise."

Although the shoes were delivered to them through Edith, Seongjin couldn't help but be concerned because he knew Louise's true whereabouts.

As I looked at the two people, who were strong Auror users, becoming lighter day by day, I felt a bitter taste in my mouth as I wondered how terrible their suffering must have been.

"Anyway, it's surprising. I'm glad you didn't make a fuss about following me to the Demon Lord."

"What? Am I a child? Why are you acting like a herd?"

When Seongjin frowned, Logan blinked with a harmless expression.

"I heard you're a fighting fanatic who jumps in whenever there's a commotion? If something happens, you're always there."

"...That's a serious misunderstanding, man. Who the hell says that?"

"Um, brother Masain?"

"What?"

Lord Masaine? Is your faith in me only that much?

When Seongjin looked back with shocked eyes, Masain quietly looked to the side.

[Put your hand on your heart and think. Can you deny that?]

'... shut up!'

In any case, since the entire Lilium detachment was organized into a pursuit group, Logan, who led them, naturally headed to the Demon World with them.

On the other hand, Seongjin, who was actively at the forefront during the demonic beasts' movement, decided to take a step back this time. Because he didn't want to go through the trouble of buying something that wasn't necessary.

I have Logan, so why should I worry? This guy is trying to figure it out.

'I'm going to train here, but when I have time, I'll learn how to

manipulate the ice heart from my father.'

Since he is a man who is passionate about construction work, wouldn't Seongjin need to stay quiet in one place to learn well?

In addition, it was time for Lord Masain and the resident knights to get some rest. Seongjin also realized that he had been overworking them too much.

"I will finish it as soon as possible and come back. Let's all go back to the imperial capital together."

"Uh, okay."

Logan, who was turning towards the chase team, suddenly turned back to Seongjin as if he remembered something.

"Oh, that's right. Seongjin Lee, I had something to give you."

"huh?"

"I had taken care of it, but I completely forgot about it when you suddenly collapsed."

And surprisingly, what he held out was the magic stone that Seongjin had lost and the 'ice heart' of the Glacher Troll.

"Two hearts?! Where did they come from?"

"I found it when I caught the demon you mentioned earlier. You have something similar, right? The demon is holding it carefully in both hands, so it looks like it's important, so I brought it with me."

Seongjin looked at Logan with disbelieving eyes.

Wow, I never asked for anything special, but a competent guy is different no matter what!

"Why are you so surprised?"

"No, it's nothing."

Seongjin accepted the cold ice chunks from him with a very flushed

face.

There are as many as three ice hearts. Now, I'm excited just thinking about what I can do with this!

"As expected, you are much better than that useless Dekaron Knight!"

"Wow, Seongjin Lee!"

Logan was startled by Seongjin's praise and carefully cautioned him.

As expected, they were concerned that old Vincent, who was with the chase team, would hear their conversation nearby.

"The Sigismund family is a great noble family from the border that once formed an independent kingdom. Sir Vincent, in particular, is a hero who protected the southern front and contributed greatly to the stability of the empire. No matter how much we are members of the royal family, we must show courtesy befitting an outstanding veteran."

But Seongjin snorted.

"Oh, it's okay. Don't worry. There's no need to show any manners between that senile old man and me."

"what?"

In a way, they are very informal, sharing disrespect and insults with each other.

Then he flinched. The ears of old Vincent, who was standing at the head of the chase team, twitched.

Now, are you listening? Then reflect deeply in your heart, you useless Dekaron Knight!

"....."

The old man gave Seongjin an unpleasant look for a moment, but did not try to argue with them.

When old man Vincent, who was famous for his eccentricity, became unexpectedly quiet, Logan looked at him and Seongjin alternately with a puzzled look. I wonder what this has to do with it.

Anyway, Seongjin happily waved his hand at Logan as he left.

"Finish it quickly and come back."

"Okay, you too, don't get into any trouble during this time."

"....."

... It looks like we need to have a serious conversation with Lord Masaine.

It was when I was seeing off the departing chase team and turning around with a sad look on my face. Orden slowly approached Seongjin and opened his mouth.

"Lowering."

"huh?"

Orden also decided to leave this chase. When it comes to military power, he is unrivaled, so if it's unexpected, it's surprising.

I could only guess roughly that there might be disharmony between the family head and the various circumstances in the territory.

However, even after calling Seongjin, he was contemplating something for a long time, and after observing Masain's feelings, he whispered softly. He had a cautious attitude, unbecoming of a simple and ignorant person.

"If you have time, I would like to show you something."

"Really? What is that?"

"It's a bit difficult to explain it here. I'd like you to go and see it in person first. Could you please accompany me?"

Still, he hesitated for a moment, looked at Seongjin, and then added

softly.

"...It's about Princess Amelia."

254. Attic (3)

The place where Orden guided Seongjin was a small attic at the top of the expanded count's residence.

"The princess often spent time here when she was young."

Hearing Orden's explanation, Seongjin looked around the room in silence.

Rough wooden floors that were damaged in places and shabby walls that were not finished properly.

Light leaked in from a small field window covered in white dust, and a small bed filled with blowing straw smelled like the dry sunlight of early autumn.

'... What did you spend most of your time on? Surely this wasn't where your sister stayed?'

Is it simply my mood that gives me a somewhat sad premonition?

Meanwhile, Seongjin discovered small graffiti written here and there on the wall. The words were written in clumsy, round handwriting that appeared to belong to a child.

"...Is this your sister's?"

"Yes, sir."

Indeed, you have shown the qualities of a master penman since childhood. Even now, my dexterity is a mess, but my handwriting is very fluid.

Seongjin traced the words with his hands, immersed in a strange

sentiment. These were words that a child would learn for the first time, and even Seongjin could read.

Mom, Dad, Family, Belle, Mom, Dad...

-Reading books with my family has been my long-time dream.

Suddenly, Amelia's face, smiling happily while reading a storybook to Seongjin, came to mind.

However, among them, a few unrecognizable words stood out. I couldn't read it at all, so I asked what it was, and Orden nodded.

"It's not the imperial language, sir. It's Breton."

"okay?"

"yes."

Orden explained that they were letters that meant church, angel, hut, etc.

"The princess is extremely intelligent, and this quality must have been evident since she was young. She learned Breton on her own, even though she had never learned it."

... Didn't you learn it?

When Seongjin widened his eyes at the somewhat subtle explanation, Orden realized this and smiled bitterly.

"Yes, as far as I know, no one has taught the young princess Breton. She has never had a teacher here. Perhaps, if the meaning of those words was something different, the princess might have been branded a witch."

Who dares accuse the princess of the Holy Empire of being a witch?

Seongjin's face hardened. As was the case with the attic she was guided to, I somehow had a feeling that the truth I would learn later would not be very pleasant.

"The reason I invited you here is because I have some items that I would like to show you and then decide on how to dispose of them."

After saying that, Orden bent down and felt under the small bed. He tears off a wooden plank hidden deep inside and carefully pulls something out from within.

Eventually, he stood up and held out a small wooden box to Seongjin.

"These are treasures that the princess hid when she was young. No one in this mansion knows about them other than me, not even the employees."

Seongjin's eyebrows went up.

"Your sister told you about it separately?"

"That's not true. I just spent time here when I was at the mansion, so I naturally learned about places where a little girl might hide things."

Seongjin accepted the box handed out by Orden. There was a lot of dust accumulated and the joints were distorted, making it more suitable to be called trash rather than a treasure chest.

Creak.

The lid opened with a cloud of dust, and soon the contents, similar to the box itself, were revealed.

A lump of dried straw, a piece of old cloth, a small white seashell, and a small pendant broken in half.

"This is a treasure...."

Seongjin took a deep breath without realizing it. No matter how much they belong to a child who doesn't know much about the world, they are things that are unlikely to be treasured.

Aside from shells and pendants, what about straw?

"Oh, it's a doll. They said this is the head and this is the legs."

It looked like the limbs of a doll were split into several pieces and tied together.

"It even had a proper name. Bell... I think it was called Belluna."

Seongjin could not hide his desolation, but Orden's eyes as he looked at the straw had an unusually soft glow.

As if every little memory with Amelia was precious.

"So, what do you want to ask me by showing me this?"

Orden nodded to Seongjin's question.

"I have always wanted to give this box to the princess. It is a treasure that the young princess cherishes. But at the same time, I was afraid."

"afraid?"

"yes."

Orden's eyes darkened as he answered like that.

"I think the princess, who is currently living happily, will have a hard time the moment she sees the box, recalling unhappy memories from her childhood."

* * *

The first time Orden got to know Amelia was around the age of 10, when she had just begun training to become a squire.

Whenever I practiced swordsmanship in the garden, I would occasionally catch a glimpse of a white face peering down from the attic window.

".....?"

It was a girl with a pale, expressionless small face and long, wispy hair.

At first glance, she looked like a ghost, but young Orden didn't find the girl scary at all.

Despite her sinister appearance, the girl was as pretty as a fairy.

"There is a fairy living in the attic of this mansion."

"huh?"

"It's a pretty girl fairy."

It would have been natural for young Orden to inadvertently bring up such a story.

He was very curious about the girl's identity and wanted to tell anyone about his little fairy.

It was unfortunate that the target was his younger brother Emmett.

"What kind of stupid talk is that?"

Emmett, who was swinging a sword next to him, made a strange expression.

"Are you crazy? Why are you talking in your sleep like that during the day?"

"...Do you want to get hit?"

Orden, angry that his story was being ignored, threatened Emmett.

Then the obnoxious younger brother quickly stepped back and made a fuss.

"You're still a kid! You're just a kid! Everyone is talking about being the eldest son and a genius, but I'm a much more worthy successor than my stupid brother!"

"Shut your mouth, Emmett. Before you get beat up."

"Hmph! Try it! Do you think I'll let that happen?"

Emmett stuck out his mouth in disgust and quickly ran to his grandmother in the garden.

"Grandma! Look at Brother Orden! He's been saying such stupid

things since a while ago. He's talking nonsense about there being a fairy in the attic!"

Emmett was so excited that he buried himself in the width of his grandmother's skirt and chatted, as if he thought he had caught something.

"Emmett! Stop it! Grandma, that's not actually it...."

"What do you mean, Orden? If it's a ghost, there's no way there are fairies in this world. You must have seen something wrong."

".....?"

"Stop talking nonsense and start training quickly. Before I confess to your father that you are being lazy."

Jomo decisively cut off their conversation without even asking for details. Orden still could not forget the bloodshot eyes of his grandmother, who glared coldly at him at that time.

For several days after that, for some reason, Orden could not see the girl in the attic.

'I guess she really was a fairy. 'Did I disappear from the world because I told people about it?'

Somehow, I felt sad and had that thought.

But the next day, the girl appeared again at the attic window. Her face, which she had praised as pretty, was marred by bruises.

Only then did Orden realize that the girl was not a fairy or something, but a real person in the attic.

As time passed, Orden learned little by little about the girl's circumstances.

The girl's name is Amelia, and she is a distant relative of Orden. The girl, who had no one to rely on after her mother died young, was brought in by her grandfather, the Margrave.

The reason why the workers kept quiet about her was because there was an order by Orden's grandmother, Countess Sigismund at the time, to keep quiet.

The Countess hated her husband's illegitimate son and sent him away to a villa in the snowy mountains, and she also hated her only blood relative so much.

As a result, everyone locked Amelia in the attic and treated her as if she didn't exist. It is common for them to not even bring meals on time.

Orden, who could not bear to see the girl growing thinner, secretly took Amelia out of the attic one night and took her to the kitchen.

The girl followed him hesitantly, holding a bundle of straw in her small hands.

"Amell, what is that? Why are you holding such trash?"

"...It's Belle."

Perhaps because he rarely speaks, his voice sounded a little slurred.

Nevertheless, Orden thought that Amel's voice was as beautiful as a chirping little bird. If Emmett had found out, he would have made fun of her.

"It's not trash, it's my doll."

"Yes. Belle? You gave it to me? It's a pretty name."

However, Amel's answer to the thoughtless question was unexpected.

"dad....."

"huh?"

"Dad gave it to me."

Orden was momentarily speechless.

But, Amel, you said you don't have a father. Grandma is always

cursing your mother.

An illegitimate child gave birth to another illegitimate child outside. It couldn't be more dirty and vulgar than this.

Of course, young Orden also had the wit to not say that thought out loud.

"Sit here, Amel."

Orden rummaged through the cupboard and found dry bread and small pieces of cheese, and regretfully handed them to Amelia along with water.

Then he sat across from the table and quietly watched the girl eat. I thought to myself that she was like a fairy as she gently pursed her mouth.

Amelia, who had let her guard down, soon began to tell Orden various stories.

"...So I kept watching it. Swordsmanship seemed interesting."

"Really? That's right. Don't you get bored when you're alone in your room?"

"It's okay. I write letters every day in my room."

The girl nodded dignifiedly, then lifted her clear gray eyes and looked dreamily into space.

"Besides, he said if I just wait a little while, dad will come get me soon."

"Who? Dad said that?"

Perhaps the lonely girl was dreaming alone. Orden felt pity for him and asked, and Amel shook her head.

"No, the sister with the black veil did that."

Sister wearing a black veil? It was an incredibly suspicious story.

"Who is that?"

"I don't know either."

Orden succeeded in having a little chat with Amel, even if it wasn't enough, and when the meal was over, he safely took Amel to the attic. And that night, she went to bed feeling very happy.

But the next day, the girl disappeared from the window again. Worried about her, Orden knocked cautiously on her trapdoor, but received no answer from inside.

Knock knock.

"Amel? What's going on? Are you okay?"

But behind him, a maid suddenly appeared and spoke coldly. She was a young maid who served her grandmother.

"She won't be able to move for a while, Master. Her leg is broken."

... what?

Orden's face turned white, but the maid spoke with a twisted smile.

"I heard you hid in the kitchen like a stray cat last night. Wouldn't those bad things come to their senses if we stopped them from moving at all?"

Was this done directly by Jomo, who occasionally hits Amel with her hand, or was it the work of employees who listened to Jomo's orders?

Anyway, at least one thing was certain.

'Everything I do, everything I do for Amel, is harming Amel!'

The boy realized his limitations and reality. No matter how hard he struggles, everything goes according to the adults' circumstances.

Orden completely gave up on approaching Amel. Maybe that's what his grandmother really intended.

'I'm sorry, Amel... ... '

Some time later, Amel reappeared at the attic window, but Orden tried to ignore her.

Amel, who occasionally made eye contact with sad eyes, soon became expressionless again, as if she had adapted to being ignored.

It was one day that three years had passed.

A person who claims to be Ammel's father appears in the Sigismund Territory.

"You've done a good job hiding the child all this time."

Pushing through the pale-faced people, an unusual man wearing a white robe walked into the Count's residence without hesitation. He was accompanied by a group of armed paladins.

-Your Majesty, that girl, it can't possibly be like that...

It was something that was not easy to believe, but Orden was confident even amidst the noise of people. It was indeed as the girl said, her father had appeared.

Orden, who observed Amell every time, could immediately see that the man's face had some resemblance to Amel.

That person was the one who passed on those clear gray eyes to Amel.

"dad.....!"

And the man facing the girl raised the corners of his mouth and smiled cruelly.

It was the first day Orden learned that a person's smiling face could be so scary.

255

255. Attic (4)

"Your Majesty, you can't do this! No matter how loyal Sigismund is to Delcross, you still lead a group of knights into the territory without any prior notice! This is a clear disregard for castle and imperial law!"

The person who stopped the Holy Emperor and the Holy Knights who suddenly attacked without warning was Archduke Hendrik Sigismund, who was not yet the head of the family at the time.

However, there was no hesitation in the young Seonghwang's steps.

"Are you saying such things even after deliberately hiding the existence of your daughter, a member of the royal family? If you had notified me in advance, what would you have done to my child?"

"that!"

"If you are curious, I can personally show you what it is like to threaten a territory with force. So, get out of the way quickly. Before I hold you responsible for all of this."

As soon as those words were out, Knight Commander Katrina, moving like the limbs of a holy emperor, raised her long shield and pushed the Archduke aside.

"Father! Say something to Your Majesty!"

Hendrick, embarrassed, looked back, but Margrave Vincent just looked at the sheep without saying a word.

"...father?"

Hendrick, who had called again as if puzzled, took a deep breath in

surprise.

The Margrave was not just turning a blind eye to the Emperor's actions. He was just frozen in extreme fear and unable to move.

Is it because I recently reached the level of Dekaron Knight? He sensed an unprecedented danger emanating from the young emperor.

"What is your Majesty..."

Yes, I felt like a mere ant facing a huge storm. The moment you rashly step in, you feel helplessly caught up in it, unable to preserve its shape and feeling like it will be torn apart.

Meanwhile, the Holy Emperor, who had climbed to the top of the mansion, pushed the knights back a little and opened the door to the attic himself.

Sigh.

In the dim light coming from the entrance, a skinny girl appeared. He looked pitiful, wearing shabby clothes and one leg twisted at a strange angle.

Seonghwang seemed to be greatly shocked, forgetting what to say for a moment and staring at the scene in bewilderment.

"dad.....!"

At that time, Amel's eyes widened when he saw the success, and he smiled with joy.

It was obviously the first time we saw each other face to face, and it was as if we knew right away who our parents were.

However, the girl who was staggering towards him soon spotted the armed knights and flinched in surprise.

"...Amelia, how can you do that?"

A slightly low voice calls out the name of a daughter I have never heard.

Then the girl answered in a hushed voice.

"Well, my dad is a person who travels here and there by himself. He's never traveled with so many drivers...."

But I think it's my dad's face, which is really strange.

When the girl tilted her head, Seonghwang slowly approached the girl, fearing that she might be scared, and spoke.

"Yes. It is a good habit not to judge anything hastily. You are intelligent, Amelia."

"It's just like my dad to give such strange compliments. But my dad didn't even wear clothes this white and shiny like yours."

"....."

When Seonghwang silently approached and stopped, the girl, who had been thinking for a moment, looked up at him as if she had made up her mind.

"Then let me ask you one thing. Can you name my friend? My friend is the happiest girl with the biggest family in the world."

Then Seonghwang, who was thinking about something, answered.

"Then your friend is definitely the Belluna of the night sky. She is a happy goddess with beautiful daughters called Caliche of the sun and Olivier of the moon, and countless sons of stars."

Little Amel's face brightened noticeably at the answer.

"Well, then... what word starts with A and contains Arrhc? It's the first word my dad taught me, Breton."

"That word is probably 'angel', Amelia. Anyone who sees you will inevitably think of that word first."

Only then did Amel approach the crowd with a relieved smile on his face.

"Of course it's my dad!"

"....."

Orden couldn't understand. How can a father and daughter who have never seen each other have a conversation like that?

"What does all that mean now?"

Her father, Archduke Hendrick, also mumbles without knowing what he is saying.

Meanwhile, Seonghwang, who had been staring at Amel, who was barefoot for a moment despite the cold weather, took off the robes he was wearing and knelt down on one knee to make eye contact with the girl.

He then wrapped the robes around her shoulders and gently hugged her.

"My pretty clothes get dirty, Dad. The Countess always calls me a dirty child."

"Is that possible? You are the most precious and beautiful child in the world."

"But my clothes get dirty...."

"These robes exist because of you. So, if you don't accept them, these robes will have no meaning."

Seonghwang's expression looked surprisingly calm as he said that.

But everyone there saw blood clearly gushing from his neck. For a moment, it seemed as if his eyes were emitting a strange silver glow.

"I'm so sorry I found you so late, Amelia."

Amel let out a small laugh at the silent apology.

"The sister with the black veil has already apologized. She did. I am so sorry for taking my only father away from me."

"....."

"But I said I would be happier in the end because I would be able to meet more family."

"...Yes, that's right."

Seonghwang slowly stroked the girl's head and said something whose meaning was unknown.

"It was at that crossroads in Regina. It changed everything for you and me."

And soon, miraculous divine power poured down on Amel.

The girl's pale cheeks turned a pale rosy color, and her matted hair instantly became shiny. Her twisted leg also made a popping sound and then straightened.

'angel... ... '

Orden, who was staring at the scene blankly, suddenly thought. The little girl wrapped in her white robes looked as if she would become an angel and fly to the sky at any moment.

And Orden realized that the time to say goodbye to her had come. Amel is no longer her own little Amel.

I was so happy that my heart was pounding, but at the same time, I felt empty.

Murmur.

While everyone in the count's mansion was winking and whispering.

Seonghwang, who held Amel dearly, slowly got up and looked back at them. With a cruel smile plastered on the corner of his mouth.

Creepy.

The moment he faced his face with its brilliant eyes shining, Orden somehow felt a chill that was coming upon him, cutting into his soul.

Because I was worried about Amel and came closest, I was the first to meet his scary gaze.

"....."

However, Seonghwang, who looked down at him coldly for a moment, passed by and lightly tapped the boy on the shoulder.

Tuk.

".....!"

At first Orden thought he had been cold-heartedly pushed away.

But I soon realized that this was a very mild treatment for the Sigismund people.

Because the next person who faced the Holy Emperor's gaze was never safe.

"Kwaaaaaak!"

Tdu-duk, tdu-duk!

Even though no one touches it, the leg of a maid who was standing fine breaks and twists on its own. She was a young maid who took care of the countess's errands.

".....!"

"Aaaahhh!"

While everyone was embarrassed by the sudden situation, the young maid rolled around on the floor with foam at her mouth.

The bones that tore the skin and protrude are splashed with blood, and the muscles are crushed and explode all at once. It was as if an invisible demon was twisting her legs in various directions in the air.

In that grotesque scene, only the Holy Emperor and the Holy Knights who accompanied him were standing with calm faces.

Of course, the gentle-looking knight commander gave her a pitiful

look for a moment.

"Off....."

In the end, in extreme pain, the maid closed her eyes and fainted.

Seonghwang looked down at her with eyes as cold as frost. Meanwhile, she did not forget to cover Amel's head with her robes and completely block her sound with her aura.

"...Are you done?"

In the moment of silence, someone's frightened voice rang out unusually loudly. But unfortunately, it was only a prelude to the bloodshed that was to come.

"Kaaaaaak!"

"Aaaah!"

Soon, people's screams were heard from all over the place.

Someone's arm is twisted at a scary angle, and someone else is screaming at the top of their lungs while holding on to their cracked skin.

Knock knock knock-

Toad duduk-

The excruciating pain was painful, but the extreme fear of an unknown phenomenon occurring in the air was strangling their breathing.

Only the terrible crashing sound and breathtaking screams completely engulfed the Count's mansion.

Orden, who was frozen and watching the whole scene, was horrified to find some familiar faces among those writhing in pain. And he soon realized one thing.

These phenomena all have distinct causes! The person who hit Amel's

face had the entire skin of his face ripped off, and the person who twisted Amel's arm had his arm brutally chopped off and broken.

It was unclear how the detailed assaults that Amel suffered were being repeated with greater intensity.

However, it was clear that all of this was revenge for his daughter, carried out by Seonghwang, Amel's father.

"Ugh...."

After the cruel screams and wind of blood passed by. Only half of them were still standing.

'Did so many people participate in harassing Amel?'

While Orden was astonished at the new truth, Seonghwang, who was slowly looking around at the bloody scene, declared in a calm voice.

"But rest assured. You have committed a crime worthy of death, but I will not take your lives for the sake of my daughter. You have also been punished for carrying out what Sigismund commanded, and so will the rest of your ruined lives. Sigismund will take care of you."

And the next place that Seonghwang turned his eyes to was the place where the direct descendants of the Sigismund family were gathered.

"Your Majesty...!"

Archduke Hendrick, looking pale, stands in the way of his wife and young children. Behind them was Orden's grandmother, who was trembling with fear.

Then, Seonghwang made a cold accusation towards the Grand Duke.

"Are you going to ask for sympathy by pretending to protect Shik-sol? If it's for the sake of the territory, you can throw away even bloodied people like leftover firewood."

"Please stop! You can't treat a noble like this without a trial!"

"You probably don't know that the crime of insulting and injuring a

member of the royal family can be punished immediately."

"If so, at least let her be formally tried! Although our treatment of the princess was negligent, it happened because no one knew she was the princess!"

Seonghwang shook his chin slightly without answering. He seemed to be asking me to talk more.

The Archduke bit his lip at that cold attitude, but there was no room for him to retreat any further.

"Of course, my mother couldn't even guess. She was just trying to control the family's illegitimate children in accordance with the family law, in accordance with the Lord's will not to be greedy for lust...!"

Cooung.

Archduke Hendrick could no longer speak. At that moment, the temperature around where he was standing dropped significantly, causing an eerie chill.

As the frozen Hendrick's chin trembled, Seonghwang, who was looking at him quietly, smiled a gentle smile. Apart from the frost-like eyes becoming even colder.

"Did you really think that I wouldn't know that you, who were the first to notice the fact, confuse the guild's investigation to cover up everything? What you did secretly to silence outsiders who knew about my daughter's whereabouts can never be hidden forever. "Did you think there would be?"

".....!"

"You even pretend to defend your mother and don't hesitate to shift all responsibility onto her. Why on earth do you so easily abandon human duties?"

Only for the territory. To minimize expected damage as much as possible.

This was the answer that reflexively flashed through Hendrick's mind as he was speechless.

But Seonghwang, who knew what I was thinking, nodded and said with interest.

"Yes. It's for the territory. You can't even guess what consequences your choices will have in the future."

"....."

"There is nothing to worry about right now. I have no intention of harming you, even going so far as to violate the imperial laws I have established. All you have to do is exist as you are and continue to make future decisions without hesitation. "Only for your territory."

I wasn't saying I would forgive.

The cold silver-gray eyes staring at Hendrick mean only one thing.

-I don't stop it. I'm really looking forward to the results.

'What on earth...? ... ?'

While the Archduke was so confused, the Holy Emperor turned and walked towards Margrave Vincent, who was still shaking.

"Ugh!"

The Margrave fell to the floor, making a sound of out of breath. Not long ago, he looked incredibly unsightly for someone who had risen to the rank of Dekaron Knight.

"Your Majesty! I'm sorry! Princess! I'm sorry! Please take it away! I-I...!"

The Margrave bowed his head to the floor and began to think frantically. The actions of someone who seemed to be half out of his mind due to fear were truly shocking to Orden.

A silver light occasionally flickers in the eyes of Seonghwang, who quietly looks down at him.

Looking at him calmly, as if he was anticipating his grandfather's reaction, it was clear that he was using some invisible trick like before.

"Off, off!"

How long has it been like that?

Only when his grandfather fell to the floor and was in a semi-faint state did the Holy Emperor turn around again. Toward the Countess, who had turned blue from earlier and looked like she was about to collapse at any moment.

'... 'Grandma!'

Orden became anxious. Perhaps the person most responsible for Amel's abuse here is by far his grandmother.

As someone who inherited the same blood as her, Orden couldn't help but be very concerned about his grandmother's treatment.

But then, something unbelievable happened before his eyes.

"countess."

The Holy Emperor, who was silently staring at Jomo, who was trembling in fear, bestowed upon her the most powerful blessing.

The Countess is bewildered by the divine power that suddenly surrounds her.

Surrounded by holy white light, the Holy Emperor smiled brightly like never before.

And Orden still clearly remembered the words he muttered softly at that time.

"You will be remembered as the happiest person in front of Amelia. Don't let my children feel any guilt because of what happens to you in the future."

* * *

"...blessing?"

Seongjin, who heard the whole story from Orden, couldn't help but wonder. Why would you do something like that to a person who wouldn't mind being beaten to death right away?

However, when Seongjin came face to face with the countess in front of him, he was able to realize everything clearly.

The amount of punishment that one person's soul can fully endure. The cause and effect, which was probably a little lacking, is delicately balanced due to someone's blessing.

"This is an opportunity given to me!"

A chance to exact cruel revenge that only I can carry out. My father, who knew that I would not endure it, was willing to leave my share for me.

Seongjin opened his mouth and smiled fiercely.

Ah, how could I not be happy!

256. Attic (5)

Orden could not tell Seongjin the details of the past. Not only did it happen a long time ago, but it was also a huge shame for the family.

It was just that his grandmother, a former countess, did not like young Amelia. She said that she had been neglected by everyone at the count's residence as her illegitimate daughter for years. And he simply explained in detail that the Emperor came to the count's residence and punished the servants.

However, Seongjin was able to infer many things on his own while listening to the short explanation.

A lump of straw was treasured as a doll, or a piece of trash was called a treasure chest.

Above all, Orden's dark, sunken face explained many things. Because he is simply ignorant and has no talent for lying.

'It's not just neglect, there's something more!'

But until then, Seongjin didn't think it was that big of a deal.

My father came to pick me up, so I guess he didn't take care of things. Anyway, now Amelia is living happily in her imperial palace.

"So what happened to your grandmother?"

I was just curious about what kind of punishment Orden's grandmother received. Because he remembered what the Countess had said on her first visit to Sigismund:

-This year, I was unable to attend the birthday party because my mother was sick.

Doesn't that mean that the damn old woman is still being treated well at the count's mansion?

Well, Sigismund was a very powerful nobleman, so even if he were his father, it would have been difficult for him to use his hands recklessly like other servants.

However, there is no way he would have held a formal trial and publicly revealed the fact that his sister was treated poorly, which in some ways could be a blemish on him as a member of the imperial family.

'But there's no way you didn't do anything... ..'

And Orden's answer to that was unexpected.

"...blessing?"

"Yes that's right."

ok?

Seongjin tilted his head curiously.

"why?"

Why would you do something like that to a person who wouldn't mind being beaten to death right away?

"I'm also good at that...."

Well, I wasn't asking the ignorant Orden guy expecting an answer. Seongjin looked down at the contents of the box with a shocked expression.

'What does this mean to you anymore?'

Things like this. If he wanted to, Seongjin could give Amelia a room full of dolls or a beautiful set of expensive jewelry.

It's just that my sister doesn't seem to like it very much because she likes middle school students.

'But if you even gave it a name, it must have been very precious to you at the time.'

I would like to take the opportunity to ask how someone else can customize and value one person's memories.

After making that decision, Seongjin carefully packed the broken box into his arms.

"Anyway, I have to say thank you to you. You've taken good care of my sister's things."

Orden bowed his head bluntly. Seongjin did not miss the faint relief and regret that briefly passed over his face.

Okay, so you feel bad about sending these rags because they are your sister's belongings?

Seongjin hardened his expression and spoke to Orden.

"I guess you won't think nonsense. You may be simple, but you don't know fractions, right?"

"yes?"

"You wouldn't know, would you? You and Amelia are related by blood. You are cousins."

".....!"

Orden, who had been frozen in a daze as if shocked, suddenly became startled and waved his hands.

"Oh, no! It's not okay! I would never have such reckless thoughts...!"

"Hmm, really?"

Then what?

Seongjin nodded and left the attic. But isn't Orden muttering softly behind him, as if telling me to listen?

"But strictly speaking, we are not complete cousins...."

What, man?

When Seongjin turned around and rolled his eyes, Orden quickly lowered his head.

"Of course, that doesn't mean I have any other thoughts, sir!"

"Yes, of course I should."

Otherwise, you won't be able to go near the ecliptic from now on.

Seongjin snorts and heads towards the stairs -

"But the current King and Queen of Brittany are cousins..."

... This bastard is really going to die by my hands!

It was some time later that Seongjin left the attic to catch Orden and threaten him.

"no!"

"Sir, I just didn't say anything..."

"Well, I don't want dirt in my eyes!"

"....."

On the way back to the room.

Orden's face became noticeably depressed after being scolded without stopping his walking steps. Then she sighs and ends with these words!

"...But, sir. The most important thing is of course Princess Amelia's thoughts...."

Whoops! You bastard! You die today and I die!

This was when Seongjin grabbed Orden by the collar and was shaking him back and forth.

"Orden!"

Suddenly, a solemn shout was heard from behind.

When they looked back in confusion, they saw an elderly woman standing with a cane, glaring at them with her bewildered eyes.

"...Grandma!"

Orden straightened his posture with a straight face. Seongjin also noticed her, so he let go of his collar and turned around.

'grandma?'

okay. Is that the former countess, Orden's grandmother, who said she treated her sister poorly?

Seongjin looked the old lady up and down with disapproving eyes.

In contrast to her casual outfit of only a shawl over comfortable silk pajamas, the stiff old woman's face looked stubborn and stubborn. His hair is matted, flowing loosely over his shoulders, and his straight back, leaning on his cane, is nothing short of elegant.

Compared to her husband, she looks much older. In reality, they probably aren't a couple with a big age difference. Old man Vincent is a Dekaron Knight who slows down aging.

'You said it hurts somewhere, but on the outside you look pretty fine?'

Seongjin, who did not feel any need to be polite first, stared at her, and the old lady scolded Seongjin with a solemn expression.

So, it was towards Seongjin, not Orden.

"Orden! How on earth is this unreasonable to persecute a knight of the family in a place like this? Do you even have any awareness as Sigismund's eldest son?"

"....."

"How long are you going to act like a child? I bet your younger brother Emmett is twice as mature as you!"

Seongjin looked back at Orden blankly.

'You said you're not feeling well, but do you have a headache?'

'I'm sorry. Recently, my grandmother has been showing signs of mild dementia. Normally, the users were always hanging around, but it looks like he sneaked out on his own during nap time.'

After responding like that, Orden approached the old woman and gently comforted her by wrapping her arms around her shoulders.

"Grandma, why are you out alone again? Let's go back to your room. I will take care of you."

"No, no! I, Countess Sigismund, am teaching my grandson, so why is the family knight interfering with me? Can't you just back down?"

The old woman glared at Orden and waved her staff. It was quite a harsh hand.

Wow!

Orden, who had been hit on the arm, quickly grabbed his staff. Since he was an Auror user, it probably didn't hurt that much, but there was still a look of disappointment on his face that couldn't be hidden for a moment.

"Grandma, please fix it."

"Ruthless! How dare a common knight stand in the way of a nobleman now!"

As she was unable to get the cane out, the old woman clenched her fists and began to beat Orden mercilessly on his back and head.

Knock knock knock!

"Let go! Let go, you bastard!"

"Grandma! It's me. This is Orden!"

"You dirty bastard, still!"

Wow, the old man is really grumpy.

No matter how much he doesn't recognize his grandson's face, he recklessly commits violence against anyone.

"Tsk tsk."

Seongjin clicked his tongue slightly, and the old lady, who didn't know how to hear it, turned her head and looked at Seongjin intently.

The old woman's noble dignity was gone, and her messy hair and severely distorted face made her look like a demon with its head pulled out of a cave of hell.

"...those eyes!"

While he was frowning at the strange atmosphere, the old lady tilted her head to one side and put her face right in front of Seongjin's nose.

Her wide, unfocused eyes show a kind of madness that goes beyond anger.

The old lady, who was making eye contact with Seongjin, eventually chewed her lip and spoke.

"Yes, I know eyes like these. These are the eyes of that vulgar witch!"

... what?

Seongjin stared at the old lady, feeling an eerie premonition.

"Grandma! You can't do this. This person is the prince of the Holy Empire!"

Embarrassed, Orden grabbed her shoulder and pulled her backwards, but once the old woman started to have a fit, her madness was so strong that no one else could match it.

"Aaaaah! Let go! That girl is over there! That dirty thing that twisted Vincent out is over there!"

"Grandma! Hello! Is there anyone here!? Hurry and get Grandma!"

"Do you think I will just leave it like that? I will kill it! I will torment it again and again until it withers and dies!"

Wow!

Seongjin stood there quietly glaring at the crazy old man, spitting and barking like a dog.

'Yeah, I should have realized that a long time ago.'

Regret, self-destruction, and a wild anger that goes far beyond that engulf my entire body.

Isn't it said that a person with that kind of temperament treated Amelia poorly? What the hell was she like, she should have questioned from the beginning.

And Seongjin knew the answer right away. The old woman, who had been caught not only by Orden but also by her maids who had rushed to her, snapped her neck and started gnawing at her while glaring at her face.

"You lowly bastard! Why don't you die no matter how many times I hit you?"

"....."

"Why do you not die even when you starve? Why do you not die even when your limbs are broken? Why do you come back to life so suddenly? Are you truly the seed of the devil!"

It must have been something like that.

You glared at my sister, who was a small child, with those eyes, swore at me like that, and hit me like that!

"haha."

Seongjin didn't know, but unconsciously his mouth was making a small sound of laughter.

Startle. Orden suddenly feels an eerie energy and looks at Seongjin in surprise.

However, Seongjin was no longer aware of the surrounding situation. All she could do was hold back the powerful emotions and focus all her attention on the monster in human disguise before her.

The extreme anger that knows no end may, in a way, be bordered on joy. My hands are shaking with excitement, and the corners of my mouth are tearing apart.

"Tell me."

A faint silver glow began to flicker in Seongjin's eyes.

"Tell me everything, every word, about what you did to your sister."

Stand tall.

Then the old woman who was convulsing stopped moving and stiffened, looking at Seongjin.

No sound came out of the frozen mouth anymore, but Seongjin could fully hear what the old woman's soul was saying through her eyes.

The woman who kicks the little girl with a pointy shoe, the woman who slaps the little girl's cheek forever, the woman who grabs the little girl's hair and screams at her like crazy...

Countless scenes quickly pass before your eyes.

Heightened emotions that seem as if they will burst out at any moment are accompanied by a rapid expansion of consciousness.

Surrounding sounds fade away and your field of vision begins to expand uncontrollably in all directions.

"...Lowering?"

As a strange light flashed in Seongjin's eyes, Orden, feeling an ominous energy, let go of Jomo and approached him.

"Why are you doing this, sir?"

Seongjin thought idly as he listened to Orden's voice, which seemed to come from far away.

'Yes, Orden. What did your father say when he saw that senile thing before?'

Orden had never said such a thing to Seongjin, but somehow Seongjin knew that fact. No, I thought maybe he had known for a long time.

-You will be remembered as the happiest person in front of Amelia. Don't let my children feel any guilt because of what happens to you in the future.

Yes, I understand what my father means. Seongjin was able to realize everything clearly at that moment.

The amount of punishment that one person's soul can fully endure. The cause and effect that was not enough to inflict the worst punishment was narrowly balanced by someone's blessing at that time.

'This is an opportunity given to me!'

A chance to get the worst revenge that only I can. My father, who knew that I wouldn't tolerate it, was willing to leave me my share.

How can you not be happy!

omg.

Orden, feeling fear for an unknown reason, retreated without realizing it.

Is it because of my mood? The current appearance of the prince resembled the appearance of the Holy Emperor holding little Amel a long time ago. Aren't those strangely glowing eyes just as scary as those of the former Emperor?

At that time, Seongjin, who was relieved, freely poured out the anger

in his heart towards the old lady.

[You will never be forgiven for your sins. You won't be able to sleep peacefully until you die. Even after death, your soul will never rest.]

Huh.

The old woman lets out a breathless moan as the shock hits her soul. But this was just the beginning.

[No one knows about your death. No one will remember you when you die. Even after death, your soul will split into a thousand or ten thousand branches and you will suffer a thousand or ten times as much as other souls. That time never ends.]

Turn it off.

As the old woman foams at the mouth and closes her eyes, the frightened maids make a fuss, laying the old woman down in the hallway.

lady! Come to your senses, madam!

haha. Seongjin, who was somehow in a cheerful mood, cursed one last time.

[You will long for extinction and pray again and again, but even so, you will not have the luxury of disappearing forever. Your soul will come back to life intact and you will repeat the pain again.]

Because there will be no such thing as [Rest] allowed for you.

"Lowering....."

A curse poured out not with a voice but with thoughts. A curse deeply engraved in a person's soul.

No one could hear it, but only Orden, who was right next to Seongjin, could feel it. The prince had just done something terrible.

"What on earth did you just do...?"

Hearing Orden's trembling voice, Seongjin turned to the side and smiled cheerfully. She still had an eerie silver-grey sparkle in her eyes.

good. I can wait as long as it takes until it dies. If it's for the best and perfect revenge. If only to repay my sister for the pain she suffered a hundred or a thousand times.

'It's dangerous if we don't go back soon.'

A feeling of endless exaltation and a consciousness that extends far and wide.

It was a wonderful feeling, but Seongjin thought he had to stop now. He didn't know how, but he had to find a way.

Nevertheless, Seongjin did not forget until the end and completed the last drop of causality that was narrowly lacking.

"So, grandma. I too will gladly bless you. Please stay healthy until the end of your life, which is not long."

Sweet.

I felt like I could hear the perfectly coordinated sound of cause and effect coming together in my head. The shackles of the poor soul that will be trapped in the cycle of eternal pain are complete.

"ha ha ha."

"Lowering."

"Haha, why are you looking at me like that, Orden? I also blessed your grandmother. Just like my father did."

Ha ha ha ha ha.

Although Seongjin was smiling, inside he was starting to get worried.

'There was a big problem. This won't stop. How will things work now?'

No, is there really a need to go back?

Because I...

Tuk!

At that time, someone gently grabbed Seongjin's shoulder. Before Seongjin could even sense his presence, someone quickly came to his side.

Seongjin looked back.

"Lord Sharon?"

And soon he meets the exorcist's brightly shining silver-grey eyes. The corners of his mouth, which had been pulled up as much as possible, lowered, and his vision slowly began to return.

The excitement calms down and the mind calmly returns to its original state.

"...father."

257. Regina's Crossroads (1)

It was a very strange thing.

The strong energy that seemed as if it would rush out of my body and sweep away everything in front of me at any moment slowly fades away, as if I had been poured water, the moment I meet Seonghwang's calm silver-gray eyes.

The uncontrollable anger that had been surging did not disappear at all. I just realized that there was another perspective of myself that I could quietly observe from a step away, putting up a layer of fence around those uncontrollable emotions.

The fitful laughter subsided, and the rapidly blinking eyes gradually subsided.

"...father."

Then the exorcist who was quietly examining Seongjin tapped his shoulder a couple more times.

Tuk-tuk.

Seongjin's mood became more subtle as he felt like he was being praised for doing a good job.

"...Your Majesty? Sir Sharon?

Orden cautiously called out to them from the side. The prince, who burst out laughing while radiating unusual energy, and the exorcist, who appeared from nowhere in a strange atmosphere different from usual, were both extremely confusing.

Then Seonghwang glanced at him for a moment with cold eyes and

then turned his head towards Seongjin.

"Lowering."

There was no doubt that it was Sir Sharon's usual voice. For a moment, I thought he had returned to being Sir Sharon again.

Nevertheless, looking at the bright light blinking in the eyes, I could tell that it was still in full swing. Perhaps it was because he was conscious of the eyes of people around him.

"It appears that the old lady is very unwell, so it would be best for the Archduke to assist her as is. I will take care of her from now on, so please return to your room with me."

No, father. You're really not good at acting.

If you're trying to pretend to be Sir Sharon, your tone and mood are too serious.

"....."

Orden also blinked in surprise. This is because we have been traveling together for quite some time and are familiar with this crazy exorcist's words and actions.

Seongjin, realizing the need to quickly resolve the situation, quickly nodded.

"Okay, sure. Let's go back now."

Orden hesitated for a moment. Since he is a guy with a good sense of humor, he seemed to realize that something unusual had just happened.

But there was no way for him to recognize the stigma engraved on his soul, the curse engraved in his thoughts. Orden finally nodded his head with an anxious look on his face.

"Then, I ask you to please, Lord Sharon."

Before the words could be said, the Holy Emperor, who had

possessed Lord Sharon, coolly turned around. He didn't even pay attention to the old woman who was lying on the floor with foam at her mouth.

"Gruk ruk ruk."

"Ah, what is all this about? Madam! Come to your senses!"

Even at first glance, it looks very serious. This is proof that Seongjin's curse was so severe that a person could fall to that point with just a blow to his soul.

"A doctor! No, a priest first!"

"Ah, there's a Paladin here... Paladin?"

Lately, someone recognized the exorcist and called him, but Seonghwang started walking down the hallway at a fast pace without looking back.

Seongjin, who had been staring blankly at the old lady, was also startled and ran after her, a step behind her.

"Father, I...!"

"Be careful, sir. There are many eyes around you."

Seonghwang, who answered like that in a tone that was not at all like that of Lord Sharon, walked straight ahead as if he had a thorough understanding of the structure of the count's residence.

'No, what if the knight accompanying the prince goes ahead alone like that?'

Seongjin thought with a clumsy face, but he continued walking without saying anything more. This was because she somehow felt a very heavy atmosphere from the sight of him walking quickly.

They flew across the count's residence and soon arrived at the room where Seongjin was staying.

Percussion.

And as soon as the door closed, Seongjin, who was itching to speak, quickly opened his mouth.

"Father, father! Something strange happened. I just...!"

[Mores.]

At that time, Seonghwang decisively cut off his words. It was the voice of Seonghwang that Seongjin was familiar with, echoing in his head at the same time.

[Don't you know? Don't think deeply about it anymore.]

"uh....."

And before Seongjin can respond, he suddenly points to the bed and says this!

[I guess I'll just lie here and take a nap.]

yes?

Seongjin asked him in confusion.

"No, growing up...."

[Didn't I say before that I would teach you how to handle objects in the normal world? That's what I originally came for. I'll teach you now, so calm down and get some sleep. Then, I will transfer your soul to the gap where flames can easily materialize.]

What is this so suddenly?

"Wait a minute, father! Now is not the time! Sister...!"

[Then, can you stop those dizzying thoughts right now and completely calm down those wild emotions yourself?]

".....!"

I couldn't tell what he was talking about.

The abuse my sister received as a child, the enormous anger that rose

up the moment she found out about it, and the terrible curse she poured out with all her might.

Calm down immediately is an unreasonable request.

"There's no way that could be possible. Your father knows, right? How much of your sister is in this mansion..."

As soon as I think about Amelia, something surges inside me again. The emotions that had barely subsided began to stir like crazy again, like a stormy sea.

Tuk.

Then Seonghwang's hand quickly began to tap Seongjin's head. I've experienced this before, small pats that continue at regular intervals.

Tuk. Tuk. Tuk.

"uh....."

Then, my complicated mind became clear, and my pounding heart instantly calmed down. Seongjin was dazed, she looked at Seonghwang and blinked her eyes.

'Wow, that's amazing. 'What on earth are you doing?'

Seonghwang, who soon confirmed that Seongjin was genuine, sighed softly.

[okay. I knew something like this would happen at some point, but I had no idea it would happen so suddenly and in such an unstable state.]

"What you're saying is that my father knew everything that would happen today. That's why he gave that damn old man his blessing? It's for the sake of the balance of cause and effect. Is that right?"

Seonghwang did not answer that question, but just looked at Seongjin with slightly complicated eyes.

"Ah, there's another problem. Anyway, I just did something amazing

to her. I feel like I knew what it was, but now I have no idea if my memory has become hazy again."

[...]]

"What are all these? Father, what and how did I just do?"

There is a slight hint of desperation in Seongjin's voice. In fact, what he really wanted to ask was this.

-Father, what on earth am I?

The reason why I couldn't just ask that question out loud was obvious.

There was a warning from Seonghwang not to be suspicious, but the moment he did so, he felt a vague sense of anxiety that he felt like he would be finished.

'But how long are we going to have to stay in this awkward state?'

If you can't ask directly, you'll have to make some guesses on your own.

Why is Cardinal Benitus so wary of himself? Why is Lord Masaine so worried that Seongjin might get caught up in a heresy controversy?

And why is Hayes, who was a member of the Dark Church, subordinate to him?

'The answer is not far. Maybe I...'

When Seongjin thought that far.

Tuk.

A light shock to the forehead interrupted those thoughts. When he opens his eyes and looks up, Seonghwang's worried gaze meets him.

[Be careful in everything you do, Mores. Haven't you already said that you shouldn't define yourself carelessly? Beneath the thoughts and perceptions of the Oracle lies a great power that you are not yet

aware of.]

"...If you don't think about it."

Seongjin, who suddenly felt depressed, lowered his head and asked in a slightly cracked voice.

"If I don't do something properly, if I don't touch it, then I'm not that something yet?"

Not yet.

Sensing the sorrow contained in those words, Seonghwang patted Seongjin's head vigorously.

Pusssss, my light blonde hair becomes a mess in an instant.

[Mores.]

"...yes."

[You are my son. That fact is the truth that will never change.]

"Um, yes."

You said that before...

Seonghwang, who noticed Seongjin's shocked reaction like a ghost, stopped messing with his hair and looked down at Seongjin.

[why? Wasn't that enough? Do you want to check once more what happens the moment you deny this?]

"what?"

Seongjin opened his eyes fiercely and glared at Seonghwang.

This guy! Are you threatening someone with your body again? Did that sound fun?

Then after a while. "Oh," he said, tilting his head.

"But isn't it someone else's body now? Are you really going to make a

show of self-harm in Sir Sharon's body this time? What are you doing to her?"

... Oops.

A look of confusion appeared on the usually insensitive face of the man, as if he had been caught off guard.

'I'm so dumbfounded... ... '

Aside from feeling upset and angry, strangely enough, feelings of sadness and anxiety disappear as soon as you push them, like a deflated balloon.

Seongjin changed the topic with a shy expression.

"...Um, so you said you grew up somehow?"

Anyway, Seongjin obediently decided to follow Seonghwang's instructions.

I wanted to learn how to use the Ice Heart and give my sister a nice gift, but it seemed like the only answer was to take a nap.

Even now, when I think about my sister even just a little bit, I feel overwhelmed and feel uncontrollable emotions.

'No, but is there any need to endure it? My damn Sigismund is just... ... !'

As I grind my teeth without realizing it, a hand taps my head as expected.

Seongjin suddenly felt an eerie feeling. If things continue like this, there could be a truly irreparable accident.

"Father, please teach me at least this one thing."

Once again, the true Seongjin asked as he lay quietly on the bed.

"Did I properly avenge my sister?"

[Yes, you took the best revenge you could on that woman. In some

ways, it is a punishment that can be considered excessive for the sins a person has committed throughout his or her life.]

After answering that, Seonghwang added with a slightly calm expression.

[However, there may be differences of opinion as to whether it is complete revenge. How could it be entirely her fault?]

"Ah, of course, the lesser Dekaron Knight and the Margrave, who turned a blind eye to this situation, also bear great responsibility! Even if they did not directly cause harm, they encouraged the Count's people by watching and turning a blind eye!"

Then Seonghwang raised the corners of his mouth slightly. It was an expression that seemed somewhat self-mocking.

[Could they be the only ones who neglected Amelia like that?]

".....!"

Seongjin was shocked and kept his mouth shut.

For some reason, this guy seemed very depressed earlier!

'... Now you think it's all your fault

Although Seonghwang knew in advance what Seongjin would do in the future and fulfilled the cause and effect, there was a more important reason why he did not take direct action against the old lady.

'Do you think you don't deserve to punish her?'

If so, isn't that excessive self-blame? Seongjin heard the general situation from Orden and knew it.

I heard that Amelia's mother was originally a very weak woman. Since she died young due to lung disease, no one in the ecliptic would have expected that she would have left behind a daughter in that short period of time.

Thanks to this, Amelia had to suffer needlessly for a long time, out of the sight of the Holy Emperor.

'But it's not like you left it on purpose, is it?'

Seongjin cautiously asked Seonghwang, who looked sullen.

"Well, father, do you really think that God's representative must be perfect in everything?"

Then Seonghwang slowly shook his head.

[The title of God's representative is merely a façade for properly exercising divine power in the world. I don't think he's arrogant enough to mistake himself for a god.]

"No, but why are you blaming yourself for something you couldn't have helped? Your angelic sister will be very sad if she finds out that your father did that. That's an even bigger mistake!"

Seongjin jumped up from the bed and protested.

"It would be more productive to do something else with that time for your sister. Even so, this continent is full of crazy people who spend all day doing nothing but repenting. That's not to say that reflection is bad, but... What I mean is...."

As I move my mouth in a hurry, words come out in vain.

Then, a faint smile passed across the face of Seonghwang, who was quietly listening to those words.

[Yes, Mores. I know very well that all of that is just self-satisfaction anyway.]

"uh....."

It's not a face you recognize at all?

Seongjin opened his mouth to say something more, but Seonghwang pressed his forehead and laid him back on the bed and said,

[That's why I'm trying to do what I can for you guys. Now shouldn't you make your shaved ice into a gift that the Orthodox Church can accept?]

Acceptable?

"...The shaved ice guards protected Sigismund's territory against the demonic beasts. Inquisitor Sir Valery even confirmed that it was not a mistake. Moreover, God's [grace] is spread across the ecliptic, so as long as the shaved ice water is safely brought there, safety is guaranteed. "Isn't that guaranteed?"

What is wrong is entering the ecliptic where one cannot enter. What more proof do you need?

Then Seonghwang slowly shook his head.

[It's not such a simple problem. This is a Glacher Troll that has been treated as a magical beast of the Demonic World for a thousand years. There is definitely a lot of room for problems in the Orthodox Church. The magnitude of the backlash would be completely different from accepting a monster for which there were no records.]

Seonghwang did not elaborate, but somehow Seongjin was able to realize one important fact.

'Because I'm the one controlling this!'

These are the people who surrounded Jinju Palace to summon the prince as a witness. What would happen if we found out that it was the controversial 3rd prince who showed up with the devil in tow?

Seongjin frowned, thinking deeply, and Seonghwang made a sound of admiration.

[That is why we are planning to designate shaved ice as a sacred relic first.]

"...yes?"

What did I just hear?

Seongjin blinked, and incredible words that I couldn't believe continued to come out.

[In inserting evidence to support this, we are first considering the period when the five great kings came to power. It's too far in the past to find historical information, but the theologian Granius once wrote in detail about Glatzer Trolls. Therefore, we are considering a plan to exclude <Exploration of the Miraculous Continent> from the banned book.]

Whoa, wait a minute. wait for a sec.

Isn't the story moving too quickly?

[Francis has already departed from the imperial capital to begin this work. It won't be a good feeling, so it's best to do what we can to prepare before he arrives.]

Seongjin's mouth opened wide.

Are you already making those preparations?

I could see what the adjutant's expression would be like after being separated from his respected knight commander for at least 15 days one way and a month round trip.

[If you want to keep the Glatute Troll as is, it would be okay to adjust its appearance a bit while changing its size. Sir Valerie had an interesting idea. It would be a good idea to engrave the god's symbol on your chest.]

"....."

You said you were going to bring shaved ice as a gift, but you even fabricated something like that to make the process go smoothly? You put so much effort into it just for souvenirs?

-That's why I'm trying to do what I can for you guys.

But aren't the limits of what 'can be done' too broad?

'Is this it? Is this the new horizon of propaganda and fabrication that

Sisley was talking about?'

Seongjin stared blankly at the exorcist's face with shining silver eyes.

Anyway, this guy. I was secretly thinking that it was nonsense, but I think this shrewdness is quite similar to my sister.

258. Regina's Crossroads (2)

They were planning to head towards the gap now, Seonghwang explained.

Unlike the place I experienced in the imperial palace before, it is a very stable space with a separate owner to manage it. So you don't have to worry too much about motion sickness.

[Don't forget to take the ice heart.]

It is said to be a magical space where only the soul moves, but the objects it carries are still reflected.

Certainly, Seongjin had experienced the presence of a body in both the office and the space at the same time before. I don't know what the principle is, but it's probably a similar phenomenon.

"hmm....."

Seongjin, who was putting three ice hearts in his pocket, hesitated for a moment, then quietly took one out and put it back on the table.

For some reason, I had a feeling that it would be better to leave at least one piece in its original state. But for a moment, I thought a bright silver light flashed in Seonghwang's eyes.

[If possible, why not take them all with you? I think you'll get another heart soon.]

"yes?"

[Aren't you already aware of another material?]

Then Seongjin tilted his head.

"That's right. Well, the first thing that comes to mind is what that damn Dekaron Knight left behind..."

[Then he will bring it to you.]

"yes?"

Seongjin's eyes widened.

"Why does that old man do such a thing?"

[Are you not very angry with him?]

No, that doesn't mean... ... ?

[He probably won't go against your wishes too much. His ability to detect danger is more excellent than you might think.]

For that to be the case, it has already looked too loose and untidy.

[Perhaps the moment you arrived, he instinctively sensed that Yeongji would overcome the danger safely. Thanks to you, I was able to completely relieve my tension.]

"...You really believed in me and did such foolish things?"

While he was dumbfounded, Seonghwang pressed Seongjin's forehead onto the bed.

[It's better not to think about them too deeply anymore. The cause and effect given to me is fixed, and I don't have much time now.]

No, but thinking about that old man makes me angry again!

Father, while we're at it, shouldn't we also do something for that old man? As it is, I feel unfair... ... !

As Seongjin struggled, Seonghwang sighed softly.

[I have already dealt with them, so now all that remains is to wait for the results. Don't worry anymore now.]

"yes?"

[Go to sleep now.]

Sigh.

For some reason, Seongjin, who was feeling weaker than usual at night, suddenly lost consciousness.

* * *

"Hmm...."

Taktaktak.

Old Vincent, who was slowly driving his horse at the rear of the chase team, felt restless due to the cold that came over his body from time to time, and eventually let out a low groan.

"Why are you doing this, Vincent?"

One of the Wolf Knights asked curiously, but he stubbornly furrowed his eyebrows without answering. How could I explain the vague feeling of great fear and anxiety to a young knight?

'It all started after the princes came.'

It was difficult to maintain composure in front of Prince Mores, but ever since Prince Logan appeared before my eyes, that fear had become quite concrete.

In particular, when I looked at the back of the boy paladin riding the white horse in front of me, the hand holding the reins almost trembled from the fear that came over me so strongly. A genius sword master who truly resembles a successful person, at least in the back of his head.

'your majesty... ... '

The day the Holy Emperor entered the Sigismund Territory without permission and took away Princess Amelia.

Old man Vincent did not fully remember what happened that day. I was just shocked enough to die at once, and the feeling of fear

engraved deep in my bones remains vague.

Anyway, from that day on, the old man abdicated the throne to his son and stayed in the estate.

I didn't even go to the birthday party I used to go to every year. Just thinking about Seonghwang's cool gray eyes made his whole body tremble like an aspen tree.

Instead, from that day on, the old man did not take a single step outside the territory and devoted himself to training. Because there was no way to control his anxious mind without swinging his sword and becoming stronger.

'But it was all an illusion!'

This time, I realized this the moment I saw my sons who looked exactly like Seonghwang.

Dekaron Knight was caught up in a psychological problem of unknown depth. If things continue like this, I will never be able to overcome my fears or reach the level of a sword master.

-As expected, you are much better than that useless Dekaron Knight!

And Prince Mores' merciless evaluation keeps ringing in my head.

In the end, old Vincent, who had been struggling, turned his head towards the ice base alone.

"Lord Ilma. I have somewhere to go for a while. Please join the chase team."

Then Lord Ilma looked back at him with a darker look than usual.

"Huh? Vincent. Where are you suddenly..."

"The cliffs to the south. I guess I'll have to go back to where I caught that devil worshiper."

For some reason, he no longer wanted to find fault with Prince Mores.

Is it the ice of the Glaturre Troll or something? I must find it and quickly receive recognition of its usefulness from that arrogant little prince.

Otherwise... ..

Leaving behind Lord Ilma's puzzled gaze, old Vincent began to ride his horse with a stern expression on his face.

* * *

The whole place is shrouded in fog.

In the heavy silence that completely drowned out even the sound of footsteps, Seongjin walked along an invisible path, following Seonghwang.

There were several positive effects of the soul moving away from the body.

It didn't make all the anger go away, but at least it prevented reason from being helplessly swept away by uncontrollable emotions.

Additionally, I felt like the memories that had been blurry until now became a little clearer.

So, Seongjin followed his intuition and asked Seonghwang a question. Following a strong premonition that I would have to find out exactly what Seonghwang's intentions were toward Sigismund.

[Father, can you tell me? What is the blessing that was given to the former Countess?]

It is clear that it is an incredibly strong blessing, as it makes up for the shortcomings of cause and effect.

However, Seongjin has not yet found any evidence of blessing on the old woman's body.

It is natural that she is healthy for her age, as she must have been treated well all her life, but she still looks much older than her husband, old man Vincent. Isn't she an ordinary old lady who has not

been able to avoid aging at all?

Then Seonghwang gave an unexpected answer.

[I blessed her soul, not her body. So that I can dream sometimes even in extreme pain.]

[...] A dream?]

[okay.]

dream? Why that way?

I had my doubts for a moment, but at least one thing was certain.

[Anyway, you gave her a chance to breathe from the pain. Why?]

Perhaps sensing the dissatisfaction in his voice, Seonghwang stopped for a moment and looked down at Seongjin.

[Son, what do you think is the difference between 'moving cause and effect' and 'creating cause and effect'?]

What moves and what creates?

Seongjin tilted his head.

[Aren't both the same thing?]

Then Seonghwang nodded with a smile on his face.

[okay. At first glance, it may seem like there is no difference. Both can start from the same basis and produce the same results. However, unfortunately, the impact of the two when discussing human karma is greatly different.]

This comes from the perspective that ordinary humans are ignorant of the results of cause and effect movements.

After saying that, Seonghwang turned around and started walking again through the hazy fog.

[Do you know this? She wasn't that harsh from the beginning.

Although she may have kicked out her husband's children out of wedlock, it did not prevent her from providing the bare minimum of food, clothing, and shelter. Nor did she object to her child being cared for by her earl when she died, leaving behind her daughter.]

Is that caring? Did they torture you with the intention of making you die even more painfully?

Words of protest rose up to his throat, but Seongjin held back and listened to his next words.

[However, while waiting for her husband to continue wandering around the territory, her malice grew uncontrollably. Then, when she saw that her grandson, who had inherited her husband's talent, was once again giving Amelia her attention, she thought like this.]

At this rate, grandson Orden will also fall in love with a woman and follow in Vincent's footsteps.

Amelia will be the culprit that ruins everything for Sigismund.

[Does that justify torturing my innocent little sister so much? Not everyone who harbors murderous intentions becomes a murderer!]

I'm crying.

I can't stand it either! Even if you become a soul, being angry is still being angry!

Then thud.

Seonghwang interrupted Seongjin's thoughts by lightly hitting him on the forehead and continued speaking.

[okay. Even if you harbor deep hatred in your heart to the point of killing someone over and over again, there is a huge difference that you cannot overcome compared to actually taking action. And your personal revenge does not require God-like impartial judgment.]

-You are now completely in the ignorance of humans.

Is it an illusion? At first glance, I felt like I heard a faint thought

coming from Seonghwang.

Seongjin tilted his head, and Seonghwang continued speaking.

[If we consider principled legitimacy, there is nothing more ridiculous than the subject of revenge being someone other than Amelia.]

No, that's a bit much!

[So are you saying that people who don't have the power to take revenge should just suffer? Are you saying there is nothing the person next to him can do for him?]

[Son. I am not blaming you for taking revenge on that woman.]

Tuk-tuk.

Seonghwang tapped Seongjin's shoulder a couple more times as if to soothe him from tears, then turned around and started walking again.

fluttering. Even though it was a space with no air flow, the hem of Seonghwang's white robes swayed as if fluttering in the wind.

[The only thing you need to know clearly is this one thing. That you never exercised justice on behalf of Amelia.]

[...] ... !]

[The woman certainly faced such a result due to her own mistake, but she should never be mistaken as thinking that the retribution she deserved was given on God's behalf.]

Seongjin bit his lip, but despite his anger, he was unable to mount an appropriate rebuttal.

[What about Sir Vincent, the other man you said you could not forgive?]

While I was looking down sullenly, Seonghwang walked forward with great strides and continued speaking.

[He lived a busy life all his life, building a huge ice wall in the Demonic Land for the safety of his territory and driving out heretics from the south. Then, sometimes, on the days when he returned to the count's residence, the butler would report to him like that. He said the child is doing well.]

[...]]

[So he thought. Is there any need to further offend my already uncomfortable wife by giving her attention for no reason?]

So are you saying that neglecting your sister is an extenuating circumstance? So whose fault is it for your sister's suffering?

When Seongjin, who had a frown on his face, no longer followed, Seonghwang stopped walking again and looked back. As if he knew what Seongjin was thinking.

[okay. It must be difficult to understand. Would you believe that all of this started with someone inadvertently 'moving cause and effect'?]

The difference between moving and creating.

Seonghwang has been talking about that since a while ago.

[An arrogant person who found out about Amelia's existence thought like this. Although she was not born with as much talent with the sword as her father, I thought that it would be much easier for her to inherit and run her territory from him in the future if she made everyone, including her earl, aware of her father's faults.]

[...] ... !]

[His mother was a noble of the fallen Ortona, and his wife married into a wealthy family in Anatolia. As the conflict between the two stubborn people reaches its peak and the house continues to be in turmoil, I think it would be a good idea to channel this anger somewhere else.]

Seonghwang's calm voice spread as if echoing through the empty space.

[What he whispered at that time was only a few words.]

Mother, have you ever heard of a cursed clan that fascinates people like the devil? Somehow, that girl's eyes are exactly like theirs.

Father, I will take care of the Count's affairs, so please do not worry about trivial matters and only protect the safety of the continent.

Seongjin's eyes widened in shock.

[Whose fault do you think is the biggest here?]

No, if that's true, the person who made the situation worse is by far...
... .

[But can you understand that even though 'moving cause and effect' has such clear results, the weight of the karma is infinitely lighter compared to 'creating cause and effect'?]

[...] ... !]

Hendrik Sigismund, who was the archduke at the time, soon learned that the emperor was desperately looking for his child. Also, his half-sister, whose face he didn't even know, was his woman.

Only then did he become fearful of what would happen later, and began to disturb the guild members who came to the territory to investigate, and to deal with outsiders who knew of Amelia's existence, step by step.

And he encouraged the mother and employees to harass the little girl even more, leading to her death. Later, when Seonghwang, who found out about the truth, investigated, it was made to look as if the girl was sick and suffered a natural death.

[However, despite years of helping others accumulate enough cause and effect to be punished, he himself has not accumulated any cause and effect at all. He even believes without doubt that all of this is done to revive the territory with minimal sacrifice.]

Inorganic eyes without emotion and a calm voice. Nevertheless, Seongjin felt that he was angrier than ever.

[If we were to strictly consider the merits and demerits of his life, which were derived from his own 'good intentions,' his soul would certainly be more weighted towards his merits. It is very difficult to watch it quietly.]

-So, even though I know full well what the Margrave is planning, I am leaving it alone. I'm really looking forward to the results.

A faint thought comes from him.

This time it was definitely not an illusion. Seongjin clearly understood what he wanted to say.

[...] The person my father most wants revenge on is Margrave Hendrik.]

Now that he doesn't have enough accumulated to take heavy revenge like the former countess, he is waiting for him to 'create' enough cause and effect to accumulate karma.

Then Seonghwang opened his eyes slightly wide, looked at Seongjin, and then nodded.

[okay. Don't deny it. So, if possible, I hope that he will somehow accumulate some kind of great karma.]

The gray eyes that used to shine brightly become darker than ever before. And Seongjin once again vaguely heard his true feelings that he did not express.

-I am just standing by and watching him commit a serious and irreversible sin. Even though I clearly knew the consequences, I tried to take advantage of it, so in essence, I and Margrave Hendrick are not that different.

Does Seonghwang know that Seongjin vaguely hears his thoughts?

-Still, I hate him. To the point where I think it's okay to bear the full burden of the sin of arbitrarily moving cause and effect while 'knowing' the outcome.

You probably don't know. This is a man who has never shown his

emotions so openly towards his children.

It was just a fleeting coincidence that occurred due to the combination of Seongjin becoming more adept at coming into contact with thoughts and his inability to store his emotions better than usual.

-Of course, I do not forget that this is also due to my personal resentment and self-satisfaction.

Surprisingly, Seongjin suddenly trembled with an ominous feeling.

Isn't there someone this man resents more than Margrave Hendrick? as soon as...

[...] Father, please tell me. Why did the Margrave bring a medicine cart into his domain? What was he planning in the first place?]

When Seongjin asked in a trembling voice, Seonghwang smiled bitterly and turned around.

[Aren't you currently in the state of a complete oracle? You can't teach things like that easily.]

-If you knew that, surely you wouldn't try to stop me?

[but... ... !]

It was when Seongjin was about to say something more to him.

[It would be better to end the story here. You have arrived at your destination.]

As soon as Seonghwang finished speaking, the fog cleared and a gray, faded space unfolded before my eyes.

259. Regina's Crossroads (3)

The space that unfolded before his eyes clearly resembled the [gap] that Seongjin had seen before.

However, unlike the gap that disturbs the view like a broken kaleidoscope, this was a static world like a well-crafted piece of glass.

Cross sections of the cold, frozen world are scattered here and there. It was so motionless that it just seemed like a decorative relief carved into a stone wall.

[This place... ..]

[This is the gap I mentioned earlier. It is definitely a place where the owner resides, so it is a personal space where he creates and manages the rules.]

Moreover, surprisingly, there was a 'floor' in this world that one could step on. Seongjin stepped on the floor, which he couldn't tell whether it was granite or marble, and looked around blankly for a moment.

Suddenly, what Ricardo said to Seongjin, written in Sigurd Sigurdson, comes to mind.

-In this frozen world, you were the only friend who could understand me.

Did the young bard Laurent once say this?

-Passion! love! craving! I couldn't feel any strong desire there! That's why my songs left me!

They all said that Delcross was a world that had stopped. But will you really hear that sound even if you look at this place?

Aren't the countless fragments of the world hardened in gray like tombstones commemorating a dead world?

[okay. The most stable state probably means that it has completely stopped. It may not be much different from death.]

Seonghwang explained how he knew what Seongjin was thinking.

It no longer occurred to him to shed faint thoughts like before. His gray eyes, having regained their complete composure, carefully examine Seongjin with a hint of doubt.

[Are you okay?]

[...] Um, yes.]

Seongjin's reaction was a little slower than usual because he was consciously clearing his head in case his thoughts were read.

Then, the Holy Emperor, who tilted his head for a moment, came closer and suddenly poured divine power on his head. It looks like he must have received a big shock while moving through space.

[It's okay, you can stop now.]

Seongjin, engulfed in bright light, quickly opened his mouth to clear his mind.

[Isn't sacred power too precious to be wasted like this on a healthy person?]

[What do you think? It's not difficult, but it's also not something you can put a separate price on.]

[It's even more of a waste in that it can't be valued!]

[Is that so? Since you say it's such a waste, I'll do it one more time when I have the chance.]

Wow.

Seongjin's eyes widened in the white light that poured down again.

No, this guy!

[ruler... you!]

It was right then. An old man appeared behind them.

He was an old man wearing a plain robe who suddenly appeared out of thin air. His sharp facial expression and neatly slicked back white hair reminded me of a stubborn scholar.

[How on earth did this happen?]

Although his mouth was wide open in shock and his awkward standing posture greatly damaged his seemingly gentle dignity.

'what? 'It's strangely strong?'

Seongjin, who was nervous, was in high spirits, and then suddenly. Seonghwang, who put his hand on his shoulder as if to comfort him, bowed lightly to the old man with a calm expression.

[See you again, old man. After saying that I wouldn't respond to calls for a while, I suddenly came here like this, so I'm offended.]

[...]]

[Ah, I brought my son with me today. I was wondering if I could show you around the old man's 'workshop.']

Only then did the old man look back at Seongjin's face and open his mouth in astonishment. His eyes are so wide open that it seems like they will pop out at the slightest touch.

'Is it okay to not be on guard?'

Seongjin slowly relaxed his body as he faced the old man.

Probably not an ordinary human. The thing in the gap, as well as the vertically slit pupils, reminded me of Cadmus.

'Well, Cadmus is very strong, but in reality he is just a useless insect eater.'

While I was thinking about this while looking at the old man, the old man suddenly rushed towards me, grabbed Seonghwang's arm, and dragged him to one side. Then he urgently whispered a faint thought into his ear.

Of course, Seongjin, who was skilled at catching thoughts, was listening to everything.

[Hey, what on earth are you doing?]

[As I said before, I apologize for the sudden visit. Since I made a promise to my son, I plan to borrow a little of the elder's workshop.]

[no! Even though it's a workshop, why are we bringing 'that' to this point?]

While saying that, the old man's sideways glance at Seongjin was extremely cruel.

Then, Seonghwang's expression suddenly hardened and he quietly gave him a warning.

[Please be careful what you say and do. Isn't the child listening?]

[...] No, look! That... .. !]

[I just made it clear. This is 'my son'. Do you understand?]

[...]]

Then the old man looked at Seonghwang with shaking eyes, as if he was very shocked.

Anyway, Seonghwang removed the old man's arm, looked back at Seongjin, and made a light gesture with his hand.

[Come here and say hello, son. This person is an 'elderly person.' He was the one who first organized the 'meeting of six' that I mentioned earlier. He is currently leading the meeting in an impractical manner.]

... Impractically?

So does that mean it's nothing in the end? Somehow, it seems like the little dignity is being diminished further.

[You don't need to be overly polite, but you're also not someone who should be rude. Just because he devotes himself to a fruitless task for this long, he is a person worthy of a little respect.]

[...] ... ?!]

Seongjin looked at Seonghwang with round eyes.

Father, were you always like this? Why do people seem to change when you meet them somewhere other than Delcross?

At that time, the 'old man' urgently grabbed Seonghwang's arm.

[Hey, Nate. Let's talk for a moment.]

[There is no time for that. My son and I have to do some finishing touches on the souvenirs to give to the children.]

[It only takes a moment! Can't you bring your son again next time?]

When the desperate old man raised his voice, only then did Seonghwang look at him with cold eyes.

[The 'next opportunity' you are talking about is not something I can easily guarantee. As you know, for me, not only time but also cause and effect are tight.]

[that... ... !]

[Or would you rather hand over the [Key] of the Lycanslope race to your son? Then, my child can come and go here whenever he needs to...]

[Huh!]

The embarrassed old man grabbed both of Seonghwang's arms. A look of disappointment appeared on his face when he realized that this friend was truly talking nonsense.

[iced coffee! A workshop? Yes, use as much as you want! It will be an unfamiliar environment for your 'son', so you will probably need a competent helper, right?]

[No need. If I see it myself...]

[no! I'm sure your thoughts will change. The best engineer in existence will take a look at it in person!]

The elderly man shouted urgently, waving the sleeves of his long robe.

Then, suddenly, a huge door appeared before their eyes.

It is an antique door with precise reliefs engraved on the surface and two golden lions holding doorknobs in the center.

Bang bang!

The old man shouted loudly as he banged on the tightly closed steel door.

[Dexter! Hey Dexter! Are you inside now?]

Then, a faint answer was heard from inside: 'Yes, old man.'

There was still nothing behind the door, but it was truly amazing that sounds could be heard from inside.

As Seongjin was looking at the steel door with curious eyes, the old man frowned and glared at him for a moment. Of course, when I saw Seonghwang's attention, I slowly turned my head back.

[If you have time, come out here and help the customer! Just give me a quick tour of the workshop!]

[There is no time for sightseeing, old man. Hurry up and fix things... ... ,]

[This is an important guest, so take care of everything! Listen to what he wants as much as the workshop facilities allow! I won't say anything if I use any ingredients!]

Only then does Seonghwang nod his head with a firm expression. He had an attitude as if he had been waiting.

[Thank you for your consideration.]

The old man glared at him for a moment as if he was disgusted, then sighed and shook his head.

[No, thank you. Now that the problem is solved, you can come and see me!]

[yes. All right. Now, go inside, Mores.]

And Seonghwang disappeared somewhere, dragged by the man called the elder.

[...]]

It happened so quickly. Seongjin, who was suddenly left alone, stood blankly in front of the tightly closed iron door.

By the way, since he is an old man, this is the first time I have seen him treated with respect by the Emperor. I guess that means he's quite an amazing being in this world, right?

Well, maybe it's because of the first introduction, but it looks oddly dignified.

And after a while, the thick steel door opened softly with a small sound, making you wonder if a person could really push it open.

Creak.

A thin voice is heard next.

"So, what's your business, kid?"

what?

Seongjin's eyebrows twitched.

A kid in the first meeting? Me, who is over 60 in terms of mental age?

At that moment, the spirit of Jang Yu-yu-seo, which was engraved deep in my bones, surged up, but when I tried to get angry, the other person's gaze was quite low.

So, much further down than you might think.

[...] ... !]

The person who pushed the steel door and came out was a short dwarf.

He is wearing thick work clothes, carrying a set of tools of unknown purpose, and wearing goggles the size of bells on his eyes that cover half of his face.

Seongjin looked down at him in bewilderment and blinked.

'Who on earth is this person calling him a kid?'

Then the dwarf spoke again in a dissatisfied voice.

"If you have any business, speak up quickly, kid."

hmm?

At that time, Seongjin felt a strange sense of discomfort and tilted his head.

what? Something is strange.

"...hey!"

Seongjin could clearly see that his mood was suddenly becoming uncomfortable, so he quickly took out the ice heart he had brought with him.

Although his harsh attitude was annoying, Seongjin calmed down. First of all, let's be polite. I am now a son visiting my father's friend's house.

[Oh, sorry. Dexter... Seed? I would like you to take a look at some of the items from the normal world here.]

"Well, of course you came because of the items from the normal world! This is a workshop, right? Is that all you have to say?"

Every time he says something nervous, his short mustache twitches in the wind.

Only then did Seongjin realize the cause of the discomfort he had just felt, and his eyes widened.

what? Are you speaking with your mouth and not with your thoughts?

"So, is that the only thing you want to show Dexter? Give it to me."

"Sniff."

Is this an atmospheric space? Am I breathing now?

While my nose was crying with a surprised face, Dexter pulled up my goggles and asked me as if I was pathetic.

"What on earth are you doing? Is now the time? How do you introduce yourself when you first meet? How do you greet your elders?"

No, actually, maybe I'm older? No matter how I look at it, that dwarf doesn't look like he's over sixty.

Seongjin thought for a moment and then answered obediently. Now I am visiting as father and son, and I look completely like Mores. Also, the author may be a race that ages much more slowly than you think, right?

[Uh, no. excuse me. [It's the first time I've seen someone speak directly from their mouth.]

Then Dexter rolled his eyes as if it was absurd.

"What? Then people speak with their mouths or with what?"

There is definitely a vivid feeling of the air vibrating and making your eardrums vibrate.

Seongjin moved his mouth carefully.

"iced coffee....."

Oh, you really have a voice?

"What the hell is this? You idiot."

Seongjin asked with a cautious voice, looking down at Dexter who was snoring. It was a question she had been itching to ask for a while.

"By the way, Mr. Dexter, are you... a dwarf?"

If you're a short human from another world, aren't they the only species that comes to mind at first glance?

But something unexpected happened. The dwarf took off his goggles, threw them on the floor, and screamed.

"Oh, this is so crazy! How many times has this happened? This is just achondroplasia! You ignorant otherworlder who is steeped in this fantasy!"

".....!"

Seongjin opened his mouth in bewilderment.

Throughout my life, I have been told by people in other worlds that I am steeped in fantasy!

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260. Regina's Crossroads (4)

Cartilage hypoplasia.

Although it is not a commonly heard disease name, it is still a distinctly Earth-style disease name. Also, Seongjin, who is dressed as a Delcrossian, is called a person from another world?

"...Are you, by any chance, an Earthling?"

Then the dwarf sniffled and crossed his arms.

"Can't you tell just by looking at it? Now that Ionia has been destroyed, is there any world other than Earth that can handle this high-level over-technology?"

Over technology?

Aren't the tools you're wearing too clunky and old-fashioned to say that? Wouldn't it be perfect to tinker with a windmill or a steam engine?

'At least the Earth I lived on before destruction was a world dominated by semiconductors and software.'

While Seongjin was thinking that, Dexter picked up his goggles and grumbled.

"You're wasting this genius Dexter's precious time. If it weren't for your request, I would have kicked this idiot's ass right away!"

What, you bastard?

Seongjin's eyebrows twitch and distort.

This guy said he'd see it. Can't you see that I'm putting up with rudeness just by looking at my father's face? Otherwise, I would kill you right now... .. !

'uh? But wait a minute!'

For a moment, Seongjin blinked as a realization struck his head.

I was consciously stopping my brain movement for fear of being caught eavesdropping on Seonghwang's thoughts, but now, due to the subtle anger rising, my head began to slowly turn.

Now that I think about it, I forgot about it for a while, but didn't the Holy Emperor explain this to him one day?

-This is a wise ancient dragon that has protected Delcross for the past thousand years. I can't tell you his true name, but I call him 'Elder'.

okay. I couldn't help but feel strangely strong. The old man was really a dragon!

For some reason, the vertically slit pupils looked suspicious.

'then!'

Sigh.

When Seongjin suddenly exposes his teeth and laughs viciously, Dexter, who feels an unknown chill, flinches in surprise and blinks his eyes.

Anyway, Seongjin smiled kindly and spoke politely to him.

"It's nice to meet an Earthling. I've heard a lot from you about the advanced technology there. You already know what kind of person you are, right?"

"Ah, yes. Well...."

Dexter said, 'Why is this guy acting like this all of a sudden?' He answered with a shocked expression on his face.

"But Mr. Dexter, for what reason have you come to another world and been living in this 'Dragon' workshop?"

"What? Why are you suddenly asking that? What are you supposed to do with such a thing?"

Dexter twitches his eyebrows and glares at Seongjin.

There isn't much of a reaction to the word "dragon." Seongjin confirmed this and said with a smile on his face.

"Oh, it's nothing. I'm just thankful that you work hard for 'us' here, leaving a place as good as Earth. Now, would you please show me around the workshop?"

Dexter, seeing Seongjin's kind smile, was startled again and muttered softly.

be surprised Why is that smiling face so scary?

"yes?"

"...No, it's nothing. Follow me."

Creak.

Dexter, who felt a little intimidated for some reason, opened the door wide and gestured. Seongjin followed him into the room and was quite surprised by the dizzying sight that unfolded before her eyes.

'It's a completely different space inside the door!'

The workshop actually resembled a huge exhibition hall rather than a room.

Engines whose purpose is unknown, spewing out strong steam, and strange crystal plates flashing and blinking light. Wires with a complex structure whose connections cannot be counted.

Several floors of shelves filled with such unique machines, and dozens of high landings to get up to them.

It seemed as if many objects from across the world and time had come together in one place. Just taking a quick look at it is enough to make your eyes spin.

"Haha, what do you think? Have you ever dared to imagine that there is a place like this in the world?"

While passing through the crowded machines, Dexter's voice began to gradually become louder as he gained confidence.

"Look at this! It's an amazing machine that can distill dozens of layers in a short time with just simple operations! Isn't that amazing? It's a [Soul Reader] that reads not only human memories but even records of past lives!"

"oh....."

Of course, Seongjin's sentiments were simple, as he lived a life far from machines, both during his lifetime and even now.

'Um, yeah. 'These are very complex machines.'

And soon enough, they arrived in front of a huge, isolated machine. It was a huge machine with a high monitor reaching up to the ceiling and a lot of flashing crystal plates.

Voila!

Dexter shouted proudly, spreading his arms wide.

"Now, look! This is the highlight of the day! The ultimate [Homunculus Engine Editor]!"

But Seongjin's sentiments were still simple.

'Right. 'It's a very complicated machine that applies principles that you don't need to know.'

"Wow... that's really cool...."

Clap clap clap.

Dexter twitched his mouth in soulless admiration.

"...Is that all?"

"No, that's great, Mr. Dexter. I was so shocked that I couldn't even speak."

Seongjin spoke nonsense without even putting saliva on his mouth and then added:

"But is this over-technology really Earth's technology? From my insight, it seems a little distant from Earth's products."

At first glance, the quaint crystal plates that gave off a strange glow were a far cry from Earth's machines.

Then Dexter frowns suspiciously.

"Of course, this is the last legacy of Ionia. It is obviously over-technology, but it is not of Earth. But how do you know that?"

"That's because 'we' have a high mental age and have accumulated a wide range of experiences."

"...hmm?"

Only then did Dexter sense something strange and began to carefully examine Seongjin with new eyes.

Aren't we supposed to lump together the elders and refer to them as 'us' from now on? Even though she was young, she seemed strangely serious, as if she had gone through some difficult times.

When I stopped pretending and faced him politely, I was suddenly startled by what conclusion Dexter had come to and took a step back. Oops on that face! The expression on his face was clearly revealed.

'You're caught!'

"...Are you, by any chance, a hatchling?"

He asked in a hushed voice, but Seongjin turned his head and

avoided answering, pretending not to hear.

If they look young but have a high mental age, are they all dragons?
Now, which one is more into fantasy?

From then on, it was just as Seongjin cooked.

"If he can become our colleague, Mr. Dexter, even though he is an Earthling, he must have lived using over-technology for at least a thousand years, right?"

"No, no. I just...."

As Dexter broke out in a cold sweat, Seongjin smiled warmly.

"Mr. Dexter, please speak low. I only have the mental age of 640 years. Compared to Mr. Dexter, who has mastered this over-technology for so many years, I am nothing more than a foolish brat."

I didn't say I lived 640 years. So it's not a lie.

But that alone made Dexter's face pale. I think he thoughtlessly ignored the proud hatchling, who would grow up to be a mighty dragon in the future.

Okay, now let's try some.

"Please, Mr. Dexter, help me as I am young and immature."

Saying that, Seongjin took out a large number of objects from the normal world that he had in front of him.

Not only the three ice hearts, but also the Nebraska Amulet, the Soul Stone, the magic stones given to him by his brothers and sisters, and even the handkerchief tied to the nutcracker.

The idea of coming to the workshop was to grab everything that could be pulled out.

"No, this is too much... isn't it? That's a different story..."

Dexter's face becomes gloomy as he checks the pile of work.

But Seongjin added with a smile.

"The old man told me to give 'as much' as possible to what he wants, so I tried to be a bit greedy. Oh, will it be difficult to have too many items? Then, I will go and ask again."

"No! No, it's okay."

Dexter waved his hand urgently and pulled out a machine from his belt. And he began to look at the items Seongjin had taken out one by one, as if scanning them.

How long has it been like that? He suddenly opened his eyes wide and shouted with a straight face.

"Huh? Wait, wait! What is this, yo?"

"yes?"

When Seongjin asked, not knowing what to say, Dexter, who was very excited, shouted.

"No way? It's here? Is this really it? Is it true that it is a [signpost] created by Oracle and that reflects the spirit of Oracle?"

Shouting like that, what he picked up was a pendant with a bright red broken gem. It was a relic of his grandmother that Seongjin found in the labyrinth some time ago.

* * *

It happened more than ten years ago now.

The Astros mercenaries had just completed a commission and were staying in the huge city of Regina for a while.

Mercenaries who received additional money for a rare success were congratulating each other by drinking heavily.

"The next request is Brittany! Will you come with us this time too, Bart?"

Justin, who was heavily drunk, asked Nate, who was diligently dressing up as a woman.

But he was still busy packing without even looking at the leader.

"Now, how about becoming an official mercenary member? I'll settle the bill well."

"I'm leaving this time. I have somewhere else to go."

"...What? No!"

Justin screamed loudly. Naturally, he thought that Bart would be with him, and he readily took on a request that was a bit tight compared to the mercenary group's capabilities.

"What should I do with the request without you?"

"Wouldn't it be okay to proceed without me or to cancel the request altogether?"

"Impossible! The reward for this request is so high! This can never be returned!"

But before I knew it, Nate, dressed in women's clothing, was walking across the bar and speaking calmly.

"I also know that I will never have another opportunity like this. If I go this time, I don't know when I will come to the northern part of the continent again. I have to hurry and go to Marie."

Then the mercenary members who were quietly watching the two's scuffle whispered quietly.

number of animals? Is that a woman's name? That's a girl's name!

"What? Bart! You finally have a girl you're dating?"

"This sinful bastard has his first lover!?"

"You envious bastard! Is she pretty? You say she'll wait for you?"

Hustle and bustle.

While the Astros mercenaries were talking excitedly, Nate pushed open the bar door and came out. He kicked Justin hard, who was hanging on by his legs.

There was a reason for his haste. This is because her lover, Marie, was a particularly sickly woman.

'I feel somewhat uneasy... .. '

Since she always had assassins on her tail, she couldn't stay for long, even for her lover's safety.

Not only was it not enough to pile up plenty of food and fill it with firewood, he even left behind a signpost he had made himself, just in case.

Nevertheless, I have an ominous feeling that something big is about to happen to Marie.

It was just as I was about to move north.

Damn.

With a ringing sound in my head, something hanging around my neck split in half. It was his mother's last remaining milestone.

".....!"

Especially now.

The significance of the timing when the milestone was broken was clear.

'If we go to Sigismund now, we'll be in big trouble!'

Nate froze in place.

Is there an assassin pursuing him closely now? If he goes to Marie like this, will not only himself but also her location be exposed?

'What needs to be done is decided. As the signpost indicates, we must move as far away from the North as possible.'

Still, Nate was worried.

He had no choice but to leave her, because Marie was a sickly woman who would quickly wither if he did not give her divine power. I definitely have to stop by at least once in the near future.

'But my mother's foresight is never wrong. If I go to Marie like this, a great and irreversible misfortune will befall me.'

Nate quietly closed his eyes and composed himself, sighing and throwing the broken pendant in front of the bar. According to her mother's will, if the milestone were to break, she would leave it in its place.

"Bart! Bart! Please! Huh?"

And even then, they were dragged by Justin, who was clinging to them from behind without getting tired, and they headed straight to Brittany.

* * *

[When I was young, I received several milestones from Mama Mama.]

Nate explained to the elder in a calm voice.

Empress Bethsheba, the previous Oracle, left a total of three bright red jewels to Nate. One of them broke when he was still a small child.

At the time, young Nate followed the instructions of the signpost, but ended up in an accident where he was trapped in a labyrinth alone with the guard knight who had been commissioned to kill the prince.

Nate, who managed to kill the knight and escape the labyrinth, had no choice but to doubt his mother's intentions for a while. But she later found out that it was thanks to him that she dramatically avoided her fate of being taken to Rohan.

The other one was given to the newborn Owen as a godson when he was running away from assassins. He thought he didn't have much

time left to live anyway, so he hoped to be of some help to his godson's future rather than to himself.

[And one last milestone was broken right at the crossroads of Regina.]

As expected, Nate faithfully followed his mother's instructions.

But the choice he made at that crossroads changed his and Amelia's fate in an instant.

[What do you think would have happened if your mother had not changed that choice?]

In response to the old man's question, Nate rested his chin and thought deeply.

If I had found her again then, I would have found out that she was pregnant. And she wouldn't have met Tatiana on the way to Brittany.

It was a time when he had an assassin as his tail, so he probably couldn't stay by Marie's side forever. However, it is clear that he would often find her and take care of her, revolving around her squirming spirit.

[Even if I had stayed around her, Marie would not have been able to avoid death in the end.]

Nate can tell now. No matter what choice she made, Marie's life would not have been any longer.

But Nate could have saved little Amelia. And he must have wandered the continent alone with his child.

Although they may not have had a comfortable life, they would have had a great time seeing the continent's wonders and searching for delicacies. That alone would have made the two happy enough.

[Eomamama, as an oracle, 'knows' everything and moves cause and effect.]

There is a clear difference in karma between 'moving' and 'creating'

cause and effect.

However, this is a story that only applies to ordinary people who are ignorant of cause and effect.

For the Oracle, who sees through all cause and effect and is able to understand its beginning and end, the act of moving cause and effect itself remains as karma.

[Perhaps Mama Mama has taken on an unimaginably great burden of karma.]

The woman who brought a little girl to the brink of death several times and put her life in extreme pain has accumulated enough karma to be trapped in the cycle of eternal suffering.

What about his mother?

Who was the Oracle of the previous generation who, despite knowing the misfortune that would befall the girl, moved the cause and effect so that it would happen?

Nate looked up and his eyes became heavy.

[What kind of future did you see, and what kind of price did you prepare for?]

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261. Source Editor (1)

"Is this really it? Is it true that it is a [signpost] created by Oracle and that reflects the spirit of Oracle?"

Dexter, who was shocked to see the pendant, took off his goggles and shouted.

"Oh my god! Look at the change in the wavelength here! That thing I only heard about in theory really existed in the world!"

"uh?"

Listen to the theory?

Seongjin tilted his head, and Dexter held the broken bright red jewel close in front of his eyes.

"Why is this coming out of your pocket? How can you leave this with all the junk?"

He was extremely cautious just a moment ago, but now he is very excited and is pressing on Seongjin as if he is going to eat him.

Thanks to this, Seongjin's plan to scare and freeze and even eat the bone marrow went awry, and he blinked in embarrassment.

"...It's a milestone, though."

Why is this here?

It seems that it got mixed up because it was carried around with the Nebraska Amulet.

"I'm not going to look at that now, so keep an eye on me...."

When Seongjin held out his hand, Dexter was startled and quickly hid the jewel behind him. He looked very nervous, as if he had encountered a robber trying to steal a precious heirloom.

"....."

Seongjin frowned and glared at him.

Give it to me when you treat it well. It's not something I should say because I carry it in my pocket, but it's important. It's a keepsake from my grandmother.

"...Is it okay if I take a closer look at this first?"

Toward Dexter, who asked cautiously in a trembling voice, Seongjin shook his head resolutely.

"No, just give it back. Today I came to see the items from the normal world."

"But while I'm at it, it would be good if you analyzed this too...."

"That's it. Please take a look at these 'ice hearts' here. I heard they seem to be of a fairly high grade."

But Dexter didn't even pay attention to his ice heart. Isn't he rather showing a straight face and getting angry at Seongjin?

"No, is it time to waste time looking at something like that? There is something worth analyzing right in front of us!"

... When you analyze it, isn't it just a gem?

As Seongjin was making a shocked face, Dexter quickly put the machine in his hand on one of the soul stones and called out to Seongjin.

"Now, take a good look at this here!"

The machine he showed was a kind of handheld scanner. There was a small screen, with pink and blue lights moving around and drawing a strange graph.

"...What is this?"

"Of course, isn't it a machine that measures Aon's reflection?"

I don't know, what the heck is Aon?

It's already been decades since I graduated from school, but I remember that at least that wasn't common sense in Earth science.

"Now, do you see these graphs here? This is the unique waveform from the analysis of the soul stone. Originally, all materials show unique aion waveforms depending on their composition."

Regardless of Seongjin's reaction, Dexter continued his passionate explanation.

"Also here, do you see the section where the pink and blue are widely separated? This means that this soul stone is a material that refracts aion with twin axes! In other words, it is proof that this is a product of the normal world!"

huh. Seongjin nodded his head.

I also have no idea what you're talking about.

"Okay! But wait! Look at this!"

But Dexter didn't care about Seongjin's harsh reaction. This time, she started chatting frantically while holding her grandmother's pendant, which she had hidden behind her, against the machine.

"Here is an item that you cannot believe exists in this world. It is the [Milestone] of the Oracle! Take a look at the ever-changing waves it creates!"

The difference was clearly visible even to Seongjin, who knew nothing.

The size of the wave increased and decreased, the two graphs merged into one and then spread apart, etc., so there was no point. It was almost suspicious that the machine was broken.

As I was staring at the fluctuating graph, Dexter's rapid-fire explanation poured down on top of it.

Now, do you see the [signposts] and the graphs that keep changing depending on the angle the scanner hits? What this means is that the number of reflection axes varies continuously depending on the location of the milestone! Moreover, doesn't the gap between the two graphs narrow and move apart? That means that even though it is a solid that appears to be uniform, its internal polarization coefficient... Oh, excuse me. This is not an actual ionic term, but I just use it for convenience. In any case, it means that the refractive index of aion is constantly changing! oh my god! How in the world does something like this exist?

"Oh oh."

Seongjin was very impressed.

I spoke for so long, but not a single word was intelligible!

"Because these dream-like objects are real, Ionian engineers worked so hard for such a long time to implement laws that were only possible in theory into the world!"

Dexter was now filled with tears of emotion. Seongjin, who couldn't stand it any longer, raised his eyebrows and gave him a look.

-Stop talking nonsense and just conclude.

Dexter, seeing that dull expression, pounded his chest in frustration.

"Do you really not know what this means? So the Oracle's [signposts] are things from the normal world, but they also partially have the same properties as substances from the normal world!"

It is a product created by a sophisticated mind, but it still has a distinct substance.

Something that originally could not exist within the laws of the original world came to exist in the world intact solely through human mental ability.

"Based on the mental world of the oracle, we create highly standardized rules and use them to embody reality in the world. Based on that core theory, Ionian engineers worked hard to create it! That is the crystallization of this over-technology, This is [Homunculus Engine Source Editor]!"

"Yes, but?"

"Ah! So, the principle of this engine editor is based on this [milestone]!"

The way the oracle recognizes the world, modeled after it and made to be implemented stably in reality, is the homunculus engine, the ultimate law that governs the normal world.

"Hmm. Well, I roughly understand, Mr. Dexter."

Seongjin nodded and said.

"But isn't that [engine] entirely Ionian technology? But I understand that the Oracles who created this milestone are prophets of the Kornsim clan from long ago?"

How could the Oracle of Kornsheim, based in Delcross, be related to Ionian over-technology?

Then Dexter asked back as if he was puzzled.

"Isn't that obvious? Isn't Oracle one of the legendary engineers of Ionia who first started this research?"

"Huh? Why is the Oracle in Ionia?"

"The Kornsim clan was originally a people who came from Ionia to Delcross, right?"

".....!"

Border races that made their home at the border of the dimension. In addition to those who currently make up the 'Council of Six', there were central races that lived in the center of the Ionian continent.

One of them is the Kornsim clan.

-Ionian races had unique characteristics that were different from humans. Most races had something called [Essence] that protected and supported the spirit of the clan.

One day, Seongjin heard such an explanation from Seonghwang.

However, unlike most races that place the essence externally and manage it carefully, the Kornsheim clan had humans who performed the role of the essence with advanced mental abilities.

The Oracle was the representative of the Kornsheim race and the living [essence] of the race.

"...wow."

Seongjin opened his eyes round.

Okay, this is definitely surprising.

* * *

Sweet.

Tatiana, who had been attending a political meeting on behalf of Seonghwang for the first time in a long time, took advantage of the short break to visit the office. She had an agenda that she wanted to meet with Seonghwang and hear his words, if possible.

But unfortunately, it was not the Emperor or Chamberlain Louis who greeted her, but Princess Amelia, who was looking at the documents.

Well, if she was in the office, I wouldn't have postponed the political meeting for her.

"Tatiana mommy."

Tatiana stared blankly at Princess Amelia, who greeted her politely.

Although she always called herself 'Empress Mama' in official settings, in private the princess always called herself 'Tatiana

Ermamma.' When she first entered the imperial palace, she had been imitating Logan without even realizing it.

Strictly speaking, it is not a properly formal title, but it may be an area of talent to look friendly rather than arrogant.

"You've been working hard recently to help Your Majesty with his work, Princess Amelia."

"You're helping me out. It would be fortunate if I just stayed by your side and didn't cause you any trouble."

The way she answered shyly was also sweet like a flower.

That beautiful princess certainly resembles His Majesty a lot, but she must also have many similarities with her mother.

What a beautiful woman she must have been to have such a flower-like daughter. Jealousy towards the princess's now dead mother creeps up on her.

But Tatiana never showed it. She was the empress of the most powerful empire on the continent, and she has maintained her empress' dignity without a single flaw until now.

"Father, I heard that His Majesty is still in the prayer room. Now, Director Katrina is attending by his side."

"Really? If you really went to the prayer room, it will take longer than expected for you to come back. I had to interrupt the political meeting for a while because I really needed to ask your opinion..."

Tatiana sighed deeply. Now is the time to focus on the problem at hand rather than vague jealousy.

"Princess Amelia. Do you know anything about the generals who came from the Principality of Asein before the birthday party?"

I asked just in case, and the princess nodded and quickly found the document among the papers.

Tatiana was a little surprised by the quick reaction, but then slowly

lifted the document and frowned. The long notices that had been sent several times in a detailed assortment several months ago were annoying to me for no reason.

"It seems like Grand Duke Asin really wants to push his savings into the imperial capital."

Recently, the western and southern nobles, led by Grand Duke Asin, were rolling up their sleeves to start a full-fledged savings business.

One of the ways is to acquire all the ritual tools used in the imperial capital through savings.

It was a proposal that had once been rejected by the Emperor, but as soon as he left, he pushed it back to the Empress as if to show off.

-Isn't it natural for us, as his beloved children, to provide the best for the Lord!

It was extremely embarrassing when even some high-ranking priests, including Cardinal Benitus, came out strongly.

The budget that had to be executed was a budget, but I was especially concerned that everything was going according to Grand Duke Asin's wishes.

'But now there is no excuse to refuse.'

As Tatiana seemed determined to push through even when she tried to go through all the difficulties, she ended up going to the king's office to ask for his advice.

But Amelia, who was closely examining Tatiana's face, opened her mouth.

"Wow, these savings ritual tools must be so embarrassing for the young priests."

".....?"

When I raised my head, not knowing why, clear gray eyes that looked exactly like Seonghwang sparkled with a bright light.

"According to research, isn't it said that a piece of jewelry weighs 1.5 to 1.8 times more depending on the craftsmanship? It is said that everyone wears small accessories without knowing it, but the weight of ritual utensils will increase significantly."

Tatiana blinked.

... Did you? It was a fact she had no way of knowing, as she rarely cared about the weight of her little trinkets.

"But how difficult must it be for the young priests who have to walk the imperial capital carrying ritual tools made with savings on the saint's feast day? They must be low-level priests with weak physical strength due to their lack of divine power."

".....!"

As the Empress opened her eyes wide, Amelia smiled sadly at her.

"Isn't it the feast day of Bastian, the saint of forgiveness, who forgives and inspires even violent criminals with his love? How much it would hurt the heart of such a kind-hearted saint if he found out about this."

"Is... is that true? Are you properly prepared with the materials?"

"Yes, Tatiana, my dear. There are documents that your father, His Majesty, has ordered you to carefully examine."

After answering that, Amelia walked quickly to one side of the office and took out a stack of papers from a pile of documents. Among all those documents, without any searching work.

Tatiana looked at this as if she were fascinated.

She was once called a prodigy, and at the time, she even studied abroad in Brittany alone, which was rare. Even though she did not have divine powers and could not rise to become a high priest, she had no doubt that she would easily achieve her dream of becoming a competent administrator herself.

What was it like after the Emperor came to the throne? Didn't she even have the ambition to properly lead the empire from the position

of empress?

But above those who run, there are always those who fly.

-That document was processed a week ago, Tatiana. If it's okay, could you take a look at the documents over here?

-The letter you are looking for is in the third booklet from the left.

Tatiana's sense of self-destruction was indescribable when, after wandering around in a mountain of work, she finally realized that leaving Seonghwang alone was the only way to help her.

Is it just that? How could it be possible for an ordinary person to win an argument against strict Orthodox church leaders at a sacred meeting?

It was clear that Seonghwang's mind was filled with an enormous amount of historical information.

The same is true even recently when political affairs have stabilized. Even though she has talented servants working in their respective positions without any gaps, Tatiana sometimes feels that it is very difficult to replace the Holy Emperor when he is away.

'however... ... '

Empress Tatiana looked at Amelia with a suspicious expression and asked a question carefully.

"I heard that there have been several reports of strange storms in Cyprus recently. Can you find the information for me?"

"Yes, Tatyana, mom."

Then again, Amelia answered calmly and began to pick out the documents without hesitation.

'Of course. I'm memorizing everything I've seen once!'

What a terrifying power this is!

Tatyana shuddered.

Those who surround her and flatter her always say: Logan, who is gifted with great divine power and a genius swordsmanship, is well suited to succeed Seonghwang.

'But Your Majesty is not supporting this empire with a sword. His true strength lies in his ability to handle government affairs quickly and accurately.

Since Tatiana does not even have the talent for swordsmanship, let alone divine power, Amelia's abilities come to the fore even more powerfully.

Perhaps the princess's ability is the perfect talent for a leader of a country.

'I thought that one day I would marry a royal from another country and go to Rohan or Brittany...'

Perhaps the princess will emerge as a new competitor in the battle for the throne. Tatiana stood there, stunned, shocked by her sudden realization.

So, she didn't realize that the princess was humming a strange song to herself.

'Cyprus' report this quarter may be... Bam bam bam bam thump thump thump. That's right! 'This is the fourth index!'

262. Source Editor (2)

After that, Dexter's lengthy explanation continued for a while.

The great birth of the Homunculus Engine and the mysterious power of the Oracle that is its basis. Still unsolved mysteries contained in the milestones.

Rather than listening to the scientific history of a world, it felt like listening to a myth or a ghost story.

Thanks to this, Seongjin briefly suspected that Dexter was not actually an engineer, but a follower of yellow media obsessed with UFOs and conspiracy theories.

But fortunately, that explanation did not last long. This is because while Dexter was distracted by talking, Seongjin quickly snatched the milestone from his hand.

"100 million.....!"

Dexter's mouth widened as he looked at the bright red jewel in Seongjin's hand. His face was as helpless as a child who had been deprived of the candy he was trying.

Either way, Seongjin said firmly, thrusting an ice heart at him instead of a milestone.

"Please take a look at this first. I will give you time to explore the milestones later."

"but.....!"

"Mr. Dexter, like I said, this comes first."

I don't have time to do this now. Do you think your father, who is always suffering from lack of humanity, can stay here for a long time?

Dexter, looking at Seongjin's cold face, had no choice but to lower his head and say.

"Then, be sure to show it to me again later...!"

"I promise you this on your honor."

Of course, it has no value to me and I don't have the authority to do it.

But that seemed to be enough. Dexter picks up his ice heart, choking back tears with a resigned look on his face.

"...Keuheuk!"

Oh, I'll give it to you later!

So, don't look like Logan who lost his country. I feel weak for no reason.

In any case, taking Lee Jeong-gil hostage was an excellent choice. Since then, Dexter has been extremely cooperative.

He placed the items requested by Seongjin side by side in front of a huge machine that took up an entire wall of the studio and began to analyze them.

Homunculus engine source editor.

Although it had a name that seemed like adware, similar to malware, Dexter explained several times that this machine was a collection of Ionic over-technology.

The boards, which were studded with old-fashioned crystals, certainly looked quite decent just from the outside.

"Starting with this?"

"Yes, it's something called the Ice Heart of a Glacher Troll."

Dexter placed the ice heart on the analysis panel and started the machine. Then, the small crystals attached to the board started flashing dizzily, and soon numerous letters began to appear on the huge screen. Dexter was a little embarrassed and his eyes widened.

❑ Glacier Troll's Ice Heart ❑

❑ A new item obtained from the Gerardu Valley dungeon boss, the Glacher Troll King. You can set the activity conditions of the registered entity and give commands with simple sentences. ❑

❑ Item grade: A ❑

❑ *Currently unable to check Northland server. ❑

It also contained information that Seongjin had previously confirmed with his spiritual eyes. In full text form without any damage.

"It is true that this is a high-level product. It is just that it cannot be converted properly and therefore does not function in reality. In reality, there are an enormous number of concepts hidden in it. It is so needlessly heavy with data."

Dexter explained that this was probably because it was not made with a homunculus engine from the beginning.

It is said that the records of Glature Trolls appearing in the Demon World go back hundreds of years at best.

Then another question arose for Seongjin.

"But didn't you say earlier that the Homunculus Engine was created in Ionia not that long ago? Less than a few decades ago. But how can something from the normal world have existed even before that?"

Are you saying that the concept of the normal world itself is not that old?

"It is certainly true that the normal world has grown rapidly in recent

years based on the Homunculus engine. However, time does not flow equally in each dimension, and a completely different form of source existed before the normal world in the first place. It is a 'game'. That's what it means."

"...A game?"

I definitely felt that way before. But Seongjin pretended not to know and she asked him back.

"Yes, I heard that one of the engineers designed an engine based on it. In fact, I was introduced to Ionic technology thanks to my relationship with a game company called Impulse Soft."

Dexter, who had said that much, scratched his head with a slightly embarrassed expression.

"Hmm. How should I explain it? It may be a little unfamiliar to beings from another world like you. But regardless of the underlying theory, the way the Homunculus Engine works is actually very similar to Earth's 'game'. there is."

That's why sometimes game data is clumsily converted to that of the normal world. This happens frequently when the rules that govern the normal world are recognized as the source of the normal world.

The game itself can transform into a new world. They are also called the 'early normal world'. It was given this name because it was completely different from the world carefully created based on the Homunculus Engine.

"Perhaps the Glacher Troll that was controlled by this was also not in its proper form. Would you like to see the original?"

As Dexter adjusts the board here and there, a huge monster soon appears on the screen. A rugged monster with huge tusks and long white fur.

It was somewhat reminiscent of a Yeti, but in any case, it would be closer to the name 'Glacher Troll' than its current inanimate form.

"This is also an unknown source from where it came from. It is a very

primitive form of data with polygons surrounding the basic framework. As this became a physical entity through the laws of the normal world, its form completely collapsed and the physical laws of the normal world were lost. It goes against everything."

Seongjin nodded and looked at the screen carefully.

Surely the Glatute Troll moves in ways that are truly incomprehensible. Without a skeleton or joints to support the body, the block of ice was swinging its arms around the empty space.

"So how can we change this now?"

Then Dexter suggested changing the shape of the 'ice heart' a little. The reason was that round, spherical ice blocks were cold and cumbersome to carry.

"Can I make it into a flat rock-like shape? It is said that reprocessing this unidentified source using a homunculus engine was quite popular in Ionia. In particular, the rock is the most basic form, so it is a method used by many."

After hearing those words, Seongjin realized something.

'All the magic stones in the imperial palace treasury were created that way!'

The functions have been reduced for convenience in order to apply them in the real world as they are now, but if you dig into each of the components, they may all be of an incredible level.

And from then on, the arduous work of processing the Ice Heart and Glatute Trolls as desired continued.

Dexter modified some of the data to suit Seongjin's requests, looked at the results, and adjusted them again.

Meanwhile, Seongjin was able to ask him a few more questions.

"Mr. Dexter, I experienced my soul becoming unstable several times while using this ice heart. Do you know why?"

"Well, honestly, what happens to the soul is out of my jurisdiction. I am a technician after all."

Dexter adjusted his goggles and continued.

"I have only seen early Ionian research materials. It is said that unprocessed sources, especially those with excessive functions like this, place a great burden on the mind and body when exposed to them without filtering. That is why the Ionians enjoyed reducing and processing them."

"Then one more thing. I came into this space purely as a soul. But how can things from the normal world come here with the soul? And how are the adjustments made here reflected in reality?"

It was perhaps the most important question, but Dexter's answer to it was simple.

"That's because all objects in the normal world exist based on a kind of 'concept' called the Homunculus Engine."

So, if you touch on the concept here, it also applies to shaved ice in the real world.

But unfortunately, it was impossible to add something that didn't exist at all. Only entities already registered in the Ice Heart can be adjusted.

However, after a fierce battle, apart from shaved ice No. 1, which was completely destroyed and disappeared from the list, and excluding the shaved ice that was not in very good condition, there were only about five left.

The same goes for the two ice hearts taken from the devil. Because Seongjin had fun destroying the ice monsters controlled by the devil.

'If I had known it would be like this, I should have registered a few more decent glitcher trolls when I had time.'

There was no way anyway. I have no choice but to use what's left and make a gift.

Seongjin crafted a Glacher troll to be taken to the imperial capital. Don't forget to engrave the god's symbol on his chest.

'And I'm giving this to the kid again...' ... '

The next thing Seongjin put effort into was a gift to Sisley.

I was thinking about giving something to Amelia and Logan, but I felt like there was no right gift for Sisley.

As a gift from my sister, there is a wonderful sword that was already taken from the Margrave. When I showed it to Logan, who was very knowledgeable about the Henesys longsword, he was very impressed, saying it was a rare and famous sword.

-Seeing as it has a similar center of gravity to Arjuna, it is possible that it was made by the same craftsman. There remains a craftsman's unique habit that only those who have wielded a sword can understand. Even after the fall of Ortona, there are still craftsmen who make such good swords.

It's just that it looks ugly, isn't it a bit unsuitable for a lady? Seongjin smiled confidently at Logan, who had such a nervous look on his face.

-It's okay, it's okay. I assure you, this is totally your taste!

And I thought of everything I could give to Logan.

If the products processed here and the resourcefulness of Branch Manager Schmidt in Regina are combined, something quite worthy will be created.

'And there is also the matter of the Sigismund estate... ... '

It was a time when I thought I could roughly create what I had envisioned in my head.

"Aaaah!"

Dexter suddenly threw away his goggles and let out a strangled groan.

"Oh, no! If this continues, withdrawal symptoms will occur...!"

Then, he grabbed his neck and started rolling around the room!

"Oops! Oops! My passion and curiosity are being suffocated and dying! I can't take it any longer! Save me!"

"....."

Seongjin looked at the fuss with a sullen expression and thought.

'Well, there are all kinds of strange withdrawal symptoms.'

There have been a lot of things I didn't like with the guys who go to engineering school for a long time.

My junior, whom I met at a college club and continued our relationship with at the company until my Hunter days, was also an engineering graduate. And there was something strange about his personality.

"Ugh...."

However, since he had ripped off more than expected so far, Seongjin obediently handed Jomo's pendant over to Dexter. While he does not forget to give attention.

"Please be careful."

Then Dexter, who suddenly became fine, shouted with his eyes shining.

"Of course, I have no intention of handling this precious thing carelessly. I will cherish it and be careful not to cause even a scratch! I promise!"

No, that's not it.

I have a bad feeling that this is something I didn't really want to do earlier.

'Well, I can't help it. 'Because a promise is a promise.'

In this way, the bright red, broken gem entered the Goi Analyzer.

And the moment you turn the machine.

"Oooh!"

Along with the dazzling light on the instrument panel, an enormous amount of data began pouring in.

Windows piled on top of windows. Text is overlaid on the dext. A huge amount of data that cannot even be compared to the ice heart from before!

Beep beep beep beep-

But suddenly, a strange sound began to be heard from the crystal instrument panel. And soon after, a thick black smoke billowed out!

"Dangerous!"

Instead of Dexter, who was absorbed in looking at the monitor, Seongjin quickly snatched the pendant from the analysis panel.

And soon after-

Pow!

The Homunculus Engine source editor was destroyed in a spectacular explosion.

"Aaaah! No! My engine source editor is! The essence of over-technology!"

Dexter falls to the floor with a despairing look on his face and screams.

Oh, that's why I told you to be careful.

[What's going on, Dexter! Are you okay?]

Then suddenly. The door to the workshop opened and the old dragon man strode in.

Then, he freezes on the spot when he sees a machine emitting black smoke.

[The legacy of Ionia...]

Seongjin shrugged his shoulders, but soon made direct eye contact with Seonghwang, who had followed the elder.

Gray eyes that were extremely calm, as if they had anticipated everything.

Seongjin realized what he was thinking and silently screamed.

'No, that means it's all a misunderstanding! This is not me! 'It's real!'

One way or another, Seongjin felt truly unfair.

263. Source Editor (3)

The aftermath of the huge machine being destroyed was enormous.

The workshop quickly became thick with black smoke, but no one was able to take a step from the spot. This is because everyone felt first-hand how big of a deal this accident was.

[The last legacy left by a great civilization...]

Eventually, the stiff-necked old man lamented.

[There is no Ionian engineer left who can properly repair this.]

Dexter muttered that and even had tears in his eyes.

It looked so pitiful that he asked, 'Have you not already mastered Ionic over-technology, Mr. Dexter?' Seongjin, who was trying to tease him, had no choice but to keep his mouth shut.

Moreover, it was definitely not just the machines that caused the catastrophe.

Although it was split in half, the milestone that had been properly attached to the pendant until then was completely torn in two and fell off due to this incident.

While I was fiddling with the piece of the milestone with a sad heart, the old dragon suddenly turned around and glared.

[What are we going to do with this now, Nate?]

what? Why is this old man blaming his father for this?

Seongjin's eyes became sharp, and Seonghwang's attitude as he faced

the elderly man was deceptively carefree.

[What are you telling me to do when everything is broken in due time?]

[You know, right? That is the last legacy left by the Ionian civilization! If your son destroys it on his own, take responsibility for it!]

[You're destroying it arbitrarily. My child will never... It is not a child.]

In response, Seongjin looked up at Seonghwang with resentful eyes.

father? You just hesitated for a moment. What does that mean? yes?

Anyway, as Seonghwang continued to show off in a high manner, the old man changed his methods and began to gently appease him.

[Hey, Nate. How can I help you?]

[This is an unreasonable statement.]

[I don't expect much from you. Can't you just give me some clues so I can fix it?]

[Do you think that is possible?]

Seonghwang looked at the old man with cold eyes.

[The old man who applies such strict standards of cause and effect to me is now telling me to directly touch a machine that disrupts cause and effect?]

[that... But didn't you actually come to use that too?]

[It is a fundamentally different problem for my child to use the machine a little and for me to touch the machine myself.]

Then the old man, speechless, looked into space and sighed deeply.

[Hehe, I heard that it is human nature to have different feelings when coming and when leaving, but I thought you would be different!]

However, there was someone who reacted to an unexpected part of those words.

Dexter, who was shedding tears while looking at the broken machine, looked back at Seongjin with a dumbfounded look on his face.

"...Human? Wasn't it a dragon?"

Everyone's attention was focused on those words, but Seongjin put an iron plate on his face and played it off.

"What do you mean? When have I ever introduced myself to you as a dragon?"

Then Dexter's jaw dropped and his mouth opened.

"I heard you're 640 years old?"

"I once said that I had a mental age of about 640 years. That's because I grew up early and matured."

How dare the whole royal family come to me for life advice? Ah, this contemplative scent that cannot be hidden.

"But you said earlier that you are working hard for 'us'...!"

"Yes, I just expressed my gratitude to Mr. Dexter, an Earthling, for his work for 'our beings of the Delcross dimension.'"

Speaking of dragons, isn't it too much of an illusion? Aren't you too into fantasy, Mr. Dexter?

"...I remember it definitely wasn't that nuance?"

Dexter's face turned bright red, but Seongjin avoided eye contact and looked the other way.

"You tricked me like that when you're not even a dragon? I can't believe I went through all that trouble for this swindler!"

[fraud... ..]

The old man, who saw Seonghwang's eyebrows twitching, quickly

warned Dexter.

[Dexter! These people are from the most noble family in Delcross. Among humans, they can be considered to be at the highest level. So, you must also show proper courtesy to them.]

Then Dexter, who was completely angry, snorted loudly.

"Huh! Sir, I am a person of Earth. Is there any need to force me to bow to them in accordance with such an outdated class system? Yes?"

Seonghwang, who was quietly looking at him, opened his mouth.

[I'm sure he's right, son. Not all dimensions are like ours, and we cannot force Delcross customs on everyone. No matter where you are, the culture and customs of this world deserve to be respected.]

"Yes, father."

[So you cannot charge him with lese majeste. Of course, as much as we respect them, we can expect the same respect for our customs from them.]

aha!

And Seongjin, who clearly understood what he said, nodded.

"Then there is no need to show respect because of one's age. In Delcross, status comes first, so there is no need for me to force myself to follow Earth's customs."

And Seongjin held out his hand with a bright smile on his face.

"Now let's put it all aside and just be friends, Dexter."

"....."

At that moment, the old man and Dexter looked at Seongjin at the same time with dumbfounded faces. At first glance, you might think, 'What is this guy?' He looks like he's thinking about it.

"Why? Did I say something wrong?"

what? why? what?

* * *

Although there was a bit of a commotion, in the end, Seongjin and Seonghwang were able to come out of the gap with a somewhat heartwarming ending.

Thanks to Seonghwang's persuasion, the dragon elder finally came to terms with this disaster.

-That belongs to the culprit that caused the [disaster] of Ionia. It would be better not to function right now.

-Don't tell me what you like about what I brought you here!

-Isn't it the child's fault? Besides, I know you clearly told me earlier that he is my son, right?

-Hmph! Yeah, yeah. Okay, so lighten up your face! Well, if that's you, then it's like that...

It ended pretty well with Dexter too.

This is why Seongjin, who had achieved some satisfactory results, felt sorry for Dexter, who had suffered without gaining anything so far.

'Besides, I don't think we should break up in this bad atmosphere. I somehow feel like I will see this friend again next time...'

Seongjin thought for a moment and then held out the broken half of the milestone to him. Needless to say, Dexter's eyes widened.

-I can't give it to you because it's a keepsake from my grandmother. But if you really want to study it, I can lend it to you for a while. Please don't buy it again and cherish it.

Then, Dexter's eyes suddenly go blank, and he grabs Seongjin's hand and shouts in excitement.

-Thanks, friend!

It was an incredibly quick change of attitude. I wonder if the milestone is such a great thing.

After getting out of the gap between the elders, they began to go back the way they came, wading through the fog again.

[I'm sorry, father, for entrusting your grandmother's belongings to you without permission.]

Seongjin, who was following the hem of the white robes shaking in front of him, spoke. Then Seonghwang answered in a calm voice without even looking behind him.

[It already belongs to you, son. However you use it, everything is yours.]

From the moment Empress Bethsheba first handed over the milestone, she asserted that it did not belong to the Holy Emperor. So, once it breaks, I told you to throw it away so it can go to its owner.

He said it was okay to hand it over to someone you think is the owner. That was why Seonghwang handed a milestone to his godson, Owen, without hesitation.

[If you gave it to that Earthling, it means that your relationship with him will continue in the future.]

The severance of a milestone means the severance of a relationship.

So at that time, at the crossroads in Regina, the Holy Emperor was certain that he and Marie would never meet again. Of course, at the time she thought she would die first.

Of course, Seonghwang had a part of him that he believed in. This is because before leaving her Marie, he made her milestones just for her by putting in all the effort he could.

At the time, I could not have guessed that it would not function properly and that it would be passed down and become stuck around Amelia's neck.

Now that I think about it, I can only assume that Amelia's happiness is what Marie wants most in the world.

[ah! And I have another question.]

At those words, Seonghwang stopped and looked back.

Seongjin walked towards him at a brisk pace and took out a soul stone. It was a soul stone stained black with Hayes' soul.

[This is Hayes, a remnant of the Dark Church. You know it too, right? He is the one who opened the gate to the Heresy Tribunal in the past. What should I do with the interest now?]

[...]]

Then Seonghwang looked at Seongjin's face instead of the soul stone for a moment. As if he was trying to guess what Seongjin was thinking about when he showed this to him.

Tuk-tuk.

He patted Seongjin's head a couple of times as if to comfort him, then turned around and answered.

[okay. Do whatever you want.]

[yes? But this...]

[He paid the price by losing his life at my hands. Things that are completely cut off from this world due to death are no longer my business.]

And he smiled faintly at Seongjin.

[The same goes for any soul subordinate to you. No matter how you use them, I won't care from now on.]

[...] ... !]

It was a word with many meanings.

It doesn't just mean haze or red. Seonghwang knew from the

beginning that there was not one soul subordinate to Seongjin!

As Seongjin stood there blankly, not knowing what to say, he looked somewhere, lost in thought, and then added one word.

[The subordination of the soul establishes an absolute superiority relationship beyond your imagination. So no matter what happens from now on, it will never betray you.]

* * *

When Seongjin opened his eyes in bed, it was already late afternoon. It seems that the time spent working with Dexter in the gap was longer than expected.

Until I closed my eyes, I could no longer see Sir Sharon next to me. Perhaps Seonghwang moved his soul with Seongjin, and Sir Sharon, who was freed from possession, returned to his original state.

-I have already punished Vincent Sigismund greatly. The Margrave will also pay his due someday, so you should not get involved anymore and return to the imperial capital quickly.

Even before leaving, Seonghwang repeatedly urged Seongjin to do so. Even now, he feels angry when he thinks of his sister, but Seongjin couldn't ignore his words.

In any case, the former countess, the culprit of the abuse, will eat well and live well, and then die after enjoying all the life she was given.

'But my father said he had no involvement in anything after death.'

Then it's the same for everyone, whether it's an old man, a margrave, or a former countess. Their true atonement begins only after death.

It was a vague, unfounded premonition, but Seongjin was confident that he would make them pay the full price.

'The question is what my father has in store for the margrave.'

I deliberately tried not to think deeply while I was with Seonghwang.

-Still, I hate him. To the point where I think it's okay to bear the full burden of the sin of arbitrarily moving cause and effect while 'knowing' the outcome.

At the very least, it was clear that he did not want to postpone revenge on the Margrave until after his death. Doesn't it seem like he wants to commit something big even though he is burdened with insufficient cause and effect?

'What on earth is your father planning? 'He's probably thinking something unreasonable, right?

Seongjin, who had been thinking for a while with his arms crossed, suddenly raised his head with a strange feeling of discomfort.

Now that I think about it, why is this guy so quiet? Even though Seongjin was away for a long time without saying a word?

'Hey, devil?'

I called carefully, but there was no answer.

[...]]

Seongjin tilted his head.

After escaping from the Emperor's grace and increasing his radius of action, the Demon Lord sometimes left Seongjin's head and spent his time manipulating creatures such as rats and birds.

But that wasn't the case now. I can definitely feel his presence in my head.

'hey? Are you here? 'Why isn't there an answer?'

As I quietly concentrated my mind, I could feel the demon king's soul curled up inside the flame crystal.

However, unlike usual, I can't understand his emotional state very well, so it seems like he's locked in and trying to save his soul.

Why is he like this all of a sudden?

'Did you leave without saying a word to me and come back upset? But you know that, right? 'I didn't have time to say anything in advance because I suddenly went through a gap.'

[...]]

I guess things are a little strange.

Since he's just a soul, he won't really feel physically ill. what is the problem?

'Do you want bear meat for dinner?'

When I finally pull out my trump card, I hear a voice creeping into my head.

[...] Seongjin Lee.]

'huh.'

[Lee Seong-jin.]

'okay.'

Then the Demon King, who was silent again, hesitated and asked after a while.

[Are you really Lee Seongjin?]

Only then did Seongjin realize that this was not just a matter of the Demon King's mood.

After cursing the old lady earlier, I went straight to the gap and didn't have time to talk to this guy.

What on earth is this guy feeling, and what is he scared of?

'... Oh right.'

[But earlier...]

'are you okay. My father healed everything.'

Seongjin spoke more firmly than ever before.

'Everything is okay now, devil.'

Sniff.

Then, I felt my soul, which had been strained by the decision to burn, finally relax.

[...] Yes, that's right. That can't be possible.]

'... ... '

[Because your father is Seonghwang, he is called the representative of God in this world, so there is absolutely no way you would do that.]

'... ... '

[Sniff. I'm sure it's all just my imagination.]

What on earth did you mean you were mistaken?

But Seongjin couldn't bear to ask that.

The moment you talk about it openly, you and the devil must recognize and face it at the same time. I didn't have the confidence to face it head on yet.

[however...]

The demon lord continued to fidget for a while, and then he asked in a cautious voice.

[Sniff. Are you really going to eat bear meat for dinner?]

'... 'Ugh,'

Seongjin sighed softly.

Max and you, indeed. It's like he has no iron. I'm not raising a child right now.

264. Hwangdo-ro (1)

Seongjin spent some time quietly waiting for the chase team that left for Makyeong to return.

Other than practicing or occasionally going to see Max, I was still in my room.

If possible, I didn't want to encounter the people at the count's residence. Just looking at the servants, as well as the Marquis Baek family, reminded Amelia of her past, making her blood pressure rise and her spine tighten.

Instead, Seongjin was able to focus on training for the first time in a long time.

After receiving Masain's detailed guidance and meditating with Director Bruno, I felt as if I had returned to the Pearl Palace.

"I miss it a little. Those faithful days when I devoted myself to training at the training center all day."

"...Are you serious about that, my Majesty?"

Sir Carmen, who was training next to Leader Bruno, asked Seongjin as if he wanted to hear all the crazy things.

"Tsk. Of course I'm serious. That means you're the least bright."

"yes?"

"Didn't you join before Sir Claudia?"

But why is it so much less bright than hers, huh?

"Ah, I'm so pissed! Please stop making comparisons like that... Eup!"

"....."

"...I'm sorry."

There were so many other things going on here and there that time just flew by just to sort them out.

Thanks to this, it was Dasha who became busy. I heard that in order to carry out the work requested by Seongjin simultaneously in the Imperial Capital and Regina, the Monkey Watchtower was requested to recruit a large amount of personnel.

"Sir, are you really pushing this forward?"

And every time she saw Seongjin's face, she asked worriedly.

"Then. If you're not really doing it, what's the point of all the trouble you've gone through so far?"

"But isn't it too absurd to say it's a business?"

The situation in Delcross was not much different from the Earth where Seongjin lived. This is because it was common for children from high-ranking, prosperous families to recklessly and ambitiously start businesses and then ruin them.

However, it is surprising that a young prince who knows nothing is starting a business that spans the continent.

"Well, Branch Manager Schmidt has already laid out the basics. We have also sought some advice on profitability, so there is no problem."

Moreover, in order for Logan's present being prepared to be completed, Regina needs to start the groundwork right away.

"But no matter how much I think about it, it doesn't seem like it will make a profit. Considering the maintenance costs, it's just right to run into a loss...."

"Uh-huh!"

Basically, in any business, if you can hold on until it stabilizes, half the problem is solved.

Since I have a father, my capital will never dry up, and there will be no competitors, so if I wait, I will find a place someday.

Plus, I have a secret item that I made together with Dexter.

"What on earth is that?"

"I'll show you around in Regina on the way back."

Haha.

Seongjin smiled confidently.

It was around that time that Adjutant Francis arrived in Sigismund.

* * *

"...Are you really saying this is a Glatzer Troll?"

Francis pushed up his glasses and examined the shaved ice with sharp eyes.

Instead of No. 1, which was destroyed in battle, it was Bingsu No. 2 that Dexter asked to adjust. Seongjin had parked it in the back corner of the count's residence.

'Originally, I had planned to enter the country proudly with as many family members as I could.'

The prevailing opinion was that if gigantic beasts walked in a line, the people in the imperial capital would feel scared.

It was as clear as day that ice monsters weighing tens of tons would destroy the well-maintained Imperial Road.

In addition, considering the opposition of the Orthodox Church, an agreement was reached with the Holy Emperor to take only one designated holy relic.

As such, a lot of effort went into shaved ice No. 2.

Seongjin proudly opened his arms wide towards Francis.

"It's not a Glatre Troll, it's Shaved Ice No. 2, Sir Francis. And now it's a holy relic officially approved by the Holy Assembly!"

"You know and I know that's bullshit. And please don't give strange names to things that are meant to be relics."

Perhaps because he had to be away from Director Katrina for a long time, Francis became more grumpy than usual.

However, even he couldn't hide his admiration for a moment when he saw the shaved ice No. 2 that Seongjin showed off.

"His Majesty suddenly asked us to designate a demonic beast as a holy relic, and I thought this was some kind of crazy order. But this is quite enough...."

Well, it wouldn't be unreasonable.

Bingsu No. 2 was no longer an ignorant ice block monster, but was closer to a statue of a knight wearing a fairly decent-looking ice armor.

The armor with the god's symbol embossed on the chest resembled the full armor of the Holy Knights. On the head, instead of a rough face that looks as if it were roughly made of ice, is the delicately carved ice helmet of the Holy Knights.

Where is that?

He wears a long sword made of ice on his waist and a huge cloak with the Lord's emblem engraved on his back, so it can only be described as a noble knight given by the Lord himself.

In addition to being sleeker overall, the size was also reduced to about 5 meters, and the weight was also greatly reduced.

At this rate, you won't have to worry about holes in the ecliptic road every time Bingsu No. 2 walks.

"I'm going to take this and give it to my father. Wouldn't it be nice to display it in the main palace lobby?"

Is proud. I feel like a dutiful son who gave his parents a new car.

"Well, okay. I guess it'll be okay."

Francis took out a thick document and began to diligently edit something into it.

"What is that?"

"This is a draft of the documents to be submitted to the Holy Assembly. Do you know how easy it is to designate a holy relic? We are planning to compile a lot of historical materials based on the amazing continental tour. All the details must be correct at that time so there will be no noise later."

After responding like that, Francis narrowed his eyes and focused on filling out the documents.

"First of all, let's call this Glacher Troll the relic 'Knight of Grace'. Wouldn't it be better if it's intuitive and plain?"

It was an action that completely ignored the original name of Shaved Ice No. 2.

Seongjin glared at him with dissatisfied eyes, but he paid it no heed and began to scribble corrections with a single stroke of his hand.

Hmm, it would be better to completely change the expression to 'Knight of the Lord' rather than 'Giant of the Lord'. There are many things that don't fit the description of size. Should we change the expression, 'It is said that when he raised his huge body, it was like a mountain rising', to 'When the knight raised his sword, he was so majestic that it seemed as if he could split the mountain'? It would be better to completely delete the eyewitness account of a giant walking across Lake Salz. If you went into the center of a lake that size now, you would probably be submerged up to your head. Wouldn't it be a little funny? Other than that, I think the overall description in the book may be a bit problematic. Ah, for this part, it would be quicker to completely overhaul [Exploring the Miraculous Continent]. And

again...

Seongjin, who was listening next to him, was very embarrassed.

"You even edit books that have already been published?"

Then Francis responded calmly without even looking up from the documents.

"Yes, well. Isn't [Exploration of the Miraculous Continent] a banned book that will never see the light of day if left as is? This was a planned procedure from the time we decided to exclude it from the list of banned books."

"....."

"Why are you surprised when the scriptures have been revised several times at a holy meeting? Still, it will be quite a sight to see when the revised first edition is published in the Imperial Capital. How about purchasing one for yourself? It is rumored to be quite interesting."

Tear up the scriptures and change them? For Seongjin, who lived on modern Earth, this was something he couldn't even imagine.

Seongjin, curious, glanced sideways at a document that Francis had finished editing.

-On the day that Granus visited the Devil's Palace under the orders of the Holy Emperor, auspicious light was shining from all directions. It is truly the divine will of the Lord being exercised on this earth. Then the representative of God said, "This is to prepare for the dark shadow that will one day fall on the kingdom of the Lord, so send down the divine giant and send down a knight who has received grace..."

They wrote a myth.

Isn't this a full-blown fabrication? Where did your conscience go?

"Your Majesty's work has always been like this since long ago. Even when you drove out the Dark Church from the Ecliptic, you completely tore up and changed the scriptures. Everyone is muttering

about it, but it is a fact that everyone in the know knows."

"...Father?"

"Yes. It's not just your Majesty. Among the successive emperors, there was one who cut out an entire chapter of the scriptures. It was so long ago that we no longer know the contents. It was just that it contained secret stories from the time of the founding of the nation, such as Delcross. There are a lot of rumors that it was an apocalypse that predicted the destruction of ."

Francis, who had said that much, narrowed his eyes and glared at the document as if there was something blocking it.

"Well, it cannot be denied that it is the most efficient way to rule the empire, but it is necessary to consider whether it is the right attitude as the representative of the main lord. To be honest, the current Majesty is also a person who has completely built a wall with his conscience, isn't he?"

Then Seongjin burst into tears and opened his eyes.

"But doesn't the fact that you are here mean that you were on Lord Katrina's orders? Then the leader is also an accomplice. Why are you doing this only to my father?"

Then it was Francis' turn to get upset.

"No, the one who gave the command and the one who received the command are the same?"

"When has your father ever forced an unreasonable order on the leader? I guarantee you that leader Katrina would have had no doubts about her father's orders."

Sir Katrina is said to be like her father's mirror, carrying out her father's orders. Then does that mean that she either has no thoughts of her own, or is equally as far from a conscience?

Then Francis put the documents down on the floor and shouted.

"Ik! How can you say such a thing about our fair and fair leader?"

Everything the leader does is right!"

"Then everything your father does is right!"

"Yes, sir! I will say so! Ah, it's not like the kids are fighting right now, what is this!"

"Don't be ridiculous! You've already committed all kinds of blasphemy, so why are you pretending to give in now?!"

The two fought uselessly for a while, but finally stopped the fight thanks to the intervention of Masain, who came running after seeing the commotion.

"Francis. You're usually fine, but I don't know why people turn into idiots when it's only Director Katrina who gets caught."

Masain, who was scolding Francis, turned his head to Seongjin and sighed softly.

"Why do you all do this when you're with me, Logan, Francis...?"

".....!"

Seongjin was greatly shocked.

No, this is my fault now, Lord Martha? Is that it?

[Then whose fault is this?]

'shut up!'

Anyway, Francis, who had finished the report on Shaved Ice No. 2, this time traveled around the Sigismund Territory to investigate eyewitness accounts of the 'miracle'.

However, gathering testimonies from the people of the territory without much fabrication was simpler than expected.

Because it was such a big deal, there was no panic, and because the battle took place in the dark, few people remembered the details of Bingsu's appearance.

-The ice soldiers given by the Lord appeared with divine light and defeated the demonic beasts!

That wasn't holy light, it was probably a flashbang.

-The brilliant light that bounced every time God's apostles swung their fists!

As I punched ignorantly, the ice on my fist broke and bounced in all directions.

-Where is that? The huge Sigismund badge proudly flew on his back, and the main god's symbol was clearly engraved on his chest!

It seems that Sir Valerie's clumsy appearance looked quite convincing.

"Everything has been resolved with this. Now, even the Crusade will not stumble over this matter."

Francis, who had been diligently organizing the remarks, spoke in a relaxed manner.

His mood also improved with the anticipation that he would be able to return to the imperial capital earlier than expected.

"Well, it seems like it was somewhat vague."

Seongjin was still in a dazed mood. It seems like something is solved so haphazardly.

Unfortunately, many of the soldiers who witnessed shaved ice in broad daylight were killed. Including old Sir Hans, who guarded the Gorge Fortress.

This means that there are not many people left who can disagree with this story.

The blunt Orden is silent, as if his silent mouth has been completely shut.

-So, they weren't just glamor trolls, but knights of grace, or

messengers of God? Oh oh! As expected! Somehow, from the moment I first saw it, I felt a sacred energy!

Sir Oscar, who was a sane witness, went one step further and went to all the bars in the estate to spread the rumor.

Now the bard Laurent had come to compose and sing an absurd song based on his testimony.

The prince firmly raised his hand and pointed to the white horizon.

Behold those cold invaders! That is our old enemy!

At that light gesture, the knight of grace bestowed by the Lord swings his sword... ..

Seongjin, who was watching the unfolding situation in bewilderment, could not help but shake his head in frustration.

Anyway, what is a world without proper media?

"Well, isn't that a good thing? It's nice that there's a lot less work to do thanks to this."

Francis, who completed all the work in just two days, gave instructions to Seongjin with a rare bright face.

"Then, I will go to the imperial capital first. Please, Your Majesty, please take your time and come back slowly. Although the documents are fully prepared, it will take some time to convene the Holy Assembly and designate the 'Knight of Grace' as a relic."

After Francis left the estate in peace. Soon after, the chase party returned to the estate. Including Logan and Lilium's detachment, still wearing their white, shining uniforms.

Now the moment has truly come for Seongjin to leave the territory.

"Margrave Hendrik. If you have time, please speak with me for a moment."

And Seongjin visited the Margrave's study that evening. Before he

returned to the imperial capital, there was still some negotiation to be done with him.

265. Hwangdo-ro (2)

Margrave Hendrick was troubled by the recent situation. Because nothing matched his expectations.

'It's something that couldn't have happened in the first place.'

The Margrave always had a plan that was almost perfect, considering as many variables as possible, and there were several levels of preparedness in case the plan went awry due to irregularities.

Therefore, he was not embarrassed when Prince Mores suddenly appeared at the estate and demanded that the distribution of medicinal tea be stopped. If the medicine cart didn't work, he had another next step.

The same goes for the fact that they were unfazed by the unprecedented air raid. He had a final bastion that he kept hidden until the very end.

'But why?'

If you think about it, the answer was obvious.

Strangely, the variables created by Prince Mores are always far outside the range that humans can anticipate and prepare for.

Everything is turning around the prince. Not only the medicine cart, but also the Milo Sangang, and even the movements of the Penitent Church.

'Now it's a holy relic!'

At first, I thought it was some kind of nonsense, but isn't it really the Ice Knight who is supporting the Count's mansion?

An inspector of relics dispatched from the imperial capital even officially prepared documents, saying it was evidence that the 'Knight of Grace' had descended. It was a situation he could never have predicted in advance.

'I thought the prince would try to cover this up quietly... ... '

This is the position of Prince Mores, about whom there were once disturbing rumors.

Anyway, there would be no benefit in making it widely known that he had moved the magical beast, so I was just trying to take some advantage by pretending to cover it up.

But now the situation has become the opposite.

'Rather than the stigma of being a territory that survived with the help of a demonic beast, it is a hundred times better to be known as a territory that the main lord personally protected by sending down holy relics!'

Therefore, Prince Mores also did not tell the Margrave in advance. It was as if the Margrave was returning back what he had arbitrarily tried to reduce to the princes' merits.

In any case, the continent would be in an uproar with the news of the relic's arrival. Sigismund's desire to show off his firmness to the North was in vain.

If this is the case, then what is the meaning of curtailing the activities of the princes? Also, what will happen to the relationship with the Penitent Church from now on?

'Besides, Prince Mores probably won't just let it go.'

My head was already aching as to what the prince would demand in return for trying to reduce the Duke.

However, the day before he left, this was what Prince Mores said to the Margrave when he appeared in the study.

"Margrave, give me Max."

".....?"

"I promise. I will make Max happier than anyone else in the world."

For a moment, the Margrave did not quite understand what he had heard.

On the other hand, a list of useful talents in the territory, from the Wolf Knights to the lowest ranking soldiers, flashes through my mind.

'Lord Marx is an old man about to retire. I heard that Marx, who came from the village below me recently, is quite talented, but he is still at the squire stage. Not only do neither of them have any contact with Hae-jae, but they probably aren't talents worth coveting either. Who on earth... ..!'

Then the prince added with a pitiful look on his face.

"What are you thinking about, Margrave? Is that something you should think about for a long time?"

"I apologize, sir. But which Marx are you talking about...?"

"What on earth are you talking about? I'm talking about a wolf dog in a kennel."

"Ah? Yes. Is that so?"

I heard there's a wolfdog that's definitely cute.

Still, the reason I didn't think of it right away was because I never thought the prince would ask for that dog from the beginning.

Above all, Margrave Hendrick did not remember the names of each of the dogs he owned. Although he knew all the human resources of the territory, the number of dogs was important, and he was completely uninterested in the characteristics of small individuals.

"What can I do? Can you give it to me?"

"Of course, my lord. As a hound, you can do whatever you want."

Trying to use the disposition of a dog that is not even part of the negotiation agenda as a tile may have the opposite effect. In that case, it would be better to at least be kind to the other person.

"Good. After all, you are someone who knows how to communicate."

The prince smiled in satisfaction, then walked to the side and pulled out a book from the study.

He flipped through it carelessly, put it on the bookshelf, and took out another folder.

It was the same thing that old Vincent sometimes did when he came into the study for business.

"....."

The Margrave barely suppressed his frown.

The study is his space, a space completely controlled by his own rules. And he absolutely hated any disruption of the rules.

He couldn't help but lament that Prince Mores and Old Man Vincent, the two people he couldn't mess around with, had similar habits.

"To be honest, Margrave, I was a little impressed this time."

widely.

Eventually, Prince Mores put the documents he was holding into the bookshelf and turned his head.

"Sigmund's power is beyond imagination. The ice wall was destroyed and many soldiers were killed or injured. Also, part of the territory became a battlefield and was completely destroyed. But even in such chaos, the people of the territory did not shiver from the cold and never starved. "There is none."

Although it may seem like a compliment, it is not a very good thing to hear as the beginning of a negotiation. So does this mean that they will tear it apart as much as they want without hesitation?

However, as always, the Margrave bowed his head, skillfully hiding his expression.

"That's too much praise, my lord. This is the result of not being negligent in preparing for the danger that is the devil's side."

"Yes, I know. I guess I've been saving it up little by little over the years in preparation for an emergency."

Somehow this feels strange.

Margrave Hendrick furrowed his eyebrows as he thought about its meaning, but Prince Mores, who had been staring at him quietly, continued.

"That's why I became even more convinced. That you don't care about your own self-interest and work harder than anyone else only for the future of the territory."

"Since you know so much, I don't know what to do, my dear."

Even as he answered, the Margrave was puzzled.

What on earth does the prince want to say?

"But Margrave, I sometimes feel this way when I look at you recently."

Prince Mores crossed his arms and tilted his head.

"Does the prosperity of the territory have value in itself to you? Regardless of the well-being of the count or the people of the territory."

"...Huh? What do you mean?"

"That's exactly what it says. You have the most promising son on the continent, and you have loyal residents who protect the territory even in the harshest cold. But are they and the territory completely different?"

"....."

"The medicine cart thing at the top of Milo is a good prediction. Why do you sometimes get the feeling that what you do is in complete parallel with their well-being?"

Of course it is different. To Hendrick, they are members of the territory, not the territory itself.

But from many years of experience, the Margrave knew that this was the wrong answer.

"If you feel that way, it is only a result of my shortcomings. I am only completing this body for the sake of the people of the territory and the empire."

Then, cold, colorless eyes, similar to the eyes of Seonghwang, whom he once encountered, quietly gazed at him.

"I have only one question to ask, Margrave."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you already know that they were going to bring out [penitent wood]?"

The Margrave, who had suddenly hit the nail on the head, was almost startled.

However, with a really desperate effort, I was able to stop my facial muscles from twitching for a split second and make a puzzled expression. It was a skillful response that the young prince would not have dared to see through.

"Who are they, sir? And what is penance?"

The Wolf Knights had already heard about the attack by the Demon Tree.

However, it is true that not many people know about its second name, [Chamhoemok]. If you understand it right away, there will be nothing more suspicious.

But the margrave had no idea. Something in the prince's mind just

whispered this in his ear.

It is a lie.

"....."

And the prince smiled. It was an eerie smile that you would never expect a young boy to make.

"Well, then. Enough introduction. Now, shall we talk about the remaining calculations?"

For some time thereafter the Margrave discussed future compensation with Prince Mores.

The content was nothing special.

Prince Logan and the Liliium Detachment will send a formal letter of appreciation to the Imperial Capital for their activities in the Demonic World.

And in the deal with the new merchant, we will recognize several priority exclusive rights.

It may have been large, but it was within the range that the Margrave had assumed. On the contrary, compared to the prince's temperament that was previously understood, it is rather generous.

'Have you looked into the situation of the territory? Since he's been quiet up until now, I thought he was going to try and extort a lot of money.'

After sending the prince off, the Margrave approached the bookshelf. I had to straighten out his rules that had been bothersome from before and had been disturbed by others.

However, the Margrave, who was trying to quickly sort things out, suddenly realized an unbelievable fact and stopped dead in his tracks.

'... 'Is it the same?'

Nothing has changed.

Not only the order of bookshelf and documents arranged according to complex rules, but also the intentional disorder that is cleverly arranged.

'I was clearly watching with my own eyes as they picked things out and rummaged around!'

At that moment, the words the prince uttered in passing came to mind in the Margrave's mind. And she realized the reason for the discomfort she felt earlier.

-okay. I know. It must have been saved little by little over the years in preparation for an emergency.

What it meant was clear. It is said that the prince has already investigated all of Sigismund's material movements over the years.

I also saw top-secret materials that were never exposed to the outside world and that only a few people, including the Margrave, knew about!

The Margrave stared blankly into space in shock.

'Since when did the prince start going in and out of the study? How far did you see it? No, how far did he figure out my plan!

Of course, we do not create documents with dangerous content just to show off. All plans and materials are in the Margrave's head.

However, some people infer many things just by listing seemingly meaningless data.

'I didn't just come for negotiations. He was warning me.'

The Margrave, who realized that his rules were not an all-purpose lock, couldn't help but feel sad for an instant.

* * *

[So what was the conclusion? What on earth did you threaten?]

'well...'

In fact, although he pretended to be in front of the Margrave, Seongjin was also unable to completely understand the specific plan the Margrave had in mind.

'In the end, we have no choice but to finish on a moderately warning note.'

Of course, when I think of what the author did to my sister, I want to rip off every single capillary, but if that happens, it is not the Margrave who will suffer, but the subjects of the Sigismund Order.

The Margrave is not by nature a person of extravagance, but is a person who manages funds rationally for his fiefdom.

Now, Sigismund, which has been hit by an unexpected disaster, will have to claim more support.

'The Margrave has one last move he is hiding. It's also probably related to the Dark Church.'

Seongjin rested his chin and was lost in thought.

'I guess I won't be able to take my eyes off Sigismund for a while, right? Should I tell Dasha to mobilize all of Monkey Watchtower's agents to keep a close watch... ..'

However, the Demon King said that he did not feel any special magical energy in the territory.

Somehow, I can't shake the feeling that there are limits to the human eye. If they dig too deep, it will be difficult for the agents to get out.

In the end, Seongjin, who had been thinking about it, came to a conclusion.

'Let's leave this matter to Schmidt.'

Since he is the branch manager who will win Sigismund's anti-monopoly contract anyway, shouldn't he put in this much effort?

It would be good to keep an eye on him as he goes back and forth about contract issues, and he has a pretty cute demon in his

household who cries at meeme.

[what? Do you like a family member who makes such soft animal cries? Is that why you find that mongrel dog that makes bullshit cute?]

'Why have you been tripping over strange things for a while now?'

But their conversation did not continue any further. This is because I encountered a not-so-pleasant person in the hallway.

"Sir, what's going on!"

The Margrave's second son quickly approached him with joy. He looked like he was going to take out everything, including his liver and gallbladder, but Seongjin just stared at his face without answering.

"....."

"How can you say that?"

Seongjin vaguely remembered the sharp thoughts he had heard while in a dazed state after drinking medicinal tea.

-Orden That bastard, it's so disgusting to see him pretending so arrogantly without knowing the end. I wish I could go somewhere and die.

Dry eyes behind that loose smile. He's probably the one who has the most of the Margrave's personality, but his head doesn't turn that much.

Seongjin looked at him blankly and asked.

"Where is the Archduke?"

Crispy. Emmett's smile cracks.

"yes?"

"I have no business with you. Where is your brother?"

Then he wheezed, clearly showing his face color changing. Compared to my father, I still have a long way to go.

But no matter what he was thinking, Emmett had to give an appropriate answer to the prince's question.

"...It will be at the training ground. I will guide you."

"No, you don't have to."

Seongjin responded like that and walked past him.

"Unlike others, the Archduke's Auror activity is very strong. It's not a sign that can be hidden just by hiding it."

"....."

"Why don't you just train like your brother instead of bandaging your healthy arm? Or go and help with the estate work. What is a grown man doing that's a trickster?"

Sensing the fierce gaze following him from behind, Seongjin snorted and quickened his pace.

"There's this guy and that guy, and there's really no one I like in the Sigismund family.'

I think Orden is the best among them.

... On the topic of Orden.

266. Hwangdo-ro (3)

What Seongjin said to tease Emmett wasn't completely empty.

As I was roughly walking in the direction of the training ground, I was able to sense Orden's strong aura emitting with strong fighting spirit.

'Anyway, his momentum is at the level of a knight commander.'

It was there for a while, but if you think about it, when you first saw it in the imperial capital, it gave off such tremendous energy.

While he usually spoke little and was serious, the Aurors he operated were extremely rough and rogue.

'Seeing as they are completely different from the Wolf Knights, it may be the influence of their teacher Balthazar... ..'

Seongjin, who entered the entrance to the training ground, was able to find Orden swinging his sword hard alone in light clothes on this cold day.

And I was momentarily distracted by his unique sword play.

'That's an old sword technique... ..!'

Orden's swordsmanship teacher is Balthazar, the greatest knight on the continent.

And Balthazar was famous for teaching his students the old sword techniques before Banajas organized them. Thanks to this, there was a craze for old-fashioned swordsmanship among the continent's greatest swordsmen.

-If you want to truly understand the essence of a sword, be sure to learn its original form!

It may not be a completely unfounded rumor.

Certainly, Orden's movements and Auror's use had many minor details that were not found in the standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights. However, it has a quite old-fashioned and old-fashioned taste.

Obviously, as there are more forms and forms, it is likely to be more varied and diverse than standard swordsmanship.

'But that's not all.'

While using such delicate swordsmanship, the momentum emitted is also such rough and free-spirited.

Perhaps it is because the intention behind the sword is different from others. Seongjin, who was now somewhat familiar with swordsmanship, could vaguely guess it.

Until now, Seongjin had had the opportunity to catch a glimpse of Orden's sword several times.

However, seeing him unfold the equations one after another like this, I was able to see more clearly the difference between him and other people.

It is different from the sword of Sir Martha, the so-called genius, as well as the sword of Commander Bruno.

Unlike those who are constantly striving towards the goal of an ideal sword in their head, they are already fully prepared to communicate with the world with just a sword.

In some ways, he may be most similar to Logan.

'... That's what a true sword genius is.'

These are people who, if you teach them one thing, learn the principles of the world on their own.

Seongjin, who relies on intuition, hunches, and painstaking repetitive training, is something I will never be able to understand.

Look at it now. Isn't it so natural to unconsciously melt one's thoughts and one's life into the sword?

What was in front of Seongjin now was the still green sprout of the Sword Master.

'If several guys like that grow up and become my father's strength one day... ..'

Suddenly, I felt very regretful.

At that time, Orden, who noticed Seongjin's presence, stopped his sword and slightly lowered his head.

"Lowering."

"Uh, sorry for interrupting your training."

"no."

Orden answered briefly and approached Seongjin with his sword in hand.

There was a time when I thought that blunt attitude seemed very arrogant. After dealing with so many of Sigismund's shady guys, I now feel like this guy seems more unpretentious and upright.

Sheesh, on the topic of Orden.

Seongjin, who was thinking with a shocked face, opened his mouth.

"Tomorrow we will leave for the imperial capital, Grand Duke."

"Yes, I heard from Hermann. Even so, I wanted to greet you today, Your Majesty."

After answering that, Orden's eyes darkened.

The young man, who had always seemed calm, had been looking a little depressed recently.

A series of incidents and accidents in the territory and discord with the Margin. And an uneasy premonition that something unusual is happening under the water that he doesn't know about.

All of these things came rushing in at once and were tormenting the young man.

But even amidst the chaos, one thing was certain. It's like the great favor that Prince Mores bestowed on Sigismund.

"Thanks to you, not only did we solve the medicine cart incident, but we were also able to protect the territory from the demonic beasts without major damage. We, Sigismund, owe you the greatest debt..."

Seongjin looked at him, who bowed his head politely, with a bored look on his face.

Oh please! You buy things like that and go into debt. When are you going to pay it all off?

Are you going to mortgage your soul to me later?

"Goodbye. So speaking, would you like to go to the imperial capital with us?"

"...yes?"

When Orden raised his head with a puzzled expression, Seongjin started talking gibberish about reasons he didn't even know.

"Well, when I came here, I felt comfortable with you and the Wolf Knights escorting me. So I hope it will be the same when I leave."

".....?"

"When I get to the imperial capital, I will immediately confiscate and wipe out the Milo merchants. Don't you want to see what happens to Giacomo Milo's trial?"

"...Lowering."

"Ah! Now that I think about it, you've been attending martial arts

competitions lately, so you haven't had a chance to study swordsmanship with Lord Balthazar, right? How about you just sit back in the imperial capital for a while and focus on training?"

Even though I said that, I didn't have any particularly high expectations for Seongjin. As Sigismund's eldest son, there was no way he could be away alone at a time when he was busy taking care of the territory.

As expected, Orden had a rare, faint smile on his blunt face.

"I can't escort you like I did when I came, but I'm relieved that the Lilium Special Forces are with you on your way back."

"....."

"I will be able to greet you again at the imperial capital at next year's birthday party."

Well, I thought so.

Seongjin scratched his cheek and then searched his pockets.

'It's a bit of a waste for Sigismund to give it to him, but... ... '

Seongjin hesitated for a moment, then sighed and held out an ice heart to Orden.

"You have this. I briefly thought about leaving it to the Margrave, but I don't think he would use it very well."

"...Yes? But I don't know how to handle this, sir."

Orden, who received the ice heart, answered as if he were embarrassed.

"It's okay. I removed most of the functions and made it like a normal magic stone. It will be easier to use now."

Seongjin then lowered his voice and explained in detail how to use it so that only Orden could hear.

As they sensed that the gaze from the Count's mansion's window towards them did not stay away for a long time, emitting a dark light.

* * *

The next morning.

After completing preparations to go to the imperial capital, Seongjin and his party gathered in front of the count's residence.

The Liliun detachment also joined the several wagons that the Margrave brought as a token of gratitude, making the group quite large compared to when they came.

And there was an unexpected party there. Lord Ilma, who resigned as leader of the Wolf Knights, decided to go to the imperial capital with Seongjin and his party.

"Are you sure you're okay, Sir Ilma?"

"Yes, sir. It is an honor to serve you again this time."

Lord Ilma answered calmly and smiled softly.

Her face was haggard as ever due to recent mental hardships, but even so, her eyes were shining with determination.

"Perhaps Luise headed to southern Anatolia."

Sir Ilma said that if he were to separate from Seongjin and his party in the imperial capital, he planned to go on a long trip south in search of his daughter.

When learning and experiencing something new, you probably think of the unfamiliar and stable South rather than the familiar and chaotic North.

Seongjin, who knew that Louise had actually entered the demonic realm, felt sick to her stomach for no reason and avoided her gaze.

"But what happens to the Wolf Knights when the Lord leaves?"

"I decided to entrust the job to Sebastian. Sorry, but my husband is also a member of the Wolf Knights. He will probably get used to it quickly and be able to do it more skillfully than I can."

From being a guard captain to being the leader of the Wolf Knights? Wouldn't that be a bit too much work?

Sir Ilma smiled bitterly, wondering how he had noticed Seongjin's notice.

"He needs heavy responsibilities and a lot of work for the time being. Don't let him have any foolish thoughts. Otherwise, he's going to run into the devil's land right now to find his daughter."

Sir Sebastian is said to have spoken to Sir Ilma several times.

-Ilma, don't you know what my nose is like? Strangely, I feel like I can smell Louise from the north along with the scent of flowers. Maybe our Louise may have headed to the magic world.

But even he couldn't be completely sure. Not only was there no reason for her daughter to go to her temple, but now her body odor had become so distant that it was impossible to trace it.

"...Louise will be safe. She is a shrewd and smart child."

This may be the only consolation that can be given to parents who have lost a child.

However, despite Seongjin's uncertain voice, Lord Ilma smiled brightly. As if even the slightest trace of her daughter flowing from her stranger's mouth was precious.

"Yes. Thank you very much for taking care of Louise so far, sir."

In front of the count's residence, there was an incomparably larger number of residents gathered than when Seongjin arrived.

To send off the princes and the Lilium Detachment that saved the territory from danger. and-

Cooung, cooung.

It was to see the 'Knight of Grace' proudly leading the way in front of the group.

The large brown cloak, like that of a knight of the Royal Guard, has a clear pattern of the main deity, and the ice helmet and armor that are directly exposed to the sunlight sparkle with a beautiful silver-grey brilliance.

The sight of ice coming alive and moving is truly a miraculous sight rarely seen in one's life.

"Oh, that is the true grace of the main god!"

"A miraculous knight who saved the territory from demonic beasts!"

And this time, even Margrave Hendrick could not avoid Logan.

Up until now, he had been able to make excuses about returning to the territory or the chase team, but he, the owner of the territory, could not be left out even at the farewell ceremony for the prince and the detachment.

"Sigmund will not forget for a long time the fact that you two took the lead in helping the territory. We have already sent a formal letter of thanks to the imperial capital. Please take a look."

He gave a brief greeting to Logan and Seongjin from a distance, and hurriedly hid himself behind the workers, fearing that no one would touch him.

It stayed like this until the end, and Logan was quite embarrassed.

"Why on earth is the Margrave so annoyed with me?"

With those words as small as a sigh, the eyes of the three musketeers of the detachment, Sir Otto, Sir Ellie, and Sir Duchamp, suddenly become sharp.

"How dare he attack His Majesty Logan!"

"How can there be someone who doesn't have a case?"

"Ah, it's pitiful. You don't yet realize how great a blessing it is to be able to be in your sight even just for a moment!"

... No, Sir Duchamp. Didn't that go a little too far?

However, Seongjin also does not know English.

This is because, before coming to Sigismund Territory, I had already confirmed several names in the [Contract List] with Branch Manager Schmidt. And as far as Seongjin knew, the Margrave was never a devil contractor.

But why on earth are you avoiding Logan like that?

As if there was something to hide from the strong paladin. Or as if he wants to give the impression that he is hiding something.

'If you think about the author's personality, I guess...'

"Hmm."

Seongjin's thoughts could not continue for long. At that moment, someone came up next to me and cleared their throat lightly.

After several collisions, old man Vincent became very intimidated and tried to avoid meeting Seongjin as much as possible. As Sigismund's eldest adult, it seems he couldn't avoid this place either.

"Ah, thank you for your hard work so far."

"Don't say things you don't mean, you old man."

The eyes of the employees of the count's residence behind him widen at those rude words.

However, I couldn't help but say something blunt. Just think of what this guy did to your sister!

But what is happening? The old man, who normally would have expressed his displeasure, seems to have passed it off with a relaxed expression today.

Not only that.

His face, as he secretly extended his hand to Seongjin, showed a kind of confidence whose basis was unknown.

"Hmm, I gave it to you. It's hardly a gift in return, but if you need it, you can take it or not."

".....!"

Seongjin blinked as he checked the old man's hand. On top of his palm, another heart of ice was resting, glowing with a faint light.

-If possible, why not take them all with you? I think you'll get another heart soon.

Now that I think about it, Seonghwang said something like that before leaving the gap.

But I never thought I would really bring this.

"The old man did everything to help for the first time."

The spirit may be hateful, but there is no sin in the heart of ice. Even so, the ice heart I gave to Orden was a bit of a waste.

Seongjin is so pleased and extends his hand...

"excuse."

There was a hand quickly intercepting it from the side.

"...Logan?"

".....!"

Old man Vincent's eyes widened. How common is it for someone to casually steal a Dekaron Knight's belongings?

But Logan held up the ice heart and smiled with an extremely polite face. Being able to rob others and still look decent was a talent.

"Thank you in exchange for the gift you gave to Mores. But Sir

Vincent, isn't this an item used by a devil's companion? Although it is weak, it is imbued with demonic energy."

"Well, that's...."

"Sir Vincent, the Dekaron Knight, is fine, but ordinary people can be fatally affected by demonic energy."

Then, the old man who was watching Logan's eyes turned pale as if something occurred to him. Then, his confidence goes out of nowhere, and as he becomes so discouraged, he quietly disappears.

"Why is he avoiding me again?"

In the hands of Logan, who spoke in a puzzled way, a seemingly sacred divine power shone brightly.

"What are you doing now?"

"purification."

Logan answered briefly and held out his hand. And unlike before, the ice heart, which became a clear light, rolled down onto Seongjin's hand.

Seonghwang and Logan were truly people who did not know how to waste their divine power.

"Uh, thank you."

"What? With something like this."

"But you can look forward to it. I have something for you too. I've prepared something great for Regina right now!"

As Seongjin laughed mysteriously, Logan muttered with a slightly worried expression.

"When you laughed like that before, I think what you gave me was a necklace made from a rhinoceros beetle."

Uh-huh! You should keep to yourself the dark history of your

childhood that you cannot remember.

Logan looked at Sungjin's confident face and raised the corners of his mouth.

"What on earth are you hiding? You seem really confident?"

Of course, Logan.

You'll probably find an unexpected gift in Regina.

And ten days later.

In front of the large banner hanging in Regina, Seongjin spread his arms wide and shouted to Logan:

-Bertrand & Lee

"Congratulations on becoming co-president of a new company with no performance yet, Logan!"

267. Bertrand & Lee (1)

I heard that after the fall of Ortona, a large number of northerners, tired of their increasingly difficult lives, turned to bandits.

However, who could stand in the way of a procession led by the 'Knight of Grace' at the front and escorted by a Lilium detachment driving horses with flashing white livery on the side?

The road back to the ecliptic was more peaceful than when heading to Sigismund.

Meanwhile, Seongjin spent most of his time in the carriage with Logan or Sir Martha.

I've had lunch with Logan at the Pearl Palace before, but this is the first time I've been stuck with him all day like this.

Thanks to this, Seongjin learned just how extreme the Lilium Detachment Unit was.

In particular, the peak of these were the Three Musketeers of Lilium, Otto, Ellie, and Sir Duchamp.

"Sir, here are some scriptures and holy water for your morning prayers."

"Ah, thank you again, Sir Otto."

"Sir, I combed Roxanne's fur this morning."

"Good job, Sir Ellie. You don't have to do that, Roxanne would have been very pleased."

"Sir, I know you will be on your way, but would you like me to recite

a collection of poems by your favorite Ortona next to you?"

"No, it's okay. Thank you for your attention, Sir Duchamp."

Seongjin stuck out his tongue.

The Liliun Detachment was also a detachment, but Logan was just as amazing. How can he just smile and get over those annoying writers with their eyes shining all day long?

[Why is it so bad? I heard that in the past, that guy tolerated Mores' evil behavior like a saint?]

'hmm... ... '

Seongjin became solemn for a moment at the devil's point.

"They are so diligent and lead by example in everything they do, so I can't help but say that they are truly a role model for Holy Knights. I am always learning a lot from them."

"...You're kidding, right?"

Manager Bruno, who could not be seen from the side, also frowned at Seongjin.

"That's what the Liliun Detachment was like. I can admit that they serve His Majesty Logan wholeheartedly, but I can't help but think that they are truly extreme."

Seongjin looked at Director Bruno with dumbfounded eyes.

No, leader? I don't think it's normal for you to drink hot Melbourne tea after every meal, right?

However, Seongjin did not criticize him openly. The taste of the manager's tea, which I thought couldn't get any better, was getting better.

Howl.

[Ah, it's really good. I feel like all the fatigue in my body has been

relieved!]

The demon king who shared the taste of tea was so happy that he rolled around in the flame crystal.

Although it was such a peaceful journey, discord broke out in an unexpected place.

It was the relationship between Max, the wolfdog, and Roxanne, Logan's rottweiler.

Ureung...

Purr.

From the day they first met, an unexplainable, uneasy atmosphere flowed from the gazes of the two animals.

After that cold first encounter, the two were busy keeping each other in check at every turn.

Whenever she was having her hair brushed long or decorating the insignia of the Holy Knights, Roxanne looked down at Max with proud eyes.

-How do you feel? Have you ever dared to be treated like this?

Then, at night, when the horses were tied up next to the camp, Max walked around Roxanne in a teasing manner.

-What are you doing there? Is it fun to be stuck and not be able to move? uh?

The war of nerves between the two mute beasts was becoming so blatant that everyone in the group could now sense their discord.

[We met each other. Why do you hate it so much? Is this called homophobia?]

Tsk tsk tsk tsk.

The Demon King smiled evilly, as if he was complaining.

Shut up! I will return those words to you exactly as they were.

However, there were times when such a tense confrontation between the two ended in Max's crushing defeat. That was when Logan rode Roxanne instead of the carriage.

The beautiful white horse clacked its hooves gracefully each time and looked down at Max with majestic eyes.

-Now look! I am this great.

Then, Max, who was very sarcastic, rushed to Seongjin's carriage and started barking loudly.

Wong wong!

-Ride me! Come on, I can ride like that guy!

Seongjin, who immediately understood the meaning, took out a snack and gently comforted the wolfdog.

"No, Max. You can't transform as much as before. Even if you could, it would be just as difficult. You're not a horse, right? There's no need to carry people around anymore."

But stubborn Max did not give up, even if it was easy.

Wong wong wong!

-I am strong too! I'm huge too!

Whoa whoa!

-Hurry and take me!

In the end, Seongjin had no choice but to place his head on his forehead and let out a long sigh at the unexpected sight of the flock.

"Anyway, Max. You immature brat...."

When the noisy day ended and night fell, Seongjin meditated in the carriage until late at night. Perhaps because I was so absorbed in training for the first time in a long time, it was common for me to

stay up past dawn.

Logan, who was worse for days like that, knocked on the carriage door.

smart.

"Take it easy, Seongjin Lee. What if you get hurt?"

This sword master, who is sensitive to auras, can easily figure out whether Seongjin is meditating or sleeping just by checking his presence.

Seongjin opened the carriage door with a sullen look on his face.

"Oh, just a little more."

"It's too late, stop sleeping."

"But now is a very important time! I think that if I concentrate a little more here, I will realize the hidden true meaning of the Banajas exercise...."

"Then, as Sword Master Gael Bertran, I can assure you. It's okay. You're still a long way from reaching that level, so it's all your mistake."

"....."

Well, I have nothing to say.

In the end, Seongjin had no choice but to pout and grumble.

"But I am not a genius like you or Orden. I should save my meditation time and practice swordsmanship even more."

Seongjin has been uncharacteristically anxious recently.

Because there were so many incidents and accidents, there was no progress in Taoist training, and after watching Orden's training, he clearly realized the gap between himself and a genius.

'So, if I don't do something like this, I can't be of any help to my

father.'

Then Logan looked at Seongjin blankly, as if he couldn't understand.

"What do you mean, Seongjin Lee? If you're not a genius, then who in the world is a genius?"

"...huh?"

"Is there anyone in the world who can build up aura layers and move auras as naturally as you? Not even Gael Bertran in the world could build up auras as quickly as you."

Seongjin looked blankly at Logan. There was a part of me that was half-confident about him because he was a guy who was very good at talking loudly without even changing his facial expression.

But Logan paid no heed and continued speaking calmly.

"And the same goes for swordsmanship. People like you who can draw the optimal sword path using only their senses are not common. Such people will one day, sooner or later, reach the secret knowledge of the sword and become a sword master. It is only a matter of time."
."

"....."

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

A genius? No, that can't be true.

Naturally, the image of Orden's sword that I saw at the training hall flashed in my mind. Each form with its unique intention, and the subversive formulas that came together to form it.

Isn't that what a sword genius is?

"The Archduke certainly has a swordsmanship that is hard to find. Everyone acknowledges that he is a young man with a promising future."

Logan nodded to Seongjin's question.

"But have you ever thought about this? If the Archduke were to see the sword he was wielding, would he be able to grasp the same things as you? Would he be able to understand the meaning behind the sword at a glance?"

Logan explained.

Anyone who can navigate the dizzying torrent of water one by one and move towards their goal is definitely a genius.

However, a person who understands the goal first and skips the rapids before getting caught up is, in a sense, a genius on a different level from an ordinary genius.

"So trust me, you will definitely become stronger someday."

After saying that, Logan smiled slightly.

"Well, now that I know, what should I do?"

"uh....."

Seongjin was dazed in shock and responded in a daze.

"...I have some decent talent, so let's devote ourselves to customized training to sharpen it."

"That's not true. The way it is right now is enough. So there's no need to beat yourself up like you're being chased by something."

okay? wake up early It is said that children grow taller when they go to bed early.

On a subject less than half a year apart, Logan pretended to be an adult and gave advice.

"And Lee Seong-jin."

"huh?"

"There are many people around you who will draw their swords according to your will. Never forget that."

"hmm....."

But this guy. You're talking flashy words and treating me so casually as your subordinate?

"But aren't you sleeping? Why are you staying up late when you're in your prime?"

Then Logan shrugged his shoulders.

"What does it matter to me? I have the divine power to restore my body at any time."

omg. I can't refute it.

Seongjin had no choice but to quietly lie down in the carriage and start getting ready for sleep.

But then. Logan, who was about to close the carriage door after confirming that Seongjin had covered himself with a blanket, suddenly made a face and asked this.

"So, Seongjin Lee. If you want to learn the sword a little more deeply, you could also learn a little bit of Henesys practice...."

"No thanks!"

This guy is trying to make a business out of something forgettable? I will achieve great success with the Banahas practice!

* * *

After traveling for over ten days, the group finally arrived in Regina and were immersed in the flavor of a big city they had not seen in a long time.

Wagons coming and going frantically and people wearing light clothing. Brightly painted signs and crowded street vendors.

"Is it because of my mood? It feels like the warm air of the Imperial Capital is reaching here!"

Sir Claudia twitched her freckles and sniffed the air. As she said, it was now only one day from Regina to the ecliptic.

The statues of Little Saint Aurelion, densely displayed at the street vendors, were still there. Seongjin, who was happily looking around the street, suddenly tilted her head at a strange sense of discomfort that was different from her memories.

'But is it because of my mood? Compared to before, I feel like your sculptures have become a bit plumper...'

Oh no way.

'Could it be possible for the entire city's trend to change at once? 'Maybe it's just my imagination.'

And it was here that I said goodbye to Sir Ilma and the bard Laurent.

"It looks like the stagecoaches heading to Anatolia will diverge, so I have no choice but to say hello here. Please be considerate, Your Majesty."

After politely bowing, Lord Ilma quietly left the group.

Logan and Lord Valerie recited simple congratulatory messages for her as she now had to go on an endless journey to find her daughter.

"Thanks to you, I saved my life and gained valuable experiences that I will never have again. Although I ultimately did not learn about makjang, I still have a new goal from now on."

Laurent also spoke in a brave voice.

"New goal?"

"Yes. I want to write an epic poem that will be remembered for a long time to come. As a start, I want to spread your achievements in the Sigismund Land widely throughout the continent!"

... no way.

Are you going to proudly sing those embarrassing studies full of

exaggeration and praise with poor melody?

Seongjin was startled, but Laurent, who was already far away, shouted loudly for the last time and narrowed his eyes.

"Please leave everything to me! I will someday make you a more famous hero than the wandering knight Fernand!"

No, don't do that, Laurent.

Please don't do that!

However, Laurent waved his hand excitedly and disappeared from the group's sight.

"...Are you okay, sir?"

Masain asked Seongjin in a worried voice as he stumbled after receiving fatal internal injuries from an unexpected opponent.

"Oh, it's okay, Sir Martha."

Seongjin barely managed to pull himself together with his help.

Now is not the time for me to be like this. Since I'm in Regina, I have something to show Logan.

While the group was unpacking their belongings at the accommodation, Seongjin led Logan to a building near the logistics relay station. It was a building with a small top, which he asked Dasha to purchase in advance and instructed Deputy Schmidt to operate.

There, some workers are busy preparing for the opening. It was a shabby top with no proper signboard yet and only a flimsy banner hanging.

-Bertrand & Lee

Bertran & Lee.

In fact, it wasn't long before we finally decided on a name for this

little top. It was probably when Logan said this to Seongjin in Sigismund Territory.

-okay. I can understand. There was a time when I too had a hard time enduring the fact that I was no longer 'Gael Bertrand'.

I thought about it then.

Seongjin had people who continued to call his name. Logan and the Demon King will never forget that he is Seongjin Lee.

But Logan, what about that guy?

Who in this world will know that guy's true identity and call him by his name?

So, this thought suddenly occurred to me. It might be a good idea to leave a trace of Gael Bertrand somewhere and have people continue to call him by his name.

After all, it was a company created to give to Logan someday.

"Congratulations on becoming co-president of a new company with no performance yet, Logan!"

As Seongjin spread his hands wide and shouted confidently, Logan glanced around the building with a bewildered look on his face.

company? What are you talking about?

This little thing is the top?

"Ah, you should be happy if I give you a gift! You have to make a lot of money, right? You can't just support Ortonine forever with the allowance your father gives you, right?"

Logan tilted his head at Seongjin's scolding.

"Of course, it would be nice to be able to make money from this. Thank you for your thoughts, Seongjin Lee. But running the top is more difficult than you think. Wouldn't it be better to use the funds to find other ways to help Ortona?"

Tsk tsk.

This guy only knows one thing and doesn't know the other.

"It's meaningless unless it's at the top, Logan. The flow of funds must be constantly moving and constantly changing. Do you understand? This 'Bertrán & Lee' is a logistics conduit connecting the northernmost tip of Ortona and the ecliptic! "

"Northern Ortona?"

"okay"

Seongjin nodded vigorously.

"Starting with 'Bertrán & Lee', we will gradually make Ortona's economy self-reliant!"

".....!"

268. Bertrand & Lee (2)

From the beginning, Seongjin did not plan a grand project to revive the northern economy. No matter how good the items and plans are, isn't a business prone to failure depending on luck and trends?

Seeing his junior join the company, crying after ruining one of his ventures, Seongjin decided that he would never touch a business again for the rest of his life.

Just a small salmon specialty store.

A delicious restaurant where you can enjoy fresh salmon delivered directly from the producer every day.

I only wanted that one thing. He was the prince of the Holy Empire and the greatest merchant on the continent, and he just thought that he could afford to run such a small store with his pocket money.

However, Branch Manager Schmidt's opinion on this was skeptical.

"Somehow, the financial calculations are not right."

The place where salmon is mainly caught is in the northern part of Ortona, Barletta.

This is an area where cold sea water flows and is home to an abundance of plump salmon before they migrate up to fresh water.

Fishing was once a thriving industry, but after the fall of Ortona, it gradually decreased and there are now not many fishermen left.

"Most of them became refugees, and most of those who remained became bandits."

Naturally, the number of salmon caught has decreased significantly.

Although it is still distributed at relatively low prices locally and in nearby regions, the situation was different in the Empire, where it was supplied in small quantities through the maritime trade of Cyprus and through the inland upper reaches. The price of a piece of salmon jumps to more than the same weight of silver.

The supply was not constant, and it came in irregularly, mixed with church supplies.

'Ah, but a salmon specialty store, I think it's really possible... ..'

Seongjin covered his head.

Somehow it seemed like it would work. I have a strong feeling that there will be a solution soon!

But this time, Seongjin couldn't just rely on his intuition and do things blindly.

He is completely unfamiliar with business, and the opinion of Schmidt, an expert, is so negative. If you make a mistake like this, not only yourself but also branch manager Schmidt will be ruined.

"I thought it would be cheaper and more stable to drive straight inland rather than going around Cyprus...."

"Would the cost of an already safely secured distribution route be the same as that of a dangerous new distribution route that needs to be opened? Moreover, since the fall of Ortona, public order in the north has been a mess. Areas without proper lords are like lawless areas."

"Yeah. I guess so."

In any case, it is a burdensome investment that is too unreasonable to develop a distribution channel just by looking at salmon.

"Then wouldn't it be possible to maintain the status quo if we combine it with other productive businesses?"

Thinking like that, Seongjin this time turned his attention to other

resources around him. Schmidt, the branch manager of the Merchants' Union, had a lot of information about the goods traded in Ortona in the past and the industries that flourished there.

Seongjin shouted after confirming that there was a highly profitable copper mine near Barletta.

good! Copper mining. How about this time!

And Schmidt's reaction to this was relatively positive.

"Well, it's not bad. It will take time to reinforce the outdated mines, but we will avoid a deficit within three years. As long as you give up distribution of salmon."

Then, let's increase the scale a little more to overcome the deficit.

Seongjin, who was searching through the data with his eyes open, learned that there was a huge lumber yard upstream of the river flowing through Barletta.

'Let's cut down the trees we have and sell them! With this, the initial investment won't be as high as a mine!'

And upon hearing this opinion, Schmidt was quite pleased.

"In two years, you may be able to recoup some of your investment and make a profit. Of course, the low-quality salmon will continue to eat into that profit."

Okay! It can't end like this!

Seongjin struggled with the documents.

Then, when he changed his thinking a bit and came up with a plan to supply rotting grains from southern Anatolia to the north, the wrinkles between Schmidt's eyebrows finally began to smooth out.

"With a business of this scale, it would be tempting to pioneer a new distribution network. The problem is that the scale has grown so frighteningly. But it's still bad."

"huh?"

"Could you please put down that unprofitable salmon now?"

"....."

After instructing Schmidt to explore various ways to secure the supply chain, Seongjin left Regina.

However, Seongjin's worries did not end even on the way to Sigismund territory or upon arrival at the territory.

'A little cooler. So how did you do it? 'Is there anything I can show my father?'

What was then born was a large-scale cooperation plan that attracted nearby lords. In Ortona, where the normal distribution structure has been broken, it is aimed at fiefdoms that are self-sufficient or need help from the top on a regular basis.

From slaughter to dyeing, it is a large-scale project in which several small businesses and related personnel move at once.

'How did I end up here?'

Anyway, when I sent a letter with a detailed explanation about this through Dasha, I was finally able to get a very positive response from Schmidt.

-I really didn't know you had this much talent. Indeed, he can be said to be the grandson of the Iron Blood merchant, Grand Duke Asein. Perhaps, with this level of planning, stable profits will be generated within a few months.

Even though the reply ended like this.

-Except for salmon, of course.

'Holy shit! This is all done to airlift fresh salmon to the Imperial Capital!'

But there was no other way. Distributing fresh live fish or dead fish

was a completely different problem.

There was a reason for the merchants to mix and distribute supplies supplied to churches. In order to maintain freshness, you must use items containing sacred power or the sacred power of the priest in charge.

'There really is no answer now...'

As such, the work of opening a salmon specialty store in the Imperial Capital was at a standstill indefinitely, and Seongjin faced a major attack by demonic beasts in the Sigismund Territory.

Then, I unexpectedly acquired an ice heart.

Seongjin created a refrigerator by modifying shaved ice that does not melt even at room temperature at Dragon's workshop.

It was a perfect mobile warehouse that even had the characteristics of normal world items that could never be stolen unless certain conditions were met.

'... 'What on earth have I done so far?'

What came over me was disappointment rather than joy.

The efforts so far were in vain, and the problem was easily solved. Somehow, I had a feeling that everything would work out on its own.

"It's definitely a cool thing, but...."

Dasha, who was the liaison between Schmidt and Seongjin, also looked a little depressed when she saw the completed refrigerator.

Anyway, everything was smooth sailing from then on.

While living in isolation at the count's residence, Seongjin diligently exchanged letters with Schmidt and gradually fleshed out his plans for a salmon specialty store.

It was in the meantime. One night, Dasha spoke to Seongjin like that.

"Thanks to the momentum of the decline, it was becoming a pretty cool thing, but it's a little disappointing."

"Is that so too?"

"Yes, it would have been a good opportunity for Ortona to stabilize a little and for some of the wandering refugees to settle down."

"Um... huh?"

Seongjin suddenly came to his senses as if he had been doused with cold water, and blinked his eyes into space.

'Ortona is stabilized, refugees are settling down... ... '

Then, the countless documents he had been struggling with up until now began to unfold in reverse order in Seongjin's mind.

Revitalization of fisheries, especially salmon, and development of highly profitable coal mines. and the operation of an abandoned logging site.

Supply southern grains at low prices and obtain cooperation from nearby lords to stabilize the economy near the distribution network.

'... Wait, isn't this really all possible?'

For a moment, a shiver ran down Seongjin's spine.

A picture of a lantern that started in a small northern village called Barletta, moving down toward the ecliptic, and eventually starting to slowly light up the entire region of Ortona.

That brief vision hit Seongjin's mind hard at the moment.

'okay. Is this right! You can't just pour Logan's pocket money into Ortona forever, can you?'

Logan had already arranged for several merchants and was sending relief supplies to refugees while keeping their names hidden. It is said that the quantity has increased significantly due to the recent increase in pocket money.

'Still, there are probably more people taking advantage of the refugees than going to them! I can't monitor this one by one. If Ortona is to be rebuilt and refugees are saved, the only way is to make the economy self-reliant!'

And if you catch one of the popular republican transfer groups in the capital, connect them to the top, and bring them to the forefront... ..

Seongjin's head began to spin for the first time in a long time.

'Then, even though he is the prince of an enemy nation, there may come a day when Logan stands proudly in front of the Ortonans... ..!'

* * *

"This is what happened! In this way, Ortona's economy will gradually revive! Refugees will no longer have to wander around!"

Logan had a blank expression on his face after hearing the harsh records of the past.

I wanted to respond to Seongjin's enthusiasm, but because the scale was so huge, I didn't seem to know how to react.

"Now, and this is the cold carriage, the great beginning!"

Seongjin pointed to a wagon standing at the entrance of the building.

The newly manufactured packaging, which is still shining white, has 'Bertrand & Lee' written in large paint.

"Cryogenic carriage?"

"Yes, a wagon to carry the refrigerator."

"refrigerator?"

"The long explanation is endless, but to put it simply, it is something similar to the Knight of Grace."

Then Logan made a dumbfounded expression.

"...You're saying that holy relics are being used in places like that?"

"But you can't have a priest in shifts 24 hours a day to maintain the freshness of the salmon, right? The church won't sit still, and the financial calculations aren't right either."

"hmm."

Logan was hesitantly agreeing, and Seongjin's eyes sparkled as he walked closer to him.

"So, Logan."

"huh?"

"You should invest in this business too! I've done too much and I'm probably short on initial capital. But I'll make you double or even triple your investment in a few years!"

"...uh?"

Seongjin stabbed Logan, who was taken aback by the unexpected words.

"Think about it carefully. The profit is not just that. Even excluding the effect of Ortona's economic revival, the profit will be threefold just for you! Then you can use it to start another revival project. There is no better story than this. Where are you?"

Seongjin, who was tearing the corner of his mouth, looked like a fraudster from all angles.

Logan, who suddenly received a gift that looked like an empty tin can and signed a large investment contract in return, asked awkwardly.

"...So Lee Seong-jin, is this really a gift?"

"Well, of course!"

[What is natural, you fraudster.]

The demon lord let out a small sigh in his head.

However, Logan is also a man with a formidable personality.

"Okay. If you are, then whatever."

Scrunch.

Logan coolly scrawled his signature on the contract that Seongjin secretly presented to him.

"Excellent choice, Logan. I assure you."

Seongjin, who was happily putting the contract in his arms, suddenly looked back at Logan in shock as to what he was thinking.

"But, Logan?"

"huh?"

"If someone asks you to sign something later, be sure to call me next time, okay?"

".....?"

* * *

That afternoon, Administrator Dorian visited Seonghwang's office carrying a huge stack of documents.

Although he was soft, he was sharp in getting things done, and was a young administrator whom Seonghwang always admired.

However, Dorian, who had hesitated for a while even after entering the office, finally spoke while holding out the documents he had brought in front of Seonghwang.

"Your Majesty, it is a matter of permission from a merchant who plans to conduct business across the imperial capital. Other than that, various business plans are awaiting approval at the same time."

"If it is such a problem, we can discuss it with the Merchants' Union at the executive level."

"Haonde, the name of the merchant owner is jointly owned by Prince Mores and Prince Logan...."

"....."

Seonghwang, feeling something unusual, accepted the document without saying a word.

"It seems like he impersonated the prince, but the content is very specific and the amount of money is large. So, I felt like I had to report it to His Majesty first."

Seonghwang's eyes, as he was carefully reviewing the contents of the document, began to tremble slightly.

After a period of silence in the office.

"business....."

widely.

Finally, Seonghwang turned the last page of the document and slowly raised his hand to stroke his face.

'okay. It's a hundred times better than going somewhere and getting hurt. It's better, but... ..'

Still, isn't this a scale that far exceeds the annual operating budget of a small country?

How big are you going to make this happen, son?

269. Penitential Offering (1)

Logan, who returned to the dorm together after looking at the gifts that were not gifts, suddenly spoke as Seongjin entered the entrance.

"Go in first and rest, Seongjin Lee. "I have somewhere to visit from now on."

"huh? "Where are you going?"

"It's been a while since I've been to Regina, but I still have to go to church."

Logan added that it had been his intention from the beginning to visit the church and meet the vicar.

"what? Then tell me sooner. Isn't it the complete opposite direction? "You have to come all the way here and then go back to the city."

"Still, I have to see that you get back to your dorm safely. "I promised Brother Masain that I would take good care of you so you wouldn't have an accident."

"... .."

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

no wonder. Even though I said they wanted to go out alone, they obediently let me go. Was it all because of Logan?

But how far are you going to treat me like an immature child? Sir Masain. There's no age difference between us, so don't you think the discrimination between me and Logan is too much?

Even though my mental age is much higher!

[This nonsense is at the level of severe dementia, so it could be treated like an elderly person, right?]

'shut up!'

Logan explained the church in detail to Seongjin.

Regina's church is a place that exorcists and inquisitors traveling through the North must pass through at least once.

In the north, where there were no decent parishes and public security was a mess, these paladins often wandered alone without proper support. Then, when I finally arrive in Regina, I gather my tired body and unravel the information I have gathered.

So, it is the first place where you can find reliable information about the Northern Dark Church as well as the current status of devil worshipers.

"It looks like we will have to form a punitive force again soon, so I think we need to gather information from the North in advance and plan a route."

Seongjin blinked at those words.

"wait for a sec. "Didn't you decide to stick to the ecliptic this year?"

"I originally planned to do that, but... .."

Logan's face darkened as he spoke.

After joining Seongjin and his party, Logan heard in detail about the appearance of the Yakcha, Milo Merchant Marine, and the Demon Beast. It is also almost certain that the dark church is behind it.

I can't help but think that the Dark Church's evil forces may have been spreading deep throughout the North for longer than he expected.

Above all, the words the devil shouted at Sigismund's Territory continued to haunt me.

-There was more at stake in your death than you thought! Even if the Guardian hadn't stolen you, a lot would have changed now.

They say they are already working with the Knights of Saint Aurelion to dig into them little by little, but is that really enough?

Perhaps we should organize a punitive force and begin a proper long-term investigation.

"Didn't you raise your allowance as a condition of helping with the monster task force work in the imperial capital? What if it gets cut again? "After investing in 'Bertrán & Lee,' there will be almost nothing left, right?"

Logan smiled as he read the look of concern on Seongjin's sullen face.

"Didn't you say that if you wait a little longer, you'll get triple the amount? "But what are you worried about?"

"No, that's true, but... .."

"And you're right. "Abama is a good person, Lee Seong-jin."

So, I know you won't take back the allowance you raised.

As Logan added that, his smile faded for an instant.

"okay. Now that I think about it, I realize I know that person quite well. "And then I awkwardly tried to keep my distance. If you think about it, I guess it was all just foolishness on my part."

"... .."

"No, I said something useless. don't mind. "Then I'll see you at the dorm later."

* * *

Seongjin, who was free after breaking up with Logan, visited the logistics relay station in the afternoon accompanied by Sir Martha. He had already sent a message to branch manager Schmidt saying he would visit him.

However, Seongjin, who was climbing the building without thinking, suddenly felt a strange sense of discomfort.

'Why can't I almost feel the presence of people?'

It wasn't just my mood, the top floor of the logistics relay station was truly empty.

The only person breathing there was Branch Manager Schmidt, who was guarding the office with a very nervous look on his face.

"His Majesty Logan of Lilium has returned to Regina. Who would dare to remain around here?"

It was only then that Schmidt breathed a sigh of relief after confirming that Seongjin had left Logan behind.

It was said that the demonic contractors and demons at the logistics relay station had all left the place to avoid Logan. The branch manager, who was shaking and unable to do anything when he was notified of Seongjin's visit, had suffered so much that dark circles had already formed around his eyes.

"But demon contractors don't usually emit magical energy. "Don't you all attend the birthday party?"

"Do you know how much effort we put into concealing our demon energy for that day? "A month before departing for the ecliptic, I prepare by avoiding proper communication with the devil."

It is said that in the past, Logan tracked down an Ortona noble who was a devil contractor and summarily disposed of him. Even though he was one who made a pact with a lesser demon and had little trace of demonic energy.

This guy's divine power is so strong that anyone who has used demonic power or summoned a vassal even once recently will inevitably be caught by his spirit.

It was a good thing that Logan went to church and didn't follow me to the logistics relay station.

"... So, is that really true?"

Schmidt looked for the presence of Lord Martha waiting outside the office, then lowered his voice a little and whispered.

"hmm? what?"

"Is Prince Logan really the Sword Master?"

"... "How did you know that?"

When Seongjin asked with wide eyes, Schmidt let out a laugh.

"You should not look down on the information power of the Merchants' Association."

Even if the Margrave hisses, rumors eventually spread. Well, it was an incredible feat that would break several records of being the youngest person on the continent.

Anyway, after hearing the confirmation from Seongjin, he tilted his head with a strange expression.

"I often heard that he was a genius. But is it possible for a person who hasn't yet become a Sword Master? It wouldn't be like being reborn, but how could it be unless they were from another race or demon with a long lifespan?"

"Uh, um, well. "Logan is a particularly special genius."

Because he is his father's son.

As Seongjin hesitates, Schmidt looks at him with suspicious eyes. However, Seongjin continued to avoid her gaze and tried to distract her, so she eventually sighed and continued speaking.

"Well, let's say so. However, the incident where the Penitent Tree appeared this time was also the same, as was the sudden birth of the youngest sword master on the continent. "In many ways, I think it's very special because it reminds me of events from ten years ago."

"Ten years ago?"

"The Ortona Civil War."

A sword talent that humans can have.

Schmidt said that only one person comes to mind who has reached the peak of it.

"This is General Gael Bertran. He was very famous among the devils from his birth."

"U, famous? why?"

This time, Schmidt looked at Seongjin, who was wincing and chewing his tongue, with slightly strange eyes.

"Well, that's right. "His spirit was very special."

"Is it special?"

"yes. It is said that in the eyes of the devil, his soul could not be more brilliant. "It's to the point where I want to corrupt them and mortgage them by making some kind of contract right now."

If this is true even in the eyes of a single devil, how would he look in the eyes of other high-ranking devil kings?

Ironically, it is said that the influence of these demon lords was very large in the way that Gael Bertran grew up safely and became a sword master.

Once it became an established fact that he would be owned by a high-ranking demon lord, from then on, most demons were prohibited from going near him.

"These people are now tampering with other people's souls... .."

Seongjin furrowed his brows, and the Demon King noticed this and secretly comforted him.

[Wow. Calm down, Seongjin Lee. Your blood pressure is rising. First of all, you were reborn safely, right? In the end, no one has his soul.]

Meanwhile, Schmidt's explanation continued.

"And an elaborate ceremony was prepared over a long period of time."

"Consciousness?"

Is there any special procedure required for the devil to have a soul?

Schmidt shook his head in response to Seongjin's question.

"If you only wanted Gael Bertrand's soul, you could have made a contract somehow to extort it. But what happened at that time had a very different texture."

Even the demons did not know the detailed story. Everything was done secretly at the hands of the Penitent Church that was prevalent in the North at the time.

In any case, it is said that when the civil war was nearing its end, several penitential trees appeared in every corner of the north. At first glance, it seemed like a large-scale offering in which the whole of Ortona was sacrificed at once.

And Gael Bertrand's soul was scheduled to be placed on top of it. As if it were the most desirable fruit to decorate the center of a large cake.

"But I heard that there are no records of the Penitent Tree appearing in the materials kept by the exorcists? The last time there was a record of penance was hundreds of years ago, so was it during the Five Great Times? "I said it was around that time."

When Ortona was destroyed, wasn't my father young?

"The Penitent Tree was summoned at the same time, devouring five small villages. Because it was a remote place and the entire continent was in turmoil due to civil war, everyone probably passed by without knowing. "Anyway, even if there were witnesses, they would all have been caught in the tree of the demon world and died."

And the subsequent results were just as Seongjin and Mawang had

guessed.

"However, despite years of thorough preparation, the ritual somehow failed and the penitents were reverse-summoned to the demon world. "All that was left were villages that were in ruins, so they could not be properly recorded."

"... .."

While listening to Schmidt's explanation, Seongjin was thinking of something strange at the same time. These were the words of Cadmus, the first king, who was eagerly targeting Sisley's body.

-Why would you intentionally harm the child who will become my new body? You will sacrifice everything to me!

Sisley did that.

In the Delcross Chronicles, he was said to be the key to the descent of the High-ranking Demon King and the culprit in destroying the world.

'Of course, the Delcross Chronicles was a bad joke made up by Sigurd Sigurdsson,'

But could this really be a coincidence?

Whether it's a precognitive dream that doesn't come true or a plan that fails. How could it be that two of a father's children become targets of high-ranking demon lords at the same time?

While Seongjin was deep in thought, Schmidt stroked his collar and spoke shyly.

"ah. Anyway, this story has little to do with us now. "The topic of penance came up, and as I thought about it, I realized I had been talking too much nonsense."

"... .."

Seongjin secretly wanted to hear more, but he still didn't stop Schmidt from changing the topic.

This is because the desire to find and kill all those involved coexisted with the thought that I did not want to dig too deep yet.

"I wasted my time for no reason. "I have a lot of things to report to you from now on."

In any case, since I don't see Schmidt often, I had to use this opportunity to discuss everything I could. Not only about the preparation status of the salmon specialty store, but also about the operation of 'Bertrand & Lee'.

In the process, I mentioned a deal I had with Margrave Hendrick, and Schmidt slightly raised his eyebrows.

"I am truly grateful that you asked about the antitrust opportunity. At this point, you may be able to make up for some of the investment losses from the initial stage of the business. But Margrave Hendrick is not such a soft opponent."

"He's definitely not someone who will just lose money."

"yes. He was a person of considerable interest to merchants traveling to and from the North. "If you get caught up in a conversation with him, everyone clicks their tongues, saying that without even realizing it, they become absorbed in price competition with other merchants."

In the past, this was the reason why no merchant was willing to sign an exclusive contract with Sigismund. In many ways, the exclusive deal with Milo was unusual.

"So, have you heard anything about Giacomo Milo? "What happened to him?"

I thought the top must have headed to Regina after that incident. So, I had ordered him to be detained as soon as he showed up at the logistics relay station.

But Schmidt shook his head.

"Unfortunately Giacomo Milo did not appear here. Even if he had come, he wouldn't have easily revealed his face. This is because a large-scale arrest order has been issued in nearby large cities,

including Regina. "Maybe you should have taken refuge somewhere safe?"

"... wherever?"

Did he have anyone else to turn to?

According to Dasha's investigation, Giacomo runs a business named after the Count Milo family, but I heard that he has completely broken up with the family?

Then Schmidt lifted his dry gaze and looked down at the window.

"well. "Once you hide underground, there is only one place that immediately comes to mind."

Seongjin immediately understood what he was saying.

"... "Is this the Church of Penitence?"

"Yes, probably so."

Schmidt, who was nodding his head and responding like that, looked at Seongjin's face to see what he was thinking at that moment.

"why?"

"No, it's nothing. "I've thought about it before, but I think you can easily understand and notice anything other than what you think."

I thought, that's why it's so easy to talk to him. Schmidt muttered that, looked into space for a moment, and then added:

"But why on earth did you not understand that the salmon salmon business was not possible?""

"... hey!"

270. Penitential Offering (2)

Seongjin entrusted Schmidt with an ice heart and four refrigerators that day.

thud! Cradangtang! thud!

Schmidt's eyes widened as he looked at the huge ice refrigerators that were suddenly summoned to the warehouse of the logistics relay station.

"I heard in advance that it was something from the normal world, but it's truly like magic."

"I'm only being summoned this once. "They say you can't put it back somewhere else."

Seongjin added after thinking carefully about the precautions Dexter gave him.

"Oh, and these have pairs that need to be moved together. So we have to move the low-temperature wagons in twos? If possible, the two paired vehicles should not be too far apart. "If you do it wrong, one of them may not work."

"yes? Why is that so?"

"That's because each matching refrigerator comes from a single shaved ice. "Those are the arms and legs of Bingsu 9, and this is the torso and arms of Bingsu 11."

"... .."

When I explained it kindly, Schmidt looked at Seongjin as if he were the killer of the century.

"what? why? what?"

Speaking of devils being more evil than murderers, what should we do now? huh?

Besides, this was all an unavoidable choice.

Not only was there not much shaved ice left, but it was too bulky to shrink to the size of a refrigerator in the first place!

"Then what is this used for?"

Schmidt asked, holding out an ice heart that had turned into a small stone.

"Oh, that's a controller that gives simple commands."

"yes? Aren't they just boxes that keep the temperature low? "What are your orders here?"

That's right. The moment someone tries to steal it, the refrigerators will combine and turn into fusion shaved ice.

Like the Glature Troll, it automatically strikes the enemy, but it is a kind of safety device since it can get out of control.

"... .."

"why? "What's the problem again this time?"

Oh, it's an automatic anti-theft device!

This is something you can't get even if you pay money, so why do you have such a sad face?

[Couldn't you have remodeled it into something more normal?]

The Demon King sighed softly in his head.

After several twists and turns, Seongjin was able to return to the dorm a little later after finally completing the necessary discussion.

And I was quite embarrassed by the situation that unfolded in front

of my accommodation. A huge crowd of people had suddenly gathered and filled the street in front of the building.

"Did that really walk? "It just looks like a piece of ice?"

The cause was immediately apparent. Because everyone gathered was looking at the 'Knight of Grace' and whispering.

When I entered Regina, I thought it was a bit too attention-grabbing, but before I knew it, rumors had spread that there were moving ice sculptures all over the city.

The front of the hotel was already crowded with people who had come from afar to see the sights.

"I heard. "I heard that a holy relic from the Lord appeared in the distance in Sigismund."

"what? Isn't it just a rumor? "Even though it's a holy relic, how can something like that move?"

"Egh! Earlier during the day, I clearly saw that ice knight walking into the city on his own feet!"

The accompanying party also contributed to increasing the credibility of the rumor.

That 'Knight of Grace' is accompanying the famous Lilium Troop, right? Aren't they the Holy Knights among Holy Knights who spread the Lord's mercy across the continent without sparing their bodies?

"okay. "It is said that the Lord himself came down to save Sigismund, who was in danger, and wiped out all the demonic beasts with his strong fists."

Rumors are more specific and faster than you think.

The investigation into the 'Knight of Grace' was completed just before Seongjin left the Sigismund Territory. But the rumor is already spreading to Regina?

"A knight? Why do you put down your sword and swing your fist?"

"I don't know. "I just said what I heard."

"Where did you hear that?"

"Don't you know? "There's a bard over there singing songs all day long about the exploits of knights of grace and princes?"

... Laurent. Was it your doing? You're really acting too quickly.

[Then why did you park it on the street where you can see the rice cake? It's a blessing to be self-employed.]

The Demon King scolded him for not letting the opportunity slip away, but Seongjin felt unfair.

whatever. So that big thing would normally fit into a warehouse?

Seongjin had no choice but to avoid the crowd and headed to the back door of the accommodation. It was a small yard with a stable and several shabby warehouses.

And there, unexpectedly, I met Inquisitor Sir Valery.

"uh? Lowering. Where are you going at this hour? And why are you coming through the back door?"

Seongjin frowned as he tried to answer. Because she smelled the faint scent of blood coming from him.

Upon closer inspection, I noticed red blood droplets not only on his face but also on the white Inquisitor's uniform.

"... .."

I had a guess.

The remnants of the Penitent Church brought in from the Sigismund Order were locked in a fairly large warehouse right next to the accommodation.

And Seongjin's sensitive senses were able to immediately spot the bloody smell emanating from there.

"Isn't it enough to conduct the interrogation after arriving at the Heresy Tribunal?"

"ah!"

The red-haired Inquisitor looked blank for a moment, as if caught off guard. Then she narrows her eyes and raises the corners of her mouth.

"I forgot for a moment what kind of person you are. haha. "You said you were careful. How did you notice?"

"... .."

"We apologize for any inconvenience caused. However, I also need to conduct some interrogation before I can report to the higher-ups. "I've been busy with the demonic attacks so far."

And thanks to the group camping with them on the way here, Sir Valerie explained, there wasn't really time to quietly interrogate them.

"It doesn't look like it's in good condition, so should we take it in moderation? "What if they all really die?"

Seongjin, who sensed that he was noticeably weakened, hinted, and Sir Valerie shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, that's true. I am treating him appropriately and interrogating him. "Even if a truly dangerous situation arises, Prince Logan is here, so what are you worried about?"

You'll probably be able to breathe just in the nick of time.

Valerie said something quite creepy and smiled her usual good-natured smile.

'... Was this his personality?'

Feeling something new, Seongjin observed him closely.

"It's a bit of a pity from their perspective. It might have been easier

for me to get caught up in the demonic waters and just die. Or stay in the Sigismund Territory and face trial."

Does this mean that it would have been better to have fallen into the hands of Margrave Hendrick?

"why? Did you hear anything from them, like a confession about their relationship with the Margrave?"

"yes? Oh, that's not it. "It is simply because there is a clear fact that the Margrave had a long-standing relationship with the Milo family."

Valerie said, wiping blood from her cheek.

"Wouldn't their presence be very uncomfortable from the Margrave's point of view? So, you would rather kill them by hand and bury everything about that unsavory business, along with the transaction records, forever."

The more the Heresy Tribunal digs up the upper part of the mill, the more they will have no choice but to suspect the Margrave.

The rumor about the 'Knight of Grace' spread faster than expected, perhaps due to the Margrave's influence.

While Seongjin was lost in thought, Valerie added with a chuckle.

"They know this well, so they seem to want to stay in the North to be tried as much as possible. But am I not also the proud Inquisitor of Saint Marsyas? So, I did as the old saying goes. haha."

Valerie, who was looking at the warehouse and laughing with amusement, added that she felt that the explanation was insufficient due to Seongjin's sullen expression.

"Ah, my dear. There is a saying that comes down from the Heresy Tribunal. 'If you don't know what the remnants of the Dark Church are planning, do everything that is the opposite of what they want.'"

Well, the seniors would definitely have burst out laughing at this timing.

Valerie muttered sadly, but honestly, it wasn't fun at all. They seem to be crazy about this torture.

"Ah, but I found out one thing. The relationship between Giacomo Milo and the Penitential Order is longer than expected. "It seems like he will probably just rely on the Penitent Order."

Seongjin didn't answer, just stared at the bloody warehouse.

If they go to the Heresy Tribunal like this, Seongjin will probably never see them again.

They are clearly remnants of the Dark Church. I won't be able to get out of there before I die.

"I need to talk about it."

Valerie blinked at Seongjin's unexpected words.

"... "Your Majesty is interrogating me again?"

"huh."

"To those who were just tortured? Are you serious?"

Wow, this person is being so subtle about pretending it's not like that.

A look of confusion appeared on Valerie's face as if she was joking.

After catching a glimpse of him, Seongjin walked away and responded.

"Is that what the torturer would say?"

"No, but sir. I really don't think that's a good idea. "This is definitely not a sight the young prince would want to see."

"He has a point, sir... .."

Sir Masain, who was quietly following behind, added subtly, but Seongjin did not even listen. Soon, a soft sigh is heard from behind.

For some reason, Seongjin pushed away the restless red-haired

inquisitor and headed toward the warehouse.

"... ..!"

As soon as I opened the door, a foul smell hit my nose. It is the stench of festering wounds and rotting blood.

And the sight I encountered in the warehouse was truly beyond my imagination.

It was a gruesome sight, with people scattered about on the floor, barely able to breathe, and all sorts of torture tools lined up on one side of the blood-soaked floor.

Since he learned the basics from Dasha, Seongjin was able to easily recognize what each item was used for.

Among them, Seongjin found one tong soaked in blood and looked around at the people, wondering if it could be possible.

"Did they even pull out their teeth? "Is there any point in interrogating someone if their speech is slurred?"

"Hmm, it's okay. "I re-implanted it with divine power."

... Sir Valery. I thought you were just a no-nonsense nerd, but you turned out to be scarier than I thought.

"Kukkkeok!"

At that time, perhaps in response to their conversation, a small groan was heard from among the people lying around.

Their leader is Vicar Belinda.

Considering that he was already in a state of death when he was rescued from the Demon Tree, the mental strength he had to wriggle and move his body was truly amazing.

However, the journey so far must have been very difficult for her, and her muscular body was reduced by half.

"Bethelah... .."

She chanted in a very hoarse voice and glared at Valerie with young, wanting eyes.

"You devil. "Why did you come back again?"

"Oh, I'm sorry for disturbing you while you were just resting. "Mr. Belinda."

Valerie sheepishly apologized.

"I have a few additional questions. Depending on how the conversation goes, I might end up picking up the tool again. "Please cooperate."

This bastard threatens people in a polite manner?

Then Belinda glared at him and growled.

"joy! If you have anything to ask, feel free to ask. We are always proud before the Lord! "We didn't hide anything from the beginning, so why do we need these things?"

You didn't hide it?

When Seongjin looked back at Valerie, he shrugged his shoulders.

"How do we know if everything they say is true? They say, 'People naturally become honest only when they are in extreme pain.' "I just did it."

"... "Is that also an old saying handed down from the Heresy Tribunal?"

The Inquisitor, who sensed an unpleasant tone in Seongjin's question, smiled as if he were embarrassed.

"Haha, my dear. They are heretics who seek salvation through physical pain in the first place. Wouldn't that be good for them too? "It's not a relationship where we just smile and express gratitude, but deep down, they will be grateful to me."

No, I don't think so.

Look at that. Those eyes look like they want to change you right now.

271. Penitential Offering (3)

An inquisitor with a somewhat different and reluctant attitude than usual.

A fanatic of the Dark Church with venom and brilliance streaming from his eyes.

Nevertheless, there was something else that got on Seongjin's nerves from earlier. Right behind him was Masain, visibly stiffening.

He did not try to crack down on Seongjin in advance like he did before. He just held the sword handle tightly with a stiff expression on his face.

However, the blood in his knuckles that had been exerted was drained, and his face also showed signs of tension.

'I can't stay long... ... '

Seongjin checked his condition for a moment and then looked back at Belinda. I just need to quickly ask a few things I'm really curious about.

"I ask, believing that I am proud before the Lord. Why are you distributing medicinal tea in the North? "Do you really know what its ingredients are?"

That was the most important thing to Seongjin right now.

To find out in advance what the Margrave Sigismund was planning and what he is still planning. By doing so, he ultimately prevents something his father thinks.

Then Belinda raised her eyes in confusion and then burst into

laughter.

"Medicine tea? Ah, that guy Giacomo is talking about a different name for 'Awakening Tea.'"

"Awakening tea?"

"Yes. Another spiritual blessing bestowed by the Lord Himself! 'The awakening tea is a precious treasure given only to penitent brothers!'"

Tea that creates salt crystals and stimulates salt crystals.

If you call it 'awakening', it would be a fairly intuitive name.

"okay. Shouldn't that precious treasure be shared among brothers underground? Why bother creating a problem by distributing it to the top?"

"Hehe. You foolish apostates. 'The Lord is not that narrow-minded.'"

As Belinda let out a chuckle, the blood droplets that were filling her mouth started to jump out.

"Awakening tea is ultimately given to save all humans! 'The reason we are willing to share it with you apostates, even if it means taking on disadvantages, is because it is the will of the Lord who wants humans on all continents to awaken spiritually!'"

He has no doubt that he is shouting with such force that he is truly doing it for the world.

In her firm eyes, I could feel the kind of incision that one would only see in a martyr.

[That guy, is he serious?]

'Ah, this is why fanatics... ..'

Seongjin clicked his tongue slightly and continued asking questions.

"There's still something left to answer. 'I would have asked if you knew what its ingredients were.'"

"Yes, it is a treasure of penitence that the Archbishop himself distributes to the brothers!"

"So what are the ingredients of that treasure?"

"It is a divine grace from the Lord!"

... You have no idea.

'Anyway, it is the Archbishop of Penitence who delivers Loferum's eggs to them. If you want to know for sure how to procure monster eggs, you have to find him and kill him.'

Having concluded that, Seongjin moved on to the next question.

It is about the Penitent tree, the tree of the devil's world that devours everything around it the moment it germinates.

"I heard this report the other day. "You testified that you brought it about by order of the archbishop to destroy Giacomo Milo, who dishonored the note."

"... "Yeah, yeah."

However, Belinda's voice as she answers becomes less confident for the first time.

Is it because I was confident that I would be honest with the main lord, or is it because I am inherently bad at lying?

[You're lying?]

Oh, I guess so.

Seongjin crossed his arms and repeated the previous question.

"Did you try to destroy Giacomo Milo with the magic tree?"

Then Belinda raised her head stiffly and shouted.

"Yes! That wicked apostate dared to betray the penitent brothers! "I can never tolerate that!"

"So the archbishop ordered you to do that?"

"Yes, yes."

Look at this.

"The reason you brought the Demon Tree was purely on your own initiative."

"... It is the duty of our brothers to understand His deep will in advance and assist Him as thoroughly as possible."

That's enough of an excuse, you fanatic.

Why are you causing such a big accident based on pointless guesses?

After taking a quick glance at Masain, Seongjin asked the last question.

"Do you know Gael Bertrand?"

Belinda's sullen face distorted.

"Are you kidding me? "You're not asking this because you don't think you know that famous person, right?"

"okay. "It's Gael Bertrand."

Then Sir Valerie, who had been listening to me until then, looked interested.

Perhaps he relaxed when Seongjin asked him a question that was completely unexpected.

Instead, the instinct of an inquisitor who is drawn to miscellaneous stories and gossip is slowly activated.

"Was it your Penitent Church that killed him?"

Then, everyone in the warehouse suddenly looked blank.

"... hey. If you're going to be unreasonable, give a plausible reason. Now they will hold us responsible for even the lives of those who

died in the civil war... .."

Belinda muttered with an absurd expression on her face, and Seongjin glared at her and asked softly.

"I won't ask again. Did you kill him?"

"... .."

Belinda pursed her lips and lowered her head.

Huhuhuhuhu.

Soon, a sinister laugh shakes the bloody warehouse.

"okay. I wondered why he was asking that. Now that I think about it, you are the Prince Mores... .."

"... .."

"As expected, you know something! "If you do this, everyone will know anyway, so I'll be happy to answer!"

Flashing.

Belinda raised her head and made eye contact with Seongjin. It was as if she was a completely different person than before, and her face was now showing a strange joy.

As if sparks were coming from a broken wiring, eyes glowing with an eerie light glare at Seongjin.

"ha ha ha! okay! He was the 'sacrifice'! "Maybe it's not that unfamiliar to you either!"

Wiggle.

Sensing that Masaine and Valerie were tense at the same time, Seongjin gave a cold command.

"... "Explain in detail."

"Of course. He is a 'penitential offering' carefully selected by the

Archbishop of Penitence to be offered only to the Lord! He was chosen as the sacrificial lamb, and his country was also chosen as the land of the glorious god!"

"I chose it as the land of the Lord God. "Then what was all that long civil war about?"

"haha! "To our great Archbishop, the Apostle of Penitence, how big a deal would it be to destroy a country like that?"

Is this the penitent archbishop again?

At that moment, something came to Seongjin's mind. It was Hayes' soul who cried out desperately, shedding black tears.

-Lord of the soul! Noble archbishop! Apostle of rest!

Naturally, this question arose.

"What does the existence of an archbishop mean to you?"

Then, kekekekekeuk.

Belinda burst into laughter as if she was dying of fun.

"... "What's funny?"

"No, I'm dumbfounded to hear such a question from you and no one else. Do you know nothing about [preparations] for yourself?"

"Spare?"

It was right then.

"... Lowering!"

Sir Masaine shouted softly from behind. The voice was desperate, as if someone was strangling it.

And Sir Valerie, who was watching from the side, blocks Seongjin's path and quickly covers Belinda's mouth with a gag. It happened almost simultaneously with Masain's cry.

"town!"

"Don't grit your teeth like that, Belinda."

Valerie pressed her mouth harshly and spoke in a soft voice.

"Eup? Huh?"

"Well, aren't the teeth that were replanted earlier already shaking? Go ahead and keep your mouth shut. Do you understand?"

"... .."

Seongjin turned around after checking Lord Masain again, who was breathing heavily with a pale face.

"okay. I can't go any further. "Enough with the interrogation."

Of course, I didn't forget to warn the Inquisitor before leaving the warehouse.

"And Sir Valerie?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm going to see Lord Masain today so I'll just quietly pass by. But if you block my way like that next time, I won't let you go even if you're a member of the monster task force. "Do you understand?"

"... ..!"

Valerie, who was shocked at what she saw for a moment, immediately bowed her head politely with a serious expression.

"... yes. "I will keep that in mind, sir."

* * *

"... "Why is everyone in such a mood?"

That night. Logan, who returned to his dorm after dark, was very embarrassed.

This is because a gloomy atmosphere was hanging over Seongjin and Masain, who were sitting in silence.

"Did something happen in the meantime? "Brother, why are you doing this again?"

Seongjin raised his head with a confused expression upon hearing Logan's worried voice.

'Gael Bertrand was sacrificed as a penance. 'What if Logan finds out about this?'

That's what Belinda said. The reason Ortona fell may have been because it was the country where Gael Bertran was born.

Seongjin felt his mood sinking even more as he faced Logan's harmless and innocent face.

"... "Oh, poor thing."

"... ... ?"

And then there was silence between them for a while. Martha, who would normally greet Logan warmly, is now immersed in the sofa and rarely raises her head.

Logan, who couldn't help but stand up, said.

"I don't know what's going on, but it looks like both of you aren't feeling well. Immediately call the dedicated maid and have a cup of warm tea..."

And at the same time, he was strongly blocked by both Seongjin and Masain.

"no! "No Edith!"

"Tea is fine, sir!"

Logan, taken aback by the sudden extreme reaction of the two people, blinked for a moment.

However, he did not know the reason and soon came to his own conclusion.

"Well, it's already too late at night to call the maid. "Then shall I give you a ride myself?"

And after a while, surprisingly, the tea that the Sword Master hastily made was quite edible.

Seongjin took a couple of sips of sweet tea with warm milk out of curiosity and soon felt a little relieved.

I like it.

It has a somewhat nostalgic scent that reminds me of the Earth's childhood a long time ago.

Logan, sensing the languid air, let out a small laugh.

"It's been a really long time, hasn't it? "We both used to eat well when I rode it at the Blue Rose Labyrinth sometimes."

"Is this Melbourne tea?"

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who sensed a familiar scent, asked, and Logan nodded.

"In the North, this is how they eat Melbourne. "It's perfect for warming up in cold weather."

"hmm. Right."

But before I could take a few sips, I felt strangely dizzy and tired.

"It's really delicious. But is it because of the heated milk? I feel a little sleepy... .."

Then, Logan, who was sipping tea on the other side, answered calmly.

"You've been sleeping soundly since long ago when you drank it. "Maybe it's because there's quite a bit of rum in it?"

"... what?"

Seongjin asked, flinching in surprise.

"Are kids drinking here?"

"hmm? Rum is also often used as a seasoning. why?"

No, anyway, is it okay for a child to drink to the point where he gets upset?

Of course, it seems possible if you are a sword master who can disintegrate a few drops of alcohol in seconds.

Seongjin is frowning and thinking.

"In the past, His Majesty Mores called this car 'Hush Tea.'"

The two people turned to see Masain's voice suddenly coming from next to them.

Fortunately, his complexion looked much better than before, perhaps because of the alcohol-infused tea.

After that, small talk continued for a while. Mainly, Logan told the news from the imperial palace, and Seongjin and Masain listened.

Then, Seongjin heard surprising news that little Saint Aurelion, who had been sent to Logan, was enshrined in Bastian Church.

"Oh, that reminds me. "Actually, I have Lord Martha's too."

"yes?"

"We all bought it together, but when I thought about giving it to you, I realized that we went on a trip together. So I was wondering what to do, so I put it in my luggage and forgot about it."

Seongjin rummaged through the women's clothes and found a small bald saint.

"Now, give it to me when you have the chance."

"Sir, why do I... .."

Seongjin looked at Masain curiously as he asked with surprised eyes.

"huh? "So, since we're family, we all live together?"

"... ..!"

At that moment, Masain looked overcome with tears.

And Logan, who was looking at that with a slightly pleased face, said:

"When we return to the Imperial Capital, let's first learn how to make a cone with me. "Brother Masain."

"... "A cone?"

"It's popular in the imperial palace these days to put a pretty cone on little Saint Aurelion."

That's not all. Little Castle Aurelion's custom pouch and custom decoration stand... ..

Seongjin, who was listening to Logan saying strange things next to him, burst out laughing without realizing it.

Is it because it's been a while since I drank alcohol? Do you feel much better?

"okay! "Now that you're out, should I show you something fun?"

As the gift was presented, Seongjin remembered something again and jumped up from his seat.

"Actually, there's something I'd like to ask the two of you for."

Seongjin said that and took out an ice heart from his chest.

I already know Amelia's strong taste. It was very easy for her to prepare her gift accordingly.

Logan also knew what he needed, so he prepared a gift accordingly.

However, Seongjin did not yet know what Sisley liked.

Maybe it's because we haven't known each other for a long time and because he matures quickly, but he doesn't often say things like 'what I want to do' or 'what I want to have.'

However, even if you ask others, there is no clear answer because she has lived as a celibate saint until now.

"So, first of all, I prepared something that a girl of Sisley's age would like. It's a cute doll that we probably put the most effort into. But just in case, I want to hear both of your opinions first."

Seongjin shouted with a confident face.

"Come out! Shaved ice number 3!"

Then coo!

A huge shadow was suddenly summoned from the air and fell to the floor. It was a huge teddy bear made of ice.

[Wow!]

The bear shouted loudly and looked at Seongjin with bright eyes.

"... "You said it was a doll?"

Logan asked in confusion, having imagined something like a small porcelain doll wearing a dress.

"huh! "It's a teddy bear."

"Teddy... what is that?"

"What do you mean? That's just an ordinary teddy bear... .."

Seongjin, who was answering, tilted his head.

what? I chose it because I thought it was a design that wouldn't go too far with the trend, but maybe teddy bears aren't that common in this world?

Okay, if design doesn't appeal, let's show function!

"This is not just a doll. "He's a great bear who speaks simply."

Then the ice bear flapped its short, chubby arms and shouted loudly. It was a high and loud sound, like a recorded electronic sound.

[Al~la~view!]

"Huh!"

Logan and Masain, startled, quickly put their hands on the swords on their belts.

Wow, it's still too early to be surprised. There's still a lot left to be proud of.

"It's not just that. Look, this kid can dance to music."

Dudududududutun~

The giant ice bear began shaking its plump butt while singing an unknown song.

"... ... !"

As the two people's faces grew paler, only the drunk Seongjin proudly spread his arms without knowing anything.

"And there is another most important function. "It even has a light security function built in to help defeat the bad guys targeting Sisley!"

Then paching!

The dancing bear's eyes glow red, and sharp, ugly ice thorns protrude from its chubby hands.

[egg! la! View!]

"... ... ?!"

"how is it? "What could be more perfect for a children's toy?"

It's great to see it again!

As expected, it is worth the effort.

"Lowering..."

Sir Martha, who had been gaping with his mouth open, eventually opened his mouth in a trembling voice. His pupils were now shaking mercilessly as if an earthquake had occurred.

"At least, I don't think the saint would like something like that..."

Seongjin was greatly embarrassed when he saw Masain's face suddenly darken.

"uh? why? "What's wrong with your reaction?"

"..."

"Logan? Please say something too. "Why are you doing that?"

... Isn't this pretty cool? Is it just me?

272. On The Dream Road (1)

The day I remodeled shaved ice in an old man's workshop.

Dexter, who was diligently analyzing the ice heart with the Homunculus source editor, suddenly became startled and called out to Seongjin.

"Hey, what is this?"

"yes?"

"Is there something strange here?"

Dexter showed Seongjin the screen he was adjusting.

what? Looking at it this way, I'm not sure?

"This guy here. Is it something very different from other objects? "Has there been anything strange along the way?"

Ah, you mean shaved ice number 3?

Seongjin tilted his head.

Now that I think about it, I felt like I was a bit inferior compared to the other guys. Because I was always one beat behind and ended up falling on flat ground.

And Dexter's answer was surprising.

"It is equipped with artificial intelligence."

"Artificial intelligence?"

"Ah, this is a familiar concept on Earth, but it might be a little new to you. The name is true. "It is a kind of electronic intelligence created by humans."

Dexter, who until then had firmly believed that Seongjin was a dragon hatchling, carefully explained everything about artificial intelligence.

"Sometimes this happens when you indiscriminately import sources from other worlds with the Homunculus Engine. "The wrong things are drawn in and mixed up."

And Dexter, who was analyzing Shaved Ice No. 3 in more detail, said that it seemed to be a child care and learning program mounted on a home robot.

"Then shouldn't it perform much better than other shaved ices?"

It's an artificial intelligence with quite a few functions? But why did you become such a half-hearted person?

"Because the calculation itself was complex, it would have continued to malfunction in inappropriate situations. "Because autonomous judgment and orders were conflicting with each other."

Anyway, it is a useless part for remodeling. Should I just delete it like this?

Dexter asked as he manipulated the crystal board.

"Uh, wait a minute."

Seongjin stared at the screen, feeling a sudden flash of inspiration.

'Artificial intelligence sounds very plausible, but wouldn't it be okay to leave it behind?'

At first, I was just thinking of making an ice teddy bear that was cute and cool to hold.

'If possible, a teddy bear toddling around there would be cuter and more friendly, right?'

And Dexter's reaction was positive.

"It's not that difficult."

This is how a small walking teddy bear was born.

However, contrary to expectations that it would work properly by removing the conflicting parts, Bingsu No. 3 still walked awkwardly and repeatedly rolled on the floor.

To Seongjin, who was very disappointed, Dexter added as if to comfort him.

"Haven't the shape and size of your body completely changed? "It takes some time to adapt."

"hmm."

"Moreover, little by little, you will learn about your surroundings. "Why don't you move more and more skillfully?"

As he said, the little teddy bear, which waddled awkwardly at first, began to walk more and more convincingly as time passed.

Seongjin smiled in satisfaction as he watched Shaved Ice No. 3 running around the entire workshop.

"good! "You learn quickly."

Then suddenly a thought occurred to me.

But isn't it a waste to use the most advanced artificial intelligence available just for walking?

"Perhaps. "Can we put a talking function here?"

Then Dexter frowned.

"That doll doesn't have the structure to create vocal cords or respiratory organs in the first place, right? But I think it would work if it were just a simple recorded voice."

So the little ice bear started walking around shouting 'Alabyu'.

"Oh, it's cute. Okay, while I'm talking, if you can sing and dance... .."
."

"... yes?"

After a while, thanks to Dexter's digging, the bear was able to do the same unidentified butt dance.

But even then, Seongjin's orders were endless.

"But. I heard you were a child sitter in the first place? Then, if there is someone trying to harm the child, it is also a good idea to add a function to step in and protect the child... .."

"It seems like the weapon needs to be much larger in order to wield it properly, but if you add a size conversion function... .."

Dexter, unable to endure the endless demands, ended up throwing his goggles on the floor and getting angry.

"What on earth do you want to make! "Is this really a gift to give to a child?"

* * *

"... Well, it's a gift. A gift that everyone wants to have when they are young... .."

Seongjin, who was muttering, opened his eyes.

"omg?"

And then he made eye contact with Logan, who was looking at him blankly.

"Are you awake? If you drink hush-peach tea, you still fall asleep without knowing whether there are mice or birds, right? "I guess you've mastered the Auror skills now, I thought you'd be okay with that level of alcohol."

"... Logan? "Why are you here?"

Even though there was someone next to me, I fell asleep without feeling anything at all?

When Seongjin stood up in embarrassment, he saw Sir Masain sleeping, leaning on the armchair next to him.

Why is this guy acting like this again?

"It hasn't been long since I switched with brother Masain. "My brother was very worried."

uh? What's there to worry about? I just fell asleep while drunk.

When Seongjin made a puzzled face, Logan silently pointed behind him.

"How could I go to rest, leaving you and me alone?"

Just as he said, on the other side of the bed, a huge teddy bear was standing blankly, exposing its vicious thorns.

When Seongjin made eye contact, the bear tilted its head and let out a polite electronic sound.

[Al~la~view!]

"... .."

Only then did the memories of yesterday begin to come back to me.

What on earth did I do while I was drunk?

Suddenly, I was holding my head with a headache, and Logan asked with a cautious look on his face.

"Are you going to take that to the imperial capital like that?"

"huh. Anyway, it's a gift. why?"

"Wouldn't the people of the imperial capital be a little surprised?"

Logan spoke back, but Seongjin immediately understood what he wanted to say.

Strictly speaking, the original source of shaved ice is Glatzer Troll. What a great magician. They are worried that they may violate the boundaries of the Orthodox Church.

But Seongjin also had an idea.

They have already accepted the 'Knight of Grace' as a holy relic. If you bring one more similar item, it will be easy to convince them the second time.

"are you okay. "I even engraved the right pattern here."

Seongjin confidently pointed to Bingsu No. 3's chest.

Certainly, there was a small symbol of the main god engraved on the bear's chest, similar to the 'Knight of Grace'.

In the Holy Empire, with just one pattern like this, a demonic beast can be transformed into a miracle of the god overnight.

"And, if you're worried about people's eyes, you can reduce the size."

Let Seongjin manipulate the ice heart -

Pyooooong.

The teddy bear shrunk in size, making a sound similar to the sound of air being blown out.

Logan, who was silently looking at the little bear walking around the floor of the dorm, eventually smiled and muttered.

"Well, okay. Looking at it like this, it seems a little cute, doesn't it?"

"Now you really appreciate the true value of shaved ice!"

Everyone pretends not to be like that and becomes a teddy bear lover.

Just wait and see. Sooner or later, there will be a teddy bear craze in the imperial capital as well. Everyone will fall in love with the charm of the teddy bear loved all over the world?

While Seongjin was making a confident expression, Logan stood up and said.

"If it's okay, let's get ready to leave. "We're already a little behind schedule."

And he added with some hesitation:

"... "Let's go home quickly."

* * *

Just before entering the ecliptic.

The party who entered the sphere of influence of [Grace] stopped for a moment and were deeply moved.

The same was true for ordinary people, but the change in the facial expressions of the Paladins was truly dramatic. This is because everyone is deeply worshiped by the immense and holy divinity that humans cannot fathom. Some people shed tears endlessly.

In particular, Sir Sharon looked truly overwhelmed. She, who was always grinning with her crazy face, crossed herself with a calm expression on her face, which was rare.

Even Lord Valerie was quietly reciting a prayer with an expression of great emotion.

Even Director Bruno, who had no divine power at all, clearly felt the difference.

"Something is really different as we get closer to the ecliptic.
"Kalmen's presence has become very calm."

A look of relief appeared on his face, as he was always worried that his student with anger management disorder would have an accident.

Of course, unfortunately, there was one person who was not happy about this change.

[Ugh. I feel like I'm going to die of frustration!]

The demon lord was trapped in the flame crystal and groaned.

The guy who had fallen out of favor and was wandering around carefree has once again become trapped in Seongjin's head.

[Wow, I don't know how I withstood this pressure before.]

I thought this guy was pretty pitiful. While we're bringing in salmon, let's get some bear meat from the north.

And there were splendid improvement ceremonies one after another.

Seongjin looked out at the buildings along the main street decorated with flowers in full bloom and colorful ribbons, feeling a little strangely impressed.

'Before, I was watching Logan come in like this at the imperial palace... ... '

But this time the atmosphere was a little different from before.

"Long live Prince Logan! Long live Prince Mores!"

"God's blessing to the Holy Family that always protects its subjects from demonic beasts!"

"Glory to the mercy of the Lord who bestowed the knights of grace on behalf of his subjects!"

The subjects of the imperial capital were repeatedly chanting and waving handkerchiefs, even to Prince Mores, whom they had never called before.

"... ... "

The Lilium detachment, led by Logan, looked majestic as always.

In particular, the three Musketeers, Otto, Ellie, and Duchamp, riding right behind Logan, were overflowing with a solemn dignity that anyone who knew their behavior could not even imagine.

"No matter what, the biggest hero of this demonic attack is Prince

Mores. He wished he had been at the forefront, riding a horse like the Liliun detachment. "So that everyone can see his wonderful side."

As Sir Claudia spoke with regret, Sir Maria who was next to her shook her head.

"You don't like being treated like a public official in front of others. Besides, isn't there that wolfdog?"

"Oh, well... .."

Sir Claudia looked back with a slightly shocked face. A huge wolf dog wagging its tail eagerly next to the imperial carriage.

Initially, Prince Mores was also scheduled to enter the country on horseback with Prince Logan. However, we soon ran into unexpected difficulties.

-Wong wong wong! Whoa whoa!

When the wolf dog saw Prince Mores on his horse, it began to howl sadly.

-Uuuuuuuu!

How can this be? Leave me now?

It was so sad that everyone who saw it could understand the meaning of that cry, even if they were not members of the household.

-Yes, yes. okay. This cute guy.

'Not cute at all!'

While everyone is shouting internally.

Prince Mores gave the wolf dog a treat with a nonchalant look on his face and then quietly locked himself inside the carriage.

As they passed through the cheers and reached the imperial palace, it was Amelia who came forward and greeted them in person.

As she stood calmly, there was a slightly unfamiliar atmosphere,

different from what I usually see.

Although she was wearing a light and airy dress, her organized prayers still showed a kind of confidence, like a general leading a large army.

But still, Amelia was Amelia. Seongjin could clearly feel the bright gray eyes of the princess, who was standing there pretending to be polite, sparkling with joy that could not be hidden.

The princess walks lightly and stands in front of Seongjin and Logan.

Soon, a bright smile spread like a rose in full bloom.

"Welcome, Mores."

"uh... .."

Seongjin suddenly froze.

At first, I tried to just say a proper greeting. She proudly showed off what she had acquired from Sigismund and tried to tell him that she had also prepared a wonderful gift for him.

But the moment he faced Amelia's face, Seongjin felt speechless for some reason.

Eyes looking at him with a kind light.

If you think about it, Amelia has always been kind to him from the beginning.

-You already apologized to me.

He forgave Mores for his long-standing evil deeds as if he were an angel.

-I will protect Mores in the future.

Didn't he show unconditional support no matter what he did?

Amelia is looking at herself with the same extreme love as usual.

"I've been waiting for you for a really long time."

"... .."

But Seongjin was different from before.

I know now. The name she calls in that sweet voice refers not to someone else but to herself as a whole.

"Siesley and I prayed to little Saint Aurelion every day. Please make sure you come back safely."

What she had been waiting for was not another Mores, but herself.

"... .."

Amelia, who was looking at Seongjin's frozen, silent face, suddenly noticed something and was momentarily taken aback. Then she smiled softly and took his hand. The small amount of warmth coming from her slender hand could not touch her chest like that.

"Welcome back to the imperial palace."

Tuk.

And soon after, Logan's White Knights' livery covers Seongjin's head.

"Let's go inside, Mores."

Tuk-tuk.

A thoughtful hand pats the shoulder as if comforting.

Perhaps Logan is the only person who can properly understand the complex emotions that Seongjin is feeling here and now.

"Don't stay here like this. I have to hurry up and see Sisley, the twins, and Abama."

Seongjin, whose throat was locked, could only nod slowly without answering.

Uh, okay.

That's how it should be.

273. On The Dream Road (2)

A few days before the prince's party returned, the Delcross capital was full of rumors about the 'Knight of Grace'.

-The Lord himself sent down a knight wearing ice armor to help his suffering subjects. It is said that the divine light at that time lit up the night sky like broad daylight!

-Prince Mores defeated an army of thousands of demonic beasts with this ice knight! Now, the 'Knight of Grace' who has fulfilled his duty will be designated as a holy relic and become a knight who will protect the imperial capital forever!

Romain, who was wandering aimlessly around the city as always, tilted his head when he heard the unexpected news.

'... 'Knight of Grace?'

A god without a name is as good as non-existent. There is no way such a minor miracle could happen now.

However, since it is said to have been designated as a holy relic, it is probably not an unfounded rumor. Perhaps it was a concrete miracle created by human hands for some purpose.

Moreover, the fact that it was spreading at such a rapid rate was highly likely to have been carried out by the Ministry of Intelligence, which had been ordered to succeed. In other words, the subject of the conspiracy is Seonghwang.

So I thought about it for a while.

'Why on earth did the guardian of Delcross create something like

that?'

There is no particular need to borrow the authority of the main lord, nor is it to keep the nobles in check.

He possesses great divine power befitting the title of God's representative, and is not a strong person in power who can hold and wield with one hand both the Orthodox Church and the nobility.

'That's what he does. There must be some hidden purpose.'

But no matter how much I thought about it, the conclusion was that I wasn't sure.

So Romain, who came out to watch the triumph ceremony out of curiosity, was greatly shocked when he realized the true identity of the 'Knight of Grace'.

'... Glatzer Troll? Why on earth is the sentinel of the Demonic World here!?'

I rubbed my eyes under the mask several times at the unbelievable fact, but no matter how I looked, it was clear that it was a Glatzer troll. Although his appearance had changed slightly, there was no way he could not recognize that unique being that was outside the physical laws of the original world.

Sentinels guarding the road leading to Magyeong's [Painter].

The entrance is completely hidden, and Romain, who has a gap in his memory, cannot even guess how to access it.

'Transforming that Glatzer Troll obviously means that the source was changed and edited in some way. But isn't that an Ionian technology that has now disappeared?'

A huge rule that encompasses the entire normal world.

Was there still a way to get involved with it?

Cooung. thud. thud.

Overwhelmed by the majesty of the ice monster that walked majestically, Romain stared at it in fascination for a moment.

"Long live Prince Logan! Long live Prince Mores!"

"Glory to the mercy of the Lord who bestowed the knights of grace on behalf of his subjects!"

The subjects of the imperial capital were also enthusiastic.

A beautiful white armor with the god's symbol engraved on its chest, its cloak fluttering, as it moves gracefully towards the imperial palace.

Isn't it like a grand old myth actually unfolding before your eyes?

'... So beautiful!'

Romaine suddenly thought about this in a daze.

"That is the scene that can be achieved by those who control the laws of the world. The power to bring things into existence solely through one's own rules, even while defying the laws of the world. It's truly a miracle!"

For a long time, Romain had known what Sigurd Sigurdson truly wanted. No, he thought he knew in his head.

But it is only now that he realizes how grand and grand his dream was.

'What Sigurd Sigurdson really wants is to create another grand order that the world has no choice but to comply with. Just as an oracle long ago created rules that support reality through the power of thought, achieving a similar new order through one's own power to create stories.'

It is not something that can be expressed simply by the simple word God.

Maybe Sigurd Sigurdsson wanted to become an oracle?

"But all his attempts tended to be scattered in vain. No matter how hard he tries to imitate it, it's bound to be different from the real thing... .."

The voice that came out of Romaine's mouth was instantly lost in the excited crowd.

There was no way to hide my bitter feelings. Because even Romain was once sincere in order to be that 'fake'.

Anyway, one thing was certain.

'Guardian of Delcross. You really are a scary person. What else is this for? How far ahead is he planning to make such a dizzying plan that is so difficult to guess?'

I had no doubt about the limitations of humans, and I expected that sooner or later a loophole would show up.

But until now, Seonghwang seemed to be enduring everything quite resolutely.

The only hope is to steal the rose from the palace that he loves so much and tie his hands and feet.

'... 'Is that really possible?'

When Romaine arrived at the meeting point, he felt even his faint hope disappearing like foam.

Prince Leonard, who was giggling and holding a bottle of liquor, looked so insignificant that even a thousand years of faith would disappear in an instant.

"Look at this, Romain. This is a jewel to gift to Princess Amelia. It's a beautiful necklace made of precious red gold and gray diamonds! how is it?"

Romain was frustrated.

Prince Leonard, who is currently his only hope, rather than captivating the princess, is completely bewildered by her.

It was a truly insignificant defeat, considering that he confidently promised at first that he would steal his heart.

"yes. It's a pretty necklace. But how do you plan on handing it over?"

A topic that gets rejected every time we meet?

"Ah, Princess Amelia, who used to be quiet, seems to have something to do with it, and they say she's been making appearances in social circles from time to time lately. So she wants to join in on a proper banquet."

Or ask Prince Mores to build a bridge. Are you coming back soon?

While murmuring like that, Leonard caressed the necklace in the jewelry box with his hand. Delicately crafted red-gold petals that look like roses.

"Isn't the meaning behind this design truly amazing? 'It's a work of art that depicts her beautiful rosy hair with red gold and her sparkling eyes with precious gray diamonds!'"

Romaine stared blankly at the box the prince held out for a moment and then asked again.

"But isn't this an ordinary soft crystal, not a diamond? 'Would someone of the princess's caliber happily accept something that would normally not be given as jewels?'"

Then Leonard made a listless face.

"Ah, as expected. Your eyes cannot deceive you. What did you say? 'An eye that looks into the grain?'"

"It is an eye that looks straight at the essence."

"okay. Whatever it was. Anyway, those eyes are really magical. 'It looks similar, so I thought if I covered it with expensive savings, no one would know.'"

Leonard carefully took out the necklace and began to examine it carefully. Romaine, who watched him for a moment, suddenly became

curious and asked.

"Don't you love her, Leo?"

Don't you usually think that way?

It is said that one will do anything sincerely for the person he or she admires. I'm not trying to deceive you like that.

"That's a naive question, not like you. I'm surprised you ask that. But what does me loving her have to do with gifting her a well-made fake of hers?"

The prince's expression as he asked that question was colder than expected.

"What are you going to do if you get caught? Then you can't really steal her heart, right?"

"That too. "I love her for who she is, why should I beg her to give me her heart?"

Leonard's eyes were shining cruelly as he looked back at Romain. Those eyes filled with pure interest that he once showed right before he stoned a man in the royal palace of Rohan.

"Anyway, as long as I have her, that's it."

"... .."

"Besides, don't we have various plans? "You can't spend a lot of money on something that doesn't guarantee results."

Leonard said and held up the necklace into the sunlight.

Even though it was fake, the gray gem caught in the sunlight reflected a brilliant light comparable to that of a diamond. Even Romain, who knows its fleeting value, was struck by its beauty for a moment.

"Look. What if it's fake? "It's okay if you're this pretty."

Leonard smiled with satisfaction.

"Well, I'm not sure if she'll be happy. Until now, no beautiful flower or gorgeous jewel had captured her heart. Does she really like anything about the princess? What on earth does she have to shove in front of her to get even the slightest bit of admiration?"

* * *

"... "It's so, so cool!"

Amelia's eyes were shining with admiration as she looked up at the gigantic knight of grace.

"How did that knight defeat the demon beasts, Mores?"

"Yes, sister. "I knocked out the Glatzer Troll with one punch."

In response to Seongjin's answer, the knights of the Royal Guard quietly whispered.

'A knight? 'Why did you leave an intact sword next to me?'

But it seems the princess had different thoughts. Her cheeks were flushed, and her clear gray eyes shone hazily as if she was dreaming.

"amazing! What would it be like to become such a strong giant? "If you just swing your arm once, the castle wall will be destroyed in an instant, right?"

I've been thinking about this before, but why is my sister so obsessed with destroying the castle wall?

And at her reaction, Logan and Masain exchanged glances.

'If you react like that, isn't Sisley also something to look forward to?'

'Yes, sir. 'Maybe you like ice bears more than you think.'

'I was worried that he might be scared after receiving the gift, but it seems I was unfounded.'

Of course, they had no idea that Seongjin was thinking this way.

'what a waste. If I had known that they would like it this much, I would have brought one Glacher Troll with them according to the number of family members, even if it was too much. If it weren't for that damn clogged Inquisition... ... '

[Arthur. The roads are all destroyed.]

However, unlike the subjects and nobles who were purely amazed, the Orthodox priests were pale.

Although it was said to be a miracle from the Lord, it was due to fear of encountering something unfamiliar and not found in the scriptures.

Moreover, even though it bears the sacred name of 'Knight of Grace', why can't I feel the slightest divine energy from it?

The reaction of the high-ranking priests who attended the crusade was also very shocking. They were the ones who, unable to overcome pressure from within and without, hastily approved that strange thing as a sacred relic.

In particular, Cardinal Benitus was not a sight to behold.

"Ah, this is the end. Don't..."

He was trembling so pitifully that his already small body was crunching his nails.

"I can't believe that in this Delcross, which is full of the Lord's grace, such an evil monster is running around. What can I do with this? Ah, Lord!"

He was fidgeting with vague fear, and eventually he glared blasphemously at the person he thought was the culprit of everything.

Prince Mores.

"okay. Everyone is that evil..."

At that time, someone warned him in a sharp voice.

"Please refrain from speaking, Cardinal Benitus. "You are now insulting both His Majesty the Holy Emperor and the authority of the Holy Assembly."

When he turned around, Archbishop Wesker, the head of the Orthodox Church, was glaring at him with a stern face as always.

He was an arrogant junior priest who clashed with Benitus at every turn.

"Are you shamelessly talking about God's miracles? "I don't know that you strongly influenced Cardinal Myer to hasten the Holy Assembly's decision, Wesker!"

However, Archbishop Wesker snorted and turned his head as if he had heard all the funny things.

"A priest so easily criticizes the decision of the Holy See, which strictly follows the scriptures, without any basis! There is literally no end to it."

"How dare you... .."

"Do both in moderation. "We are now in front of His Majesty Seonghwang."

The head of the Holy Congregation, Cardinal Meyer, could not see this and consoled them.

Meanwhile, Seongjin stood proudly in front of Seonghwang.

For some reason, the corners of his eyes were a little puffy, but his upright posture was extremely revered. It's hard to believe that just a few months ago, he was a pig that would have been more comfortable rolling around.

Tap, tap, tap.

Seongjin, who stood in front of the emperor with a stoic step like a soldier, politely held out something with both hands and spoke.

"When the ice wall collapsed and Sigismund's subjects fell into deep

despair, the Lord shone down from heaven, and it was the Knight of Grace. The soldiers on the battlefield dared not open their eyes and look at the light due to the divine radiance of the main god."

Seongjin's voice flowed smoothly as if he had oiled his throat.

"When the Knight of Grace swung his huge sword, the Great Mountain split apart and the waves of demonic beasts rushing in immediately lost their power. It was truly a day when I could feel the almightiness of the Lord in my bones."

Without even a moment's hesitation or stammering, it was truly like flowing water.

But it has to be that way. While Logan was chasing the demon beasts, Seongjin was working hard at creating a great story with Francis at the Count's mansion.

Some of these stories were purely his creation.

Everyone in the conference room was mesmerized by the vivid battlefield story told by the prince. Only Seonghwang, who was sitting on the throne, touched his forehead in silence for a moment with a confused expression.

'Basically, he is a person who knows how to show off to the audience.'

Archbishop Wesker, who was listening to Seongjin's voice resonating sonorously from every corner even though it was not loud, suddenly thought.

A quality I never dreamed that that bastard Prince Mores would have.

'If you commit fraud with words like that, there's no one who won't fall for it.'

At that time, a mumbling sound reached her ears. It was the voice of Cardinal Benitus muttering softly as he looked at the prince.

"It is sad. It's just too bad. Is that really the tongue of the devil...?"

Archbishop Wesker blinked his only eye and thought.

I really didn't know that I would feel the same way as that tight-lipped senior.

274. On The Dream Road (3)

"The battle in the dark of night was like a nightmare, but we moved forward, relying on the glory emanating from the Knight of Grace and believing in God. "After everything was over and I suddenly came to my senses, wouldn't this have suddenly appeared before the Knight of Grace?"

The prince raised the object he was holding high so that the audience could see it. It was an ice heart that was transformed into a small key through Dexter's editing skills.

Oh oh-

Voices of admiration erupt from everywhere. The faintly glowing key was unusual to look at.

Is that all? The paladins, who had strengthened their eyes with aura, were able to clearly see the main god's symbol engraved on the small key. If you do it, you may not know what it is, but it is definitely a sacred item.

"At that moment, I knew instinctively. This is another sign given by the Lord, the key to activating the Knight of Grace. Even after saving the Sigismund Spirit, the Knight of Grace was willing to remain in this world to protect Delcross."

Roaring Roaring-

That strong and gigantic ice knight continues to protect the imperial capital and the imperial palace!

When they heard the story, which they had only heard about through rumors, directly from the prince, the crowd's vague doubts gradually

turned into excited expectations.

"... "Isn't this a beautiful story?"

Sir Agnes, who was next to Wesker, smiled softly and whispered.

She, the leader of the Knights of St. Grazier, was already over 70 years old, and had left the 4th missionary corps heading to the south in charge of her adjutant and was remaining in the imperial capital.

"Maybe it's because I'm older now, but I like dream-like stories that connect everyone as one."

I guess that means it's a dream-like fiction. He probably sensed that much of the prince's remarks were laced with bragging.

But even so, Sir Agnes' eyes were extremely affectionate, as if she were looking at her cute grandson doing a trick.

"So do i. Hehehe."

Wesker, who responded like that, found it difficult to refrain from bursting into laughter the moment he looked at the throne.

This is because I read a faint, momentary expression on the face of Seonghwang, who was quietly keeping his mouth shut.

-Do your best, son.

Wesker worked with Seonghwang for a long time, and had resorted to unjustified means on several occasions.

There were also accidents that narrowly crossed the border of fraud. Of course, this was possible thanks to the implicit approval of the Emperor.

But I never thought that the day would come when I would see him racking his brains over someone else's fraud!

"I thought about it when you took out the prisoners from the capital guard, but aren't you the type of person who does really cute things?"

Wesker basically liked that kind of trickster temperament.

To her, who thought it was okay to sometimes cross the line to achieve a desired result, such a person was not a criminal, but simply a person with whom she could communicate.

In a way that was different from the success, I felt that I and Prince Mores seemed to get along quite well.

"Ah, I am afraid. That unknown thing is deceiving everyone! If we just leave it like this... ..!"

Of course, not everyone was favorable.

Write it!

Although Cardinal Meyer noticed several times, Cardinal Benitus was already so agitated that he could not pay any attention to those around him.

At that time, a heavy voice stopped him.

"Cardinal Benitus."

A voice that cracks ominously, as if scraping rusty iron. It was Sir Leander, the head of St. Terbachia.

A face as insensitive as a withered old tree looks down at the cardinal with a rare cold glow.

"Prince Mores has served as an advisor to the monster task force at the earnest request of Leandros. And he came back with a remarkable major that no one could disparage. So, if you continue to say bad things to Your Majesty and Your Majesty, I will not wait any longer."

The leader of all exorcists. Rumor has it that this is Sir Leander, whom even the devil is afraid of and avoids.

When his gloomy and ominous gaze fell upon him, Cardinal Benitus was startled and closed his mouth like a mute.

"Hoo."

Sir Agnes, who was looking at the scene, whispered in surprise.

"I've been at odds with you in the imperial palace for a long time now, but this is the first time I've seen you go out of your way for someone like that."

Wesker nodded in sympathy.

Leandros was certainly a man with many secrets.

Like Director Katrina, he is considered one of the Holy Emperor's closest associates, but not much is known about him other than the fact that he is often away from the imperial capital due to work.

Meanwhile, the prince's report had reached its end.

"So I would like to dedicate this evidence of glory to my Father, who is God's representative and the supreme ruler of the continent."

The heart of ice was handed to the valet and then transferred back into the hands of Chamberlain Lewis.

And finally, after receiving the item, Seonghwang looked down at the back of the prince's head with an incomprehensible expression for a moment.

"As reported by Prince Mores, I heard that there was a lot of praise for the main deity and the royal family in the local area. "It is said that the Lord always comes where His will is, so wouldn't that mean that the princes' sincerity for their subjects was so extreme?"

Soon, Seonghwang's calm voice echoed throughout the conference hall.

"Mores, Logan. Despite your young age, you have done excellent things as members of the Holy Family. "As your father, I am very proud of you."

"... thank you."

For some reason, the prince hesitated for a moment before opening his mouth a beat later. It was a very simple greeting, considering the

lengthy rhetoric that had been made earlier.

Seonghwang smiled faintly and finished speaking.

"Today is a truly meaningful day. "We will hold an imperial palace banquet to commemorate the princes' safe return."

* * *

Seongjin has already made refrigerators that will fit into most palaces. And it became a big topic among the workers preparing the dinner.

"It's a small low-temperature warehouse made of magic ice that doesn't melt."

"Egg money! The devil? "So it's not a cursed item?"

"haha. It's okay, chef. He said that there was a strange phenomenon where the ice did not melt around the land where the Knight of Grace landed. "They say they were made by digging them up, so they must be sacred items, right?"

Anyway, the refrigerator received great reviews from everyone.

Only Seonghwang looked at the small refrigerator that came into the office and muttered with a slightly pale face.

"Head..."

"yes? your majesty. The head? "Do you have a headache?"

"... "No, it's nothing."

If Seongjin had known that fact, he would have said it with glee.

-Oh, do you recognize your father? This is the noble sacrifice of shaved ice number 4. It is a refrigerator in which the entire body is divided into 11 parts, and a special refrigerator made of heads was placed in the office. haha!

In any case, the ample refrigerators were delivered to each palace.

Not only the main palace, office, Jinju Palace, Silver Rose Labyrinth, and Blue Rose Labyrinth, but also the twins' mansion and the palaces of each empress and empress.

Of course, these were not controlled separately by the ice heart.

I didn't have a lot of ice hearts, and like the cryogenic carriage I had entrusted to Schmidt, it wasn't something I had to worry about being stolen.

Wouldn't it be troublesome if the user accidentally opened it and the entire palace's refrigerators came together and returned to Shaved Ice No. 4?

And there was a gift-giving ceremony earlier than expected.

Before attending the imperial palace banquet, for some reason, all the brothers and sisters flocked to Jinju Palace.

"I'm sorry I couldn't meet you first, brother."

Sisley approached me with a happy look on his face. She was a girl who looked like a doll but now had a more lively expression than before.

"But I promised my brother that I wouldn't miss the knights' training."

"okay? good job. "Training must always be done sincerely."

Speaking like a person much older than him, Seongjin once again realized that the little boy in front of him was even younger than he thought. He also said he was happier than he expected.

Of course, there was still an unwelcome fake saint hanging behind it.

"Shaaaak!"

Oh, you do it in moderation!

If you feel like you're going to be on guard, don't come, or better yet, bring Cadmus! Where's the inspiration?

"This is a gift I prepared for my sister."

Seongjin first handed Amelia a long package.

"It must have been very difficult in Siegsmund Territory, but did you have time to take care of all these things? Thank you, Mores."

Amelia opened the gift with a happy face.

And when she saw the black and ugly sword that came out of there, she was at a loss for words and stopped breathing. She seemed greatly shocked.

"... Even though it looks a bit weird, it is a great sword, sister. "I can assure you that I am familiar with the Henesys long sword."

Logan, who became anxious, hinted and helped. But it was a needless worry.

"what... Awesome!"

Amelia let out a gasp, barely able to breathe. Her white cheeks were noticeably flushed, and her clear eyes sparkled like stars.

The girl I fell in love with at first sight, that was it.

"It's really, really cool! "It's the kind of sword I've only dreamed of!"

Amelia had visited the imperial palace several times with the Emperor's permission, but she had not been able to find a sword she liked.

However, as if his younger brother had looked into his mind, he had found a sword that suited his taste.

Amelia, who was ecstatically caressing the rough edges of the terrifying blade, looked back at Seongjin.

"I'm so happy, Mores! thank you so much!"

"No, what?"

Seongjin also felt better at Amelia's strong reaction.

"By the way, Mores. "Would you like to listen to this for a moment?"

"yes?"

"And stand here and strike a pose. Hmm, 5 Banajas meals would be appropriate."

"... yes?"

As Seongjin hesitated and followed her order without knowing why, Amelia smiled brightly, unable to hide her joy.

Then he clenched his fists and shouted softly.

"good! Let's draw a portrait! "We are calling a talented painter to the imperial palace!"

... yes?

'Anyway, are you happy about it?'

Sisley also welcomed the gift.

Sisley was very moved when he saw the little ice bear toddling around and asked.

"Are you really giving this child to me? This is my first time seeing a doll like this! So pretty!"

look. You like it, right?

Seongjin looked back at Logan and Masain, who were looking worried, with a confident look on their faces.

"Thank you so much, Brother Mores. "But what is his name?"

"Uh, it's called shaved ice number 3."

"Hey. From now on, stay with me. "I'll give you a cool name, sweet baby bear."

... Hey, wait a minute?

Kid. That guy has a proper name, Shavedsu No. 3?

[Al~la~view!]

When the bear tilted its head and made an electronic sound, the saintess hugged the bear with a touched face.

"I'm not sure what he's saying, but somehow listening to it makes my heart feel warm."

It was purely Seongjin's mistake.

I thought that the talking bear was 'alabyu' and pushed forward, but when I thought about it, there was no one in Delcross who could understand this.

"How does the bear you brought know the planet Earth? "As expected, it's suspicious!"

Only the fake saint Seo Yi-seo sparked suspicion, but no one cared about her.

"There's also a controller that controls this. "I will explain its function in detail later."

And there were things to give to the twins. It was a pair of small ice bracelets that could be worn on the arms.

This is what came to mind after seeing an item called [Thought Blocker] in Dexter's workshop. For some reason, the twins came to mind as soon as I saw it.

And I was constantly pestering Dexter to make two items with the same function.

-You have ours too?

Herna and Gades seemed not to have expected much and accepted the gift with questioning expressions.

"Of course, you guys should take care of yours too. "It's family."

Also, perhaps because of my mood, I feel like I often felt the presence of these little guys even when I was in Sigismund Territory.

I was worried because I felt like I had received a lot of help, knowingly or unknowingly.

"It's so cool... .."

"And be quiet... .."

Fortunately, the twins wearing the bracelets had strangely relaxed faces, unlike the first time.

I seem to like it quite a bit, so let's not go into detail about what this remains is. Sometimes it's better to keep it a secret.

"I happened to have a channel open for a while, and it was really crazy at that time. I couldn't think of anything at all. That's why I created this function. "I think such noise would be a distraction when concentrating on the game."

Then the two looked at Seongjin with very touched faces.

"Our thoughts among ourselves are also blocked?"

"We can play a game among ourselves."

okay? It wasn't a feature I put that much thought into, but I'm glad I did.

Now let's aim our blades at each other. You chess terrorists.

"Now father, stop bothering me, and from now on, you two can play chess together. Understand?"

"and! Mores!"

The twins shouted in unison, which was rare, and clung to Seongjin's arms.

"love you! Mores!"

"the best! Mores!"

The two of them rubbed their cheeks against Seongjin's sleeve with very satisfied faces.

The twins seemed somewhat dull compared to their lively tone, but now they clearly conveyed a deep sense of joy.

'Well, it's worth giving as a gift.'

This was when Seongjin was thinking like this.

"Mores, but do you even know how to play chess?"

"Mores, wouldn't you like to play chess together often from now on?"

"It's okay if you don't know. "We'll teach you well!"

"Okay, learn. "I won't bother you too much!"

At that moment, Seongjin felt a shiver run down his spine.

"Ah, because you guys are so surprised!"

Why do you want to include me in that? Make people anxious!

275. On The Dream Road (4)

That evening.

Unlike before, the imperial palace dinner started in a relatively gentle atmosphere.

Not only did Logan return with a feat as great as Seongjin, but Empress Elizabeth, who bickered about everything, was not present.

Thanks to this, the dinner was held in a friendly atmosphere under the leadership of Empress Tatiana.

And what Masain delivered to Seongjin was unexpected news.

"mother? To the Principality of Asein?"

"yes. Something happened suddenly and he left yesterday. "I heard there was an urgent call from Grand Duke Asin."

"... okay?"

Seongjin was honestly a little relieved that Empress Elizabeth was not here.

Until now, I thought she was Mores' mother and I consciously kept my distance from her.

But if he thought she was really his mother, he couldn't bring himself to face her cold gaze head on.

"I understand that there are no particularly big problems in the Principality of Asin recently. There was no special report from your father's majesty's office either. "It won't be a big deal, so don't worry too much."

Amelia seemed to understand Seongjin's subtle expression and gently comforted him.

"Yes, well... .."

Seongjin, who responded a little shyly, calmly sat down and started eating.

"But what is that, Brother Masaine?"

"Are you doing something I've never seen before, Brother Masaine?"

"Ah, Prince Mores gave it to me."

You said there was a cool feature, but I didn't really understand.

Masain said sheepishly, showing off a small trinket pinned to his collar.

"okay? Then it will definitely be a feature that I will use later.

"Brother Masain."

"Well, it was given to me by Mores. It would be good to have it handy. "Brother Masain."

"Haha, yes. "I still think so."

While listening to the conversation between the twins and Sir Martha, Seongjin deeply inserted another accessory he had brought into his pocket.

Although I prepared to give it to Empress Elizabeth, doubts arose as to whether I would have been able to hand it to her if she had been present. Will the day come when I can laugh and talk with her like a normal family?

One of the main dishes of the day was bear meat steak. It was sent by Margrave Sigismund along with a gift because Prince Mores visited it often.

In fact, it was the devil who liked bear meat, and there was nothing special about Seongjin's taste.

However, as I continued to eat it for the demon lord, I felt like it was now a somewhat appetizing taste.

I was worried that it might be a bit of an unfamiliar food, but fortunately the response at the dinner was favorable. Then, Seongjin found Seonghwang who, as expected, had not even taken a bite of food.

"Uh, father. This is more delicious than you think. "Stop crushing it and have some."

"... .."

Seonghwang, who was disassembling food with an expressionless expression as always, flinched in surprise and put a bear meat steak in his mouth with a new look on his face. And I furrow my brows involuntarily.

Of course, it was only a fleeting moment, and he quickly showed a calm expression. He kept pace with the others and steadfastly finished off a plate of steak.

'hmm. "That doesn't seem to be your taste, does it?"

It tastes pretty good once you get used to it, but I'm a picky eater.

Ah, that guy's eating habits. Someday I will fix it. Soon, a salty and salmon specialty restaurant will appear in the Imperial Capital!

"Laview... .."

Meanwhile, there was another person who didn't touch the main dish. Sisley was just looking at the steak with a pitiful expression, and it reminded her of the little teddy bear she had left in her room.

"This is a bear? Did a cute bear like Labyu die and become meat? How many of those little ones would have been needed to become steaks for a dinner party?"

"... .."

No, bears are definitely not the creatures you think they are.

"When I think of the poor bear who sacrificed my life, I shouldn't leave even a single piece behind, but it reminds me of our cute Labyu, so I can't bear to touch it."

Please go to a good place in the arms of the Lord.

The little saint folds her hands over her heart and prays reverently. Thanks to this, the surroundings suddenly became solemn.

The unexpected childishness shown by a normally adult saintess is cute, but the underlying atmosphere is so sad that no one hastily opens their mouths.

'Sisle. That's not actually a bear. 'It's an ice monster called the Glatzer Troll!'

Seongjin's mouth was itchy as well, but he was swept away by the atmosphere around him and just kept his mouth shut.

By the way, why did the name of Shaved Ice No. 3 suddenly become 'Labu'?

"Give it to me. 'I'll give you my dessert instead."

In the end, Seongjin did the next best thing and changed the plate for Sisley, who was heartbroken.

At the same time, there was a loud guy cheering in my head.

[Black! So good, another plate! I thought I would never taste it again if I came back here!]

As a result, it was a dinner time where only the Demon King was so moved that he cried.

* * *

That night.

Amelia came to the Jinju Palace reception room. As she sometimes did before, she stayed up late to chat with Seongjin for the first time in a long time.

Of course, I didn't forget to bring an armful of newly prepared children's books.

"I've completely graduated from children's books now, sister. "My reading has improved quite a bit."

Since I knew the words, it didn't take long to learn the letters.

Especially recently, my vocabulary has increased dramatically due to the creation of the 'Knight of Grace' myth with Francis. Of course, complex spellings are still sometimes confusing.

"okay..."

Amelia looked at Seongjin with a strange, strange expression.

-My child has already grown up like this. It's really exciting, but I can't hide the feeling of emptiness. Why do children's cute days pass by so quickly?

Sister, I can see what you're thinking on your face.

"okay. "You mean Ortona."

After talking about this and that, Seongjin confessed about 'Bertrand & Lee'. When I explained the ultimate goal of the top, Amelia slowly nodded.

"Where a commercial district is formed, public security naturally develops, even if you don't like it. Since the benefits are clear, the surrounding lords will have no choice but to cooperate. Thanks to this, I think it will be an opportunity for Ortona's refugees to settle down little by little. "How did you come up with such a big plan?"

Amelia's proud feelings were revealed without filtering in her eyes as she looked at Seongjin.

"Now that I think about it, something comes to mind. From what I saw while walking around the office, I'm sure there's something that could be of help to you. "There was a plan to rebuild Ortona that my father, His Majesty, had made in the beginning."

Ortona reconstruction plan?

Your father made something like that?

"You've said this once before, right?"

Now that I think about it, it was said that Seonghwang in the early days of his reign implemented a variety of radical policies. He said that while he clashed with the Orthodox Church at every turn, he pushed through various innovative policies.

But at some point, all those activities stopped as if they had come to a halt.

Amelia used to be like that. It is said that Seonghwang may have taken a step back due to frequent clashes with the Orthodox Church and other realistic obstacles.

but.

'Is it an agreement...?'

Now even Seongjin could vaguely guess.

Seonghwang, whose hands and feet were suddenly tied to the agreement for some reason, would not have been able to easily change any policy from then on.

The effects of policies that control not only a country but also a continent must be beyond imagination.

"It's just a difference in order from your plan, but there are some parts that are consistent to some extent. It will be a great help in making long-term plans if you refer to it. however..."

Amelia asked after a little hesitation.

"That salmon business. I have never seen anything similar to that. "Is that really profitable?"

"..."

At her innocent question, Seongjin became a little sullen.

Sister, we have a cold wagon! Now all problems are solved!

"Ah, sister."

Then Seongjin suddenly had an idea and rummaged through his luggage in the corner. I finally remembered what I had left with Orden.

Amelia, who had been watching what he was doing with curious eyes, looked up at Seongjin in confusion when he eventually pulled out an old treasure chest.

"I was a little worried about whether I should really give this to you. But I think you have to see it for yourself and decide."

"This?"

"I brought it from Count Sigismund's residence. "I heard it was my sister's treasure chest when I was young."

Startle.

Amelia widened her eyes and stared at the box, as if she had finally remembered something.

As Seongjin carefully handed her the item, she slowly opened the box where the chips had fallen and lifted up an old straw.

"bell..."

Amelia's eyes sank deeply, as if recalling the past.

"okay. "So many years have passed that I completely forgot about it."

Seongjin didn't know it, but for Amelia, it was a past that had to go back almost decades before returning.

"okay. Those times were very difficult. Nevertheless, these are precious items to me. "Thank you for bringing it to me, Mores."

Amelia put the straw aside and took out the miscellaneous items in

the box one by one.

But she had just picked up an old pendant.

For a moment, as if she had been struck by lightning, a huge wave of forgotten memories hit her all at once like a tidal wave.

"dream... . Yes, I had a dream then."

At that time, Amelia, who was young, had numerous dreams that felt ambiguous as to whether they were reality or a dream.

The first thing I remember was the sight of myself wearing a soft, warm wool coat and being carried on someone's back and chatting endlessly.

-Where are we going now, Dad?

-It's a place where your grandfather can't find us. Amelia.

Amel tilted his head. As far as she knew, her grandfather was the strongest man in her generation.

-Don't worry. He won't dare follow us.

The voice of the man who answered like that was calm, but it still felt infinitely reassuring.

Feeling somehow relieved, Amelia smiled and buried her head under his cloak.

Another day, I had a dream of camping next to a campfire under a sky full of stars. She was wrapped in a warm blanket and holding a new little doll in her arms.

-I want to give this pretty baby a cool name, Dad.

-Is that so? Then what do you want to do for that child?

Amelia thought deeply for a moment and then answered.

-Well, first of all, I hope this kid has a big family. I made a wish for her family, and my dad came, and I became happy, right? So, I hope

she is as happy as this kid.

The man didn't answer for a while, and after a while, he gently stroked Amelia's head.

-Then what about the goddess who has as many families as the stars in the sky? Belluna of the night sky is, as far as I know, the happiest goddess with the largest family.

-All those huge stars?

Amelia's eyes widened and she listened to the myth he told.

That day, the doll's name became Belluna.

Another day, I saw an interesting play downtown. Amelia let out an exclamation of excitement as she rode her horse on her man's shoulders.

-You really like performing. So, would you like to go to Brittany this time? It is a place where performing arts are very developed.

-Are the performances there as interesting as that play?

-It will be very fun. It's just that people there get used to pronouncing it 'Arrch' as if they were choking on cold soup.

What does it sound like when soup gets stuck in your throat?

Amelia, who had been giggling and asking various questions because she thought it was somehow funny, was already learning words containing Arrch one by one from him.

-A small angel came down to a shabby hut built with sincerity in a deep forest, and that place would be my church.

-Wow, here are all the words I learned now! What is that phrase?

-When memorizing something, it is very helpful to remember things that are meaningful to you, Amelia.

-So, does that mean that phrase has meaning to you?

-Well, whatever happens.

The man lifted Amelia up.

-Right here is my little angel.

As her body rose upward, the air around her enveloped her as if she was flying.

Hahaha!

A loud laugh echoed in my head.

"Yes, I..." "How could I have forgotten these until now?"

While Seongjin was getting restless at her sudden reaction, Amelia smiled brightly with tearful eyes.

276. On The Dream Road (5)

It happened more than ten years ago now.

That day, cleaning continued late into the night at a bar in Regina. This is because a group of mercenaries from a foreign country celebrated the success of their mission and drank until late at night.

The owner and staff were exhausted, but they didn't feel too bad.

The Astros mercenaries who were the guests that day were rough but fairly well-controlled. In addition, they even drank all the poor quality beer left in stock.

Thanks to this, the owner's pockets were well-filled, and the employees were also scheduled to receive a solid bonus for working overtime.

"Could that young man from earlier also be a mercenary? He looked somewhat different from the rest of the party, so maybe he was a knight from a famous noble family... .."

The girl serving in the hall asked while working hard on dishtowels. She had a slightly flushed face, perhaps because she was busy moving her body.

Even without a specific explanation, the owner could immediately tell who the girl was referring to.

Certainly, he was a young man who would stand out anywhere.

"You have a licensed mercenary badge? Even though he looks young, he's been around for quite a long time. "If you look at his level, he is not someone who has been working for one or two years, but more

than ten years."

"How do you know that?"

"When those guys started drinking, they took up their mercenary badges in advance."

There were many bars in Regina that sometimes asked for a mercenary badge as a guarantee. This was because there were so many mercenaries who drank alcohol and caused accidents.

"okay."

The girl nodded and smiled brightly, wondering what she was thinking.

"He was sitting upright, so I thought he was a driver. But it's also fitting that he's a capable mercenary."

The owner clicked his tongue.

"Arthur. I don't carelessly give my heart to those guys. "Do you think there are a lot of young mercenaries and widowed women who made a living in Regina?"

Regina is a large city where most mercenary groups traveling to and from the North pass through. Many mercenaries went to the north, making promises to their lovers, and disappeared into the Ortona civil war.

At that time, Benjamin, a boy who was coming in carrying a bag of onions, snapped at the girl.

"They're just people who can't settle down and just wander around. "Don't pay attention to those things and just do your job properly."

"No, you're giving me attention! Besides, when have I ever not done a good job?"

As the girl opens her eyes sharply and shouts, Benjamin's voice also rises.

"Ask everyone how you looked today! Just by looking at him, it seemed like I fell in love with him at first sight!"

"Who is crushing on you! "Why are you suddenly arguing with me?"

The girl pouted, grabbed a dishtowel, and disappeared into the kitchen. Benjamin also roughly puts down her sack and walks out of the bar.

Only the owner, who knew Benjamin's feelings for the girl, clicked his tongue inwardly.

Such an ugly guy.

'I know. 'I'm taking my anger out on Anna for no reason.'

Meanwhile, Benjamin was not very comfortable after yelling at the girl he had a crush on.

But still, he couldn't hold back his anger. Because I could understand very well the excitement the girl must have felt toward the unfamiliar mercenary.

The first time he couldn't take his eyes off the mercenary was the same. Wasn't he someone who seemed to be a literal replica of the cool mercenary that everyone admired from the stories?

"... driving me crazy. "How can I see Anna's face tomorrow?"

Benjamin foresaw the failure of his first love. That was when he was hanging his head down, overcome with feelings of self-destruction, defeat, and depression.

sparkle.

Something glowed on the floor and caught his attention.

"huh?"

On a dark moonless night, strangely enough, something that had fallen on the ground was shining alone.

Benjamin walked towards the light without thinking. The identity of the light discovered was a small bright red pendant.

"This... .."

Now that I think about it, didn't the young mercenary throw something on the floor as he was leaving the bar?

'Did you throw it away because it was broken? It would be a waste to do that... ..'

For some reason, it was completely split in half and unusable, but the brilliant jewel still gave off a beautiful light.

It was when he tried to reach for the pendant as if possessed.

[Be careful.]

Suddenly, I heard a strange voice ringing in my head.

He flinched in surprise and raised his head to see a woman staring down at him.

"... who?"

Benjamin was startled and took a step back. This is because the woman was entirely covered in ominous black.

Black dress, black hair and black veil.

In particular, the black veil completely covered the woman's face and hung down to her chin, making it extremely grotesque.

But still, the silhouette looming over the veil was delicate, and the black dress that fit well was elegant and beautiful.

'I don't think he's human!'

It's scary but pretty. Isn't it like the fairy in the old story who sentences death?

Benjamin was in a cold sweat, quickly grabbing his pendant and trying to escape. The woman's strange voice echoed in my mind

again.

[I warned you. Once you get caught up in a cause and effect that you cannot handle, there is no turning back.]

For a moment, I felt an eerie light flashing through the black veil.

'We must run away!'

My instincts are screaming at me to turn back and run right now. However, Benjamin could not easily let go of his lingering attachment to the pendant on the floor.

Even though it was broken, that beautiful gem still seemed useful. Those who have saved his salary all their lives, will they ever be able to touch such jewels again?

[...]]

Benjamin hesitated and looked, but the woman was still standing there. Contrary to her heavy warning, she doesn't seem to have any intention of stopping his actions by force.

gulp.

After gathering his courage, Benjamin quickly rushed over and snatched the pendant from the floor.

But at that moment.

Woe!

Like an illusion, a huge red flame suddenly rose up before his eyes.

"... ... !"

At one point, Benjamin was standing on a wide swath of land engulfed in flames.

A hellish land where stars lose their light in the sky and fall to the ground, and on the floor, countless people writhing black and charred in pain.

The acrid smell of burning flesh stings my nose.

And screams. That desperate scream as if it was squeezing out one's soul.

"Ugh! It's hell! "It's the end of the world!"

Benjamin screamed frantically in fear.

"what! "What's going on, Benjamin?"

"Why are you doing this all of a sudden?"

The owner and Anna, startled by the commotion, run out of the store.

And after a while.

When Benjamin finally looked back in cold sweat, the woman had already disappeared without a trace along with the pendant.

* * *

"Yes, I..." "How could I have forgotten these until now?"

Amelia, who held the old pendant and shed tears for a while, then looked back at Seongjin and smiled softly.

"I'm sorry, sister. I can't even think about your feelings... .."

Seongjin lowered his head with a guilty face.

Even though I clearly knew what she went through in the Sigismund Territory when she was young, I felt that she was too indifferent.

"no. "On the contrary, it is something I should be thankful for, Mores."

But Amelia shook her head and fondly caressed the pendant.

"How should I explain it? I had many dreams when I was in Sigismund. "For some reason, whenever I fall asleep with this pendant, happy dreams always come to me."

okay. It was a happy dream.

It was so vivid that young Amelia believed it to be real.

So, she mistook the unfamiliar Seonghwang who came to visit her for the man in her dreams and followed him without hesitation.

Soon, the affluent life in the imperial palace began, and the vague boundaries of her childhood dreams soon disappeared from Amelia's mind.

However, it was clear that the dreams had left an impact on Amelia in some way.

She easily learned Breton, which she had never learned from anyone, and already knew many stories from a continent she had never learned before.

Above all.

What was the reason why Amelia lost her heart to Leonard?

-Please become my precious, one and only family that I will love with all my soul.

Amelia, who felt an overwhelming joy at that simple marriage proposal, nodded without even thinking twice.

This is because, even subconsciously, I already knew, vaguely, what it felt like to have 'one precious family'.

"Maybe I had a big delusion back then that a happy life like the dream of my childhood would come again."

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who was listening to Amelia, suddenly remembered what Seonghwang had said in the gap the other day.

-I blessed her soul, not her body. So that I can dream sometimes even in extreme pain.

A dream blessing given to the former Countess Sigismund.

At the time, I wondered why it was done that way, but now I can understand it a little bit.

A kind of mercy that would provide as much rest as was allowed to Sister Amelia. I didn't even know that was his way of guessing cause and effect.

"At the time, I called it the 'dream necklace.'"

Amelia wiped the dirty pendant with the lace hem of her sleeve. Seongjin, who was quietly watching the scene, felt an ominous feeling creeping up on him.

By any chance, that pendant... .. ?

"They used to put a lot of mud on it on purpose so that users wouldn't recognize it. "It was badly broken, but at the time it was one of the prettiest treasures I owned."

And that premonition was correct.

What appeared in the lace without grime was an item that Seongjin was familiar with.

"milestone... .."

A bright red jewel split in half.

It was clearly the bright red signpost that my grandmother had left behind.

* * *

That night.

Seongjin returned to his room after a long time and was lost in thought, forgetting to meditate.

-How did you get this? Because it happened when I was very young, I don't remember much about it.

When Seongjin asked where the signpost came from, Amelia

answered with some hesitation.

-Probably right after my mother passed away, when I was left alone in that cold villa. A strange woman came to see me.

He said he couldn't remember what he looked like because his face was covered with a black veil.

The woman, who was all in black, handed Amelia the broken pendant and asked her to keep it carefully.

'It probably means that he is a person who knows well what a milestone is and its value.'

So is it also Oracle?

Since she said she was a woman, she probably wouldn't be very successful, and she was probably the former Oracle or something.

'... But it really can't be your grandmother, right?'

Empress Bethsheba heard that the Holy Emperor was poisoned when he was young, before he left the palace. If that were the case, he wouldn't have been alive until then.

Seongjin took out another milestone he was carrying and looked at it carefully for a moment.

Although it was only half of the piece left over from Dexter, it was a mysterious gem that gave off colorful lights as if even its cross section had been carefully cut.

Dexter explained this as a kind of terminal that reflects the spirit of Oracle.

That's why it holds so much data that the moment you try to analyze it with a source editor, the machine can't handle it and explodes.

-It breaks and shatters, reminding us that this is reality and not his foresight.

That's how Seonghwang explained the milestone.

A thought suddenly occurred to me.

'If the oracle chooses the future as instructed by the signpost, what happens to the foresight the oracle saw before the choice?'

What happens to the future that remains as a possibility without being chosen?

If the milestone reflects the spirit of Oracle, wouldn't it be possible for some part of it to remain in the milestone in the form of data?

After thinking about it, Seongjin hugged Lee Myeong and lay down on the bed. I thought the only way was to find out for myself.

[...] What are you doing now?]

The Demon King asked hesitantly, but Seongjin ignored him and firmly closed his eyes. Anyway, I was planning to try the method I heard from Amelia first.

-The way to dream was simple. All I had to do was hug my jewel and fall asleep.

Okay, hug this and sleep.

'I'm not a kid who hides toys, I never thought I'd do something like this at this age.'

But it's definitely worth a try. Seongjin, who decided that, tried to sleep hard while suppressing the feeling of his jewels leaking out.

[Check the connection of the guest ID.]

How much time has passed like that?

In his sleep, Seongjin heard what sounded like a faint electronic sound.

[I've been waiting for you for a long time. □□□ □□...]

* * *

When I opened my eyes, I could hear people muttering next to me. It

was a clear conversation made of thoughts.

[It's been a really long time since I last had a guest ID.]

[But is his connection somehow unstable? The graphics are broken.]

[Sometimes this happens. But it's okay. The function was fine.]

What are you saying?

If you're talking about me, explain it first so I can understand.

Seongjin opened his mouth to those who looked like vague shadows without a proper shape.

"What are they talking about now? Who are you? And where are we now?"

For a moment, one of them froze in surprise.

Then, he immediately shouted out to Seongjin as if he was happy to see him.

"Now say that! It's definitely an imperial language. Are you from Delcross?"

"... ... ?"

Before Seongjin could respond, he strode forward.

Crackling, crackling. Occasionally there seemed to be noise in my vision, but I could still make out his tall height and sturdy physique just through his faint shape.

"Wow, this is the first time I've seen someone log in with a guest ID in the main world of Delcross! "I couldn't be happier!"

When Seongjin looked up with wide eyes, a cool laugh was heard from him.

"haha. hey. You may still be confused, but don't worry. "I will help you."

Crackling. Chick.

Beyond the noise, the faintly curved mouth is visible.

"Take care of yourself, newbie. Shall we make a statement first? My name is Owen. "It's Owen Lockwood."

277. Yellow Zone (1)

Seongjin opened his eyes, feeling an unexpected sensation.

Just a moment ago, I was covering myself with bedding in a dark room, but now the surroundings were brightly lit, and my body felt empty.

'... what?'

When I opened my eyes, lying on the lawn instead of the soft bed, the stinging sunlight was shining on my head.

Open green lawn and blue sky.

It was clearly an unfamiliar place, not his own room.

Seongjin sat on the floor blankly and looked around.

'Is this the dream you said...?'

Even though my eyes were wide open, my vision was blurry and blurry. On the other hand, a strange state of awakening is maintained in my head.

It definitely feels vivid somewhere.

Booth.

Seongjin, who was getting up like that, suddenly felt empty in his head unlike usual and asked.

'... Hey, devil?'

As expected, there was no answer from him.

'Did I leave my body again and just my soul escape somewhere?'

If so, it might not be just a dream. There is no way to confirm as of now.

Anyway, I didn't think the current situation was that dangerous. Well, if you were really in danger, your father would have come running right away.

It was right then.

[Who is it? It suddenly appeared over there?]

I could hear people muttering next to me. It was a clear conversation made not of voices, but of thoughts.

[I am a guest ID user. Seeing as he doesn't even have any special equipment, he seems to be a newbie.]

[Newbie falls into the yellow zone? It's unlucky.]

Seongjin stood up awkwardly and looked in the direction of the sound. And soon he was able to identify the shapes of the three people he thought were looking at him.

[But fortunately, we are by your side. I can't say that that friend is unlucky either, right?]

Even though Seongjin sensed distinct gazes directed at him, there was a reason why he could only guess that they were looking. This is because it was impossible to distinguish distinct shapes, such as facial expressions or eyes, from them.

They were made of something like dark smoke and looked like shadows or ghosts.

[By the way, this is a guest ID that's been a long time coming.]

Long, long, long.

A figure that was somewhat too slender to be human spoke.

[But is his connection somehow unstable? The graphics are broken.]

cave cave.

It was as if he was lumpy, and his chubby figure spoke in a strange way, as if it had been mistranslated.

... But wait, does that guy have 5 arms now? Also, is it crooked? What on earth?

[Sometimes this happens. But it's okay. The function was fine.]

Softly, softly.

Someone with what looked like long hair waving said.

Anyway, based on the appearance alone, I still get the feeling that this person is a proper human being.

Crackling, crackling.

And between all of their hazy shapes, sometimes something like a strange noise passed by.

'Are my eyes strange, or are those guys strange...?'

However, Seongjin was not as scary or unpleasant as the evil spirit Haze.

Anyway, I could vividly feel my own two fists, and I could clearly feel the reality of those guys.

So that means you can swing this fist and knock them out when you need it.

'what?'

Then Seongjin suddenly looked at his hand and was taken aback.

'Why are my hands like this again?'

Just like those three people, Seongjin thought after seeing that his hands also looked like black smoke.

Ah, it was my eyes that got the taste.

[Anyway, if we add newbies, will we barely be able to fill the necessary number of people? If you do well, you may be able to enter the dungeon with 4 or more people.]

[It is still too early to make such a judgment. We don't know what kind of person he is.]

[You can judge it by taking it with you. Newbies will never be our match.]

"... what?"

I didn't know what he was talking about, but I knew for sure that I was the center of the topic.

Seongjin frowned.

What on earth are you talking about? If you want to talk about me, first explain it so you can understand.

"What are they talking about now? Who are you? And where are we now?"

When Seongjin suddenly opened his mouth, one of them froze in surprise. Of the three, he was the one who was considered the closest to human.

Then, he immediately shouted out to Seongjin as if he was happy to see him.

"Now say that! It's definitely an imperial language! Are you from Delcross?"

"... ..?"

Before Seongjin could respond, he strode forward.

Crackling, crackling.

Although there seemed to be noise in my vision at times, I was still

able to make out his tall height and sturdy physique just from his faint shape.

"Wow, this is the first time I've seen someone log in with a guest ID in the main world of Delcross! "I couldn't be happier!"

I couldn't read his expression, but he looked very happy anyway.

[Hey guys! It turns out that this newbie is from my hometown!]

[Donghyang-in?]

[Then you must be careful. He may be the one who can influence your reality, Owen.]

[don't worry. Just like you did, this time I will help this friend adjust.]

However, the reaction of those around him to his confident declaration was not very pleasant.

[well. How about thinking about that again?]

[Owen, you are not good at it yet either.]

[What about the quest? I understand that you haven't been able to get the job change item yet. The status window leading you didn't seem to have a very formidable temperament.]

[It's okay, it's okay. Although his temper is a little off, we, Sang Tae-chang, are not stuck in a back-and-forth. Besides, I don't even know if the former items are available now. The previous server said the seeds were dry.]

I couldn't understand what they were saying.

When Seongjin looked up with wide eyes, a cool laugh was heard from him.

"haha. hey. You may still be confused, but don't worry. "I will help you."

Crackling. Chick.

Beyond the noise, the faintly curved mouth is visible. Somehow, he was a person who gave the impression of cheerfulness just by his atmosphere.

"Take care of yourself, newbie. Shall we make a statement first? My name is Owen. "It's Owen Lockwood."

Owen Lockwood.

"... "Isn't this a familiar name?"

We have a guy with that name in our house too. He is the eldest son who left home.

Since he never came home, I thought I should go and see his face sometime soon.

"Well, maybe so. My name is a fairly common name on the continent. you?"

"This is Seongjin Lee."

Seongjin answered without thinking and thought it was a mistake. This is not a Delcross-style name.

As expected, the head made of shadows tilts to one side.

"What a unique name. It's not a style commonly heard on the continent. Are you by any chance a member of Barça's minority tribe?"

Man, are you wondering if I'm a southern heretic?

Seongjin thought for a moment and then answered. In any case, if he speaks the imperial language, on the surface he probably believes in the Delcross Orthodox Church.

"I am a person born and raised in the grace of the Lord. Are you asking me if he is now an enemy of the empire?"

"what? haha. No, I asked because it was unusual, so don't set me up like that. Besides, not all Barsha tribes are enemies of the empire."

There didn't seem to be any malice in the way he was waving his hands urgently.

By the way, for someone from the Empire to take Barça's side, everyone will look at him as strange.

Anyway, after a brief argument, it was decided that a man named Owen would guide Seongjin in this world. And Seongjin readily accepted his offer.

First of all, Seongjin alone will have limitations in understanding this world.

Also, regardless of being favorable to Seongjin from the beginning, I thought it would be better than dealing with three unknown people in a situation where visibility was unclear.

"It's not just you, you look strange to us too. "It may be because the terminal you are using is not intact, or another problem has occurred."

A man named Owen led Seongjin and diligently headed somewhere and explained.

"Terminal?"

"okay. "Don't you have something you used to access this place?"

At that moment, a broken milestone appeared in Seongjin's mind.

Was it really the ancestral Oracle's gem that brought him to this place?

"As you might have guessed, the same goes for the guys who were there earlier. They are all people who used a terminal to get a guest ID and connect. "I'm not an official user."

And Owen gave Seongjin a lengthy explanation about this world.

This is a kind of normal world, and it is like a kind of resting place where people from different worlds come, connect temporarily, and then disappear. Each of these players has their own identity, or account, which is represented by their ID.

And all of this is accomplished in a very mysterious way where thoughts reach reality.

'I don't think this guy knows much either... ..'

After listening to the rambling explanation for a while, Seongjin came to a conclusion. There was a reason why the two shadows distrusted Owen earlier.

Anyway, Seongjin thought simply based on Earth's common sense.

This is a kind of game world, and Seongjin and Owen are not users with official accounts.

"Well, take this at least for now. I don't know if you'll have anything to write about today, but you have to be careful about everything in the yellow zone. "It would be a good beginner's weapon."

Owen, who was talking intently, took something out of his pocket and handed it to Seongjin.

Of course, Seongjin couldn't see what it was. I could only guess that there was some kind of weapon there because something like a short shadow appeared in Owen's hand.

However, if something is said to be free, it is natural to receive it. Before Owen could change his mind, Seongjin reached out her hand and grabbed it.

For a moment, Owen was shocked.

"Hey, hey! for a moment! sleep... ..!"

But it was already too late.

Suddenly.

Although I couldn't see it, I felt something sharp cutting into my hand, and something warm flowed down my hand.

Maybe it's blood flowing. Of course, it wasn't visible to Seongjin's eyes.

Tangrang!

The stick that fell to the ground made a dull metallic sound.

"OMG! "Even though it's a yellow zone, even party members get injured!"

Owen hurriedly took off the things he was carrying and started looking for something.

Bandages, bandages! HP, HP!

He eventually found what looked like a blurry piece of cloth, wrapped it around Seongjin's hand and grumbled.

"Are you crazy? What are you going to do if you hold the blade like that? "Even though it's for beginners, it's still quite sharp after being strengthened!"

Oh, I thought it was a club, but it turned out to be a sword.

"Uh, sorry. "Because I can't see it."

"... .."

Then Owen paused for a moment and scratched his head.

"Hmm, I thought it would work out somehow, but as expected, broken vision is more problematic than I thought. "It's very uncomfortable, isn't it?"

Are you saying that now?

Even if we meet again next time, I don't have the confidence to recognize you.

"okay? okay. "Just wait a moment."

Ugh. My cash is almost depleted because I scraped everything up to send gifts the other day.

Owen muttered something incomprehensible and diligently manipulated something.

"First of all, I sent you a gift. "Say acceptance."

And just as he said, a small window appeared in front of Seongjin's eyes.

☐Qr#^E& sent a gift of 'Gather Friends – Skin' to ☐☐☐ ☐☐. Do you want to accept it?☐

☐Accept/Reject☐

I saw a text window pop up. This is definitely the normal world.

"But your name isn't Owen? "It's all broken."

"I told you earlier, right? "We all have guest IDs?"

"hmm."

Seongjin, who was roughly convinced, nodded.

"accept."

At that moment, Seongjin's vision became brighter. The boundaries of the ambiguous landscape find clear lines, and faded objects instantly regain their bright colors.

However, it was not a very normal world. Yellow sidewalk blocks and spotless blue sky. Clouds floating round like cotton candy.

It felt like I was in a colorful, simple children's game.

"... .."

"Oh wow, the avatar has become cute. how is it? "Is your vision okay now?"

Seongjin looked at Owen's changed appearance blankly and asked.

"It's much better than before. Do you know what your vision will be like if you apply that?"

"no? I have never used a skin myself. I just picked the cheapest one, why? "Is there something wrong?"

"... .."

"Wow, don't get me wrong. I didn't do that to save cash! "It's just that the cheaper the price, the simpler the graphics are, so it's easy for someone with an unstable connection like you to use it!"

In front of Seongjin, a tall red fox asks worriedly. Waving her richly long tail.

"why? What's going on? "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Ugh, it's so cringe-inducingly cute that I can't even tell you about it.

278. Yellow Zone (2)

"We have to go to the green zone first. A place where players cannot kill each other. "I'll explain the details there."

Bwak bwak.

"For newbies, the priority is to adapt safely. It is difficult for guest ID users like us to be revived. "They say that if you do something wrong, you can actually die in real life."

Bwak bwak bwak.

"But all guest ID users are the same. There is something I absolutely need, so I cling to this place, even if it means taking risks... Hey, are you listening, newbie?"

"uh. "I'm listening."

I really can't get used to it.

Bwak bwak bwak.

From earlier, every time Seongjin took a step with his small hoof, petal-shaped footprints were heard on the floor, along with a creepy and cute sound effect. Of course, that also applies to Owen, who is ahead.

Seongjin sighed as he followed the fox, which made cute footsteps with a brisk gait.

'... I will definitely collect that cache and change my skin!"

I don't know how long I will stay here.

"Having to risk your life unlike others may sound scary at first. But don't worry. This is also a world where people fight against each other. "In the end, everyone adapts."

Perhaps knowing how Seongjin feels, the fox ahead of him speeds up and blinks.

Although it was advice and I was picking up heavy words, the weight of those words felt infinitely light when I saw the pigtail happily wagging its profuse tail.

"Owen, anyway, you're living in the Delcross dimension now, right?"

"of course."

"So, let's say you use the terminal to enter here, how do you get out when you want to leave?"

"Ah, yes. "The most important problem is getting back to reality."

The red fox sniffed and looked back at Seongjin.

"The method is a bit tricky. But didn't your Sang Tae-chang properly tell you about that?"

"Mr. Sang Tae-chang?"

If it's some text, it will pop up.

"That's a characteristic of the normal world. Other than that, he's the one who directly gives you quests and makes you do all sorts of annoying things."

He's a brat with a nasty personality and can't wait to get his reward reduced.

Owen continued for a while, unable to tell whether it was an insult or an explanation.

The impression I got there was that the 'status window' was very close to a person, unlike the text window we commonly see.

-I've been waiting for you for a long time. □□□ □□...

Now that I think about it, it seems like I vaguely heard someone's voice in my sleep.

Seongjin, who reflected on his memories for a moment, shook his head.

"I don't have anything like that."

"okay? It's so strange. There is always a status window attached to the Guest ID user. "Do you think it has something to do with your graphics being broken?"

Owen's pointed ears perked for a moment, then he turned around and continued his explanation.

"What do you think?" The fact that you are here now means that you also have an important goal. "It is impossible to achieve in reality, but it is still a goal that must be achieved at all costs."

"It's a goal..."

At this point, Seongjin was slowly realizing that this world was completely different from the dream Amelia had mentioned.

It doesn't seem to have much to do with Oracle's 'unchosen future', which I guessed earlier.

I did the exact same thing as her, but why did I get such different results?

"I heard that users with proper IDs have an easy way to come and go here whenever they want. But that has nothing to do with our guest ID users."

"then?"

"Once we are judged to have achieved a certain level of success, we automatically leave this world. Or in reality, when you must wake up from sleep. "It is entirely up to Sang Tae-chang to decide the right time."

"... .."

"Guest ID users can only enter and exit here with permission from the status window."

Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows slightly.

Should I entrust my safety to something so uncertain?

"I told you, right? I have a goal that needs to be achieved somehow, so I have to do whatever it takes. Moreover, from what I have experienced so far, even though he has a bit of a bad personality, Sang Sang-chang is someone who helps users make the optimal [choice]."

select.

The moment I hear those words, a strange premonition passes through my mind.

Seongjin looked closely at the fox ahead for a moment and then opened his mouth.

"Owen."

"huh?"

"That terminal you mentioned, is it perhaps Oracle's milestone?"

"milestone?"

Seongjin explained again to Owen, who looked back with wide eyes.

"Like that little gem."

"Ah, yes. Do you call that a milestone? that's right. That's the terminal. According to the explanation of the friends I saw earlier, that is the origin of Sang Sang-chang."

also.

"So Owen, you have an important goal that you must achieve, so you abandoned your home and are hanging here?"

"What? Who throws it away! Do you know how much I am holding back from wanting to go home right now? ... !"

The fox, who was screaming angrily, stopped and looked back.

"... No, but did I even tell you that?"

"huh. "You did it earlier."

Seongjin nodded and immediately closed his mouth.

Although I couldn't figure out the identity of the dream Amelia mentioned, I felt like I had a reason to stay here a little longer.

Bwak bwak bwak bwak.

After that, the two walked silently across the wide field for a while.

'Is this a mountain goat...?'

When I looked at my reflection in a passing stream, I saw fluffy fur, curled horns, and bright eyes.

It reminds me of Maemee, Schmidt's demon.

'The name is really Meeme... Probably not. I'll ask later when I get a chance.'

The things on both of his hands were also small hooves rather than fingers. It was surprising that even with such odd hands, he was able to grasp the weapon Owen gave him with ease.

"Oh, we're almost there. Can you see the small guard post over there? A place where armed guards come and go. "That's the border of the green zone."

Seongjin sighed when he found a small mushroom house that looked like something out of a fairy tale and ants walking on two feet in the direction pointed by the fox.

'Maybe the guard isn't really an ant.'

What's frustrating is that all these ugly scenes only apply to Seongjin,

who has the 'Gather, friends - skin' applied.

What was even more infuriating was that while everything was normal in everyone else's eyes, only Seongjin would look as cute as a small goat!

'I'm so glad the devil bastard isn't here.'

Seongjin thought in an unusually depressed mood.

If he found out about this, he would be very excited and make fun of Seongjin for a while.

'When I enter a place called Green Zone, the first thing I need to do is ask about how to earn cash.'

Let's get out of this childish skin as soon as possible. That was when she made that decision and took one more step towards the mushroom guard post.

Wow.

Seongjin suddenly sensed something and stopped walking and called the fox ahead of him to stop.

"Hey, wait a minute. Stand there, Owen."

"huh?"

"Are you running around outside just thinking about it?"

"... what?"

The fox looks back at Seongjin with a puzzled face.

"What do you mean?"

"Or, why are there suspicious people hiding there targeting you?"

As soon as Seongjin finished speaking-

"damn! "I got caught!"

"I used a high-quality blackout item, how on earth did you notice?!"

From a small grove of grass next to the road leading to the guard post, several cute animals came rushing out.

They are all cute animals that children like, such as rabbits, raccoons, and badgers.

The only problem was that each of their cute hands covered in fine fur held a deadly weapon.

"Eight! Let's face this from the front! "He happens to be alone!"

"Is there a small sheep next to me?"

"It's probably a goat, not a sheep!" What's wrong with a guy wearing such an anachronistic infant skin? "Just ignore it!"

Quick.

At that moment, blood sprouted from Seongjin's forehead.

Of course, it might not have been visible to others because it was covered in fluffy fur.

"Now, when I say good things, please give me the change item!"

What, is it not a grudge, but simple robbery?

It was when Seongjin was fiddling with the sword in his hand, assessing their number.

"It's dangerous, so stay back, newbie."

The red fox pulled out a one-handed ax from his belt and blocked Seongjin's path with a serious expression.

"Anyway, they are from a fairly famous guild. "They probably aren't at the level to go stealing in a place like this, but it seems like there's nothing to see these days due to the job change items."

Seongjin looked around at the animals surrounding them. Even though they are decked out in flashy weapons and armor, they can

hardly hide their nervousness.

On the other hand, Owen, standing alone against them all, looked quite dependable despite being a cute fox holding a small axe.

"Wouldn't it be too much for you alone? There are too many people. "It would probably be better for the two of us to deal with it together."

In response to Seongjin's question, Owen twitched his pointed snout and smiled quite convincingly.

"It's not enough to lend a hand to a newbie. Don't worry about that and think of yourself as your top priority. Didn't I tell you before? Unlike those guys, we can't guarantee our survival if we die here."

"... .."

"So, you should never come out in front of this place, and if you feel like you can't do it, run as fast as you can to the guard post."

Seongjin frowned and crossed his arms.

okay. good. The attitude of taking risks and taking care of newbies is worth praising.

But... Do you know that you do this outside, even at home? huh?

"Let's not put each other at a loss for no reason, and if possible, let's resolve it through dialogue. "What do you want from me?"

When Owen took a step forward while aiming his axe, the animals surrounding him also took a step back and hesitated. It seemed like Owen was quite afraid.

"As I said before, just give me the transfer item."

"Transfer item? Why are you looking for that from me? "The whole server was dry with seeds, and I was giving up trying to save them too?"

Then the raccoon dog in the lead stamped its feet as if it was about to

die.

"Do not be ridiculous! Who knows that every time your suspicious gang goes to the yellow zone, they sweep away all the rare items on the server?"

"No, but this time I really...""

"If you don't want to give it up, we can't help it! It's a matter of life and death for the guild!"

The raccoon gave an order, lowering the helmet visor he had managed to wear on the head of the three-headed figure.

"Well, you heard that, right? It doesn't make sense! Everyone hit him!"

Wow!

With a shout, dozens of animals toddle towards Owen.

Boop boop bop boop boop boop!

They all looked so cute that they felt like their lives were in danger.

"..."

Bye!

Meanwhile, Owen's ax, swinging like lightning, hit the helmet of the leading raccoon. The guy's head split along with his helmet, and instead of blood, five-colored stars flew out in all directions.

Glitter.

At the same time, a small text window pops up in front of Seongjin's eyes.

□ Our children's friends! Don't forget to get permission from your parents before playing games. Isn't this game a little too violent for friends to enjoy?

"Hey!"

"Take it! Magic Missile!"

"Fireball!"

Along with the brilliant light, all kinds of weapons and magic effects rain down on Owen.

But red fox Owen was very skilled.

Even in the midst of the chaos, they cut off the heads of the animals one by one with an axe without being hit by even a single blind attack.

Flutter! Flutter!

Flash! Flash!

At the same time, five-colored stardust flew up here and there along with bright beams of light.

"and..."

Seongjin made a tired face.

This confusing scene is likely to remain a trauma. I meant it.

Even if I have to go into debt, I will change this guy's skin right away!

279. Yellow Zone (3)

Owen Klein.

The first prince of the Holy Empire and a young hero who saved the declining southern front from crisis.

However, despite his great expertise, he was not as well known to the world as Logan.

One day, Seongjin asked Dasha about it. When I thought that they could actually be family, I started to worry about him.

The first prince of the empire does not even show his nose in the imperial palace even though it is his birthday. What on earth is that guy doing?

"... criminal?"

"It is not a certain fact. 'It's just that there are suspicions, so everyone is reticent to talk about the 1st Prince.'"

Dasha told the story to Seongjin with a slightly embarrassed expression.

Since the time of his accession to the throne, he has already had five children, and has earned the dishonorable title of an unprecedented libertine.

When he came to visit Princess Amelia in Sigismund Territory, the gossip among the public grew even louder.

-How many illegitimate children does His Majesty have? If this continues, what will happen to the succession rights to the throne in the future?

However, things were different when Prince Owen entered the imperial palace. This is because the circumstances were very clear that he was not Seonghwang's biological son.

When Owen's mother had him, Seonghwang was in the midst of hunting down pirates with a mercenary group near Cyprus. No matter how much I researched his movements, nothing seemed to match his movements.

Above all, unlike the other princes and princesses, Owen's face did not resemble Seonghwang in the slightest.

"But you became the first prince?"

"Actually, there are some absurd interests involved."

To explain this, first, we cannot help but mention the 'sudden son' incident that occurred in the imperial palace several years ago.

One day, many years ago.

There was an incident when Ambassador Guerti of Rohan came to the imperial palace in a spirited manner, accompanied by Cardinal Gistier, who was on a mission to Rohan at the time.

Nominally, it was to expose Cardinal Gistier's incompetence, but inwardly, it was intended to humiliate the empire, which dispatched cardinals to each country and interfered in their internal affairs.

-Now, look at this criminal! This guy is the arsonist who started the big fire in Rohan. He was about to be stoned by angry citizens there. This senile cardinal took it away at will, using the power of the empire!

The ragged boy that Guerti had dragged in was completely exhausted from the hardships he had endured.

While everyone in the throne room frowned at the sight, the elderly Cardinal Gistier stepped in front of everyone.

He pointed to the bright red necklace hanging around the boy's neck.

-But no matter how you look at it, this boy has items that are similar to the Empress Dowager's keepsakes. If we do not properly investigate this first before punishment...

-similar? Not a keepsake, but similar to a keepsake? Do you think that is a reason to interfere with the legitimate enforcement of laws in other countries?

-No, look...

Before the Cardinal could say anything more, Guerti was already shouting to everyone in the audience room.

-Now, do you understand how stupid that old man is? Not knowing the laws of Rohan, that senile man finds fault with everything! Why on earth did you send someone like this to Rohan!

-But the boy hasn't even been tried yet. He said that to execute someone based solely on the charges...

Cardinal Gistier protested in an uncertain voice, but was soon drowned out by Ambassador Guerti's proud shouts.

-So you don't know anything! A mere commoner burned down a nobleman's estate! This is not a criminal caught at the scene! According to the laws of Rohan, this is undoubtedly a capital crime! It's a mortal sin that you can't even enter the courtroom unless you're a member of the imperial family or royal family!

But then, something unexpected happened.

Seonghwang, who was quietly watching the commotion in the throne room with a strange glow in his eyes, said this as soon as Ambassador Guerti finished speaking.

-okay. The royal family is right. That boy is my son.

-!?

... What on earth did you hear just now?

Everyone in the throne room could not believe their ears. The same

was true for Owen, the person involved.

-I... son?

However, the Holy Emperor stood up from his throne, approached them, and continued speaking without hesitation.

-Bringing back my lost child here is the Lord's care to ensure that Cardinal Gistier's sharpness does not fade. Isn't it a waste of ability to step down from the front line due to his age?

-... ... !?!?

-Why are you so surprised? Didn't Cardinal Jistier also say that earlier? What that child has is definitely a memento of Mama Mama. Now, come over here, Owen. Did you encounter any inconveniences while coming to the imperial palace?

Seonghwang had no hesitation in calling the name of the boy he saw for the first time as if he was someone he saw every day.

As a waterfall of divine power poured down on the shabby boy, everyone slowly froze in shock as they realized the seriousness of what had just happened.

No, what are you talking about?

Are you sure it's your son?

your majesty? your majesty! Please say something!

-Oh, and Ambassador Guerti.

While everyone was shouting in panic, the Holy Emperor left the following words for the last time and quietly disappeared, intercepting the boy.

-Now that we have to hold a formal trial, it would be better to reinvestigate Rohan's arson case from the beginning.

-... ... !

Ambassador Guerti, who had come to protest, suddenly became someone who had insulted the royal family and left the imperial capital in a hurry.

The subsequent trial held in Rohan went smoothly. The testimony of several witnesses was quickly secured, and Owen's innocence was quickly proven.

Of course, some people showed suspicion that the incident was covered up by creating fake witnesses.

It has to be that way. How could someone so great dare to accuse someone of arson when the emperor of the empire declared that he was his son?

Anyway, everything happened so haphazardly.

The orphan boy brought from Rohan suddenly surpassed Logan and became the first prince of the Holy Imperial Family without even knowing why. At the same time, he received all kinds of generous treatment in the Cheongjang Labyrinth.

"... So, Owen is his father's biological son?"

"It's a matter of caution, but I guess that's not the case."

Dasha slowly shook her head.

After that incident, requests poured in from all royal and noble families on the continent to investigate the boy's identity.

And informants were able to identify the boy's biological parents relatively easily. It turned out that Owen's parents were a very famous hunter couple in the western mountain range.

-The only son in the family is tall and handsome, just like my father. Ugh. What is a great fire? If he had grown up like that, he would have learned from his parents and become the best hunter on the continent.

-Both the couple had good personalities. The son of the house was also very nice. So when they heard the news of the arson, everyone

said there was no way she could have done that.

Everyone in his hometown had this recollection of Owen. There was no way that such a boy could really be a child of prosperous kings.

"Then why?"

How can Owen, who is clearly not a member of the Holy Imperial Family, become the first prince?

"Because that is what His Majesty the Holy Emperor publicly declared."

A fact that everyone doubts. Nevertheless, this is why no nobles or high-ranking priests are quick to raise objections to this.

This is because simply denying the words of God's representative is itself considered disrespect toward the Lord.

So Owen ended up staying in the Blue Rose Labyrinth for a while.

Like other children, he was provided with ample educational opportunities, but no one in particular forced him to follow the duties or etiquette of a prince.

Although he is a prince in name, I wonder if that would be okay. It may be possible if Seongjin is a prosperous emperor who has almost left Seongjin in Jinju Palace.

"And it is said that he had a close relationship with 'almost' all the princes and princesses."

Although Dasha did not mention it in detail, Seongjin was able to recognize it right away. Perhaps Mores was in the category that falls outside of that 'almost' category.

Anyway, despite all the suspicion that followed him, Owen lived a dreamy life in the imperial palace for a while.

He often hung out with Amelia and Logan, and had regular audiences with the other princes and princesses.

In particular, he said he was very fond of little Sisley, who followed him around saying, "Brother, brother."

It seemed like peaceful days would continue for a while.

Until one afternoon, during an audience, Owen said these words to the Emperor.

-father. These days, I see strange letters in the air.

-... ... ?

-At first I thought I was crazy. But now I can be sure. Those are precious letters that encourage and awaken me from my laziness.

Seonghwang furrowed his brows secretly.

What does this mean all of a sudden? I thought it was being properly regulated, but were there still people secretly putting pressure on this child?

However, Owen's face was serious as he looked directly into Seonghwang's gaze.

-Father, Soja is trying to become stronger with the power of this status window. So, unfortunately, I will have to leave my father and brothers and sisters for a while.

-Wait a minute, you're leaving? Owen. What on earth is that...

-Otherwise, you may not be able to handle what is coming. So please trust Soja and wait.

-... ... !?

By that time, the boy had become quite unsophisticated in his words and actions, and he ran away from home, leaving behind those kind words.

Following the Knights of St. Grazier, who had just formed the third missionary group at the time, they went to the southernmost tip of the continent.

And after that, Owen did not return to the Imperial Capital for several years.

* * *

Pow! Pow!

sparkle! sparkle!

The whole place was a gorgeous paradise. The stardust gathered together to create a mysterious cluster of five-colored lights, as if a fairy would pop out at any moment.

The problem is that instead of a fairy, there is a crazy fox with an ax in it.

Bah!

Owen kicked the long spear swinging over his head, and it bounced exquisitely, cutting into the jaw of the badger running from a blind spot.

"Mukek?!"

The badger let out a strange scream and covered its jaw, as if it had chewed its tongue due to the impact on its jaw.

But his ordeal did not end here. This is because Owen lunged at him, kicked his head, and rose into the air.

"Ugh... ... !"

While the badger falls to the ground, scattering stardust, Owen, who uses the recoil to jump up, twists his body around and kicks the head of the squirrel next to him. It was a very exciting kick.

Flutter!

Five-colored stars bounce up, and the already seriously injured squirrel becomes a ray of light and disappears.

"Ugh! Me, I... It hasn't been long since the death penalty ended... ... !"

A small cat next to me was crying and brandishing a great sword,
but-

Cheaeng!

Owen hit the ax blade on top of it and pulled it slightly, immediately losing its aim and stumbling forward.

"Magic Arrow!"

"Now, wait!"

And the magic that flew in during that gap hit him instead of Owen.

Puff poop!

Penetrated by numerous magic attacks in succession, the cat turns into light and melts into thin air.

'It's pretty good... ..'

At first, I was a little nervous when I saw the fox running fearlessly towards Dasu.

However, Owen was a more seasoned warrior than expected. As evidence, the number of animals is steadily decreasing.

Thanks to this, Seongjin was now able to look at the scene with peace of mind.

'I'm used to fighting. But nowhere in those movements is there any trace of the standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights or the Banajas technique.'

Very free and colorful movements, different from those of the knights of the ecliptic.

Fluffy!

As Owen quickly turns around, kicking the armor of the guy running from the side, the bright red pendant hidden under his clothes whizzes out.

Seongjin did not miss that split second and caught the milestone.

"... .."

As I guessed, it was my grandmother's milestone.

Seongjin didn't know how many of those milestones there were and who owned them.

But at least, there is probably not only one Delcross 'Owen' in the world who holds the precious milestone of the Oracle.

'As expected, it seems like our Owen is the right one. This bastard didn't come home and did something somewhere, so he was playing games in a place like this!'

Seongjin also had some thoughts about Owen running away from home.

If he knew that he was not the Holy Emperor's biological son, I wonder if he would have felt great pressure from the suddenly created title of First Prince of the Holy Empire.

Of course, looking at his cheerful attitude about everything now, it doesn't seem like he's the type of person to dig into the ground like that.

-The fact that you are here now means that you also have an important goal.

There was a clue as to the reason for running away from home. Didn't he say it himself earlier? He said that he had a goal that he had to achieve somehow.

-Although he has a bit of a bad personality, Sang Sang-chang is someone who helps users make the optimal choice.

And I also talked about the status window.

Seongjin was obviously worried about [Sang Sang-chang] whom Owen had mentioned. It certainly doesn't seem to mean texts from a simple normal world.

Also, your grandmother's milestone is the source?

"Wow! As expected, our guild's power is not enough!"

At that time, a rabbit that had fallen to the ground glared at Owen and shouted desperately.

Looking at the fact that he spits out five-colored stardust every time he utters a word, it appears that the injury he is currently suffering is not that minor.

At that time, the guy suddenly said with a solemn look on his face.

"I can't do it. "Let's do what we've all been preparing for!"

"what? But then we also have a death penalty... .."

"Is that a problem now? "If we keep going like this, we're all going to get hit by that guy!"

Seongjin looked closely at what they were doing. From what I heard, it looks like they've prepared some kind of last resort. What on earth are you trying to do?

"When you give the signal, they all activate at the same time!"

But when they all started searching inside my arms, I quickly changed my mind. I don't know what it is, but I have a feeling that the last resort will be activated quite quickly.

Wouldn't it be a bit difficult to watch out of curiosity and then feel helpless?

Weeeeeeee-

That was when the rabbit found something in its arms and started manipulating it.

Sigh! Paang!

Suddenly, a bright cluster of stars appeared in front of his eyes, accompanied by a small sound.

"what... .."

That was the end.

The rabbit could no longer speak and just turned into light and disappeared.

"... ..!"

The remaining guys were shocked.

A cute goat suddenly toddled over and stabbed a guild member in the back of the neck with a beginner's dagger.

"omg! be careful! "That's no ordinary sheep!"

"Hey, the sheep killed the man..." "Wow!"

But the warning did not continue. This is because his cervical spine was trampled by a baby goat.

It was one of the neat assassination methods I learned from Dasha.

Bye.

I thought there would be cute petal-shaped footprints on the back of its neck, but then they disappeared in a bright light.

"you... .."

Owen, surprised by the sudden situation, opened his eyes wide and looked at Seongjin.

Kwasik!

At that time, Seongjin, who was crushing the last remaining cervical vertebra, looked back at him and asked curiously.

"why? "If we do something wrong, we'll die?"

So, I have to kill him before he dies.

"What are you... .."

noisy.

Let's clear this place as quickly as possible and have a serious conversation with me. You runaway teenager.

280. Yellow Zone (4)

"omg! "He's a silent villain!"

"One of the silent villains has appeared in the Green Zone!"

"I heard that PEP and the glamping guild are targeting it at the same time. Are you still safe? "Where are you going to rob me now?"

As soon as I defeated the attackers and entered the green zone, I heard whispers from players who recognized Owen.

Seongjin looked back at the fox, thinking it was unexpected.

Silent villain?

How did the guy who was constantly talking all the way here get that nickname?

"It would be difficult to go into detail here. Follow me. "There is a small restaurant near here that we used as a base."

Owen, who said that, had a stiff expression on his face from before. It seems that Seongjin's handling of the attackers at the last minute was quite a shock to him.

I didn't understand it at all. Who was the most flamboyant guy, chopping off players' heads with an axe?

"say it. "What are you?"

After settling down in the corner of a quiet restaurant, the fox glared at Seongjin and asked softly.

Whoa, don't frown.

No matter how much you weigh, you are just a cute animal friend right now.

"I introduced you earlier, right? "This is Seongjin Lee."

"I'm sure you know you're not asking that."

Owen narrowed his eyes and carefully examined Seongjin from the horns of his head to the tips of his hooves.

"What on earth are you doing that allows you to kill players so easily?"

"... "Is that a problem?"

"of course. You are still a newbie. My physical abilities aren't that high and I don't have any decent equipment. So, it means that you killed them purely with your skills."

Owen's eyes deepened as he glared at Seongjin.

"And there is only one such case. "You're already a bastard who is good at killing people."

Ah, I thought I knew why Owen was on guard.

'But that would be troublesome.'

I need to be by this guy's side and get help and slowly understand his purpose, but there was no benefit in having him build a wall from the beginning.

Seongjin, who was choosing his words for a moment, suddenly noticed a cute hoof on the table instead of his hand.

hmm. cute. It must be appealing.

"What should I say? "The neighborhood I lived in was originally a bit rough."

Seongjin lowered his eyes and began to speak in a low voice.

"It was a place where your life could not be guaranteed if you let

your guard down even a little. I woke up every day remembering the horror of the attack, and before I could blink, my colleague next to me would die. "There wasn't a single day where I could sleep comfortably."

After speaking up to that point, Seongjin paused for a moment and raised a small petal-like hoof towards Owen.

"Everyone there had to learn these skills to survive. I'm happy if I look like I'm skilled in your eyes. "That would be perfect proof that I survived alone until now."

"alone? "Then what about your colleagues?"

"All my colleagues who were with me died. "In the end, I was the only one who survived."

The fox's eyes shake violently at those words.

"You alone... .."

Then, his face suddenly contorted, and his expression became extremely sad.

For some reason, it felt like tears would fall if I touched it.

"... I see. I'm sorry for doubting you. "It must be a really difficult memory for you."

"... .."

"But don't worry, newbie! From now on, we will all help you!"

Seongjin was dumbfounded by the reaction.

'Hey, man. When we first met, didn't you hear me explain that I was born and raised in the Imperial Capital?'

Why are you so clueless about everything?

Is this guy a different type of guy than Logan? How could I be too anxious to put it out there?

Owen, perhaps aware of Seongjin's complicated feelings, nodded eagerly and continued speaking.

"okay. I guessed that there might be something going on. "The fact that you are here means that you were chosen by Sang Sang-chang."

"select?"

"huh. Sang Chang-chang is quite selective about the personality of the user. "So far he's seen a lot of guest ID users, but he's never seen one with a really bad personality."

I don't know if it's fortunate or unfortunate, but in any case, Owen has completely let down his guard against Seongjin.

"First, let's finish registering friends. "Would you please give me your terminal for a moment?"

After hearing that, I searched my pockets to see if anything, and sure enough, I found it. The broken milestone that I was holding while I was sleeping appears intact.

In this place where it is not clear whether it is in a dream or a game, it emits a shape and brilliance that are not at all different from reality.

"I can't believe this thing is really following me here... .."

"haha. Didn't I tell you earlier? "The terminal is the thing that allows us to be here, and it is the source of Sang Tae-chang."

Then, he clicked his tongue as he looked at Seongjin's broken milestone.

"I heard that the graphics are a bit broken for some reason. It's only natural that the terminal is like this. "Maybe this is why you don't know Sang Tae-chang very well."

"Is it okay like this?"

"Well, seeing as how the skin is put on just fine, it doesn't seem to be in an unstable state at all."

Owen responded like that and began a complex operation by placing the broken milestone against his own.

"I once went out with a guy who had a terminal with a broken corner. "Even then, except for the graphics being a bit unstable, the functionality was fine."

It is said that it was his friend's idea to solve the graphic problem by overwriting the skin at the time.

As if to prove his words that it was functional, a small window appeared in front of Seongjin's eyes after a while.

☐Qr#^^E& applied to register as a 'friend' with ☐☐☐ ☐☐. Do you want to accept it?☐

☐Accept/Reject☐

Seongjin roughly clicked the accept button and thought deeply.

I've heard many stories about this [milestone] item.

However, since it is said to function as a terminal that connects to another world, I think it can no longer be simply viewed as a [keepsake].

-The oracle's [signpost] is an object from the normal world, but it also partially has properties similar to substances from the normal world.

In the old man's workshop, Dexter said that.

Originally, something that couldn't exist within the laws of the original world came to exist in the world just fine through high-level mental abilities.

Did you say that the principle of this milestone is hidden in the source of the homunculus engine, that is, the basis of the existence of the normal world?

'If the milestone created by the Oracle can become the basis for supporting multiple dimensions... ... '

So, isn't there a law that a milestone in itself shouldn't become the foundation of a dimension?

"While you're at it, why don't you register your other friends in advance too? "You will be traveling with us often from now on."

"Yes, whatever you like."

Seongjin, who was looking at Owen holding the jewel and working hard on it, suddenly had a thought.

Come to think of it, the identity of [Sang Sang-chang], whom Owen follows, is also the same. When I hear you speak, it feels like a personality rather than just text.

'If the basis of the status window is also a milestone, then whose personality does it belong to?'

Whatever it was, it was clear that it was a very unpleasant entity whose identity was difficult to guess.

After gathering his thoughts for a moment, Seongjin came to the conclusion that it was best to make Owen no longer rely on the status window.

"Owen. "You said you had a goal to achieve, right?"

"huh? okay. "All our guest ID users are like that."

"So can you tell me what that goal is?"

Then Owen raised his head and looked at Seongjin with unreadable eyes for a moment.

The fox's face, which seemed infinitely cheerful and light, passed by an ever more serious expression.

"... It's for the family. "I have to protect them at all costs."

Owen answered like that and tightly grasped the two bright red milestones. He applied so much force that the joints in his hands turned white.

"Now they are the only ones left to me in this world. You can't lose your precious people twice. "Now I can do anything to stop it."

"... .."

"Isn't that why you are here too? It's a guest ID user. So you can fully understand how I feel. That's why I'm willing to help you, even though I'm seeing you for the first time."

Seongjin, who looked at the scene in silence for a moment, finally answered:

"Well, okay. "For now, I will help you."

From then on, Seongjin listened to Owen explain things he needed to know as a newbie for a while.

The world they are currently in is a normal world called 'Pangaea Chronicle', and most users are said to access this through a place called 'Impulse Soft'.

'Impulse Soft?'

what? It's a familiar name, like you've definitely heard it somewhere, right?

While Seongjin tilted his head, Owen continued his explanation. Most of them were related to the characteristics of guest ID users.

"Guest ID users have various disadvantages compared to regular users. A good example is that you cannot form parties with regular users or use facilities such as auction houses or high-end stores."

In the midst of that explanation, Seongjin finally learned why Owen and his friends were called 'silent villains.'

"I heard that Pangea Chronicle basically provides simultaneous interpretation between users. But that's just a story between official users."

Smooth communication also occurs when guest ID users communicate with regular players. For the convenience of players,

the system supports simultaneous interpretation.

However, it was a different story among Guest ID users. If you live in a different area, you can't communicate at all.

"So you were talking with your thoughts?"

When Seongjin asked, recalling the first time he met them, Owen nodded.

"huh. Fortunately, we can send our thoughts to each other through Sang Tae-chang."

So, even though they were talking passionately with their thoughts, it seemed to others that they were keeping their mouths shut.

It might have been a little scary to see someone I didn't know.

"You mean you quietly talked like that and stole items here and there?"

"Robbing away, what kind of rude thing is that?"

"If not, why are people reacting like that?"

Isn't there a reason why these guys are called 'villains'? The same goes for the guild we raided earlier, and the reputation we heard after entering the Green Zone.

Then the fox responded, his already red face turning even redder.

"We played normally. "I did not illegally rob or steal other people's property."

"really?"

"... I just played a little harder than others. "I took over the dungeons that had good items and kept killing them."

"... .."

"Hey, don't look at me like that. We couldn't help it! Since you can't use facilities like the auction house, of course you have no choice but

to risk your life on items found in the dungeon!"

It was in the meantime.

I suddenly felt drowsy, and my vision began to blink little by little.

"Oh, it looks like Sang Tae-chang has decided to send us out now. "I guess it's already morning."

"morning?"

"huh. "Now I have to go back to reality."

After responding like that, Owen waved his hand cheerfully at Seongjin.

"I had a great time meeting you. It would be nice to see you again next time I come in. This is our meeting place, so remember it. "Goodbye, newbie."

So it's not a newbie, it's Seongjin Lee, man.

* * *

Tweet, tweet.

Seongjin opened his eyes in his room at Jinju Palace, listening to the happy sound of birds that he had not heard in a long time.

"It couldn't have been a dream..."

The things I experienced after meeting Owen were so vivid, but when I realized the reality at Jinju Palace, all of those things felt distant, like a dream.

[Why are you dozing off and lying down when you wake up? Isn't that like you? Did you have a bad dream?]

In the flame crystal, the Demon King stretches and twitches as always.

Ah, yes, there is a demon lord. This is my reality.

Seongjin slowly got up, thinking like that. Then he tilted his head at his unusual physical condition.

'But why am I so dizzy?'

Perhaps it was the aftermath of a dream, but I felt tired somewhere even though I woke up from a good night's sleep.

The decline in condition was clearly visible even during training sessions.

Masain, seeing Seongjin having difficulty concentrating on meditation, asked curiously.

'Sir, where are you uncomfortable? "Isn't it possible that you still have some fatigue from the trip?"

'Ah, it's because you stayed up all night playing games, Lord Masaine.'

Seongjin, who couldn't bear to say that, grabbed the nutcracker and sighed quietly.

'Even when I was in school, I was never really into games... .. '

Okay, now I get it.

This is why everyone tells you to be careful of game addiction.

"Why am I so down today?"

But then, a familiar clear voice came from behind.

Wow.

At the same time, powerful divine power was pouring towards Seongjin, and I felt the accumulated fatigue disappear at once.

"... Sisley?"

When I turned around, the Sisley kid was looking at Seongjin and smiling.

Now, instead of a diary, he was hugging a small teddy bear, with Seo Yi-seo still on his back, full of vigilance.

"What's going on at Jinju Palace this morning?"

When I asked, a little surprised by the unexpected visit, Sisley looked at Seongjin and tilted his head.

"huh? Don't you remember, brother? "You told me to come to Jinju Palace when you have time, so that you could tell me more about our Labyu, right?"

The little ice bear also looked at Seongjin and let out an electronic sound as if singing.

[Al~la~view!]

Uh, okay.

This guy's problem still remained.

281. Impulse Soft (1)

"Anyway, it's a bit surprising. Brother Mores is curious about Brother Owen."

Sisley said that and took a swig of tea. There was a small teddy bear sitting on his lap, and a fiercely scolding Seo Yi-seo on his back.

"The two had a very bad relationship. "Because whenever we met, we snarled at each other."

'Yes, it must have been immature.'

Seongjin was now giving up his morning training and having an early refreshment with Sisley.

Thanks to the little boy, my fatigue has subsided, but it's probably the result of following Masain's advice to take a break today.

I have a little question to ask about Owen.

"Because the personality differences between the two were so severe. But don't worry, it's low. "Until now, I have never had a fight with you so serious that I couldn't get over it."

"... .."

Masain, who was listening with a worried look next to him, cautiously helps.

what. Mores' evil deeds are not new.

Unlike before, when I didn't think it was a big deal, I feel heavy because I think that all of this is my karma.

"Actually, when Brother Owen first left the imperial palace, everyone was very worried. "She thought maybe she hated everyone in the imperial palace."

Sweet.

Sisley continued, putting the teacup down on the table.

"But I guess that's not the case. "He always sends letters to ask how everyone is doing, and he never forgets to send gifts."

Sisley, who said that, slightly lifted the pink rabbit eye patch he was wearing around his neck.

"Oh, that."

Now that I think about it, I've seen something similar in Seonghwang's office.

I once thought that the design was too modern for a Delcross product.

"that's right. Your Majesty also has the same item. "I heard that it was also a gift from Brother Owen for his birthday."

"That's what Owen sent you?"

At that moment, Seongjin realized something.

'Owen, you like cute things!'

For some reason, I felt like I overly sympathized with Seongjin, who looked like a mountain goat.

Looking back now, I have a reasonable suspicion that the reason he chose the infant skin was not simply because it was cheap.

"Anyway, it's really unusual that you chose something like an eye patch as a gift."

"Maybe it's because it's something that's hard to find on the continent? Seo Yi-seo says this is something from his world."

Seo Yi-seo?

When Seongjin looks back at her, Seo Yi-seo becomes very wary and takes a step back.

"What is it? Me, I won't tell you anything! "This ominous darkness!"

... If you're going to be so scared, why do you always follow Sisley?

Anyway, this is Seo Yi-seo's world.

I'm very wary of Seongjin, and she doesn't seem to be in her right mind at all, so I haven't thought about finding out anything from her yet.

'But Seo Yi-seo is a human from the normal world. That means... .. '

just as expected. The demon king, who was examining the eye patch for a moment, made a hint.

[Lee Seong-jin, that's an item from the Gyu-sang world.]

okay. She thought so.

"Sisley, can I have a look at that for a moment?"

Seongjin asked for Sisley's understanding and accepted the eye patch.

On the outside, it looked like an ordinary eye patch, but when I borrowed the Demon King's spiritual eye, information unique to the normal world vaguely came to mind.

☐Justitia's Headdress (*Soft Rabbit Edition)☐

☐The noble hero who protects the world, in his later years, decided to cut out his own eyes to protect the laws of the world. Accordingly, the kingdom decided to honor the hero's noble determination for a long time by granting him a treasure to cover his eyes.☐

☐Effect: Poison resistance S + , status abnormality resistance S + , mental attack resistance S + ☐

☐Rating: Epic☐

□Shopping price: 3,999,000 P Cash (*This product is 'Gather, friends collaboration commemorative-limited edition'.)□

As expected, it's from the Pangea Chronicle.

The identity of this suggests quite a few things.

Items obtained from Pangea Chronicle can be brought to the original world of Delcross and function properly.

And Owen is looking for something in the Pangea Chronicle using the guest ID.

-The same applies to all Guest ID users. Because there is something I absolutely need, I am clinging to this place even if it means taking risks.

And Owen said this.

-You can't lose precious people twice. Now I can do anything to stop it.

What is Owen really worried about?

Also, what are we trying to prepare for through Pangea Chronicle?

'by the way... ... '

Regardless of the identity of the item from earlier, there was something that particularly caught Seongjin's eye.

That's 3,999,000 P Cash at the shopping mall.

'This somehow seems very expensive? Also, a limited item? This guy, you probably didn't get ripped off, right?'

Even Seongjin, who was not familiar with Pangea Chronicle's market price, was able to roughly guess it. Seeing so many 0's piled up, this eye patch was clearly not an expensive item.

It was truly absurd to think of the amount of work Owen had to do to get two of those.

'What's so important about this?'

However, after listening to Sisley's explanation, I was able to somewhat understand the purpose of this unexpected gift.

"Brother Owen may seem like he goes around without thinking, but when you get to know him, he is a very attentive and kind person. "He once told me that I had a nightmare, and he kept forgetting about it for years before sending me this."

"nightmare?"

"huh. "After writing this, my precognitive dreams and nightmares have completely disappeared."

... hmm. So you sent a mental attack resistance S + item? Does this mean that there is a reason for being rude?

While I was lost in thought with my chin resting, Sisley urged Seongjin.

"So, Brother Mores. When are you going to show me about La View? "What is La View's amazing ability?"

"Oh, that's it... .."

Seongjin answered a little hesitantly.

When we first remodeled Bingsu No. 3, we believed that we had realized all the dreams of a child's toy. I was just proud because I thought there would never be a better gift than this.

But I'm also worried about Logan and Marsain's reactions. Also, when I look at Sisley happily holding the little bear, the thought that it might be okay as it is keeps coming back to me.

[Kyu?]

Perhaps recognizing that he has become a hot topic, the ice bear opens its bright eyes and looks up at Seongjin.

There was even a small ribbon tied around the teddy bear's neck that

I had never seen before.

'... 'Is it kind of cute?'

Wouldn't it have been better to just end it with walking and talking?
Look, the little boy is really happy with just that.

But I could no longer ignore the clear gray eyes sparkling with great anticipation.

"... "This is a controller that can control Bingsu No. 3."

Seongjin opened his mouth, taking out the modified ice heart.

"If you want to show it properly, you have to go to a large place.
"Let's go out to the training ground together."

"What kind of ability do you need a large space for?"

"There is such a thing. And by the way, before we start, you'd better take off that ribbon around your neck."

"huh?"

From behind, Lord Masain glances at them with an anxious expression.

Only Sisley, who had no idea what would happen next, just blinked with a bright expression.

* * *

[egg! la! View!]

Coo!

A strong shock accompanied by a high electronic sound shook the training ground.

This is because a huge ice bear with glowing red eyes struck the floor of the gym with its vicious, thorny fist.

The weapons arranged on one side fell down, and acrid dust rose

everywhere.

"Ugh!"

"W-what is that!"

The frightened resident knights gathered in the corner of the training hall and whispered. Among them, Sir Haven was so scared that he was hiding behind Sir Calmen and trembling.

After finishing the demonstration, Seongjin was worried about Sisley's condition. What if the child is too scared?

"Laview..."

But it was unfounded.

The little saint looked up at the ice bear with an expression of emotion, then walked up to the bear and hugged its thick belly.

"You were such an amazing kid! I'm sorry for not knowing anything until now! "You're so cool!"

"uh..."

This is a bit of a surprising reaction.

If I had known this would happen, I would have just made a combined robot instead of a teddy bear.

'Still, I understand one thing about Sisley's tastes.'

Meanwhile, Sisley was not the only one who showed an unexpected reaction.

Wong wong wong!

This is because Max, who was quietly sitting in the corner of the training ground, suddenly ran towards the teddy bear and started barking.

Wong wong wong wong!

-You go away! go away!

Then he looked back at Seongjin and cried sadly!

Kiyiing.

-I can do that too! I am bigger! I am stronger!

"Max... .."

This cute guy!

Seongjin comforted the whining dog by stroking its head.

"Okay, okay. You are more amazing and cute. So you don't have to transform like that. okay?"

[joy! You are the only one who thinks that guy is cute.]

However, Seongjin did not pay any attention to the demon lord's grumbles.

"Would you like a snack, Max?"

[Just let that damn mixed breed dog of mine... ..]

Anyway, I was relieved that Sisley seemed to like it. Seongjin manipulated her ice heart with a much more relaxed mind.

Pyooooong.

Shaved Ice No. 3, which showed destructive power that shocked the knights, turned into a small baby bear again and was held in Sisley's arms.

[Wow!]

"Good job, Labyu!"

The little saint smiled broadly and stroked the ice bear's head.

If anyone had not been aware of the destructive acts that the ice bear had just committed, it would have been a heart-warming sight for

anyone to see.

'Hmm, it certainly feels like a reward for mistreating Dexter so much?'

Seongjin scratched his cheek shyly and thought.

It was right then.

'... Wait, Dexter?'

Seongjin shivered at the memory that suddenly came to his mind. The words she had heard in passing from Dexter suddenly popped into her mind.

-Actually, the reason I was introduced to Ionic's technology was thanks to my relationship with a game company called Impulse Soft.

Oh, wait a minute! Impulse Soft! Didn't Dexter say that back then?

Seongjin was someone who could never forget something once he heard about it. There was no way his memory was wrong.

'A game company related to Ionian technology is managing the normal world that Owen accesses?'

So, in order to get to the bottom of what Owen got caught up in, shouldn't we first find out about Impulse Soft?

While Seongjin was lost in thought, Sisley, with a very flushed face, approached him holding an ice bear.

"What did you do with all this, brother?"

"Oh yeah. "I have to give you this."

Seongjin suddenly came to his senses and handed the ice heart he was holding into the kid's hands. Like the 'Knight of Grace' controller, it was a remodeled object shaped like a small key.

"As I said before, this is the controller that can control Bingsu No. 3. "If you hold this, you can transform into Shaved Ice No. 3 whenever

you want."

"Yes, I see."

After answering that, Sisley quietly looked at the ice heart in his hand. The gray eyes of a girl who was more mature than her peers sparkled with an extremely serious light.

"I've decided, brother."

Sisley, who was thinking deeply about something, eventually raised his head and spoke.

"This is Labyu's stuff from now on. "The object that controls Labyu must be in Labyu's hands."

"... what?"

Seongjin was shocked.

No, wait! Can you still say that after just seeing that guy's incredible strength?

Bingsu No. 3 is a dangerous ice golem with a weapon! Proper human control is necessary!

But before Seongjin could say anything, Sisley put the key on a ribbon and hung it around the teddy bear's neck. And I looked closely at its black, button-like eyes.

"You know, brother. "What you gave me as a gift is not just a doll, but a precious friend of mine."

Scrunch.

A small hand gently strokes the ice bear's head.

"It hasn't been long since I've been with this kid, but if you spend time together, you'll get to know her right away. "She watches me carefully and she always cares."

"... .."

That's right, it's a child care program.

Seongjin didn't know what to say, so his mouth twitched, but Sisley looked at Seongjin and smiled. It was a bright smile rarely seen by a saint who did not usually show much expression.

"So, I hope that Labyu grows when he wants to grow and dances when he wants to dance."

[Kyu.]

Then, Shaved Ice No. 3 looked at Sisley and tilted his head for a moment.

Perhaps the artificial intelligence, which is not familiar with Delcross's language system, is attempting to understand its owner's words with its limited knowledge.

Bingsu No. 3, whose eyes lit up for a moment as he processed the information, soon let out a short, soft electronic sound.

[I love you.]

hmm. All he says is, "Alabyu," so I don't know what this guy is thinking.

I guess I should have tried adding more variety to the recording.

"But Sisley. That guy's name is actually not La View, but Shavedsu No. 3... .."

"Come on, Labyu. Come train with me! Shall we play together and destroy the scarecrow in the training ground?"

... Hey, kid.

I thought it couldn't be possible, but you're deliberately ignoring the name I gave you, right? huh?

* * *

"I need to see Dexter again, Dad. "That dwarf technician in the old

man's workshop."

And that afternoon.

Seongjin visited the office a month later and said so. He felt the need to find Dexter and investigate 'Impulse Soft' in detail.

"Are you saying you're going to find that workshop again? what brings you here?"

"I can't go into detail, but it is a very important matter."

Then Seonghwang put down the document he was writing and looked at Seongjin for a moment.

"It is not a place where we can go as we please. Because the owner of that small dimension is the old man. No matter how much I do, I cannot allow others to come and go without their permission."

Seonghwang said that and frowned slightly.

However, rather than meaning rejection, it would be closer to thinking about how to force the elder to get permission. At least that's how Seongjin felt.

"... "Let's talk to the old man."

Finally, as if he had decided on a policy, Seonghwang gave a concise answer to Seongjin.

And that evening, Seongjin suddenly received a call from Seonghwang.

To Seongjin, who came running to me without knowing why, he handed a small disc-like object and said indifferently:

"Now, take it. "It is the key to the Lycan Slope race."

"Tribal Key... .."

I've heard that once.

The other day, when I brought up the question of asking for

Seonghwang, wasn't the old man freaked out?

"Most functions are locked now, but you will be able to enter and exit the workshop whenever you want. "It is a precious item, so you must take good care of it."

Seongjin was speechless and stared blankly at Seonghwang's face.

There's no way that old man would just give this away.

Father, what on earth have you done in half a day?

282. Impulse Soft (2)

Brindisi, the capital of Ortona.

The beautiful city, once a center of high-quality literature, was now covered with dirty tents of refugees and wandering beggars and no longer looked like its former self.

In the center of the city is the half-ruined Magenda Palace. In the past, this was also a place that boasted a size and beauty comparable to that of the Delcross Imperial Palace, but after the fall of the Sardinian dynasty that had lasted for about half a century, it was now becoming an empty ruin without an owner.

The conference room of that desolate palace.

Four nobles are now gathered around a huge table.

They were the lords of Castile, Milo, Benso, and Cavour, respectively, and they were all powerful people who could be considered Ortona's real power.

They often held strategic meetings against the Republicans here during the civil war, and occasionally held irregular meetings here even after the fall of the country.

"First of all, congratulations on your son's wedding, Count of Castile."

There really wasn't much to say about the people who met each other after a long time.

The Count of Castile brought in a daughter-in-law from a wealthy Anatolian family. Although she was pale, it was said that she brought a huge dowry that was more than just the flesh on her body. Well,

stories like that.

"Everyone is talking so harshly even though they haven't even seen the new baby. "At least you're fairer than your daughters, Baron Cavour."

When the person involved, the Count of Castile, responded politely, Count Milo quietly helped him from the side.

"Baron Benso. "I don't know about anyone else, but you're not in a position to criticize anyone's beauty right now, are you?"

It was a remark that pointed out that his eldest son was even more famous under the nickname 'Gombo Alberto'.

Then Baron Benso responded with an unpleasant expression.

"No matter what, Alberto's situation is better than your sons. No family on the continent will ask your sons to marry, Count Milo. Don't you know that Giacomo Milo is wanted in Delcross? "Where on earth did you hide your criminal son?"

This time it was Count Milo's turn to get angry at him.

"What? How do I know his whereabouts? He is the one who arbitrarily borrowed the name of his family to create an upper level, and even desecrated it! "He is no longer my child!"

Baron Cavour, who could not see the overheating atmosphere, spoke as if to calm them down.

"now. Let's all stop talking nonsense and be honest. "I wouldn't have an in-law relationship with a northerner anyway, so aren't we all suffering from the problem of our children's marriage?"

As he said, the northern lords had been on high alert for several years to prevent any families from marrying each other.

These are the lords who withstood Ortona during the period of turmoil and still have comparable strength. Now is the time for everyone to be wary of combining forces through marriage.

"So let's all stop talking nonsense and now let's talk about the future. Doesn't everyone know? "We can't leave the North in chaos forever."

To Cavour's words, the Count of Castile added in a polite voice.

"yes. We need a king to rebuild the North. A central point that will bring all forces together without breaking the current balance."

"But who are you nominating?"

okay. That was the problem.

During the Ortona Civil War, Amedeo III, who tried to regain the monarchy by bringing in Brittany, had already died long ago.

And his eldest son, Crown Prince Vittorio, sat in Brittany without any concern for the country and was busy chasing after himself.

He was reputed to be so debauched that rumors spread throughout the continent that he was an outcast who could not function as a human being at all.

What about Benicio, another prince? Although his life or death has not been confirmed, wasn't Prince Benicio the main culprit that brought about the downfall of the monarchy and the leader of the republican faction?

"You can no longer expect anything from royal blood. Even if you are lucky enough to find a collateral successor and secure legitimacy, do you think he will become a proper monarch? "We are the actual rulers who have maintained order in the North so far."

Count Milo sarcastically responded to Baron Cavour's words.

"Now, your true feelings have come out. Do you want to become King of the North?"

"No, of course I'm not saying I will do that... .."

And there was an uncomfortable silence for a while.

Everyone wants the throne, but no one is willing to step forward.

This is because they know that the moment anyone takes a step toward the throne, they will be bitten viciously from all directions.

Then the Count of Castile broke his long silence and spoke.

"If there is no right answer, there is a method handed down from ancient times. "It is we who rightfully elect our king."

"Do you want to become an elector?"

"exactly. "Isn't that the most reasonable way to maintain the current balance?"

Quang!

At that time, the door to the conference room opened roughly, and an angry voice rang out.

"Don't you dare say the word 'elected'! "Just thinking about the dirty remnants of the republic makes me feel disgusted."

Jump and jump.

The giant who shouted like that proudly crossed the conference hall, waving his haphazardly cut mountain hair. It was Berseus Dashiano, a central member of the royalist faction.

"The electorate system is a long-standing tradition that has been passed down in the North since the era of the Three Elder Dragons. It has nothing to do with those damn republicans.'

But no one was willing to say those words. This is because Berseus's entire body was soaked in blood, and his spirit was quite daunting.

Sure enough, he was holding a bloody ax in one hand and several pieces of severed human hair in the other.

Tap, tap.

The fresh blood dripping from his severed neck traced a long dotted trail as he walked.

"... "What's with all that hair?"

Pressed by the force of Berseus, who was approaching at a rapid pace, the knights guarding the lords hesitantly approached their master, putting their hands on their waists.

However, paying no heed to the reactions of those around him, Berseus threw the blood-soaked heads on the table and snorted.

"under! They are thieves who attacked me without fear. Unfortunately for them, I'm not in a good mood today."

The lords blinked.

"What kind of ruthless person dared to attack the Marquis d'Arciano's coat of arms and commit such a big crime?"

"well. "I guess these guys' eyes were knotholes."

Berseus, who was snorting and murmuring like that, suddenly showed his teeth and smiled viciously.

"Or maybe there was no coat of arms on the carriage to begin with."

"... ... !"

The group was in shock.

Unless they misheard, Berseus had deliberately led the bandits to attack.

"... why?"

"You said it earlier, right? "I'm not in a good mood today."

Berseus had heard from an elder who came to check on him that the stolen race key had ended up in the hands of the Holy Emperor.

At that moment, Chimi could not control her anger, so she had already caused an uproar in her own mansion.

"And I've been feeling a bit down lately. "I just thought I needed a little exercise after eating for my health."

"... .."

Everyone looked sick of that natural answer.

"Come on, there's no time to stay like this."

Eventually, the lesser Count of Castile called attention.

"It is no different than me suggesting today's meeting. "I believe everyone has received the letter from the Merchant Union's Branch Manager Schmidt."

Everyone fell silent in a different way at those words. That's why this proposal was very surprising to them.

Taking advantage of the chaos, the Merchants' Association, which was prone to rip-offs and reluctant to invest, suddenly creates a large-scale plan to stabilize the economy of the North and seeks the cooperation of the lords?

"I have heard rumors that Director Schmidt is a workaholic. But when he came forward like this, I thought he wasn't in the mood to get things done."

"Anyway, if you follow Lee Jae's letter, you can make quite a big profit in a short period of time. The problem is that the Northeast monopolizes most of the gains."

Then Count Milo openly expressed his dissatisfaction.

"Then I cannot cooperate. "What about the Northwest?"

"Or how about going a little bigger? So that all of Ortona can benefit evenly."

"hmm... .."

These are lords who consider maintaining the balance of power and minimizing variables to be the most important.

However, Branch Manager Schmidt's proposal was too attractive to just ignore it. A proposal that might increase the stagnant power of

the North and perhaps provide an opportunity to take a leap forward one step ahead of others.

In the end, instead of accepting this, the lords began to devise ways to further increase the scale of the plan so that everyone would benefit equally.

The plan that Seongjin started to create for the 'Cham Salmon Restaurant' was showing signs of snowballing before he knew it.

"joy! "You're doing such a troublesome thing to lower the price of flour that barely gets to the table?"

Berseus, who was quietly listening to this, spoke indifferently.

"You only know one thing and don't know the other, Marquis d'Arciano. While the southern magnates are feeding their soldiers well, aren't our northern soldiers all becoming like worn-out mules? "As time goes by, the difference will only get bigger."

"Then tell me to attack you as much as you want. "I will kill everyone with this axe."

However, saying that, Berseus was also a capable lord who successfully protected his territory in the chaotic north.

He looked dissatisfied for a while, but after a while, he began to look through the documents, weighing the profits and losses with a rather harsh eye.

How much time has passed like that? Seeing what he had discovered, Berseus suddenly opened his eyes and screamed.

"You shameful thief!"

"... ... ?"

Everyone looked up in puzzlement, but Berseus' eyes were already sparking.

This was because of the name of the merchant's name written in small print in the middle of the document.

-Top: Bertrand & Lee

- Top notes: Logan Kline, Maures Kline

Wow!

Berseus jumped up from the table, kicked the chair and shouted angrily.

"You who are prepared! Not only did you take away my race key, but now you are trying to take over the entire North! "Such a shameful guy!!"

"... ... ?"

"Are you going to cooperate obediently? As long as this Dashiano keeps his eyes open, your plan will never be carried out!"

His shout, filled with anger, violently shook the air of the ruined royal palace.

In the meantime, the lords who were suddenly faced with enormous anger just silently glanced at each other without understanding what was going on.

* * *

"This is the key to the Lycanslope race..."

Seongjin, who returned to Jinju Palace, looked at the palm-sized disc shining silver.

It was said that anyone designated as the representative of the tribe could use it, and indeed, even without spiritual eyes, clear menus appeared in Seongjin's eyes.

☐Voting: Locked☐

☐Race: Locked☐

☐Boundary setting: Locked☐

Of course, it's because they're all locked.

Only one small menu at the bottom was glowing faintly, as if to indicate that it was active.

[portal =

□-Workshop□

□-Locked□

□-Locked□

□-Locked□

:

However, the demon king, who was expected to shout out as usual, 'Lee Seong-jin, this is something from the normal world!', said nothing.

'Do you know what this is, devil? It is a racial key held by representatives of the Ionian race.'

The Demon King seemed puzzled by Seongjin's explanation.

[okay? hmm. On the outside, it functions just like an object from the normal world, but no matter how much I look, I can't tell.]

The Demon King, who had been contemplating the disk for a while, continued speaking.

[also. If you look closely, you can feel the flow of a huge law, just like the objects of the normal world. But no matter how you look at it, it looks like something from the real world.]

'okay?'

[huh. Where have I seen something like this again? . Oh, right! It's the same as that strange jewel you're holding! No matter how you look at it, it's confusing.]

milestone?

I heard about that from Dexter. Did he say that he has the

characteristics of both the normal world and the real world?

Certainly, the [Key] is an object that governs the essence of the race. If so, it might have felt similar to a milestone created by the Oracle, the living essence of the race.

'Anyway, we'll look into this more carefully later.'

Seongjin skipped meditation and got ready for bed. To keep the milestone from getting tired, hug it and lie down on your side.

[Are you going to bed already?]

'huh.'

It would be difficult if I logged in late and missed Owen.

[If you sleep with it, you will go to a normal world called 'Pangaea Chronicle'?]

The Demon King asked Seongjin after hearing his explanation of what happened last night.

'Oh, I see.'

[For some reason, he didn't sleep-talk at all yesterday.]

Did you? For some reason, Edith had been glancing at me with her strange eyes since morning.

[I'm curious. I clearly felt that the soul was here, but how did it go to another world?]

'That's right.'

[I want to follow along too... ..]

Seongjin quietly closed his eyes while listening to the demon king muttering.

[Check the connection of the guest ID.]

And after waiting for a while, I heard a small voice.

[□□□ □□ has been confirmed. Switch to unique ID...]

Unique ID?

Without any doubts-

It's a disaster.

Suddenly, my vision became brighter, and the scene of the small restaurant where the connection had ended yesterday unfolded before my eyes.

"You're here, newbie!"

And someone called Seongjin. It was a cheerful voice that he was already used to.

"You're just in time! I was just about to enter the dungeon! After all, newbies are meant to be with us!"

Red fox Owen greeted him with a bright smile on his face.

283. Impulse Soft (3)

Seongjin felt a little confused when he saw that there were small hooves attached instead of hands.

But Owen, who knew nothing, was just cheerful.

"You go to bed pretty early! Since we connected quite slowly yesterday, I thought it might be difficult to meet today. "We were planning to enter the dungeon early today."

He muttered like that and led Seongjin to his seat with brisk steps.

Coincidentally, two people, or even animals, that I had never seen before were sitting there together. It is a plump octopus and a deer with an excessively long neck.

"..."

Looking at the circumstances, they must be the shadow friends who were with Owen yesterday. Guest ID users with Oracle terminals.

However, this time, it was in proper form thanks to the 'Gather, Friends' skin.

[But Owen. Will it be okay? Dungeons are dangerous for beginners. We still need to prepare.]

The fat octopus twitched its steamed bread-like snout and wriggled its five legs.

The movement was somehow so bizarre that I couldn't tell whether it was waving in greeting or waving.

[I think it's okay. Because we who are familiar with the game can

protect him. Welcome, newbie.]

Another friend who answered politely seemed to have an excessively elongated body, even considering that he was a deer.

Are these people really human? Seongjin stares at them with strong suspicion rising again -

[But he turned out to be very cute.]

[You're wearing a pretty cute avatar, newbie.]

The two people who were looking at Seongjin sent their thoughts at the same time.

... I made this damn skin.

* * *

"Look at that. "The silent villains have gathered again!"

"Why are we going to a themed dungeon this time?"

"Why are you taking the baby? "Are they doing some sort of offering ritual?"

"no way? "Aren't you just a user who uses a skin?"

Seongjin tried his best to ignore people's whispers and stares at the back of his head.

How famous are these guys?

[You don't have to worry too much about your surroundings, Lee Seong-jin. Once you enter the dungeon, that noise will completely disappear.]

Bwak bwak bwak.

The deer walking ahead of him spoke reassuringly to Seongjin.

It was a friend who introduced himself as 'Hatasu Titi'. Of course, the friend name registered to Seongjin is the broken text '#A&**d#!#'.
#A&**d#!#

[As expected, TT is trustworthy, right? After all, he is the leader of our party. When I first came here and didn't know anything, I received a lot of help from TT.]

[Please call me Hatasu Titi properly, Owen.]

[Uh, why? Is it friendly and cute?]

Among the guest ID users who regularly access this site, Hatasu Titi is said to be the oldest user.

[Hatasu Titi. Why file a complaint? You also don't call my name correctly. Isn't that right?]

The fat octopus spoke a little gruffly and wriggled its legs.

[Sorry, group. But your real name is really difficult to express even in thought.]

[Yes, group. I still can't memorize your full name properly.]

[Owen! It's a matter of etiquette to say it like it is. Moreover, the abbreviations have different pronunciations!]

An octopus with a name that was roughly pronounced 'gureup-kelab-gurreup-bi-keel-leup' grumbled. As expected, the ID added as a friend is an unknown character called '!N;3\$\$ti0m@'.

Of course, even if the text wasn't broken, it's questionable whether that friend's real name would have been spelled correctly.

[So where are we going now?]

When Seongjin asked thoughtfully, Owen looked back and answered kindly.

[I'm going to the themed dungeon. Until now, we couldn't go in due to the number of people, but now we have newbies. The time has come to expand your horizons to new places.]

According to their explanation, unlike regular dungeons, there is an advanced dungeon called a 'theme dungeon' here.

Although it is not particularly difficult, it is a unique dungeon with several themes and various clear conditions. And the rewards were said to be better than those in regular dungeons.

The problem is that there must be 4 or more participants.

[So far, there has never been a case where up to 4 guest ID users connected at the same time. Thanks to the newbies, we are also trying this for the first time.]

Seongjin frowned slightly at Owen's explanation.

'Is this okay?'

Although it was not explained properly to them, Seongjin may not actually be a proper guest ID user.

Also, is this the first time all four of you have gathered together at the same time? This is probably the result of the terminal controlling their access having some kind of influence, but perhaps there is some serious reason behind it?

Somehow, an ominous feeling crept in.

[You don't have to worry too much, Lee Seong-jin. Considering this is your first time, we will start with difficulty level F.]

[Okay, okay. We have the power to reliably clear even A-class regular dungeons. Just in case, if you take a little risk, you can become S-class!]

[We do it first. Excessive tension is rather harmful. Relax.]

The villains seemed to have noticed Seongjin's undesirable appearance and turned around to help him one by one.

[Uh, okay.]

Seongjin nodded.

Well, since they've been around here for a long time, they'll take care of themselves.

'But... ... '

As expected, one thing remained to worry about.

Bwak bwak. Bwak bwak.

Seongjin walked away and looked back.

A sight of footprints dotted in the shape of small flower petals, stretching in a long line along his path.

'This is a baby skin?'

But is it possible to fight? How on earth are mobs implemented?

Surely they won't turn into cute animals or anything?

* * *

And Seongjin's ominous premonition was correct.

As he followed Owen and his villain friends into a strange gate-like place, a small window continued to rise from somewhere and began to obsessively block Seongjin's vision.

□ Our children's friends! Before logging in, have you checked the game's violence and gambling ratings? Let's call my parents and ask them one more time. Isn't this game too violent for friends to enjoy?

Crumble!

Kueeee!

There were several signs of something approaching, howling, but the sight of the dungeon seen through the text window was a large mosaic itself.

Fortunately, there was no incident in which the cute animal was brutally beaten. But you can't distinguish between the background and the mob like that.

Even if a mob attacks, there is no way to recognize its movements.

[I heard it's a themed dungeon. It's really interesting, isn't it? At first I thought it was just a goblin cave, but this is my first time seeing such a loud cave! There are a lot of murals that I haven't seen before?]

I can not see.

What are you so excited about, Owen?

[Mobs also feel similar to when dealing with goblins. It's just that these guys are yellow, and instead of wearing armor, they're wearing colorful feather clothes.]

Yeah, I can't see it.

But since it's a yellow goblin dressed in feathers, it might be better to not be seen.

[Gorgeous. I'm really looking forward to the reward!]

I can't see it.

Is this really the case that I can't receive the clear reward because I can't see it?

While Seongjin was frowning with gloomy expectations, the villain trio came forward triumphantly and started hunting.

Pow! Pow!

Flash! Flash!

Clusters of five-colored stars pop up here and there along with the sound of hitting something.

[Even though it's a themed dungeon, it's nothing special, right? Is it because it's F grade?]

Owen, the red fox who was cheerfully swinging a one-handed axe, shouted in a bright voice. It seemed like he usually played the role of a melee dealer at the party.

I wonder if he matches well with Owen, who moves lightly despite

his height.

[That's definitely true. Also, perhaps due to my mood, I feel like my attacks work better than in regular dungeons.]

As expected, there is a faint sense of relief in the voice of Hatasu Titi, the deer. He seemed to have a serious personality, so I guess he still felt uneasy even if he was mentioned as F-level.

However, he was carrying a huge shield and a heavy mace that did not match his thin-looking body. It looks like it will fly away when the wind blows, so it looks like it was in charge of the tank in this party.

[Step back, Seongjin Lee. This is your turn to see.]

Among them, the most surprising ones were octopuses and octopuses.

It looks like a big, rolling mollusk, and moves quickly around the outskirts of the battlefield, constantly firing arrows.

He even used the suction cups on his legs to cling to the ceiling and skillfully shot arrows with his remaining leg.

I thought octopuses were just skins, but maybe they really don't have suckers?

[It's a great move, isn't it? [#232]

As Seongjin conveyed his thoughts with honest feelings, the octopus looked back with a very touched expression and twitched its cheeks.

[Memorize all the names! Seongjin Lee is kind!]

[Oh, okay, look ahead.]

[All right!]

Flash! Flash!

They said they were a party that could easily clear A-level dungeons, and it turns out they weren't just bluffing. Every time the fox, deer,

and octopus run wild, a feast of colorful stars continues.

At the same time-

Tiring.

Tiring.

A notification sound rang in Seongjin's mind telling him that his level was continuously rising.

'I wonder if the avatar's physical abilities will increase a little... ..'

Thanks to this, Seongjin, who had nothing to do, stepped back and glanced at the status window floating in front of him.

□Lv. 3□

□Occupation: Unemployed (Occupation Lv.10)□

[health : ??? Strength: ??? Intelligence: ??? Horsepower: ??? luck :
??? =

The level rises quickly to 3.

However, the exact stat values are unknown. Owen explained that this is also a characteristic of guest ID users.

Later, when you reach a high level, you can clearly feel the difference in physical ability. It just seemed like the gap didn't jump as dramatically as in other games.

'So that's probably why I was able to kill the other player in the first place.'

If you're not careful, even high-level players can be killed by beginners. To this extent, wouldn't it be possible to say that she reflected reality quite faithfully?

Thanks to this, I felt like this was a realistic world rather than a game.

[clear!]

The F-class dungeon was over in an instant.

Fortunately, Seongjin was properly rewarded in the end. It was beginner armor, gnoll leather, and a small amount of cache.

'500P cash... . 'When can I save this and buy skins?'

I sighed as I thought about the prices of the skins, which were at least close to 10,000 units, but my villain friends were jumping for joy.

[I did it. It's worth coming here on purpose!]

[As expected, the reward is good!]

'... ... ?'

I thought it was really salty, but looking at the happy guys, I guess that wasn't the case.

But how far did Owen go to collect the money and send that gift in this way?

[why? Why do you look at me like that?]

When the red fox asked curiously, Seongjin silently shook his head.

I can't bear to criticize him for being a bigot to his face.

Next was the E-class dungeon.

[These guys are wearing pearls instead of armor!]

[I thought it was an ordinary fishman dungeon, but looking at its gorgeous appearance, it appears to be a tropical fish!]

[beautiful! Ranged attacks work well! I'm really looking forward to the reward!]

As expected, Seongjin, who was looking at the three friends running wild with a cluster of five-colored stars, suddenly became curious and asked.

[But none of these people use magic?]

[Ah, that is also a limitation of guest ID users.]

Owen turned his head and answered cheerfully.

[I told you before, right? We don't have access to luxury facilities. But to learn magic, you have to go to the magic tower in the city.]

[Uh, really? Is it still okay?]

[Well, it would have been nice to have a wizard in the party, but we can't hang out with regular players. We've had enough on our own so far. There may be some damage depending on the attribute, but in the end, if you hit a lot, everyone will die.]

[...]]

okay. Yes, but...

... Why do I feel so ominous?

While Seongjin was frowning, the villains who cleared the dungeon like the wind shouted with excitement.

[Rather, the attack works better than in a regular dungeon?]

[I was nervous because it was an advanced dungeon, but I guess it was just unfounded. It seems like this is just a service for users.]

[Gorgeous! The rewards are good too!]

This time, Seongjin was impressed as he received fish cakes, pearls, and a small amount of cash.

Hey, wait a minute.

'Isn't that strange? 'Why does the attack work better in an advanced dungeon?'

However, before the strangeness could be expressed, the villain friends, who had gained momentum, ended up opening the door to the D-class dungeon.

And what followed was hell.

[what? Why doesn't the attack work?]

[This is strange! It feels like close range attacks don't work at all!]

[Long range is also invalid! Gorgeous but scary!]

Seongjin, who was looking at the villains who ran away excitedly and came back in a hurry, suddenly felt the blood on his forehead.

Hey, you helpless things!

284. Impulse Soft (4)

-Pangaea Chronicle Free Bulletin Board

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Mage) Theme Dungeon) Rush! help me!

= = = = = = = = = = = = = = = =

I am a wizard who has just leveled up and completed the first job change quest.

I heard that it is expensive to get it from the previous item auction house, so I came to the themed dungeon with my party members to work hard in the dungeon.

I entered the F-class golden goblin dungeon, but strangely, the damage didn't work. Although its HP is higher than that of a regular goblin, it is still clearly below 120%. If you look at something that is displayed in white, no matter how you look at it, it is a low level mob below the same level.

But even if you hit the magic missile like crazy, your HP doesn't go down even one bit! Since I'm wearing an electric attribute Creset, I get a critical hit every 3 attacks, but my HP doesn't decrease at all and there's even no knockback! Is this a bug?

Please help me! If I die now, my experience points will be negative and all the job change quests I did will be lost!

- Don't crawl anywhere, read the strategy first!

□ Ah π π I'm in a hurry, so please don't curse and help me.

□ Hi, while you are commenting, go to the tip bulletin board and search for 'theme dungeon'. There are five pages of well-organized strategies.

□ I took a quick look at it, but there is no way to use it right now! π_π

- That's probably because Justitia's 'condition' is applied to the entire theme dungeon. If you look at the main story, there is an item called 'Conditions of a Hero'.

□ The main story in this situation... π π π π

□ The conditions for the hero are key, that is, the damage dealt by party members. Until this is proven, Justitia's protective barrier is placed on the monster and cannot be released. It means that attack is impossible at all.

□ Those conditions are far away π-π

□ At F rank, it is a short range type, at E rank it is a long range type, and at D rank it is a mental attack type such as magic or summons. Conditions like this are attached. If you deal more than 70% of the mob's HP in one attack, the barrier will be lifted, and it's just gum from then on. From C level onwards, the conditions become a bit more complicated.

- Although this may seem easy, meeting the conditions is quite tricky. The total HP of the mob is not low for the same level. It's easiest to just take the high level bus. Call a friend and wake him up.

□ I'm already in the dungeon, so please tell me how to solve it here π0π

□ Give equipment to warrior-type party members and apply buffs to all of them. Once the warrior breaks the barrier with one hit, the difficulty level becomes much lower than that of a regular dungeon.

□ But since we are in a same level party, no matter how much we buff, we don't get 70% damage?

□ Then there is no other solution as of now. Just die and go to the

nearby Green Zone village. I took advantage of a friend's chance there and decided to try again.

- Notification of previous quest reset

□ Oh I'm going crazy really π π π π π π π

* * *

Theme Dungeon D Rank. Ice Banshee's Dungeon.

Unlike the banshees of regular dungeons wearing rags, this is a mysterious themed dungeon where floating air fairy-like girls emit blue light.

There is a high probability of receiving the rare item 'Scream Scroll' as a reward for clearing, and the Ice Banshee itself is popular for its cute appearance.

However, it was a story that had nothing to do with the silent villains who are currently running around under threat to their lives.

Kyaaaaa-

Kyaaaaa-

Feeling their HP slowly being lost due to the screams coming from all directions, the group ran inside with all their might.

[Is it true that we are in D class? What happened to their defense power!]

[No matter how you look at it, it's a banshee! It just looks different, but its movement and attack patterns are exactly the same as the banshee! However, the banshee is not a mob with such high defense by nature, so why do its attacks have no effect at all?]

[Gorgeous! Mysterious! But it's so scary!]

Bwak bwak bwak!

Seongjin ran after them and asked.

[Everything is fine, but why do you keep going deep into the dungeon?]

Then Hatasu Titi, who was relatively backwards because he was holding a heavy shield, shouted urgently.

[Banshee has a wider recognition range than other mobs! It is impossible to completely escape them from the narrow entrance!]

But jumping inside wasn't a good option either.

They were already running with a group of banshees dragging their tails, and their numbers were increasing exponentially.

Kyaaaaa-

Of course, Seongjin could only guess this fact as the screams from behind continued to increase.

If I tried to look back even for a moment, the text blocked my view as if it had been waiting.

□Our children's friends! Before logging in, first rate this game's violence and gambling...□

Hey, this damn text that comes at you at any time is even more violent! What on earth was the creator thinking when he created a skin like this?

[Anyway, there must be some way! Are there any well-known ways to conquer dungeons?]

Isn't this the dungeon that so many people use? There might be a well-organized strategy book.

[I've only heard of such a thing from general users.]

Owen looks back and answers.

He was struggling to speed up as he kept looking back to check if the newbie was following them properly.

[I've heard that too! There is a place where users can document and share their experiences!]

Hatasu Titi added his words and began to increase his speed in earnest, putting his shield on his back.

[But Lee Seong-jin. Even if there were such informative articles, we wouldn't be able to read them! User posts are not translated properly! We are guest ID users!]

In other words, they had been accumulating experience one by one by purely using their bodies.

Not only Owen from the Delcross dimension, but also Hatasu Titi and Gurupplabgurrp Bippullab, who said they had never experienced this type of game in their world.

How many trials and errors did they have to go through before they became accustomed to using the Pangea Chronicle system?

However, it seems that even they have not yet encountered an extreme situation where the attack is completely nullified.

'Never would have thought that I, a newbie, would be the one most familiar with this type of game...'

There were a few things I could guess about this situation.

It requires resistance to physical attacks, including close and long range attacks, or requires some special conditions from the attacker.

Considering that there is no wizard in this party, it might be a special mob that only works with magic attacks.

But I have to see something to test various possibilities.

'First of all, I need to do something with this skin!'

As Seongjin ran, he diligently looked at the menus that appeared before his eyes.

If you can wear a skin, you can also remove it, right? I think it would

be better to show it as a shadow even if the graphics are a bit broken.
At least the shapes will be distinguishable.

'Isn't there a settings window somewhere? There might be one around here... ... '

It was right then.

Hissing-

Suddenly, an eerie presence is felt from behind!

Seongjin reflexively launched himself without even looking back.

Quang!

At the same time, you can see that the floor you were on just now is deeply dented by something mosaic-like.

You didn't even scream earlier. When did they follow you like this?

[Oops, it's Banshee's stealth mode! The speed of the chase will increase even further, but it's really difficult as it is!]

Hatasu Titi, who was a little behind, shouted with an anxious expression.

At that moment, Seongjin's eyes caught the sight of a strange mosaic shooting towards him.

It was hard to guess its shape as it blended in with the background, but I could tell right away that it was a banshee attack.

[damage! TT!]

Seongjin hit the floor without even realizing it, ignoring the text window blocking his view, and hurled his hoof at the mosaic.

It's soggy!

At the same time, Seongjin's hoof felt an unpleasant sensation, as if he was kicking rubber.

Although I somehow veered slightly from TT, I feel like no damage was done at all.

[What are you doing now?!]

At that time, Owen suddenly got angry and fell back a little, and before he could say anything, he lifted Seongjin's collar.

[Does the newbie have the mind to take care of someone now? His defense is quite high, but you're a newbie who can't even wear reinforced armor yet!]

[No, but Hatasu Titi...]

[I told you, right? Our guest ID user must not die here! Stay alert and take care of yourself!]

Seongjin, who was suddenly grabbed by the back of his neck by Owen's hand and was left hanging, suddenly felt a strange sense of déjà vu.

'huh? Surely something like this happened a while ago?'

No, that's not what's important right now.

Anyway, Owen no longer had to look back, so he clung to Seongjin and started running steadily.

Thanks to this, Seongjin was able to take a look at the status window with some time to spare and finally turn off the externally applied skin.

☐Background – Skin 'Gather, Friends'☐

☐On/*Off*☐

☐Object - Skin 'Gather together, friends'☐

☐On/*Off*☐

It's a disaster.

Then, the surrounding illumination suddenly decreases significantly,

and the mosaic of natural colors that was obstructing the view disappears.

And finally, the background of the dungeon and the vague shadow-like figures of the banshees came into Seongjin's vision.

good!

'Leaving the environment window like this, are there any magic skills that I can use right now?'

As he carefully examined the menus and rolled his eyes, Seongjin's eyes suddenly caught sight of a high, dark ceiling with icicle-like things hanging from it.

Unlike the previous dungeons, which were humid and low caves, this dungeon was a corridor with a high ceiling. The ceiling is so high and gloomy that it feels like a graveyard under the black night sky.

But wait, isn't that pretty high?

[Hatasu Titi. Does the wide recognition range of a mob simply refer to the coordinate radius on the Earth's surface? What happens if you move away vertically?]

Then Hatasu Titi, who was following Seongjin's gaze, seemed to realize something and shouted towards the leader.

[Group! It's the ceiling!]

Surprisingly, the one currently running at the forefront of the group is the mollusk group. When the group, which was wiggling its five legs diligently, heard the cry, it quickly flipped its body and flew backwards.

[I understand well! Leave it to me!]

At that moment, two legs extended from him simultaneously wrapped around the body of the group. These are the bodies of Hatasu Titi and Owen.

'what?'

Seongjin, who had not expected this situation, is embarrassed...

Whirling!

The legs, which feel thicker than they look, lift the group with ease. Seongjin's body, which was hanging on Owen, also suddenly rose into the air.

The group jumped over and started climbing the dungeon wall on its three remaining legs. It was truly incredibly fast, no different from running on the floor!

'... ... !'

What on earth is this guy?

While Seongjin was shaking and struggling, the group reached the ceiling, wrapped its three legs around the ice icicles on the ceiling, and hung straight up.

[Very cold! It's difficult to last long!]

Aside from Seongjin, who has become a small goat, the deer carrying a heavy shield and Owen, who is quite strong, seem to have no weight whatsoever.

Kyaaa-

Kiiiiiii-

In any case, the momentary wit paid off.

The Ice Banshees, who suddenly lost their goal, released their stealth mode and began wandering around on the floor.

[Phew. Isn't this an unexpected method?]

[But it is only a temporary measure. Groups that are weak to low temperatures will not be able to survive for long.]

[Group! I work hard!]

While everyone took a moment to sigh, Seongjin diligently looked

through the unfamiliar status window. Then he finally found the skill window and found two sparkling skills there.

□ Basic swordsmanship Lv. 2 =

□ Summoning Lv. 0 =

'... Summoning art?'

Wait, swordsmanship aside, when did I learn this?

285. Impulse Soft (5)

Kyaaaaa-

The echoing sounds of roaming banshees can be heard here and there.

Once the ghosts gathered here, even after losing their target, they rarely left the place and hovered below the group.

[If only I could bring the beloved disease from my world here...]

Hatasu Titi, who was wrapped around Gurub's leg with his shield, lamented.

He seemed to have a relatively calm and realistic personality, but in such a dark situation, it seems he couldn't shake off the assumption of 'what if'.

[If only the staff had been blessed with the 'Book of the Dead', ghosts like that could have been immediately sent back into chaos.]

That's not the only thing I regret.

Owen added, squirming uncomfortably.

[I don't even want a weapon. If only the main body's aura could be used properly, there might have been a breakthrough.]

The group was also very sad. He was weak against the cold, and was already trembling on his three legs that were wrapped around the ceiling.

[I also wish my body were here properly. My current body is too small! There are only five legs!]

... Wait, how many legs does your body have?

Meanwhile, Owen spoke to Seongjin with a heavy expression.

[Are you okay, newbie? I tried to help properly, but I feel ashamed because this happened from the beginning.]

Seongjin looked at him with a sullen face.

Who are you helping now when you can't even think about what to do?

men and horses. We'll see when you get home.

[By the way, newbie, what are you doing so quietly?]

[uh. I don't know if it's an attribute or attack position issue. I'm looking for some basic magic that can be used.]

Seongjin answered half-heartedly and looked around at the distracting menus.

[Basic magic?]

Yeah, that's usually the case with games.

Even before changing jobs and learning advanced skills, the basic classes are divided from the beginning. In that case, you should have learned at least one basic attack according to your class.

But Owen shook his head with a dark look on his face.

[Then it will all be in vain. Didn't I tell you earlier? To learn magic, you have to go to the Magic Tower. All former users carry swords or bows.]

[...] okay?]

Well, there is no law prohibiting even aspiring wizards from using weapons. Anyway, it's a realistic game even though it's useless.

[Besides, you're still a newbie, right? The only weapons I've heard of so far are reinforced swords for beginners, so the only skills I have

are 'basic swordsmanship'?]

surely.

□ Basic swordsmanship Lv. 2 =

If you learn a skill the moment you pick up a weapon, your level will have risen a bit since you cut down the guys who were attacking at the entrance to the Green Zone.

That aside.

□ Summoning Lv. 0 =

Why do I have this skill?

[There is no magic, but there is a summoning spell.]

At those words, the three silent villains turned to Seongjin at the same time.

[huh? No way?]

[You probably saw it wrong. All skills that use MP, such as magic or summoning, can only be acquired by using advanced facilities.]

[This is probably a failed translation. Seongjin Lee's terminal is broken.]

No, but there really is.

In addition, when you briefly activate the summoning skill item, sub-menus appear as if you have been waiting for it.

□ ^#x%: Rank A-□

□ 0#%□cm@& : Rank B + □

□ !#□&!#: Rank A□

□ □ □ □: Rank E□

□ Would you like to summon?□

☐Summon / Cancel☐

'This...'

Although the text was badly broken, it gave me a strange sense of déjà vu.

Two blurry and two clear. Doesn't this composition somehow remind me of the Amulet of Nebraska?

☐List of spirits that can be summoned as summoned beasts 2/4☐

[One. ☐☐☐☐ (inactive)☐

[2. ☐☐☐ ☐☐ (inactive)☐

☐3. Hayes Martin (active)☐

[4. Red (active)☐

After gathering his thoughts for a moment, Seongjin asked Hatasu Titi.

[What is the exact way to learn summoning?]

[I heard that, like weapon skills, you can get them automatically the moment you get the soul. However, soul extraction is only possible when the skill level rises to a certain level. Therefore, beginner users must first purchase a low-level soul from the Magic Tower.]

okay? If so, it's not something you can't understand.

Obviously, the four souls, including Hayes Martin, are said to be subordinate to Seongjin. Wouldn't it be no different from owning a soul?

'Shall we sing it as a test?'

The first thing that came to mind was the Demon King.

-I want to follow along too...

But I soon changed my mind.

We do not yet know the exact mechanism for accessing this site through Oracle's terminal. But in the process of moving from the original to the normal, you summoned it without knowing what would happen to that soul?

'I don't really feel like watching it again, but I think it would be better to try it with Hayes Martin for now.'

however-

'Which one is Hayes?'

All of this damn text is broken, so there is no way to read it.

But the worries didn't last long.

'Rank E must be the demon lord.'

Because he's worthless.

Seongjin quickly chose an A-rank summoned animal, thinking that if the Demon King had found out, he would have been furious.

There was no time to worry about this or that anyway.

[Ugh, cheer up!]

Because the trembling octopus was becoming increasingly pale.

If this continued, sooner or later the group would run out of strength and fall into the middle of a swarm of banshees.

'Please show strength worthy of the A rank!'

☐Would you like to summon?☐

☐*Summon* / Cancel☐

Then it sparkled.

☐!#☐!#: Rank A☐

The broken text seemed to glow, but suddenly a thick fog began to

spread across the dungeon floor.

Sssssss.

The black fog, which was writhing and increasing in volume just below Seongjin and his group, begins to coalesce into the shape of an elongated person, as expected.

Fortunately or unfortunately, I couldn't see the details due to the broken graphics.

Hehehehe...

The eerie crying sound was exactly the same as the one I had seen in Sigismund. There was now no doubt that the summoner was Hayes Martin.

Seongjin, who had anticipated what would happen in the future, was feeling a little discouraged, and the silent villains looked down in confusion.

[What is that? There is something below.]

[Are there other elite mobs besides banshees? It is not visible well.]

[Off! Gurgeup!]

at that time.

Woe!

A tremendous spiritual pressure rose from below. At the same time, a loud scream echoes in Seongjin's mind.

[Ooooooh! Have you finally called this humble servant! Lord of my soul!]

The spiritual pressure was so powerful that the banshees who had gathered together were immediately pushed away and screamed, as if they had been hit by a bomb.

Kyaaa!

Some of the closest ones even turned into smoke and disappeared, as if their HP had been completely drained!

Tiring!

You will hear a notification in your ear that your level has increased.

okay. For some reason, he was ranked A, so he wasn't an ordinary guy after all.

[what? Does the banshee disappear when it touches that black fog?]

[What is happening now?]

[Off!]

At that time, the cloud that was trembling and sliding from the tip of the icicle twitched its cypress resin snout and shouted.

[Gurup! The limit is now! I apologize to everyone!]

With that shout, the group fell down as one lump.

And it was in the middle of a place teeming with banshees.

Quang!

However, the banshees were no longer a threat to the party.

The black fog, or rather Haze, quickly flew to the party's side and began running wild.

[Go away! You bastards!]

Wiggle, wiggle.

Living black fog spread out in all directions, enveloping and entrancing all the attacking banshees.

Kiaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa

The banshees soon turned into a puff of smoke and disappeared into vain. Considering the difficulties the group had had so far, it was an

absurdly easy ending.

Kyaaaaa-

And other banshees who flocked to the empty spot also met the same end.

Tiring!

Tiring!

In return for dozens of banshees melting away at once, a beeping sound continued to ring in Seongjin's ears.

[Ha ha ha ha ha! I couldn't be happier! My master needed me after all! He has finally given this humble thing the value of existence!]

Black fog rose and danced here and there.

"... "What on earth is going on?"

Owen, who was still holding the small goat tightly, looked blankly at the scene and muttered out loud.

"Hey, let go of this."

"Oh sorry. Are you okay, newbie?"

Owen seems to have unconsciously tried to protect the newbie, who must have had the weakest defense, even as he fell.

Anyway, Seongjin managed to escape from his arms, pulled out the beginner's sword he had been saving, and headed towards the banshees.

Bwak bwak bwak.

"for a moment! Where are you going, newbie?"

[Lee Seong-jin! It's dangerous! Those attacks don't work!]

[Be careful!]

But is it because of my mood? I felt strangely confident that it would work this time.

The moment the banshees were first swept under Hayes' spiritual pressure, a strong sense of relief came over me that everything had been resolved. Usually, this type of premonition is never wrong.

And the result was as Seongjin expected.

Wow!

Wow!

With one proper diagonal slash, the charging banshee melts and disappears.

"how... .."

As the group looked at the scene in disbelief, the small mountain goat confidently stepped forward with one foot and looked back at the group.

Wow.

And then, in a voice full of unprecedented majesty, he gave short instructions.

[Everyone wake up.]

"... ..!"

[...] ... !]

The silent villains raised their weapons as if possessed.

Burbubbuk!

Wow!

And the moment they confirmed that the attack was working, they kept their mouths shut and began to demonstrate their skills in silence.

Keeping pace with the black fog that screams loudly and runs rampant.

[Worship for rest! Praise the Archbishop of Rest! Pray for all that He will bring!]

Fortunately, it seemed that not only Hayes' appearance but also his voice of resignation could not be heard by the silent villains. This may be because it is subordinate to Seongjin and is a thought that is conveyed only to Seongjin.

Along with that, Hayes' emotions also constantly flow into Seongjin.

Joy.

Only joy.

That was the only emotion that was constantly conveyed from him.

'... Oh, I really hate it.'

I could tell without looking. Hayes is probably now bursting into laughter with a terrifying expression, shedding black tears of joy.

I really didn't want to see that guy again.

* * *

Bwak bwak bwak.

[Report to me all the skills and equipment you have. The priority is to determine the exact power.]

Seongjin gave instructions as he led the way out of the dungeon entrance.

[Uh-huh.]

[I understand, Seongjin Lee.]

[understood.]

Seongjin nodded at the immediate answer and added again.

Bwak bwak bwak.

[And the dungeons I've been to so far and the battles that took place then. Also, organize all the dungeons you plan to run through and all necessary items properly and document them. okay?]

[Uh, okay.]

[Okay, Seongjin Lee.]

[understood.]

ah.

Seongjin stopped walking at that moment, looked back and emphasized.

Wow.

[Above all, from now on you are absolutely prohibited from entering the dungeon alone. From now on, just wait until I connect. okay?]

[Sure.]

[Of course, Seongjin Lee.]

[understood.]

This time, the silent villains, who had been hesitantly answering questions, put their heads together and whispered to each other in response to a sudden question.

[hey? But why are we naturally taking instructions from newbies?]

[Because he is a real leader now. Seongjin Lee's instructions all make sense. Besides, I don't know how he did it, but isn't it all thanks to him that we survived this time?]

[Lee Seong-jin, scary but kind!]

However, it was just as we were about to leave the dungeon entrance and head towards the green zone. Suddenly, dozens of users appeared from all directions.

They stood completely blocking the road leading to the village, surrounded the group, and shouted in solemn voices.

"I was waiting! "Hurry up and give me the change item!"

Seongjin blinked at the somewhat familiar voice.

When I left the dungeon, I had already activated the external environment and object skins again. Thanks to this, users were seen as cute animal friends.

But the raccoon dog standing in the lead somehow looks familiar.

"Is it you guys again? "Why do you keep doing this when you say I don't have it?"

Owen stepped forward and asked with a puzzled look on his face.

Ah, indeed. It looks like they are the ones who attacked Seongjin and Owen earlier.

But it seems like the number has more than doubled since then?

"Wait a minute, there are three silent villains together?"

"The amount of murder from before is also there. "Is it okay?"

"Don't worry, this time we're with PEP! "It's not just our guild."

As expected, some familiar animals are whispering among themselves as if they are anxious.

[Do you guys have any job change items?]

In response to Seongjin's question, the silent villains shook their heads.

[no. I'm so frustrated that we can't find it either.]

[It looks like the entire server has run out. There's no way we could have something that can't be found at the auction house.]

[I wish I had it!]

Seongjin nodded and opened his mouth towards the raccoon.

"We don't have any. "I don't know where I heard this information, but it would be better to look elsewhere."

Then the raccoon shouted with vigor.

"Don't be ridiculous! If you who spend the most time in dungeons don't have it, then who on this server has it? Or open the entire item window and unlock what you have! Then I'll just trust you!"

what? Now, they are acting like this just out of spite?

"... "It seemed like I didn't have much connection time left, so I tried to get through it as best as possible."

When Seongjin, who was very angry, smiled viciously, the animals started to tremble.

That's right, the little goat just raised the corner of its mouth, and suddenly it felt like the temperature around it had dropped significantly.

Moreover, perhaps due to my mood, I felt like an ominous black fog was rising around the mountain goat...

"What are you..."

But the raccoon could no longer speak.

Bye!

This is because the mountain goat, which flew up like lightning, violently slashed at the guy's forehead.

A small petal-shaped footprint is left on the raccoon's forehead.

"Huh!?"

Phew!

Next is a beginner's sword that sticks straight into the blade!

As a result, the raccoon that lost all of its HP turned into a wisp of smoke and dissolved into thin air.

"Um, what is that guy?"

While the animals hesitated, embarrassed by the sudden attack, a mountain goat covered in black fog looked left and right and smiled.

"Now, shall we finish quickly?"

And what followed was a hell of a feast.

"Aaaah!"

"crazy! "Demon-possessed sheep attack people!"

"log out! log out!"

Flash! Flash!

In the middle of a dark road covered in black fog.

Like stars lighting up the night sky, clusters of five-colored stars twinkled brilliantly here and there.

286. Impulse Soft (6)

-Pangaea Chronicle Free Bulletin Board

= = = = = = = = = = = = =

I just witnessed a demon summoning!

= = = = = = = = = = = = =

-You guys are silent villains, right? They don't dye their equipment or use advanced enhancements, but they're strangely strong. There was no ID displayed above their heads, so everyone was confused at first whether they were users or NPCs.

Today, for some reason, they appeared in the themed dungeon. He entered the dungeon with a small sheep. At first, I thought it was just a user using a skin. I thought there was one more strange guy.

But what did these guys do in the dungeon? It turns out later that the sheep is possessed by a devil! The same goes for the black magic energy flowing through the body.

Above all, those bloody eyes definitely did not belong to a sane guy. Just looking at it made me feel alive and full of life, and my whole body felt numb.

(Attached is a blurry photo of the back of a small animal from a distance. Because it is surrounded by black smoke and is out of focus, the exact shape of the animal cannot be confirmed.)

But that's not the end.

Well, that demon-possessed sheep completely destroyed two guilds on the spot without using any special skills!

Apparently, that amount was not an ordinary user. Unless it's the AI of a major NPC or high-rank summon, there's no way an average person could fly so calculatedly against a large number of people.

What on earth is it?

So, I discussed it with the party members, and I guess it looks like the demon that appears in Fanc's initial background description, doesn't it? Why, so far there have been countless stories about a Heavenly Demon War taking place in the main story, right?

(A photo of a petal-shaped indentation on one user's forehead is attached.)

There is also further evidence that he is the devil. Look at the stigma he left on users. Doesn't this somehow look like one of those 'Devil's Runes' sealed in the basement of the Great Library? Everyone probably passed it by during the main quest, but I strangely remembered this unique shape.

So the conclusion is that this demon summoning incident is an update of Impulse Soft's submarine with the Battle of Heavenly Demon in mind.

If you have any differing opinions or know any other information, please share.

-Summoning the devil haha If you're going to make a main character, you should at least use photoshop properly. It's out of focus so you can't see anything, right?

☐ One person who was there. To be exact, it was not a sheep but a mountain goat.

☐ PEP and glamping were hit. They're not a very weak guild.

☐ Haha, this is how Suzaku is becoming true again.

☐ Byeongmeokgeum.

- But the devil appears in the background explanation of Fanc? Why don't I remember?

□ Because everyone skips it.

□ Well? After reading this article, I looked up the initial video, and it really seemed like a simple background explanation that passed by in a moment, didn't it? Nothing in particular has come out since then. Is it just a piece of cake?

- Could this be a new skill? If silent villains are users, doesn't that mean other users can do that too? Are there any updates to summoner skills?

□ It's the same even if they are NPCs. The fact that a new demon has appeared in Fanc1 is proof that a submarine patch for the Heavenly Demon War is in progress.

- I think I saw something similar to that among the summoning skills. That sheep was a summoning accident, probably a high-rank summoned beast.

└ ○ ○ Just looking at it, it looks like the user using the skin is summoning a beast.

□ This is a summoner passing by. If you change jobs, you can have summons descend on you, but the only temporary stat improvement or buff effect is limited.

□ So it's possible?

□ That kind of movement is impossible. Summons do not move on behalf of the user. Rather than consuming summoned animals for buffs, it is better to just summon them and fight together. Not many people use it because it is not effective.

- If you have time to patch the submarine, tell me how to improve the item drop rate! What should I do with the former item? π π

□ Haha, I agree. This job change will change the landscape of server rankings. The one who gets the heart of ice first will be crowned the new king of Pangea.

□ Oh, what a king and all, Impulse God, please give me a patch with the ice heart quantity π π

* * *

Tweet.

As usual, Seongjin blinked his eyes blankly while listening to the cheerful birdsong.

'What am I doing?'

Along with fatigue, a strong sense of skepticism came over me.

'I can't believe I stayed up all night playing games at this age...''

No, games are also games.

Above all, the biggest problem was that it was doubtful whether this digging would be helpful in the end. Could playing games together be the solution to ending Owen's long run away from home?

[Have you been to that normal world again? Pangea Chronicle?]

As I lay down and turned over my soggy body, the Demon King smiled and asked.

'uh.'

[I see.]

Even though my body was sleeping, the aftereffects of my mind remaining awake all night were significant. I feel like I haven't recovered from my fatigue at all.

How on earth has Owen maintained this lifestyle for so long?

[Ah, I think it will be fun. I want to go there too...]

In response to the immature Demon King's hesitation, Seongjin stood up without any response.

Then, suddenly, the silver disk that had been left on the side table last night caught my eye.

Lycan Slope's racial key.

'It's important to crack down on Owen's nonsense, but apart from that, we also need to find out about the relationship between Impulse Soft and Pangea Chronicle. And we have to find a way to get Owen out of there once and for all.'

However, contrary to his intention to visit the workshop right away, Seongjin did not have much time. Because he had a prestigious official position as 'Monster Task Force Advisor'.

Now it was time to officially show up at the task force office.

'Not long ago, I could focus on training all day without doing anything.'

Those days, which had only lasted a few months, now felt like days of the distant past.

Feeling a sense of nostalgia that is difficult to explain, Seongjin started the morning with meditation as usual.

"It's been a while since I've seen you, sir. "I heard you were a little unwell at Sigismund Territory. Are you feeling okay now?"

Chi-ik!

Visiting the administration annex for the first time in several months.

Seongjin, who was caught off guard for a moment by a strange emotion, was met with Jibril's enthusiastic welcome as soon as he opened the door to the task force office.

"... .."

This is true. I can't be angry when he does things like that while worrying.

Seongjin, who was defenselessly covered in perfume, frowned for a moment and then asked Jibril.

"... "The scent has changed a bit?"

From a strong scent that stings your nose to a slightly softer and

stronger scent.

Then Rep. Jibril smiled brightly and answered.

"Do you by any chance remember the latest paper I mentioned before? "The paper states that the scent of bulbous plants has the same effect as the scent of roses on fever."

"Ah, yes."

Both would be ineffective.

"So, to save money if possible, I changed to a slightly cheaper freesia scent."

Jibril remembered that rose scent was quite expensive to buy in bulk.

"budget? What budget?"

"The perfume bill. "The cost of perfume used by the Lyora Plague Society is falling into the official budget of the administration every year."

"what?"

It was a sobering sound.

"this... ... !"

Get rid of those useless Lyora quacks now!

Seongjin could barely swallow the bitter words that were about to come out of his throat.

It turns out that these perfume terrorists were eating up the empire's treasury?!

"Why are you doing this, sir?"

Rep. Jibril blinked his innocent eyes at Seongjin, whose complexion suddenly worsened.

"... "No, it's nothing."

Seongjin smiled roughly at Jibril and then touched his forehead to compose his expression.

Of course, deep down, I was grinding my teeth.

'Just make sure that Bertran & Lee's sales get on track. I'll take care of this damn Lyora Plague Society first!'

Anyway, there was no other way now. Right now, there are so many things that have been done, including Owen's work.

"First, there are the charges of collusion between the Milo Association and the Dark Church, and the alleged satanic worship of Giacomo Milo, the owner of the Association."

In fact, sitting together in the office for the first time in a long time, the task force members had time to summarize the achievements so far.

"Giacomo Milo is still wanted. I'm doing my best to search for him, but I can't even see where he's hiding."

"He must have gone into hiding in the Penitent Church."

Sir Valerie nodded to Seongjin's answer.

"That's what the Heresy Tribunal thinks. However, it would be quite difficult to properly search for the dark church hiding underground."

Aside from the failure of Giacomo Milo himself, preparations for the trial went relatively smoothly.

The search and seizure of Milo's merchants took place in an instant, and assets to be deposited in the national treasury were being piled up, along with blatant evidence of tax evasion.

In addition, the testimony of the remnants of the Penitent Church, and the circumstances under which the Demon Lord was summoned.

For that alone, Giacomo Milo is already worthy of receiving the highest punishment of the empire based on Holy Law.

'However, the circumstances by which Giacomo distributed Loferum eggs are still unknown. In order to know the connection between the Gray Plague and the Church of Penitence, the only way to find out is to find him.'

If it were possible, it would have been better to arrest the Margrave Sigismund, who knows not where he might go, and investigate.

However, in order to attract great nobles from the border, the link between him and the Milo upper class was extremely weak.

Although I have searched his library several times, Hendrik Sigismund, who is thorough, has left no evidence linking himself to the Dark Church.

For now, we have no choice but to be satisfied with at least blocking the distribution of medicinal tea. Seongjin concluded this by tapping her armrest.

"Anyway, for now, I can only place my faint hope on Belinda. Yes, it is said that he is the bishop who manages the southern branch of Ortona. "I feel like I have some clue as to Giacomo Milo's whereabouts."

The red-haired Inquisitor who had said so much added with a slightly moved expression.

"But anyway, she's really amazing. Even though the Penitent Church is accustomed to asceticism, Belinda's patience has an unusual edge. "It is truly a quality befitting a faithful servant of the Lord."

For an Inquisitor who doesn't understand anything about heresy, his attitude is quite favorable.

Seongjin looked closely at the face of Sir Valerie, who looked somewhat unfamiliar.

"You are a faithful servant of the Lord. She's a sinner who abandoned the Lord, right? "Is it okay for a paladin of the Heresy Tribunal to make such a statement?"

"haha. Why not? Heresy is just heresy, nothing changes. But if you

think about it, she too is just a poor lamb of the Lord who has gone astray in her ways. "Then wouldn't we be able to show human respect for their consistent perseverance?"

When Seongjin frowned without answering, Valerie curled her mouth.

"I find it interesting to say this to you. But I've always been like that. Even if you are someone who has committed an irreversible sin, sometimes you become helplessly fascinated when you discover a human side there. So, I've been paying a lot of attention to Belinda lately."

"... .."

"So, if possible, I hope that Belinda will obediently cooperate with the investigation, quickly repent of her sins, and be completely embraced by the Lord."

Valerie, who had said that much, added something even more crazy.

"So, I don't know what the problem is. Why is she never touched when our Inquisition is inflicting the same suffering? [Repentance] Is there something special about the suffering of the religious order?"

... You, man, say that now.

Seongjin, who was dumbfounded, asked Valerie a question that suddenly occurred to him.

"Then, if Belinda repents and is influenced, can she be safely released from prison?"

Then Valerie looked away and faced Seongjin.

"No way? That's not it. Just stop restoring your body to torture. And we begin the process of punishment to atone for the sins we have committed so far."

Even if they repent after a long time, almost all the prisoners die during the punishment process.

It has to be that way. In the past, they were alive because they were occasionally showered with divine power to help them endure the torture. There is no way that prisoners who are already in good shape can endure such severe punishment.

"If you're going to kill me anyway, why are you trying to influence me? "Can't I just kill myself cleanly?"

"As you know, isn't death the complete end of humanity? Even if the real body dies, the repentant soul will be embraced by the Lord. "Her soul will be happy forever in paradise."

Hey, you crazy religious person!

When Seongjin finally got fed up, the demon king who had been keeping his mouth shut muttered in his head.

[How crazy does a person have to be to hear that this crazy guy is crazy?]

287. Impulse Soft (7)

After a busy morning, it was finally time for lunch.

Seongjin, who was trying to use the [Key] for a moment, ran into an unexpected difficulty. Because his brothers and sisters gathered at Jinju Palace and waited for him, as if it was natural.

"You come here and have lunch every day?"

Seongjin became very embarrassed.

There is no owner, so why?

"Yes, before you came back, Logan, Sisley, and the saint were together. "Today is the first time the twins arrived."

Behind Amelia who said that, Herna and Kadesh, dressed in similar clothes as always, peeked out. Hands wearing ice bracelets are held tightly together.

"There is a widespread rumor that the chef at Jinju Palace is very skilled."

"I just need to put two more dishes, right? "Don't be too harsh."

No, I have no particular reason to treat you poorly.

Seongjin nods his head hesitantly, and the twins who are looking up at him immediately smile with sinister faces.

"So, Mores. "Do you have time after dinner?"

"Would you like to play chess together after dinner, Mores?"

"... .."

Make a lot of noise, you devils!

I think I just found a reason to treat you all poorly.

Quickly.

Meanwhile, exquisite dishes were being served one after another, and the Jinju Palace restaurant instantly turned into a banquet hall.

Unlike before, the number of employees at Jinju Palace, which had increased significantly, began to serve the meal without the slightest agitation, as if they had all adapted to this atmosphere.

Soon, the children of the Seonghwang family sat down as if they were used to it. Even Lord Masain, who was with Seongjin, suddenly joined in on the meal!

'... 'How did this happen?'

Where have the quiet and peaceful days of Jinju Palace gone?

The only one who couldn't adapt was Seongjin. Even the demon lord was jumping with joy in his head.

[Lee Seong-jin! excuse me! There's lemon pie over there! Wouldn't it be okay to eat dessert first before the meal? huh? huh?]

Now that I think about it, it seems like lemon pie was on the list of foods that the demon king came up with a while back.

'Er, I don't know. 'How about eating rice anywhere?'

When Seongjin finally gave up on the idea and sat down, a generous lunch for everyone began.

So soft.

Rich food and rich air flowed from all directions.

"that... Mr. Cadmus says the atmosphere here is so itchy and he hates it."

What was most surprising was the attitude of Seo Yi-seo, who came with Sisley.

Isn't she, who is clutching the little saint's collar tightly, expressing her gratitude to the saint with a rare, softened face?

Although his eyes are still full of caution, what is clearly visible on the other side is a hint of gratitude.

"Thank you for helping me protect my food, Black Man 2. "This is sincere."

"rice... ... ?"

"I heard you have the potential to be a great Mercedes Benz male protagonist, but you're better off than I thought."

... What on earth is this woman talking about?

While Seongjin was dumbfounded, Seo Yi-seo took a seat next to Sisley with a refreshing expression as if it was a given. She then sat down and started frantically eating the food on her table.

I thought he looked a little chubbier than before, and indeed, his increased appetite was scary.

"This scene feels like a dream again."

As Seongjin silently tasted each and every dish chosen by the Demon King, Amelia, who was sitting next to him, smiled softly and said,

She had dark circles similar to those of Seongjin, and she had forgotten to eat and was completely entranced by the sight before her eyes.

"You look so tired. sister."

"It's a bit like that. "I haven't been able to sleep well at all for the past two days."

"..."

I had a guess. He probably fell asleep holding a milestone like Seongjin did.

I didn't meet her in the Pangea Chronicle, but if Seongjin's thoughts are correct, Amelia must have been dreaming all night long.

"Have you seen your old dream again?"

Amelia blinked for a moment at Seongjin's question, but then smiled as if she was melting.

"Yes, Mores. I had a dream of being the most loved little girl in this world. Every place he went was interesting to her, and everything she saw in his eyes was simply beautiful. "I don't know how she managed to forget them all this time."

Seongjin, who felt a sad emotion lingering in her happy voice, listened to her in silence for a moment.

"So when I woke up and realized that none of that was real, I felt very sad and missed that lost world."

Amelia spoke hazily, as if she was still in a dream, but her clear gray eyes looking back at Seongjin were looking straight at reality.

"But Mores, I think I somehow understand now. Look, doesn't it look like heaven? "Maybe I went through those difficult times to see this scene today."

"... .."

"She was right when she said I would be happier in the end."

Seongjin did not ask any more questions about 'her' whose identity he could not even guess.

The same goes for Amelia. For some reason, both of them were implicitly avoiding mentioning the woman wearing the black veil in detail.

And both of them implicitly realized that the other person knew that fact.

"I heard that this jewel is called a milestone, sister."

Seongjin just thought that he had to tell Amelia at least this one thing.

"milestone?"

"Yes, it must be a keepsake left by my grandmother. "The person who knows most about this is probably your father, so when you have time, why don't you talk to him a little bit?"

Then, Amelia, who was looking at Seongjin as if she had heard something unexpected, immediately smiled shyly.

"Yes, you are right. Because the world in that dream belonged solely to me and my father, His Majesty. "Who else would I share this with if not you?"

And with that, the two people turned their heads side by side and looked at the scenery in front of them, as if they had made a promise.

The noisy scene of Sisley and Logan chatting affectionately, and the twins clinging to Masain annoying him.

* * *

"Craft practice?"

The luncheon lasted longer than expected, but surprisingly, it didn't end there.

As if it were natural, we gathered in the living room to drink tea after the meal, and the brothers and sisters placed the handicraft items they had prepared on the table.

'... 'What on earth are we going to do with this?'

While Seongjin was making a bewildered face, an impressive maid standing behind Amelia stepped forward and said.

"I am Mirabelle, the princess's personal maid. "It is the honor of a lifetime to be able to show off my humble talent to all of you from

this thriving family."

Uh, yes.

And thanks to her help, the children grabbed the needle and thread and struggled together as if they had made a promise. Even Lord Masain unexpectedly joined us!

"I promised to make a cone suitable for you."

"I said I would decorate you with a nice bag and flowers."

Even the twins, who seemed to have no interest in anything other than chess, were busy embroidering with unfamiliar needles.

Then Seongjin learned something unexpected. Sir Masaine's dexterity is quite outstanding!

He carefully observed Mirabelle's explanations and demonstrations, and soon, after some trial and error, he was able to embroider skillfully.

Masain, who had several white flower petals embroidered on such a small cone, asked Mirabelle with a proud face.

"Is this okay?"

"Oh my, what a pretty cone! The position and spacing of the embroidery blends harmoniously with the color of the fabric. "It would suit you very well!"

So, what is this 'inspiration' that everyone was talking about earlier?

No matter what the old man wants to wear, he will use it. Why did you guys take the trouble to make a cone that suits him?

Meanwhile, there was another person who was more serious about embroidery than Masain.

Ugh.

A light silver-blue aura created by Logan.

The sword master's concentration, heightened to the extreme, shakes the air in the living room and gathers at the embroidery teacher's fingertips.

"... "Cut it into small pieces."

Mirabelle's skillful hand, the angle of the needle piercing the fabric, and the constant strength of pulling the thread, without the slightest mistake.

Flash!

Logan's eyes gave off a fierce blue glow.

"Chop it into small pieces again. "I break down the gap between each stitch."

"..."

I was dumbfounded when I just looked at it.

Hey man, are you really going to take embroidery that seriously?

Anyway, thanks to Logan's superhuman abilities, he was eventually able to complete the small leaves that were embroidered quite evenly.

He smiled brightly, a rare expression on his face.

"good! "I will soon be able to bring my old man from church!"

... Uh, okay.

I don't know what it is, but I'm happy for you.

Seongjin, who had such a busy afternoon, was only able to have some alone time after skipping the afternoon training.

'I'm tired...'

Seongjin thought so as he lay down in bed early.

This fatigue is not just the aftereffects of two nights of gaming.

Seongjin, who was an only child even on Earth, was not used to the hustle and bustle of his family.

-Look, doesn't it look like heaven? Perhaps I went through those difficult times to see this scene today.

Amelia said so.

Seongjin blinked for a moment, remembering the dinner party from earlier, and suddenly burst into laughter.

No, is that possible, sister?

If heaven really exists, I can guarantee that it won't be such a crazy sight.

[Where are we going again this time?]

As Seongjin took a comfortable position holding the silver disk, the Demon King noticed something and asked.

'I told you this before, right? There is a place called Elderly Workshop. This is the species key that will take you there.'

[Um, yeah.]

Then the demon lord responded sullenly, rolling around in the flame crystal and muttering.

[Tch, I want to go too. I think it would be fun. I want to follow Seongjin Lee... ..]

Um, really? Seongjin pondered for a moment, remembering the existence of the soul stone.

The soul stone, an object from the normal world, followed Seongjin to the elder's space. So what about the soul contained in the soul stone?

'If you use the Amulet of Nebraska to place the demon king's soul into the soul stone.'

Couldn't the demon lord follow wherever Seongjin goes? Maybe even the Pangea Chronicle.

But he soon shook his head.

Do you know what kind of mechanism this is and test it carelessly?

It's different from Hayes, who is ranked A. If you use it carelessly, the soul of the insignificant demon lord may disappear without a trace.

[Ah, I want to go...]

Seongjin quickly manipulated the key, leaving the whining Demon King behind.

[portal =

☐-Workshop☐

☐-Locked☐

☐-Locked☐

.

.

Let's select the only active workshop -

Hwiik-

My consciousness suddenly became blurred, along with the feeling I had once had of my soul leaving my body and floating away. Then, in the blink of an eye, Seongjin's vision changed.

Hehehehehehehe-

Beep beep beep beep-

Machine sounds coming from all over the place.

When I came to my senses, Seongjin was already standing in the middle of the old man's workshop.

'It's the portal of the key, doesn't it? It moves in a very strange way?'

The Dexter I was looking for happened to be in the workshop.

"You, you..." ... !"

While wearing goggles and engrossed in something, he was startled when he spotted Seongjin suddenly appearing in the middle of the workshop.

Then, in a hurry, he covered the half signpost that was lying on the desk with his body.

what? What's that reaction?

"Hello, Dexter."

As he waved his hand and greeted him, the dwarf engineer glared at Seongjin and shouted desperately.

"I knew it would be like this! "Ever since you were so vicious in extorting people, I never believed you would pass the milestone so easily!"

"No, I...""

"But I never thought they would come to steal it already! Do you understand? "No matter how much you are the son of the Delcross Guardian, you can never easily hand over this milestone, you impostor!"

"..."

Hey, wait a minute.

Didn't we eat friends back then?

What on earth do you think of me?

288. Impulse Soft (8)

"This might be an interesting story for you too, Dexter. "It's a story about one of the infinite possibilities of this milestone."

"... .."

"Well, don't be surprised! By using this signpost, you can access the normal world called Pangea Chronicle. "It's a unique world, almost like an online game."

"... .."

"I heard that general users who are not Guest ID users access a service called Impulse Soft. "It feels like a game company, but I don't know how they provide the normal world like a game."

"... .."

"But Dexter, I just remembered that you once said that you had a connection with Impulse Soft."

"... .."

"... .."

Seongjin, who was worse than he was, shouted at Dexter, who was slowly retreating while holding the milestone every time he uttered a word.

"Oh, don't be on your guard! "I won't take that away!"

Then Dexter, who was hesitantly looking at Seongjin, said.

"But it's a keepsake, didn't you ask for it to be returned someday? It

was just a temporary measure. "I thought they would cover up the atmosphere of the time when the source editor was broken with a milestone and then tell them to re-release it at some point if it was forgettable."

Seongjin was hot.

To tell the truth, I wanted to get the remaining half back from him and check whether the Pangea Chronicle's graphics were okay.

It's still a long way to go to collect the cache, and going through the dungeon with my current skin is frustratingly obstructing my vision.

But no matter how much I thought about it, reassuring Dexter and getting information came first right now.

'For the time being, we have no choice but to rely on that damn shiny infant skin...'

When he looked at the half-signpost in the dwarf engineer's hand with wistful eyes, Dexter, who noticed it, freaked out and blocked Seongjin's gaze with his whole body.

"also! You can't hide those greedy eyes! "It was all with a plan, you swindler!"

no! They won't take it away! Who says you're a fraud?

In the end, Seongjin couldn't bear it anymore and proposed it to Dexter.

"good. "If you don't believe me, then sign a formal contract with me."

I need to access the Pangea Chronicle before it's too late, but the conversation won't proceed at all like this.

"I will lease the milestone to you for a certain period of time. "For now, the lease period will be two years, and we will extend it depending on the situation."

"..."

"I promise you this on your honor. "I will definitely keep what I signed."

Although I don't know the details, it appears that Dexter is indebted to the old man's workshop. Also, he has a stiff head even in front of the emperor, and the only person he obediently follows is the elder.

So the elder's honor must mean quite a lot to this dwarf engineer.

'Of course, it's a useless honor to me.'

While Seongjin was thinking such irresponsible thoughts, Dexter played with his goggles, thought for a moment and asked.

"... "What are the conditions for those two years?"

"Nothing special. Just share with me what you know about Impulse Soft. And I will help you uncover the identity of the Pangea Chronicle. "That's about it."

Even if I made a gift and splurged on it earlier, I would already have more than enough to pay the rent.

When Seongjin opened his eyes wide and looked at him with the light of truth, Dexter, who was somewhat startled, turned his head and quietly averted his gaze.

"that... "Are they going to write a proper contract?"

Ah, this guy really! Have you been deceived by the world?

Impulse Soft.

As Seongjin guessed, it was the name of a game company. It is also a fairly prosperous company in the original world where Dexter lives.

A popular game that the company has been servicing for several years has been [Pangaea Chronicle].

"My mother probably knows a lot about the Pangea Chronicle. She's the head of the engineering team. "I was left out of the engine development phase, and I believe Pangea Chronicle began service

after that."

Dexter's mother, Matilda Lorretz.

She was said to be one of Impulse Soft's core developers and senior executives. It was a fate that led to Dexter also joining the company after graduating from graduate school early.

Recognized as having outstanding talent since his school days, he was fortunate enough to be part of the engine development team that was being conducted in secret at the time.

It was an engine with an innovative concept that had never been seen before, the [Homunculus Engine].

"As you already know, the essence of the Homunculus Engine is Ionian technology. In the first place, there was nothing special about what the Impulse Soft Engine development team did. "Rather than creating something new, it was closer to porting the Ionian Homunculus engine to a computer."

The development team began work in a closed space, and all work was kept strictly confidential.

Meanwhile, Dexter learned of the existence of another original world and met several Ionian engineers who were part of the development team.

It was during those times that my relationship with the elders was created.

"There was an Ionian engineer left?"

Wasn't that place already completely destroyed? Are you saying there is no engineer left who can properly repair [Homunculus Engine Editor]?

Then Dexter pulled his beard and answered bluntly.

"It was only a few years ago that Ionia was completely destroyed. And it has been consistently showing signs of collapse ever since. "The Ionian engineers on the development team worked with an

Earth company to safely evacuate the inhabitants from disaster."

Fortunately, the Ionian engineers who completed the transplant in time took their clans, created a safe normal world, and left for good.

Unless they were the kings or oracles of the dimensions, traveling from dimension to dimension would be easy.

In other words, the only people who can currently touch the Ionian machine, even if it is clumsy, are the few remaining development team researchers at Impulse Soft and Dexter.

"And the first online game developed with the Homunculus engine they left behind was probably Pangea Chronicles. "In fact, it is not a game, but rather a dimension that can be accessed like a game."

However, it is said that Dexter did not stay on the development team for very long.

"During the engine development stage, I had already had a major falling out with my mother. "At that time, I was asked by an elderly person to manage the workshop, and I came here with ease."

The reason Dexter began to fall out with his mother was the death of his younger brother.

My younger brother, who had been constantly pessimistic about his genetic disease after breaking up with his lover, overdosed on drugs and died at a young age.

At that time, Dexter raised his voice to Matilda for the first time at his brother's funeral.

-There is a high probability that a mother's disease will be passed on to her children! If you knew that clearly, couldn't you have done something, family planning or whatever? Was there a need to have so many children? why?

At the time, Dexter thought it was all his mother's fault.

Matilda Loretz, who also had achondroplasia, passed the same genetic trait to three of her five children.

It is said that his mother then looked at him with pitiful eyes.

-Of course, I'm sorry that I passed on your genetic disease to you, Dexter. But didn't I also pass on to you an even more genius brain?

-Now that... ... !

Dexter was speechless there. It was certainly true that his brothers and sisters were all outstanding talents.

And his mother was an outstanding engineer who was praised by her colleagues as a treasure of humanity.

-I won't give you the stereotypical advice that looks aren't everything. But I have given you tremendous abilities that exceed that handicap and the best educational opportunities. They also provided financial support so that they could fully demonstrate their abilities.

Matilda, who had said that, put a cigarette between her beautifully lipstick-covered lips.

-I had no doubt that you, too, could overcome it. Based on my experience, the impact of my genetic disease on my life was extremely minimal.

-...

Even Dexter couldn't deny that. His mother, who was confident in everything, was a beautiful person regardless of her height or appearance.

The successful dating and many fruits of love so far will be the proof.

-He also contributed greatly to the development of humanity by giving birth to many such outstanding talents. Are you coming forward and criticizing me, the child who has benefited the most?

In Matilda's eyes as she asked that question at that time, there was clearly a faint suspicion about her own words.

However, Dexter, who lost his senses due to sadness at the time, did not have the time to consider his mother's situation.

-It's always been like that! You always think you are above everyone else! That's why we're so insensitive to other people's trivial circumstances and feelings of frustration!

After shouting that for the last time, Dexter kicked down the door of the funeral home and ran out into the rain.

And until I came to the workshop, I never contacted my mother again.

"... "If I think about it now, it was an immature act."

In response to Dexter's weak voice, Seongjin nodded and responded.

"uh. "Anyway, that's a bit bad of you."

"iced coffee. Of course, I was very young at the time and could not fully understand the sadness of a mother who lost her child. Perhaps her mother was comforting herself that way. But now, the gap between my mother and I is too deep to turn around... huh?"

Then Dexter looked at Seongjin with puzzled eyes and twitched his nose.

"But wait a minute. what? "Why am I even telling you this?"

"hmm? Well, well..."

Isn't it because I have hidden years of experience and am a person who can depend on others? In fact, even in the imperial palace, everyone gives me life advice.

As Seongjin shrugged to himself, Dexter got up from his seat and started rummaging through the desk.

"Anyway, what I will say is that I don't know much about the Pangea Chronicle. However, you can check information about games released through the Impulse Soft site."

And what he took out among the miscellaneous things was a small laptop.

Do you have a computer?!

Seongjin barely held back from almost shouting like that.

"that... "Is it something from Earth?"

"Okay. The old man's workshop is a very special space, so even though it's on a different level, it even provides great Wi-Fi. "You can easily connect to Earth's satellite."

When he presses the power button, a blue light that Seongjin is familiar with comes on on the small monitor.

The logo and menu were a little unfamiliar, but the way it worked was exactly the same as what was seen in Seongjin's world a long time ago.

"... .."

Seongjin was filled with strange emotions and kept his mouth shut, but Dexter, who did not realize it, continued speaking while being absorbed in operating the laptop.

"The people of Earth will never be able to endure a world without the Internet. It's like a Kornsim who has been separated from his clan and falls into a deep depression. Of course, as an ordinary Delcross person, you won't understand."

Click, click.

When Dexter opened an Internet window and typed in a few search terms, the Impulse Soft official website and the Pangea Chronicle service site appeared side by side.

"... ..!"

And there was a lot of information that Seongjin was looking for.

Founder of Impulse Soft. Interview with the game developers. Development story and future update direction, etc. And even a diverse user community!

"Attack..."

Among them, [Game Strategy] appears in most communities. Seongjin couldn't take his eyes off her laptop screen as if he were mesmerized.

"Because it is a popular game, there are many specialized communities. But they say the most active one is the free bulletin board on the official site?"

Dexter, who did not think it was strange at all, explained that Seongjin was reading mixed English and Korean texts without difficulty.

"Free Board?"

"okay. "You can easily access it through the customer support menu within the game, so users may not necessarily have to look for other communities."

Dexter answered as he clicked around the site.

'Going into the game menu...''

This probably does not apply to Guest ID users. The menu was scattered all over the place, and most of the parts were not translated properly.

Seongjin swallowed dry saliva and asked.

"Hey, Dexter. Just in case, can you create a Pangea Chronicle account here too?"

Then the engineer, who had no idea what would happen next, nodded innocently.

"Ah, maybe it's possible? "It's a little different from Earth, but there is a machine in the workshop that provides a much higher level full dive."

"okay..."

Seongjin answered like that and put his hand on Dexter's shoulder.

"Dexter."

Cheoeok.

Dexter, startled by the sudden pressure, turned around and saw the face of an evil boy with long slitted corners of his mouth.

"Aren't you tired of staying in the workshop all day? "Why don't we get some fresh air, play a game together, and become friends?"

"what? I'm a busy body. Games... .."

"contract. "I will help you uncover the identity of the Pangea Chronicle."

"... ..!"

You were fooled.

Dexter was blushing from the belated realization that came to him, and Seongjin gently patted his shoulder as if to comfort him.

"It won't be a bad story for you either. "I'll change your mood and take you on a comfortable bus ride with your friends."

The smile of the boy who said that was truly bright.

But why? The moment he faced that face, Dexter felt an unknown chill running up his spine.

And that night.

The silent villains who gathered at Pangea Chronicle and waited for Seongjin welcomed a new party member following the newbie.

A red fox, a long-necked deer, and an octopus face each other. A small mole being dragged by a mountain goat waved its hand awkwardly.

[Well, nice to meet you all, friends. My name is Dexter.]

289. Justitia (1)

Before creating a game account, Seongjin first recommended checking the 'Full Dive Machine' that Dexter will use.

He assured me that there wouldn't be any problems, but isn't this something that has been sitting around in workshops for years without being used?

Precious ho... No, it would be difficult if there was a problem with Dexter, the informant.

[Look at this. What did I say? It works fine.]

Dexter, who had tested everything in the large capsule, including the life support system and emergency escape sequence, spoke confidently.

But isn't he talking to Seongjin not with his usual voice, but with complete resignation?

[hmm? Resignation?]

[Oh, are you surprised? That's because I'm not a dragon like you, nor a Delcrossian like you. Normally, there is no way to send my thoughts as easily as you guys do.]

Chi profit.

The capsule's lid opened, revealing the dwarf engineer's face, which was much brighter than before.

[But this is the capsule used for the homunculus engine transplantation work. It can be said to be a product that properly integrates Ionic over-technology! Thanks to this, everyone, even

developers on Earth who don't know Ionian, could participate in the virtual conference room through these capsules.]

[Right.]

Seongjin nodded.

Just because they are Delcross people doesn't mean that they will give up on everyone, but there is no need to correct that misconception.

In any case, it was a truly fortunate story that Dexter was able to use his thoughts.

Even if you can communicate roughly with one guest ID user through the in-game translation function, it will easily become a sack of barley for other people who have not received translation services.

Especially in urgent situations such as when going through a dungeon, Seongjin no longer has to worry about having to translate for other silent villains one by one.

[Of course, since we are delivering our thoughts directly, the problem is that important technical documents are not translated... ok?]

Only then did Dexter feel puzzled and tilted his head.

[Wait, but you. Didn't you just read the Impulse Soft site with me? How on earth... ..]

[Oh, it's no big deal. Don't worry about such trivial things before the greater good.]

[what? no... ..]

Then the two sat in front of the laptop and created an account.

The process was simpler than I thought.

After creating an ID via email and entering iris information, a Pangea Chronicle login window appears with a colorful graphic logo.

"Hmm, is there a discount on your first purchase?"

Dexter paid for the flat-rate ticket on the spot and even purchased several cash gift certificates. Compared to his initial unwillingness, his attitude was quite serious.

"Do you also buy cash in advance?"

"of course. "This is the basics for adults who have a lot of money and don't have time."

"oh."

The stock price of our household appliances is gradually rising.

"Are you rich?"

"Well, what did you say earlier? I'm an excellent engineer with a high salary. Plus the property gifted to me by my mother... .."

Dexter, who had been answering cheerfully, suddenly looked back at Seongjin in surprise.

"But why are you asking that?"

"Ah, no, just."

Seongjin smiled happily.

Okay, buddy. Let's enjoy the fun Pangea Chronicle life together.

"... .."

"Hey, don't cheat. So, relax your expression!"

Next was the selection of perks according to occupation.

"You can change your job before changing jobs, but if you decide in advance, you will receive customized benefits."

"okay? Then decide it here."

"good. I, too, was once obsessed with console games. "I'll show off my

skills in the Dark Spirit Nodeath Run!"

Unlike the first time, Dexter, who was highly motivated, relaxed his hands and vigorously moved the mouse to the warrior occupation group.

chin.

But there was someone who blocked his hand -

"Wizard."

Dexter looked up with round eyes at Seongjin, who had suddenly interfered.

"what? But I'm more familiar with the warrior profession... .."

"Wizard."

Resolute and without the slightest will to compromise.

In the end, Dexter threw his goggles and got angry.

"Oh, it's appropriate to meddle! Are you saying it's just a game to cool off? Then at least some job freedom... ..!"

"Wizard."

"... .."

"Wizard."

When Seongjin smiled at him, Dexter, who was looking white for some reason, kept his mouth shut and quietly chose the wizard perk.

From then on, it was all smooth sailing.

All you had to do was designate the starting point near the silent villain's rendezvous point, create a character, and dive.

However, they encountered unexpected difficulties in creating the character.

Looking at the avatar that scanned himself through the capsule, Dexter was conflicted with a gloomy face for a long time.

"Is there a need to show people with genetic diseases even in games? Even if I don't really care, it's still a fact that it's uncomfortable to be seen by others."

"Then you can just make a tall avatar, right? "It's a virtual body, so what's the problem?"

Then Dexter glared at Seongjin as if he was pitiful.

"You ignorant Delcross! The effects of full dives on the human brain are still not fully understood. "If you continue to feel uncomfortable with your body movements, you may eventually experience some side effects on your actual body and the nervous system that controls it!"

"hmm. "I once became a small goat, but it wasn't a problem."

Seongjin scratched his cheek and suddenly realized.

Haven't you been in the body of young Mores, and recently experienced a drastic change in your soul to match him?

'Is it the same as the soul being influenced by the body? Even though it is an avatar, it is actually a new body in the normal world, so it will have a big impact on the soul in some way, right?'

Anyway, one thing was certain.

Dexter is not very happy about his genetic disease, but more than that, he values the genius brain he inherited from his mother.

To the extent that even the slightest possibility of side effects can never be tolerated.

"But you can't turn him into a child at this age. There is no such thing as a short race like dwarves..."

Seongjin quietly crossed his arms while looking at Dexter, who was struggling.

hmm.

An avatar that is short but not young and does not look out of place in the eyes of others.

Seongjin smiled in remorse at a thought that suddenly occurred to him.

"Hey, Dexter."

"huh?"

"Do you know what skin is? "I know of a really cute skin with little avatars."

"... .. ?"

* * *

That's how Dexter became a little mole and appeared in front of everyone.

The mole waved his hand awkwardly, fiddling with the cute goggles on his head.

[Well, nice to meet you all, friends. My name is Dexter.]

The silent villains opened their mouths in astonishment at his shy first greeting.

Among them, Owen was the first to come to his senses, jumping up and shouting as if he was going to jump out of his seat.

[Thoughts? What on earth? No matter how you look at it, it seems like an ordinary user?]

Only then did the other guys come to their senses and add their words one by one.

[Owen, as you said, there is a normal ID floating above his head. I'm pretty sure it's not a guest ID user. But how can you talk to us with your thoughts?]

[Very surprising! My intestines just came out!]

This time it was Seongjin's turn to be surprised.

Wow, group. Calm down.

If "viscera came out" isn't an idiom, it's a bit scary. How did you get your body back?

And all the silent villains looked at the small goat, the culprit of this situation, hoping for an explanation.

Hmm.

Seongjin cleared his throat for a moment and opened his mouth.

[Nothing to be surprised. Strictly speaking, the reason why guest ID users can communicate with each other in silence is because of the Oracle terminals they each have, right?]

[That's right.]

[So it is possible. As far as I know, this guy is the most outstanding engineer alive and the highest authority on 'Oracle Terminals.' Additionally, this friend also has an imperfect terminal like me.]

Then the mole looked at Seongjin with a somewhat moved expression.

[Group. I had an explanation.]

[I understand, Seongjin Lee. But even so, ordinary users are people who cannot be easily verified.]

Even after hearing Seongjin's explanation, the silent villains could not readily welcome general users. It was thanks to the painful experiences I had had so far.

Even if you somehow joined a regular party, you had no choice but to pass up rare items because you couldn't use high-end facilities.

The moment they claimed ownership, all party members turned and

attacked them.

He was even reported as a nuclear user, chased by guards, and couldn't even set foot near the green zone for a while.

[Everyone is right. What's so bad about regular users that they want to join us? There is no need to bring in that friend and create internal disharmony. This is not good for both sides.]

[okay. I understand that you guys are suspicious of him.]

Seongjin nodded at Owen's stiff response.

[But you can verify me. If you can't trust regular users, can't you at least trust me, the person chosen by the terminal?]

And after a brief pause, Seongjin pointed out his petal-shaped hoof, still very persuasive.

[I think something like yesterday should never happen again. You are already my precious friend... I mean, we became friends. So I can no longer leave you in that danger.]

[Lee Seong-jin... ..]

[I know Dexter's abilities well, and I know what a good friend he is. We asked him for help for everyone's safety, and it was clear Dexter's good will that he responded. So, I hope you don't ignore that small act of goodwill.]

Then all the silent villains looked at Seongjin with touched faces.

[Hmm.]

[Lee Seong-jin's statement also makes sense. We shouldn't deny the possibility of someone approaching us with good intentions from the beginning. If he gives up just because he has failed repeatedly, he will never succeed again.]

[Lee Seong-jin, scary but kind! So what he likes is good!]

Then the mole, who had been listening quietly until then, looked

back at Seongjin in confusion.

[But who is Lee Seong-jin that those friends were talking about earlier? When your father called before, he definitely called you the day after tomorrow... Ouch!]

While the mole jumped after being stepped on hard, Seongjin smiled brightly as he took a seat in the middle of the table.

[Okay then. I guess everyone did their homework properly, right? Shall we take time to talk slowly about each person's goals and what we need to do in the future?]

[This is Owen Lockwood. The reason I keep logging in here is probably to meet Goddess Justitia and get the things I need.]

To the red fox's words, the other silent villains reacted very fussily.

[Oh, indeed! That's why, Owen, you haven't been able to leave Pangea Chronicle for this long!]

[Have an explanation! It seems like an almost impossible goal!]

Even though we hung out together all the time, we never really talked about personal things with each other.

[But a goddess is a goddess, so what is Amado?]

[That's right, my Mr. Sang Tae-chang's quest only says 'obtain a specific item.' There are no detailed instructions.]

Anyway, seeing as Sang Chang-chang kept linking me to the Pangea Chronicle, Owen added that it was probably an item that could only be obtained here.

However, no matter how much I go through the advanced dungeons, the items do not run out, and I cannot get anywhere near the auction house.

So, he was trying to meet a goddess who would give him the highest level of compensation.

[There is only one way for Guest ID users who cannot use the temple to meet the goddess. This means completing the 3rd job change quest. At that time, I heard that the goddess was supposed to appear to give compensation.]

[hmm.]

[For that to happen, you have to somehow obtain the transfer items.]

Former item. Is this what everyone is screaming out loud?

Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows and thought. It occurred to me that getting Owen out of here might not be that simple.

[Nice to meet you, regular user Dexter. My name is Hatasu Titi. This is a pure-blooded Mashu tree from the Granbloom clan.]

At the introduction of the excessively elongated deer, Seongjin and Dexter made eye contact at the same time.

[...] ... ?]

I don't know what a Mashu tree is.

It may be a proper noun or a translation issue.

Anyway, Titi continued the story.

[The reason I keep coming here is to win the political war with the Barum Trees and eventually bring the Granbloom clan to the top position. To do that, you must first fertilize the clan's land to increase its potential.]

It is said that a rare potion obtained from the Pangea Chronicle will make their land fertile.

Of course, there were still questions about what effect increasing the potential of the land would have on political strife.

'By the way, despite your ascetic attitude, you have a very worldly purpose, Hatasu Titi.'

It seems that Sang Chang-chang does not specifically select guest ID users for the greater good.

[I'm a gulp-keup-lab-gur-leub-bi-keup-leub. I have a purpose: to save my hometown. Currently, my star is suffering from the devil!]

Finally, the five-legged octopus opened its mouth solemnly.

[Work hard to build strength. Do your best to collect weapons. And I will raise my companions and eventually defeat the Demon King!]

Then everyone looked at the group with puzzled faces.

The bewildered group twitched its puffy snout.

[Group? Why is everyone reacting like that?]

No, what should I say?

I thought you were a mushy mollusk, but you seem to be working for a greater cause than you seem.

That's a typical hero from games, right? Group.

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290. Justitia (2)

[For this F-rank dungeon 'Golden Goblin's Cave' time challenge, Owen, your role is more important than anything else.]

Seongjin was currently in the theme dungeon again with Dexter and the silent villains. This was the result of finding a place with a short ending and good rewards to test the strategies posted by users.

Since it is an unfamiliar place even for silent villains, it will be easy to check the effectiveness of the strategy book compared to the previous battle.

[To conquer the themed dungeons, you must first solve Justitia's 'conditions' in each dungeon. The first attack is the most important, because the mob's defense weakens in proportion to the damage received.]

The group that had no idea before suddenly started shooting arrows.

In addition, there is also something called a time challenge, and the rewards are said to be significantly better depending on the ranking.

I thought the strategy was easy, but it seems like I lost a lot of things knowingly or unknowingly.

[You mean hit it as hard as possible?]

Owen nodded and rushed forward, smashing the head of the lead goblin with one blow with his axe. It was truly an exciting blow.

Flutter!

And starting from that, the silent villains showed off their skills without regret. The progress was so fast that the speed of running

through the dungeon and the speed of catching mobs were almost the same.

Tiring!

Thanks to this, Seongjin's leveling up was slower than the first time, and a cheerful sound alerting him of leveling up rang again in his ears.

The silent villains who quickly defeated the boss were able to smile with satisfaction as they received an unprecedentedly generous reward.

[7th place overall so far! Once you get used to it, you'll probably be able to shorten it even further next time!]

Next was E rank, the fishmen's dungeon.

['Lair of the Coral Tribe'. Mr. Gurkalla Gurup's attack is important here! Use the strongest long-distance attack you can at full charge!]

[The name is very wrong! But I highly appreciate your efforts!]

Papa pa paak!

The group's wiggly legs pull the strings alternately and fire arrows rapidly.

A tropical fish running towards them became a beehive and died on the spot.

[It's time! Break through, Owen!]

As Hatasu Titi shouted, swinging a shield instead of a mace, the group that was running along the wall and throwing arrows also shouted in unison.

[An arrow will finish off those who are left behind! Let's speed up!]

Amid their great performance, Seongjin didn't have much to do.

As I slowly followed along, clearing away the text that was blocking

my view, I heard the ringing sound ringing in my ears again.

□Lv. 9□

□Occupation: Unemployed (Previous Lv.10)□

[health : ??? Strength: ??? Intelligence: ??? Horsepower: ??? luck :
??? =

Is it time to change jobs?

At this point, should I try a summoner that isn't in the list?

"But how can you see the dungeon clearly, Dexter?"

Seongjin asked, unable to cope with the text popping out like crazy and turning off his skin again. Could it be that he, like Seongjin, turns off the application of external objects?

But Dexter's answer was simple.

"Ah, I was lazy so I verified my adult status. "It's a little purified, but the monster looks pretty good, right?"

"... what?"

Seongjin blinked.

Adult verification? How on earth do you do that?

Then Dexter looked at Seongjin in confusion.

"You're a Delcrossian, right? "Is there any way to prove your identity on Earth?"

"no."

"Well, I knew that would happen. But even if it were, aren't you a minor anyway?"

"... ... !"

Well, I understand. At that age, it's not time to worry about being

certified as an adult.

Seongjin was greatly shocked by the words that seemed to comfort him.

'I, a hunter who fell and fell on the Earth, am going through this kind of hardship just because I wasn't certified as an adult?'

Aside from Seongjin's unexpected internal injuries, their raid into the dungeon went very smoothly.

[Owner of my soul!]

Of course, in the D-rank dungeon, I had no choice but to face the unpleasant soul that went crazy with the joy of being re-summoned.

This was because Dexter, whose level was not yet very high, had no way to inflict the necessary damage with magic.

Anyway, thanks to the strategy book, everyone was able to see at once why the attack didn't work so well at first and why all the problems were suddenly solved.

[In the worldview of this game, the existence of the goddess Justitia is very important. Her entire main story is intertwined with her, and her dungeons are also heavily influenced by that setting. If you know it right, they say strategy is like gum. Is it closer to a service for users?]

As Dexter said, everyone's mouths were wide open at the incredible results obtained after going through three dungeons.

Seongjin was also internally satisfied after receiving a fairly generous amount of cash.

good! Skin purchase is not far away!

[So, now that we have quite a bit of time, shall we wrap up the connection for today?]

Above all, the greatest income lay elsewhere.

Dexter, who has access to high-end facilities, offered to hand over the silent villains' items to the auction house instead.

In addition, they even claimed to have advanced weapon enhancements instead!

[But I can't do anything about those bound items, right? It's a waste, but I have no choice but to destroy it.]

In Pangea Chronicle, there were sometimes items that came out with the phrase 'bound' on them.

Since it belongs purely to the user, it cannot be sold. Since I couldn't leave it to someone else, I couldn't strengthen it.

Among Pangea Chronicle users, these items are treated as a piece of luggage.

However, the position of the silent villains was different.

[it's okay. Mr. Dexter.]

Hatasu Titi said with a bright face, embracing the piles of low-level belonging potions.

[If you use these a lot, they will make your hometown land fertile, although not as much as rare potions.]

The group also draped its attached weapons around each leg and swayed as if dancing.

[These weapons look good too! Take it like this!]

[...] ... ?]

The mole frowned.

[...] Taking it back to the original world?]

[Yes, because it belongs to me.]

[This is why I visit here regularly.]

[Group! Share it with your colleagues!]

[...] ... ?]

Eventually, the mole gave up talking to them and ran to Seongjin and whispered.

"Hey, opposite sex... No, the day after tomorrow... no. Anyway, you need to talk to me for a moment."

"huh?"

"What are those guys talking about? "How on earth did you take the item back to the original world?"

"Um, that."

Seongjin nodded.

"You heard it first, right? "The reason they come here is to obtain items that can be obtained from the Pangea Chronicle."

"No, you're really taking it with you to your world?"

Dexter, who had initially ignored the confusing situation, now seemed to be greatly shocked.

"Uh, I heard it's possible to take items belonging to the user or some rare items?"

Seongjin also experienced the same thing yesterday. She was so annoyed that she roughly sold the items to the store, but one bound item, fish cake, remained in her inventory.

I found it at Delcross and tried it, and it tasted pretty good.

When he answered like that, the dwarf engineer was astonished.

"Objects in the game go to the real world... ... !"

"Is that strange?"

"of course!"

It wasn't an unfamiliar experience to Seongjin, as he had experience moving various objects from the normal world when going through a gap.

Moreover, isn't the normal world not just a game, but an actual dimension?

But Dexter's explanation for it was different.

"Once the normal world is created, its foundation is very solid. In most cases, you can't break in from the outside, and you can't get out from the inside. Even though they are real items within Pangea Chronicle, do you think regular users will be able to take them into the real world?"

I guess that's why the Ionian engineers who left for the new normal world completely lost contact with the outside world.

"The more I learn about the limits of a milestone, the scarier it becomes. At first glance, it feels like guest ID users are completely treated poorly by the game system, but that's just the way it is."

The mole shook his head.

"Guest ID users are unacceptable in Pangea Chronicle. "It's an entity that completely breaks the rules of the dimension!"

That's why the game system struggles. To suppress their activities as much as possible.

"They are truly the ones chosen by the Oracle. "This guest ID user."

Then Hatasu Titi approached them.

He always seemed calm, but on rare occasions he was unable to hide his flushed expression.

[Dexter. There are no words to properly express our gratitude for all you have done for us. So, I would like to pass on a certain percentage of the profits to you as a commission.]

Then the mole was startled and waved his hands.

[No, what are you saying! I'm not doing this hoping for such benefits! I feel rewarded just by being by your side and helping you!]

Dexter's words were sincere.

Guest ID users are those who obtained Oracle's terminal from another world. Those who are chosen as milestones and easily leak world-shaking influence outside the dimension.

What better way to study milestones than watching them from the side.

But the silent villains, who understood it differently, looked at the mole with great emotion.

[Didn't you almost reject a friend full of such altruistic good intentions from the beginning? The tree rings of the past hundreds of years are almost meaningless.]

... Hundreds of years? annual zone?

Hatasu Titi. What the hell is your identity?

[Dexter is a true friend! The warrior's intestines shed hot tears!]

Uh, okay. Group. That doesn't mean that a lot of stomach acid poured out, does it?

I don't want to know what the group's body looks like anymore.

"He's a much better guy than I thought?"

The red fox, who was looking at the sight with a bit of admiration, approached Seongjin and whispered softly in imperial language.

"I feel sorry for doubting it at first. "You must have seen so many bad things in the Pangea Chronicle."

"... .."

Are you, the guy who suffered so much, still an idiot who hasn't learned anything?

Seongjin stared at him for a moment without answering, then opened his mouth.

"Owen."

"uh?"

"If you go somewhere and someone asks you to sign something, stop and ask your family first."

"... what? "What do you mean by that all of a sudden?"

"Understand? "Definitely."

"... .. ?"

* * *

"Hwaam!"

Owen, who opened his eyes in the barracks, yawned awkwardly without realizing it.

'It's a bit tiring to be online all night... .. '

Even though I was properly recovering my body with Aura, the continuous connection every day caused accumulated fatigue.

Owen rolled his shoulders and tilted his head.

'But is it because of my mood? Newbie guy, something keeps feeling familiar... .. '

Is this a friend you saw in Delcross?

At that time, perhaps sensing his popularity, a knight from outside suddenly entered the tent and spoke.

"Lowering. It's late. Please eat quickly."

"Oh, Alicia. good morning!"

Alicia was Owen's escort.

Although he was originally a very formal person, the long life on the battlefield had a great impact on this steadfast guard knight.

Thanks to this, she, who seemed like a model of an upright knight, has now changed into an informal and somewhat easy-going attitude.

"Are you going to Volanta today too?"

"okay. "I was invited to the chief's hunt."

"Then I'll go this time too!"

Alicia's expression hardened and she looked straight at Owen.

"I am your knight. How long are you going to bully me? "I can no longer let you wander around among those barbarians alone!"

But Owen shook his head.

"A guard knight, that's not something that applies to Warsain. "A warrior must protect his own body."

Moreover, when reminded of the tumultuous courtship incident from before, Alicia had no choice but to keep quiet.

Alicia, known as a fairly strong warrior, was already receiving great attention from Chikudanka, the son of the tribe leader.

Moreover, on the day she followed Owen to Volanta, there was an uproar as young men from the entire tribe lined up to woo her.

"The thoughts of the pagans are completely incomprehensible. What do they know about me? They are so reckless..."

As Alicia mumbled something like a complaint, Owen burst out laughing cheerfully.

"haha. Because you are widely known to be a strong warrior, Alicia. "I don't know, but you are quite famous in Volanta."

The son of the imperial tribe chief and Owen's most trusted subordinate.

A warrior who always rides next to him on the battlefield and cuts down Barca warriors without hesitation.

Therefore, it is bound to be very attractive to Barçaians who value military power.

-The temperament of a strong warrior comes from its mother.

That is the myth that the people of Barça firmly believe.

To them, it was probably a natural thought. What a child inherits from his father is not even a handful of his body. A child grows into a big baby solely in the mother's body.

So, isn't most of what makes up a child's body inherited from its mother?

This was also the reason why some warlike tribes of Barsha maintained a strictly matrilineal lineage.

"I wonder how reluctant the elders, who already view me as a thorn in their eyes, will be. "They hate it because it brings a strange color to the young people of the tribe."

"Is it necessary for you to please them by going that far?"

"If you combine all the Barsha tribes, the population is very large. How long are we going to continue this wasteful war with them? "If something is going to happen, whether it's too late or too soon, finding a path to peace as soon as possible will help reduce the damage."

While Alicia looked embarrassed, Owen quickly put on light armor and strapped the one-handed ax to his waist.

"Oh, now that I think about it, it seems like our priest has been visiting less often these days."

A high-ranking priest who appeared like a comet on the southern front in crisis two years ago.

Although he was very sick and could not do much outside activities,

he would still visit the barracks once every week or two to check on Owen's health.

The reason why Owen's health was fine even though there were many days without a good night's sleep over the years.

This may be due to his healthy body, but it may also be due to the influence of the divine power showered on him by the priest who occasionally visits him.

"Even though he was busy sometimes, he never stayed longer than two weeks. "Where are you hurting these days?"

Owen's concerns were valid.

Isn't this a priest who is wrapped up all over because he is cold even in this hot region?

He even covered his face with a hood. Are you saying that the dusty wind of this desolate wasteland is bad for your respiratory system?

Isn't he truly a person of deep faith, who despite being so troubled, doesn't return to the imperial capital and steadfastly remains in the missionary group?

"Try sending some messages to the missionaries. "Is your health okay, priest?"

"Yes, I will, sir."

As Alicia bowed her head and left the barracks, Owen muttered with a worried look on his face.

"Please, it shouldn't be a big deal. Priest Bart... .."

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291. Justitia (3)

Meanwhile, there was another person suffering from the aftereffects of playing games all night long.

"Now my stomach hurts... .."

Seongjin, who went to the training center a little later than usual, forgot to meditate and sat blankly on the floor.

"This is truly strange, considering the lower class of Aurors. "It seems that the ability of the Auror to restore the body on its own is weak compared to others."

Masain, who was examining Seongjin's aura with a worried face, carefully recommended.

"You will soon have to deal with the monster task force, so why don't you take a break from training today?"

"Uh, whatever."

As Seongjin nodded obediently, Masain's face became more serious. That prince, who is crazy about training, just takes a break just because he's told to?

"... "I will call Councilor Ninias."

Without even thinking of stopping Masain, who was leaving with a stiff expression on his face, Seongjin absentmindedly patted the head of Max, who kept putting his muzzle in his grasp.

How many days have you been playing the game? Did you miss a total of three nights?

'Did you say that the way my aurors move is a bit different from others?'

Logan had also pointed this out before.

Since Seongjin's auror completely follows his will, it does not seem to do any activities on its own when he is unconscious.

That's why the hangover is longer and fatigue builds up faster compared to Auror users of the same level.

'Auror's body recovery process is slow... ... '

Now, Seongjin is keenly feeling the difference.

Look at the resident knights. I heard that those drunkards stayed up all night drinking for several days, so did they ever get into such trouble?

'Today was the day of the audience. 'I guess I'll ask my father to look after it in the afternoon.'

By the way, how on earth has Owen survived living like this for so many years? Isn't this guy really amazing in stamina?

Wong wong!

Anyway, it was Max who was excited about the unscheduled break.

As if protesting that he had not been able to play properly due to his busy schedule recently, he pressed his body against Seongjin and showed affectionate affection.

[Get away from me! Please tell me what to wear and what not to wear! Don't stick your head in at any time, you stupid mixed breed dog!]

And the Demon King also became uncomfortable. Even though he knows it's unavoidable, he seems secretly upset that Seongjin went to Pangea Chronicle alone.

"Max, you guy! "Don't disturb your rest and come here!"

Fortunately, Manager Bruno stepped forward to help Seongjin.

He was holding in his hand a wooden plate covered in colorful paint, which Seongjin had specially ordered some time ago to play with Max.

Kiing!

Max, seeing the familiar wooden plate, opened his eyes brightly and wagged his tail.

"Okay, here we go! "Ask!"

Whick!

As the wooden plate draws a cool parabola through the air, the wolf dog runs towards the plate at high speed.

and-

Wow!

Max jumped high from the training ground, twisted his body brilliantly and caught the wooden plate the leader threw in his mouth.

Up!

"oh!"

"It's pretty good?"

It was so spectacular that the resident knights stopped training for a moment and were distracted.

But that was the end of the great scene.

Kiing?

Max, who had been watching Seongjin and the leader for a moment, took the plate in his mouth and suddenly ran away!

"... Ma, Max?"

Manager Bruno's dejected voice, whose plate was suddenly stolen, echoes throughout the training hall. Seongjin let out a soft laugh without even realizing it.

"haha."

Still, that's a lot of progress, Commander. At first, no matter what I threw at him, he just stared blankly.

Then Seongjin suddenly felt a strange gaze and raised his head.

Sure enough, Edith, who was standing at the window and staring at the sheep they were doing, comes into view. When she made eye contact with Seongjin, she flinched in surprise and quickly disappeared into the room.

"..."

What is that envious look?

Seongjin scratched his cheek, thought for a moment, and then called the leader.

"Hey, Director Bruno? If I have time, I sometimes talk to Edith..."

"yes?"

"... No, nothing. Forget it."

I asked you to throw a plate to the dedicated maid. Where else could you ask such a strange request?

'Next time, I'll take the opportunity and casually drop the plate, pretending it was a mistake...'

Seongjin, who had been worrying so much, immediately clicked his tongue in bewilderment.

Who else in this world would think of the right time to throw a plate at a dedicated maid other than me?

[There is no one else but you. It's obvious.]

Oh, it's noisy!

At that time, on one side of the training hall, a sparring match between two knights was just coming to an end. It was Sir Kurt and Sir Maria, old drinking friends.

The two, who were the only senior knights among the resident knights, liked to spar with each other over the price of drinks from time to time.

Cheaeng! visor!

A close battle that continues without either side losing an inch.

'Looking at it like this, the differences between the two seem more clear?'

Unlike Sir Maria, who used the standard, uncomplicated swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights, Sir Kurt, who was from the northern region, tended to use a slightly more complex and old-fashioned swordsmanship.

It is not something that was developed by Banahas, but is similar to old sword techniques such as Orden or Balthazar.

However, unlike how he usually took his time in sparring, today Sir Kurt was dealing with Sir Maria's sword with quite a bit of difficulty.

And the decisive final blow.

Banajas Type 5 Type 6, Beehive Sting.

Kwa-kwa-kwa-kwak!

Sir Maria's sword drew more precise concentric circles than before, and Sir Kurt, who was barely able to defend himself, lost the sword in his grasp.

Cheer up!

Sir Kurt is embarrassed by the unexpected and clean defeat, but Sir Maria confidently puts the sword under his chin.

"Today, I decided to drink high-quality distilled liquor for the first time in a while. "I hope you haven't forgotten that promise."

"Big... .."

Sir Kurt, who was sweating coldly and clutching his numb hand, suddenly made eye contact with Seongjin and shouted in appeal.

"Lowering! Why did this friend suddenly become like this? "Before, we could only spar with each other if I gave in, but these days, strangely enough, I end up buying alcohol every time!"

"Don't brag. "Who is saying that someone gave up on a move?"

When Sir Maria responded bluntly, Sir Kurt, who was always relaxed, became unusually excited and raised his voice.

"You must not pretend not to know! What on earth happened to you all in the north? "This guy didn't have this kind of skill!?"

What Sir Kurt said was not entirely wrong.

This is not just Lord Mary. The knights who went to Sigismund Territory with Seongjin, such as Calmen and Sir Claudia, all had noticeably improved their skills.

'After all, there is no such thing as actual training.'

The results of the difficult battles against the Demon Beasts, Glaturre Trolls, and countless Lycan Slopes were only now slowly appearing.

Of course, among them all, Calmen's Aura still has the worst brightness.

"... ..?"

As I looked at him with pitiful eyes, Kalmen, not knowing why, raised his eyebrows.

"The odds of winning before were definitely 7:3! Of course I am 7! "There are so many games that even that has been watched!"

"The exact odds of winning were 6:4. Of course I am 6. And you, who are trying to save money on alcohol, look after me. I swear to God, I have never done that before."

Lord Maria responded stiffly and looked back at Seongjin with slightly worried eyes.

"Anyway, you look somewhat tired since yesterday, sir. What makes you uncomfortable?"

"hmm? no. I had a bit of trouble sleeping. are you okay."

Seongjin waved his hand, but Sir Kurt suddenly made a joking promise with his face.

"I can't stand it like this! "The next time you go on a trip somewhere, I will definitely go with you!"

Then, Lord Maria snorted next to her.

"How can I trust you and entrust you with my honor? A talented guy can just stay in the capital and buy me a drink."

"what? Are you bragging just because your swordsmanship has improved a little? "And you're not afraid of the consequences?"

"What kind of regret! If you can beat it, try it."

"profit!"

Wow, this is crazy.

As I was listening to the two people bickering, I saw Sir Masain and Congressman Strawberry Nose hurrying towards the training ground from over there.

* * *

"Please take a break from training for the time being and rest comfortably."

Dr. Ninias' diagnosis was simple fatigue.

He prescribed some herbs and decoctions and gave Seongjin a few instructions.

"Eat regular meals and get adequate sleep. Aren't you naturally healthy and an Auror user? "It will get better soon."

"Ok, thanks."

However, Seongjin could not immediately guarantee tomorrow's condition.

Anyway, I decided to meet Owen and the silent villains at Pangea Chronicle today as well. The lack of sleep and fatigue were expected to continue for a while.

Seongjin headed to the monster department in a nervous mood.

But why?

Jangle, jangle.

Seongjin's condition, which was observing the search and seizure of the Milo upper, soon recovered so rapidly that even he was surprised.

"Sir, why do you seem to be in a better mood than usual?"

When the red-haired inquisitor who was reporting on the confiscated goods made a puzzled face, Sir Masain looked back at Seongjin with a worried face.

Seongjin smiled and raised the corner of his mouth at him.

"Ah, it's okay, Lord Masaine."

As you know, if a person works for a long time, physical pain becomes bearable.

Look there. The national treasury is filling up all the time. Who wouldn't feel excited when all those money bags are stacking up in front of their eyes?

The red-haired inquisitor carefully cautioned how Seongjin's happy

smile was received.

"... "We are investigating, so please do not steal it without permission, sir."

No, Sir Valerie? What on earth do you see in people?

And afternoon. It was time for the long-awaited audience.

Although I've been in and out of the office occasionally, this is still my first official audience since my business trip to Sigismund.

"... .."

As he entered the office following Chamberlain Louis, the same elaborate tea table as usual was waiting for Seongjin.

I am looking at the steaming Melbourne tea with great emotion...

"Mores."

Seonghwang, who sang simply, looked at Seongjin for a moment and then gestured with his hand without saying a word.

Yeah, I thought this guy would recognize it right away.

Paaaa.

As I surrendered myself to the bright light pouring down from my head, my fatigue disappeared as if I had been washed, and my limp body instantly became refreshed.

'Oh, it's cool...''

I felt so refreshed that I seemed to have an expression like that of an old man who had just entered a hot spring.

Seonghwang, who was staring at Seongjin's face, eventually withdrew his hand and sighed with a confused expression.

"I don't know if I've developed a bad habit."

Uh, hmm. sorry.

While I was clearing my throat in embarrassment, an unexpected attack came towards Seongjin.

"Please stop by the office occasionally from now on. "It will continue like this for some time."

"... "Kek!"

Seongjin, who was offended by the words that caught him off guard, chewed his tongue without even realizing it. But at the same time, I also felt an unknown sense of relief coming from within.

Ah, as expected, there's nothing this guy doesn't know.

292. Justitia (4)

"I want to become more skilled at handling Aurors."

Seongjin, who had been savoring Lewis's perfect Melbourne for a while, put down his teacup and took his first chance.

"Aren't you still handling it to your heart's content? "I understand that you are far above the level of people your age."

"That alone is not enough."

Isn't this the aura layer that was barely built up after overcoming aura depletion? Now that I had learned it the hard way, I wanted to make a living by sharing the benefits that other Auror users enjoy.

For example, stamina that can be maintained even after staying up all night.

"... .."

Then Seonghwang closed his mouth and stared at Seongjin with slightly deepened eyes. A cold look in his eyes that makes it impossible to tell what he is thinking.

But now Seongjin knows that his silence is just a process of choosing words to provide an appropriate explanation.

"... "There was a bird flying freely on land, breathing the air."

Horok.

Seongjin sipped his still warm tea and quietly listened to Seonghwang's words.

"It was an extraordinary bird that could fearlessly glide from a cliff even in the distance and soar into the sky using the turbulent currents pushing its body as propulsion even in a strong storm."

"... .."

"Then one day it happened. For unknown reasons, the sky collapsed, and everything in the world was instantly submerged into the sea. Many others were thrown into the water and lost their lives, but fortunately this bird soon realized that it could make gills like a fish."

After speaking up to that point, Seonghwang paused for a moment, looking into the teacup.

"Mores. What would you do if you were that bird? Would you like to drink sea water with peace of mind? Or will you close your beak and try to save your breath as much as possible until you get used to it?"

"... ..!"

There was no need to intentionally imagine the bird's position. There is no way you wouldn't understand this explicit metaphor.

Seonghwang is saying that Seongjin has been living in a completely different world from Delcross, so he is not yet used to the atmosphere of Delcross.

Like a bird that suddenly fell into the water.

'okay. I am Seongjin Lee, who has lived on Earth for a long time, and I am a soul who has recently arrived in this world. That is an undoubted fact, and my father knows this well. But how could I... ..'

Then, in Seonghwang's eyes as he gazes at Seongjin, a mysterious silver-gray glow appears.

"Son. It's just an example. So, don't think about unnecessary things."

"Oh, yes."

A firm tone like never before.

Thanks to this, Seongjin, who was ready to roll his head, obediently cleared his mind of all his thoughts and nodded sheepishly.

Anyway, it's a ghost.

"Fortunately, the bird's extraordinary abilities were also demonstrated in the water. "The bird began to imitate the way its wings move like fins, and soon it was able to swim faster in the sea than any other fish."

The story of success continued.

The smart bird quickly adapted to life in the sea. This guy, who moved as quickly as a fish and knew how to use his sharp beak as a weapon, quickly became an outlaw of the sea, beating out other top predators.

However, not everything was smooth, because except for the gills, the other organs did not function as the bird intended.

His eardrums were still numb from the water, and the soft feathers were too dull to feel water pressure or temperature like fish scales.

"So does that mean it's an innate problem that the bird can never overcome?"

When Seongjin asked with a serious expression, Seonghwang slowly shook his head.

"It will be a slightly different story. Just as gills were hastily created out of necessity, birds also had the ability to adapt other organs as they wanted. "It's just that for him, the ocean water was still an external force that he had to overcome, and he couldn't recognize it as something to breathe naturally."

It was a bird that had never had a deep understanding of the underwater world throughout its life. So, I didn't know that something that immediately threatened my breathing could be a comfortable and natural flow of the world for someone else, just like the air.

Also, he couldn't even guess that there were sounds in the sea that he

could feel, smells that he could smell, and temperatures that he could feel.

"Of course, he is an extraordinary child, so he will adapt successfully someday. But in order to gradually learn something so unfamiliar, wouldn't it take a certain amount of time?"

Seonghwang added that.

"You are saying that the problem is not caused by my inability to properly control the aurors. If so, is it still a matter of time? "Are you saying that I also need a long period of adaptation, just as birds accept water as naturally as air?"

"why. "Aren't you so reluctant to wait for some time?"

Then Seongjin nodded enthusiastically.

of course! I want to adapt to this world as quickly as possible!

I will continue to interfere with the Pangea Chronicle, while maintaining my health and leading the daily life of Delcross.

So, please explain the sounds, smells, or anything else in the water so that I can understand and adapt!

"... .."

Seonghwang, facing Seongjin's strong burning eyes, rubbed his chin as if he was a little embarrassed.

"okay. "If you do, I'll show you something fun, son."

After saying that, Seonghwang slowly closed his eyes. Then, the aura surrounding him also depressed the air around him and calmly sank.

'What is this guy trying to do again?'

That was when Seongjin blinked, not knowing why.

"... uh?"

Perhaps it was because of my mood, but I heard something that

sounded like music from somewhere. It was so small that even Seongjin's sensitive senses could barely hear it, a faint sound.

'... Music box?'

The clear resonance of a percussion instrument, as if tapping a glass. Yet, it was a strange sound that continued continuously like a string instrument.

Tiring, ding.

container. container.

That inexplicable, mysterious chord enveloped the office, gently vibrating all the air around it!

"I can hear music from somewhere, father."

When Seongjin, who was looking around his head, said that, Seonghwang slowly opened his eyes and answered.

"okay. This is a song that Amelia often plays. "That kid seems to have quite an outstanding talent for musical instruments."

It was like that. It was definitely a song that remained in Seongjin's memory. One time, Amelia showed me her performance at Jinju Palace, and she said it was one of her favorite songs.

"but..."

The fact that the source is unknown has not changed.

Not only can there be no sign of anyone playing nearby, but this is not the sound of any musical instrument that exists in the imperial palace!

Moreover, the sound is coming from all directions, not just one direction -

"... Aura materialize!"

Seongjin quickly figured out the identity of the sound.

It was clear. The refined auras surrounding the Holy Emperor move delicately and vibrate the air!

Is it possible to use Aurors in this way?

"Uhm..."

Once you get to know it, it's natural that you'll want to give it a try. Seongjin furrowed her eyebrows and tried her best to vibrate the air like that, when she heard a soft laugh next to her.

"It's not that moving, Mores. "I do not move the auror by isolating the complex chords that Amelia played, note by note."

"yes? then..."

"It's just a matter of creating a strong thought based on memory and creating a perfect image. So that the aura contained there can flow naturally along the flame."

How to arouse curiosity.

If that were the case, I had learned it from Seonghwang only once, on the night of the birthday party, when I fell into a gap.

At that time, Demon King No. 2, created by Seongjin, created quite a spectacular fireworks.

Of course, that's because the gap is a very special space, and I tried it a few times later, but Demon King No. 2 never appeared again.

"There is no need to think too hard about your thoughts. It may feel like a special power to you, but in reality, everyone in this world uses it naturally, whether they know it or not."

Leading the performance of the air to its climax, Seonghwang spoke softly.

"Auror users protecting their bodies is not that different from this. "Everyone born into this world is surrounded by auras from the beginning, and they breathe and grow with them."

Children naturally try to protect their bodies like an instinct, and this tendency acts as a natural will.

All those weak thoughts pile up every day to create a solid thought. Before the auror user senses the auras and stacks them up, it is already considered a natural inertia to protect the body.

Seonghwang, who had said that far, looked straight at Seongjin and asked.

"But what did you think of Aurors until now? "Didn't you just think of it as a sharp weapon in your hand?"

"... ..!"

"Have you ever let it run free instead of taking complete control of it? "Have you ever felt a strong desire to protect yourself with it?"

"I am... .."

Embarrassed, Seongjin licked his lips for a moment before continuing.

"I thought we needed to control the Aurors better. "If you strengthen your Aurors through training, you will eventually be able to perfectly control them so that they do not harm you."

He believed that the reason his aurors were moving roughly was because he was immature at controlling them.

So, since I started later than others, I just thought I needed to be more alert and control it properly.

It's a little different, but didn't Logan give the same advice?

Seongjin's aurors obey Seongjin's will even while going against the natural process of protecting the body. So, in order to control even these unconscious movements, we have no choice but to speed up our training.

"That is not wrong either. Complete control is also a solution, and a kid with talent like Logan might be able to achieve it."

However, Seonghwang added that it is no different from disassembling all the notes one by one for one performance.

How about comparing it to the movement of the body?

Moving the respiratory muscles for breathing, and moving the involuntary muscles individually for digestion. This is equivalent to consciously controlling even endocrine functions that humans are not aware of.

"But you have the power to create stronger thoughts than anyone else, Mores. What you need to do is not to break down these notes one by one, but simply to recall strongly the memory of when you heard the music and to embody the impression you felt."

And release the auras accordingly. Absolutely natural.

'I feel like I'm feeling something... ... '

Seongjin decided to test it right away.

'I'm not sure about the intention yet, but I guess I just need to focus on losing my strength first, right?'

So, I relaxed my entire body as much as I could and slumped in the chair. Trying to let the aura flowing within her body run naturally without any interference.

He was so focused on losing all his strength that even his facial muscles seemed to have become flaccid.

"Sir, are you really that impressed by the taste of the tea? "Lewis, I truly feel rewarded for serving you."

Lewis, who happened to come into the office to pour a new cup of tea, was startled when he saw Seongjin's face, and turned his head with tears in his eyes.

"Uh, okay. "Thank you for always preparing great tea."

I guess this is not it.

In the end, Seongjin gave up and corrected his posture. Well, losing strength isn't as easy as you think. Anyway, you need some time, right?

"I can't help it. "Then, I will often stay in the office for a while until I get used to making up my mind."

"... .."

As expected, I developed bad habits.

Hearing the low muttering sound, Seongjin grinned.

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293. Justitia (5)

The Volanta tribe's hunt that Owen participated in that day ended with unprecedented success.

This is because herds of buffalo and antelopes have returned to the grasslands where the fierce seawater and Nurmachi have completely disappeared.

"The hunting ground of our ancestors has come back to life!"

"Let's toast together to Owen, the warrior who kept his promise to expand Volanta's horizons!"

Hustle and bustle.

In front of the abundant fruits, the entire tribe was filled with joy and raised a toast.

However, Owen, who was at the center of it all, could not completely blend into the atmosphere. This was because a small quest window had suddenly popped up in front of his eyes earlier, obstructing his view.

[Surprise Quest – Preparation for tomorrow.]

[Quest Grade: F]

[You have successfully completed a tiring day's schedule. How about this? In the busy pace of daily life, have you perhaps forgotten how to relax in life? Well, now is the time to take a breather. How about going back to bed early today and taking the time to reorganize your body and mind for tomorrow?]

[Reward: 30 P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

Is the person who robbed me of the leisure of life suddenly ordering me to reorganize? And it's not even 300, it's only 30 cash?

"The compensation is too salty!"

Owen, who was in the midst of the excitement of hunting, simply closed the window. Rather than returning home with this much reward in mind, he would rather have strengthened his friendship with the people of Volanta.

"A lot of this meat and skin is yours, Owen! I'm really worried about the way back. "I have seen many imperialists over the years, but you are truly the first time I have met a hunter as good as a Barsha warrior!"

"There is no need to worry, Chikutarku. As a token of my friendship with Volanta, I am willing to share my share with my friends."

"ha ha ha! How exciting! Now, hurry and get this drink!"

Owen smiled brightly as he accepted the drink personally handed to him by Chief Chikutarku.

However, the toast did not last very long. This is because a new quest window suddenly appeared before his eyes again.

[Surprise Quest – Comfort your subordinates!]

[Quest Grade: E]

[Your sweat as you do your best every day for peace is beautiful. But behind you, there is hidden the hard work of your subordinates who support and care about you. Are you so focused on achieving results that you are forgetting those who are precious to you? How about going back to work early today, at least to comfort and encourage them? Your reputation will increase further.]

[Reward: 50 P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

Owen furrowed his eyebrows slightly.

'... reputation?'

No, did Sang Tae-chang have a good time today? Why are you suddenly worried about my reputation when you never used to be?

Anyway, Owen hesitated for a moment.

Even 50 cash is a shame now. Additionally, when Sang Chang-chang is this persistent, in my experience, there is usually a reason.

'I've roughly stamped my eyes with the elders, should I go back now...''

It was when I was thinking about that.

"Owe-n!"

Suddenly, a thick arm wrapped itself around Owen's neck. It was Chikudanka who was heavily intoxicated with horse liquor.

"What are you doing here now? There was a wrestling match in full swing, so why should Barça's best wrestler be left out? Come on, let's go!"

"Oh yeah. "That's how it should be!"

that's right. The festival has just begun, so does it make sense to leave now?

Thinking like that, Owen roughly pushed the spear away and walked towards the wrestling ring with Chikudanka.

But it was right then.

Beep beep!

Suddenly, an eerie warning sound rang in my ears, and a red text appeared before my eyes.

[warning! – Quest failure penalty]

[I am very sorry. If you can't understand something when you say it in a good way, you have no choice but to experience the results yourself. I wish you good luck.]

[Result: 70% reduction in total acquired P Cash for the next month.]

[*This product can be used in the Pangea Chronicle store window, but it is very doubtful whether cash will be collected properly in the future.]

"... 100 million!"

It was the sound of sobering up.

We are already suffering from a serious cash shortage, so what are you going to do if 70% of the acquired cash is taken away?

"I'm sorry, Chikudanka! "I forgot something, so I guess I'll have to head back for today!"

Owen hurriedly said hello to the people of Volanta and soon began riding toward the camp. He was in such a hurry that he didn't even get his share of the game.

'No, Sang Tae-chang! You can say it with nice words. 'Why would you threaten someone so cruelly?'

As Owen gritted his teeth and spurred on, a small text popped into his mind as if teasing him.

[It is a day to engrave in our hearts the old adage that a beating is better than a reward for a misbehaving child.]

ah! Stop being sarcastic, Sang Tae-chang!

I did everything wrong!

But when he came back in such a hurry, an unexpected guest was waiting for Owen.

"Lowering! "Why are you so late?"

As he enters the barracks, leaving Alicia behind, a familiar figure greets him and stands up.

A long robe that wraps around the loose body, and a thick hood that completely covers the face.

"... "Priest Bart?"

The high priest, who was said to be sick and unable to go out often, looked at Owen and nodded slowly.

"... .."

Soon, a foreign language was heard in a soft tone, and the attendant standing next to him spoke in place of Priest Bart.

"I thought we almost missed each other, and now I think it would be better to go a little early." "The priest speaks."

As a high priest, Bart always had one of these attendants with him.

His role was mainly to support him or interpret for him, but this was because Bart, from Ortona, could not speak the imperial language properly.

It was a bit surprising that a high-ranking priest couldn't speak the imperial language when masses across the entire continent were held in the imperial language.

"Ah, I'm a little late today because I have an important event. "If he had known the priest would come, he would have returned sooner."

Then Priest Bart silently nods his head.

Although he can't speak the imperial language, he still seems to understand simple words.

'Phew... ..'

Owen sighed inwardly.

If I had known this would happen, I should have listened to Sang

Sang-chang a long time ago. If he had known that this sickly man would wait until late on purpose for him, he would have come running in the middle of the hunt.

Look at the poor auror activity over there, like a dying person.

[It's no use pretending to regret things that are now in the past. The behavior you show today will have a huge impact on determining future quests and rewards.]

Sang Sang-chang, who has a bad personality, said sarcastically.

Yes, yes, I was wrong.

"Now, please don't just stand here, please take a seat, Father Bart. It's hard, but don't overdo it."

Anyway, Owen was happy and took long strides toward the priest. Then he grabbed his shoulder and tried to make him sit back down.

This was something Owen didn't usually do, but it happened because his mind was strangely relaxed now. This may have been because he was intoxicated with horse oil and also because he was grateful that Priest Bart had waited for him on purpose.

But the moment Owen's hand touched-

"... ..!"

Priest Bart's body suddenly felt stiff with tension.

"... ..?"

And Owen, too, was startled as he felt a creepy recoil from somewhere.

'Why do people weigh so much?'

A feeling of discomfort that can be clearly felt even when you just gently push your body. Doesn't this make the person feel so light that their body is completely empty?

Even making a scarecrow out of hollow sugar cane would have been better than this.

"... What is this? "Even if it's hard, eat well."

But Owen didn't have any doubts about him.

I heard that he was very sick, and this is the same Bart priest I have been seeing for several years.

Moreover, for some reason, there was a part of Priest Bart that reminded him of his godfather. Even though it seems strange to me to connect him, the strongest man on the continent, with the sickly man.

A person similar to your father could never be a bad person, right?

"... .."

Tuk-tuk.

As I sat him down and carefully dusted his shoulders, Priest Bart, who had been frozen for a moment, slowly relaxed his body. Soon a small sigh is heard from inside his thick hood.

And the unfamiliar Ortona language is softly recited.

"I am the first prince of the Holy Empire Delcross. He always had the awareness that he was in a noble position, and it was right for him to be careful and be on guard in everything he was around. "The priest speaks."

At the attendant's words, Owen tilted his head back and smiled brightly.

"Hahaha, Priest Bart. You don't have to worry about such things! Even though it's like this, I'm being careful not to disturb my father! Moreover, if people do not show faith to others first, how can they live properly in this world?"

Hwiik-

At that time, the priest's hand stretched out in front of Owen like lightning. The speed was so incredible that even Owen, who prides himself on being a fairly strong Auror user, missed the movement for a moment!

"... .. ?!"

I winced.

However, the hand that stopped for a moment in front of him soon slowed down and landed gently on Owen's forehead.

"Uh, lungs... "The priest says he will bestow his blessings on the prince."

At the same time as the dazed attendant spoke, a familiar divine power poured out from the hand that touched the forehead.

As always, it was an incredible, miraculous divine power that made fatigue and hangovers go away at once.

However, Owen internally tilted his head as he received Priest Bart's blessing.

'what? Did I see it wrong? At first, I thought there was a chestnut flying at my head... .. '

Hey, it must be my mood.

How could it be possible for Priest Bart, who is like a living saint, to throw a chestnut at the prince's forehead?

* * *

That evening, Owen accessed the Pangea Chronicle slower than usual. And he faced newbies and silent villains who welcomed him as always.

[Hey everyone!]

At the cheerful greeting, the silent villains and the small goat turn their heads at the same time.

[Owen! Containing welcome!]

[A little late today, but just in time, Owen.]

It was right then.

"Look at that! "They are the devil-possessed sheep and their gang!"

"That guy destroyed two intact guilds on the spot, right? "Who are you planning to sacrifice again this time?"

"Hey, let's avoid it! No matter how you look at it, that's not the color of a normal person's eyes."

As soon as the gaze of the small goat reached them, the users at the meeting point trembled and hurriedly left the place.

Oh, they are such unsophisticated people. To me, it's just cute, but why are they making such a fuss?

"Hello, newbie!"

For the sake of the poor newbie who was being misunderstood, Owen gave a firm greeting in Imperial once more.

OK-

"Uh huh."

The mountain goat answered sullenly and turned its head away.

Wow, my friend is more blunt than he looks.

"Come on, sit down. "We were having a meeting about the dungeon we were going to next, but because you were late, we couldn't talk about something important."

And then the words continue as if thrown out.

'It's not very polite to say that I waited.'

But look, he's not a good guy after all.

Owen smiled brightly as he looked at the baby goat who, despite being a newbie, had now become the leader of the team.

294. Justitia (6)

The silent villains' raid on the theme dungeon continued.

[The place we will attack this time is the C-rank dungeon, 'The Orc King's Maze.' From now on, the level of difficulty will change as your rank increases, right? There are a lot of rules to follow, and the patterns of the mobs are becoming more and more complex.]

And while Dexter was pushing me away, he suggested that we beat the themed dungeon to the end.

[Because in order to obtain the advancement item, you must eventually conquer the S-rank themed dungeon.]

After you clear the themed dungeon up to A rank without failure, you will be given the opportunity to challenge for S rank based on your time challenge performance.

As this S rank is quite difficult, it is famous for giving out rare items. Thanks to this, it is one of the dungeons that players who are eager to upgrade their skills have recently become very excited about.

[The time challenge records of the top ranked players are all similar. So, you should try it when you have the chance. If other parties come up, you have to try again from the beginning to qualify.]

It made sense.

The only problem was that most of our party members were guest ID users.

[I said it before, Dexter. Guest ID users should always put safety as their top priority.]

On the first day I logged in, Owen told a scary story to Seongjin to raise awareness.

-One day, there was a guest ID user who was covered in the flames of a desert dragon and was immediately disconnected. However, Sang Tae-chang said that even in his own world, he was found reduced to ashes.

Dexter shook his head at Seongjin's concerns.

[You don't play with other users, and your abilities aren't displayed properly, so you can't really feel it. However, when I evaluate it objectively, I think our party's current strength is considerable.]

Dexter said that even after Seongjin and the silent villains finished logging in, he remained alone and played for a while longer. Naturally, there were opportunities to compare them with other players.

This was a conclusion reached after carefully analyzing the strategy records of rankers posted in the community. By matching advanced enhancement weapons with appropriate level set items, silent villains can immediately rise to the ranks of rankers.

[Still, I am against anything that poses even the slightest risk.]

Seongjin's attitude was stubborn, but the situation was different for the silent villains, who were already completely intoxicated with the results of their successful strategy.

[Wouldn't it be okay to listen to it and decide?]

Red fox Owen let out a comforting sound next to him.

They glared at the immature guy, but the deer and octopus also noticed Seongjin's notice and quietly helped Owen.

[Isn't this a suggestion because the possibility is very high? If there is a risk, there are also appropriate measures for it.]

[Dexter, you are very smart! For the second time, memorize the long name!]

[of course! I already know all the main strategies of the theme dungeon! Even though it is just theory without practice!]

These are truly fearless!

Seongjin, who was angry, made an angry expression, but-

[Let's just listen to it, okay? I'm a newbie.]

[I will follow your decisions as leader. So, can you please just review it for a moment?]

[Lee Seong-jin, I apologize!]

It was difficult to completely ignore the gaze of the cute animals, who were looking at us pleadingly with their shining eyes.

[...] Well then, just listen to it.]

In this way, the group listened in detail to the strategy explained by Dexter.

[C rank, the setting is that 'The Orc King's Maze' has a unique story. The goddess Justitia left a prophecy to the king of the orcs about a hero who would appear someday. So he decided to build a huge maze to stop the hero... ..]

And surprisingly, Seongjin, who was indifferent at first, was also listening carefully to what Dexter was saying.

'This is quite... ..'

It's quite authentic since a genius engineer is serious about the game. Instead of simply memorizing the listed strategy, didn't you properly analyze the silent villain's abilities and create a strategy that can deal with various variables?

Also, sometimes there was a sharp perspective that only those involved in the development of the Homunculus engine could have.

'If I had met Dexter on Earth, I think I would have hired him on the strategy team right away.'

Even the picky Seongjin would have thought so, but what about the silent villains who are extremely sloppy? Even the slightest bit of anxiety that was left in a corner of their minds had already been blown away!

[If everything goes according to his plan, he can quickly gain the upper hand in the political war with the Barum Trees!]

[Group! Our compatriots suffering from the devil! The moment of liberation is near!]

Even Owen spoke brightly.

[With this, you can shorten the main stream produced by Sang Tae-chang! Then it won't be a dream to return to the imperial capital any time soon, right?]

[...]]

Thanks to this, Seongjin's stubborn attitude softened a bit.

is it? Would it be better to take a little risk and achieve quick results as a shortcut to bringing this runaway teenager back home?

[Haha, leave everything to me regarding strategy from now on!]

Dexter confidently patted his stomach and gave all the silent villains the reinforced weapons he had prepared.

[I took care of it during the day when you guys were away. Now you can definitely feel the power increase.]

[Dexter...]

Everyone looked at him with moved eyes.

[You are a really good guy!]

[Dexter! How can I express this gratitude!]

[moved! The warrior's intestines shed hot tears... ... !]

The silent villains made a fuss for a while, then ran out to the field to

test their respective weapons.

"Hehe, it was worth dedicating the day to the game."

Dexter said in a somewhat satisfied voice.

He said he played games alone during the day, and before he knew it, he had completed his first job change. Equipped with a fancy wizard's robe and a nice reinforced staff.

"You hated it so much at first, but you're more serious about the game than I thought, right?"

"Why not? When everyone needs my skills, I feel the greatest sense of accomplishment and joy. "I feel like I truly belong to everyone."

The mole who responded like that looked for a moment with faint eyes at the doorway where the silent villains had disappeared.

"okay. "Isn't that the time when people truly feel the worth of living in this world?"

"... .."

"... No, but isn't it strange? "Why do I keep saying such useless things to you?"

Seongjin looked at the shy little mole for a moment, fiddling with his goggles.

"Dexter,"

"huh?"

"Are you going to return to Earth someday? Or would you like to come visit Delcross when you have time?"

Even though I am like this, I am the son of someone who is quite high up in Delcross. I will treat you well.

Then, as if hearing something unexpected, the mole opened its eyes and looked at Seongjin.

"Well, it's not like I don't want to go see the sights. But the elders strongly forbade it. Are you saying that if I, who inherited Ionian technology, set foot in Delcross, there is a risk of greatly harming the causality of the dimension?"

"okay?"

Seongjin thought for a moment and then shook his head.

"I have a feeling that will be okay? don't worry."

"But the old man... .."

"Oh, it's okay, it's okay."

If it's that dragon old man, my father will definitely deal with it.

The man who stole the race key from the elder in a matter of hours is my father!

"Well, if that's the case."

Dexter answered hesitantly and asked Seongjin.

"Anyway, why don't you hurry up and change jobs? You've leveled up, right? You've passed the first hurdle to becoming a summoner. Do you want to become a summoner now? "It would be better to have a full range of professions in the party."

hmm. As a guest ID user with many limitations in career choices, this was a unique opportunity.

But Seongjin was reluctant for something.

"Or, become a warrior according to your talents. "I saw you use a sword quite well yesterday."

"well. Do I really have to change jobs?"

Then Dexter made a puzzled face.

"Why won't you do it? You have to change jobs to really use special skills! The difference in damage is huge, so is there any reason not to

do it?"

"Yeah, but."

Seongjin was thinking hard, but soon the silent villains came back, very excited.

[Is this huge?]

[Preparation is perfect! Let's quickly enter the orcs' maze!]

[Everyone is dead!]

Ah, yes.

How can I stop those excited guys? Seongjin also sighed and prepared to enter the dungeon.

□Object - Skin 'Gather together, friends'□

□On/*Off*□

But it was right then.

Crackling!

Noise appeared in my vision, and a strange lamenting sound came from somewhere.

[Ah, □□□ □□. This is what happens in the end. You should never have come here in the first place!]

It was a very unfamiliar voice, not the thoughts of anyone Seongjin had heard so far.

'... ... ?'

But there was no time to wonder.

Kikikiki.

With a strange sound of laughter as if someone was whispering in my ear, my vision suddenly darkened and darkness came in an instant.

* * *

'What is this again?'

Seongjin stood alone in the dark.

In complete darkness, not only the silent villains who were right next to you until now, but also the scenery in front of you cannot be seen.

'Am I really awake?'

The body's presence was intact. When I quietly raised my hand, I saw ten faintly glowing fingers.

Not the small hooves of a goat, but his own proper hands with the calluses characteristic of a swordsman.

'... Isn't it a mountain goat?'

Chichik.

At that time, a crude noise appears in my field of vision again. After applying the 'Gather Friends' skin, I thought the graphical problem was completely solved, but was it just Seongjin's mistake?

'... ... !'

However, when Seongjin's vision became clear again, he was facing a woman he had never seen before.

It is a tall woman holding a long golden spear in one hand and covering both eyes with a red cloth. A dress made of thin fabric flowed down to her feet and flapped as if it were her wings.

'... Justitia?'

It doesn't look that different from the illustration on the site that Dexter first showed me.

Above all, that strong presence shining alone in the darkness clearly did not belong to an ordinary person. That woman is truly the goddess of the Pangea Chronicle.

[Be careful.]

At that time, a low, gloomy thought entered my mind.

[You have already disrupted the order of this world several times,
□□□ □□.]

What do you mean?

[It is no longer dangerous. Please do not stir up chaos any further than this.]

... that?

At that time, Seongjin realized that she was looking somewhere other than him.

Although the goddess's eyes were completely covered, Seongjin could clearly feel the direction of her gaze.

'Behind me?'

An eerie chill ran down my entire body in an instant.

And I felt a clear presence like never before.

Long black hair like seaweed gently reaching her ears, and a woman's pale arms wrapping around her shoulders and neck.

'This... ... !'

For some reason, someone has been sticking behind him like a spider.

Crackling.

He was even biting something hard behind Seongjin's back.

Although it didn't cause particularly severe pain, Seongjin could feel something, whether blood or vitality, slowly escaping through the wound.

I wonder why I've been feeling particularly tired lately!

'what's this?!'

Frightened, Seongjin quickly turned around and swung his arms, but it stuck like a leech and still did not come off.

Giggling.

An unpleasant sound of laughter flows down along with the thick blood.

'Why did I never notice the existence of this guy until now?'

But at least I could clearly see why his vision had been imperfect up until now.

Gigigigeek.

That's because the guy was covering Seongjin's eyes with his fingernails. Warm blood was also flowing from the area of his heavily wounded eyes.

[...] ... !]

Seongjin frowned and grabbed the guy's hand.

'Get away, you nasty bastard!'

Just then, the goddess in front of me warned me.

[You won't be able to shake it off. □□□ □□.]

Tdu-duk-duk.

Red blood also flowed from the eyes of the goddess who said that.

At that moment, Seongjin realized. The red cloth covering her eyes was not originally red...

[Justitia has already melted into the atmosphere here, and it can no longer be restored.]

... Justitia?

When Seongjin turned around at those words-

Another goddess with gaping eye sockets opened her blood-soaked mouth wide and laughed, as if she was happy that her presence had finally been noticed.

Kyakyakyakyakya!

295. Justitia (7)

[You were never supposed to come here from the beginning. Have you ever thought carefully about why there is a limit to the number of people entering the theme dungeon and why the number of guest ID users has never exceeded three?]

Seongjin looked at the woman in front of him who was complaining as if she was reprimanding him.

Elegant clothing, like a character from ancient mythology, and long, golden, wavy hair. Except for the creepy eye patch soaked with bloody tears, it was clearly the image of 'Justitia' on the main screen of Pangea Chronicle.

A noble hero who is said to have plucked out his own eyes to protect the laws of the world.

A goddess at the center of the Pangea Chronicle worldview who eventually became a divine being and managed the world.

'but... ... '

This strange woman who is now attached to Seongjin's back like a leech is also called 'Justitia'.

Black hair tangled like seaweed in the deep sea, skin with an unpleasant feel like wax.

This is not a goddess, but rather like a drowned body left in a low temperature state for a long time.

'Which one is the real Justitia?'

Maybe both.

For some reason, I had that feeling.

[So, why did you suddenly appear in front of me like this?]

Seongjin asked, tearing off the clammy hand that was hanging on with the intention of pulling out his eye at any moment.

Does it matter which one is real? First of all, it seems like I can't communicate with one side at all, so I have no choice but to try communicating with the side that seems more normal.

[Didn't you just say that? Please do not provoke Justitia by causing any more chaos.]

[Do not call someone else's name. You must be Justitia too, right? It seems like both of them have no eyeballs.]

[...]]

The goddess kept her mouth shut at Seongjin's sharp response. But Seongjin, who had already become sarcastic, thought she was a goddess and a leech, and there was nothing more harsh about her.

[If the settings on the site are correct, you are the one who manages this world, right? But why mess things up and now blame others?]

[I am holding you responsible for the chaos you brought about.]

[Don't make me repeat the same thing. If you really wanted to prevent guest ID users from entering the theme dungeon, shouldn't you have specified the conditions properly from the beginning? Rather than lax measures such as limiting the number of people.]

[Since the upper-level conditions have already been restricted, it is meaningless to define the lower-level conditions again. All of this is chaos caused purely by your presence, so you have no choice but to put it to rest.]

[Then, why not ask politely? Besides, if you wanted to persuade people of anything, couldn't you have created a more appropriate atmosphere for conversation?]

At least it's not a place with blood-sucking leeches.

As Seongjin nervously ripped off a handful of the seaweed-like hair, the sound of someone biting something again was heard in his ear.

Crackling.

Oh, don't bite anything without permission, you!

[I am deeply sorry about this situation. However, originally, you and I, as guest ID users, would never have met unless a few restrictive conditions were met. Even I, the administrator of the world, cannot avoid the conditions that have already been established.]

Sleep, sleep, sleep.

The goddess said, taking a few steps forward.

[So the moment the illusion was put on and peeled off, I had no choice but to take advantage of that momentary twist. I had to avoid the rules imposed on me through the chaos you fostered. Of course, the price is not that small.]

At the same time, the blood flowing from the goddess's eyes spreads across her white dress, creating an eerie pattern.

this. There's a bloody show going on in front, and there's a drowned leech hanging in the back!

'This is the worst!'

Seongjin, who usually disliked horror movies, was disgusted.

Still, since these things can at least be touched with hands, it must have been some consolation that punches work.

[If you really don't like this situation, there is only one way left. All you have to do is leave this world right now.]

At that time, the goddess responded coldly and pushed her face right in front of Seongjin.

Then, a soft, seductive whisper follows from her red lips.

[Or are you still going to use your unique ID? □□□ □□. Just like before, I'm getting rid of everything that bothers me.]

[...] ... !]

This time it was Seongjin's turn to keep quiet. The moment she heard the goddess' words, she felt a prickling sensation in her heart, and immediately something stirred inside her.

Exciting

This was definitely a commotion that Seongjin had experienced at some point.

but.

'... No, it's not time yet.'

A strong premonition that is difficult to explain comes flooding back to me at the same time. Seongjin took a deep breath and tried to calm down the waves of unknown emotions.

[Don't make nonsense. Anyway, this was your best bet for the conversation, right?]

Then, as if she had lost some steam, the goddess slowly leaned back and answered.

[I won't deny that. So what are you going to do? Would you leave here now? This world is too imperfect and unstable to support your existence.]

Are you unstable? Pangyea Chronicle is a typical normal world, right?

Perhaps realizing Seongjin's doubts, the goddess added a blunt explanation.

[This world was forced to wake up from its egg before it was ready. So, to make up for the ridiculously weak tone, numerous rules were

added in a disorderly manner. In such great chaos, the distortion of the world eventually arose.]

Tap, tap.

Even as she leaned back and spoke, bloody tears continued to flow from the goddess's eyes. If things continued like this, it seemed like her handmade dress would be completely stained with blood.

[And □□□ □□, you will accelerate this flood of chaos and eventually cause the collapse of the world.]

[...]]

[So, please, for the sake of this world, get out of here right now.]

okay. I don't know, but you're saying it's a matter of the existence of the game, right?

'Leaving this annoying world is something I've always wanted!'

But before that, there was something that needed to be resolved first. Seongjin said, pushing back the leech that was grinding its teeth on his neck as chewing gum.

[There is a condition. First, promise me that you will meet a guest ID user, Justitia.]

[Guest ID user?]

[okay. And obediently hand over whatever item he wants. If you do that, there's no reason why you can't leave here right now.]

If he had to get out, shouldn't he at least get Owen out with him?

-The reason I keep logging in here is probably to meet Goddess Justitia and get the things I need.

Of course, there is no guarantee that meeting Justitia will completely complete Owen's quest. But at least, wouldn't he be able to avoid getting into trouble just because he met the goddess?

However, the goddess's reaction after hearing Seongjin's words was cynical.

[That is impossible. Didn't I say this before? Even I cannot avoid the conditions that have already been established. Guest ID users cannot enter the temple, and in order to meet me, they must meet several strict conditions.]

No, then what?

Now Seongjin was beyond annoyed, and his head was slowly starting to heat up with discomfort. If Seongjin wasn't willing to listen to this side's conditions, there was no reason for him to listen to that side's one-sided nonsense anymore.

[Then stop talking nonsense! I won't leave here until I achieve my goal!]

[This world will collapse because of you!]

The goddess screamed as if she were screaming, but Seongjin didn't even blink.

[What do I know? This is a world where strange things like this are obsessed. If we leave it like this, it might lead to bigger problems, right?]

[Such self-centeredness... ... !]

[The accusation of being egocentric should rather come from this side. If you want to at least have a proper conversation, you should do something right now, whether it's my life or my strength!]

Stop making people tired! I will never miss tomorrow morning's training!

Hwaak-

At that moment, as if reacting to Seongjin's mood, a strong spiritual pressure rose from him and swept in all directions.

[...] ... !]

Cheesy!

It was so powerful that in an instant, noise erupted from all directions simultaneously.

Goddess Justitia staggered and looked at Seongjin with an expression of surprise.

'... 'What did I just do?'

Seongjin, who first found out that he could do this, was also momentarily taken aback.

But what was even more absurd was that even in this situation, the leech was stuck behind him and did not move!

Crack, cluck.

'What a disgusting bastard!'

The goddess, who noticed Seongjin's disgusted gaze, spoke as if resigned.

[Didn't you say from the beginning that you wouldn't be able to shake it off? There is nothing I can do. It is another Justitia born in great chaos. He has become the law of this world in itself.]

Chaos or law, whatever, get away from me!

When Seongjin waved his arm towards the back again-

Woe! Woe!

The spirit force, which became sharper than before, struck the leech several times.

Kyakyakya!

Then, the leech narrowed its gaping eye sockets and laughed at Seongjin. As if she was making a futile attempt.

[Didn't you hear? I have already become the law of this world!]

Blood-soaked lips clenched, and an unpleasant voice was heard, as if rusty iron was being ground.

[Everyone can't avoid me! You are already seeing, hearing, and breathing through me! I am another foundation that supports this world, I am like the atmosphere of the world!]

'... atmosphere?'

It was right then.

There was one strong memory that came to Seongjin's mind.

-Mores, what would you have done if you were that bird?

A bird that fell into the sea.

A familiar voice quietly explained about it.

-Birds also had the ability to adapt other organs as they wanted. It's just that for him, the water in the sea was still an external force that he had to overcome, and he couldn't recognize it as something to breathe naturally.

My father said back then that I was like a bird in the water.

But did the atmosphere of another dimension mean only Delcross?

-It's not that moving, Mores.

Another memory comes to mind.

A vibration like a small laugh that resonated softly with the sound of music.

-It is simply a matter of generating a strong thought based on memory and creating a complete mental image. So that the aura contained there can flow naturally along the flame.

I know.

I have already learned how to create thoughts by creating thoughts.

Grumble!

And before Seongjin was even aware of it, a small flame bloomed in front of his eyes along with the memory that naturally came to mind.

He was very familiar with Gehenna's burning of everything.

'... 'Demon King No. 2'

At first glance, it was an insignificant flame, as if it were the devil's true form. However, its power was exactly the same as what was seen from the gap.

It's a shame.

Like dust falling, when Demon King No. 2 fell from the sky onto the leech's hand -

Grrrrrrrrrrrr!

The flame that caught the target grew bigger in an instant and quickly spread behind Seongjin.

[What is this! □□□ □□! What are you doing now!]

With the cries of the embarrassed goddess Justitia -

Wow!

Suddenly, the tearing sound of a leech rang out. A completely different reaction from his previous relaxed attitude.

But before Seongjin could check the results, his vision suddenly blurred and the darkness swept away.

"... rain!"

... huh?

"It's a newbie!"

And then he felt someone grabbing his shoulders and shaking him violently. Seongjin slowly blinked her eyes as if she was waking up

from her sleep.

"what's the matter? Why are you suddenly standing blankly?"

My blurry vision becomes brighter, and I see copper-colored hair shimmering before my eyes.

"... "Owen?"

"For a moment, I thought I fainted while standing up. Are you okay?"

"Is it Owen?"

"What are you talking about all of a sudden? "Are you really in pain?"

Seongjin looked blankly at the person standing in front of him with a bewildered expression on his face.

That's because the guy who was supposed to be a red fox has now completely changed into something I've never seen before.

'what? The voice is definitely Owen's?'

The person in front of Seongjin now was a sturdy young man with an expression as cheerful as his voice.

The long, copper-colored hair looked like a rich fox tail, and the outfit was a bit unfamiliar, with brown feathers decorated here and there.

Seongjin slowly raised his hand and rubbed his eyes with his small hoof.

what? My avatar is still fine?

"Owen, you... .."

"huh? what's the matter?"

The young man asked back as if he was worried.

Ah, when I heard the voice, I was sure it was that stupid fox bastard.

But why did his skin suddenly disappear and the graphics become normal?

296. Code Zero (1)

'What happened?'

Seongjin played around with the status window for a moment.

□Object - Skin 'Gather together, friends'□

□*On*/Off□

□Object - Skin 'Gather together, friends'□

□On/*Off*□

However, no matter how many times I turned the skin on and off, the situation did not change. It feels like not only external objects but even the player's graphic skin has been completely blown away.

Of course, even in this situation, Seongjin was still angry that he remained a small goat.

"Are you sure you'll be okay, newbie?"

Owen, who had an unfamiliar face, asked again with a worried expression.

That wasn't the only thing that changed.

Crackling.

Although there were unpleasant noises occasionally, the surrounding scenery seemed quite realistic, unlike before.

I guess the reason the graphics were so bad at first wasn't simply because the milestone was broken.

-You are already seeing, hearing, and breathing through me!

Suddenly, the voice of a drowned body that was viciously tearing out its eyes came to mind, and Seongjin felt goosebumps running down his spine.

It must be because of him, right?

Did Demon King No. 2 kill him properly?

[Lee Seong-jin, are there still any anxiety factors that need to be considered? If you, the leader, are against it, you can put off running the themed dungeon right now.]

Hatasu Titi. "No," asked the shield warrior with Hatasu Titi's voice.

This person also appeared to be a normal person on the outside. Of course, only the abnormally thin and elongated impression and the creaky movements of the limbs remained the same.

[I believe in Dexter, Seongjin Lee. Okay.]

The most unexpected thing was the group. She had the appearance of a very typical beauty, with flowing fine hair.

The flaw was that the limbs, which looked agile as a ranger, moved a little shakily.

'what. Originally, I was wondering why I left my legs in the world, so I thought the avatar was just a mollusk, but surprisingly, he's fine, isn't he?'

I almost got fooled like that for a moment.

If only Gureub's long hair had not moved alone and kindly held out a potion in front of Seongjin's eyes!

'... ... !?'

[Potion of abnormal status. Would you like to drink it?]

Seongjin, who was shocked, awkwardly accepted the potion.

'What is this again? 'Does the hair have powered joints?'

Group. How on earth did you become an avatar?

[What should I do, newbie? If you're not feeling well, would you like to take a break during this dungeon?]

In the meantime, Owen's appearance was truly a sight to behold.

He looks free-spirited, wearing armor roughly over his shabby clothes, and with his flowing copper-colored hair tied back tightly.

Seongjin looked at him disapprovingly for a moment while holding the potion.

'There are degrees of sloppiness. What are those feathers that bloom like a magpie's nest on your head? 'You're the first prince of Delcross, so can't you dress up more properly?'

However, in a situation where we haven't revealed each other's identities yet, we can't nag like this carelessly.

[What's wrong, newbie?]

[...] No, it's nothing.]

okay. Did you say you spent a long time on the battlefield with the heretics? Then maybe you should understand.

I guess he had assumed that Owen would be similar to him, having spent a long time interacting with the neatly dressed members of the imperial palace.

'I'll pass this time. But you bastard, just keep walking around like that when you return to the palace!'

[...] ... ?]

Tingling.

Owen, who received Seongjin's harsh glare without knowing why, scratched his messy hair in embarrassment.

* * *

[The C-rank dungeon, 'The Orc King's Maze', is not a very difficult dungeon overall. As the name Maze suggests, the structure is complex, but if you solve the 'conditions' well, the difficulty level goes down like previous dungeons.]

The little mole continued his explanation while fiddling with his goggles. Even though everyone's appearance changed, only Dexter still looked like a cute animal friend.

Is it because it is the account that purchased the skin directly? Or is the change in avatar proof that it is not just a matter of appearance?

[Long-range, close-range, and magic-type orcs are spread out evenly in all directions of the maze. The compatibility of each is quite clear, so if you work through it step by step, there will be no major problems.]

Then Hatasu Titi tilts his head. It still felt strange to see her suddenly change from a simple deer to that of a serious warrior.

[It's the same as the first explanation, Dexter. By mentioning this again, does it mean that you have no intention of attacking according to the previous plan?]

[okay. We need to discuss it with everyone.]

The mole nodded, adjusting his goggles.

[It's true that I came here and saw the records, but the other team's time challenge record was much faster than expected.]

[That means... ..]

[This means that if we follow the rules, we won't even come close to these records.]

The standard strategy for 'The Orc King's Maze' was to go through the complex mazes from all three directions and head to the boss room.

A tricky structure that requires you to sequentially step through

mazes that change over time while avoiding traps and alarms here and there.

[Of course, you can give up part of the maze and go straight to the boss room, but in that case, although the time will be shortened, the clear score will be extremely low.]

[what? Then what on earth did the other guys do?]

[It's difficult to understand. Don't go through all the mazes. But it catches all the mobs. how?]

At that moment, Seongjin, who had been listening quietly, calmly said something.

[...] You're stepping on all the alarms from the beginning.]

[...] ... !?]

Everyone's shocked gaze gathered together.

Dexter also looks at Seongjin with surprised eyes, and then nods his head in confusion.

[okay. You noticed it well. That's exactly the conclusion I came to. The other party members probably intentionally drew mobs into their path to shorten the clearing time as much as possible.]

[But is that possible? If you attack the maze step by step according to your compatibility, if all the mobs in the maze come pouring out at once, the difficulty level of clearing increases to the extreme.]

At Hatasu Titi's words, everyone's expressions became serious.

Hundreds of mobs of all types pouring into one place at the same time. From then on, it is no longer a problem that can simply be dismissed as low-level mobs.

[Aren't there 'conditions' that need to be solved for each type? I heard that Justitia's conditions become quite complicated from C rank? Fighting hundreds of orcs while protecting them sequentially...]

Owen shook his head heavily.

[No matter how much I think about it, it's unreasonable. Ordinary users who can try it multiple times may not know, but for us, it is a reckless challenge that requires us to sacrifice our lives.]

Pangea Chronicle is a very realistic game in which high-level players can die unexpectedly due to the knife attacks of beginners.

If all kinds of attacks were coming from all directions at once, no matter how high their defense was, they wouldn't have the talent to hold out for long.

[But Dexter is smart. He definitely thinks there is a way.]

The mole nodded, feeling a little embarrassed at the group's point out.

[okay. According to my calculations, it's not completely impossible in theory. Would you like to take a listen?]

So what Dexter proposed was a kind of defensive warfare.

The idea is to run the shortest distance to the three-way intersection where the boss room is, and take turns blocking attacks coming from each direction based on that point.

[...] switch?]

[okay. It's the core of this defense. The 'condition' for 'The Orc King's Maze' is to inflict damage equal to 30% of total HP with an attack of the same attribute.]

In other words, you must start attacking close range mobs with close range, and attack wizard mobs with magic.

On the other hand, the tricky thing was that once you broke that condition, you had to use a completely different type of attack against the weakened mob to get any benefit in terms of defense.

For example, if a wizard weakens a wizard, then the ranger has to beat them to death.

[A close-range warrior is a good match for a ranger, and a wizard is a good match for a close-range match. So, you have to meet the troops coming from three sides, break each condition, and then quickly change the attack position according to the compatibility.]

[hmm...]

Although it seemed plausible at first glance, there were several problems with it.

Gureub asked, sweeping down the quiver with his hair.

[It's tight. What happens when the same mobs come pouring in from three directions at the same time? There may be overlap.]

[That can be solved by getting to the boss room in the shortest possible time and sounding the alarm. The Orcs' small units are spread out quite evenly, so if you think they are leaving for the boss room at the same time, there is almost no chance of them overlapping.]

Moreover, just because the compatibility is not right, it does not mean that the attack will not work at all. In the end, Dexter added that this is a problem that will naturally be resolved if the side that defeats it first supports the other passage.

[But what do you do with the guys you meet on the way? Ultimately, the structure of the maze changes over time. By the time we get to the boss room, the troops chasing us will be all mixed up.]

Dexter nodded at Hatasu Titi's point.

[You have to go out there by breaking the conditions you encounter. If possible, it would be a good idea to reduce their number as much as possible while running. Then, at least the passage we passed through will have much more room to defend later.]

[Still, it sounds quite tight.]

The response is that the worries are still not gone.

However, the faces of the silent villains were much brighter than at

first. As I listened to Dexter's explanation, I began to think more and more that maybe it was really possible.

[Orc warriors have a narrow detection range and there is a slight delay in recognizing long-distance targets. Orc wizards also have the characteristic of switching to buff mode when there is a ranged unit in front. [I'm trying to make the most of that loophole.]

Dexter continued speaking with a confident face.

[Besides, everyone's power is different from yesterday. You all got your hands on advanced reinforced weapons, right? I think it's worth a try.]

[okay. In the end, the first key will be how quickly you can reach the boss room without getting lost in the maze.]

Owen, who was deep in thought with his arms crossed, suddenly asked Seongjin while secretly examining his expression.

[What do you do, newbie? To be honest, I think it's a pretty realistic plan.]

[hmm...]

Seongjin held the beginner's sword without answering.

Originally, I would have shouted opposition without even thinking about it, but-

'Do you think it's possible?'

For some reason, I had a strong feeling like that.

Dexter's plan was already being drawn up in elaborate drawings in Seongjin's head.

Occasionally, the rhythm may be off due to hands and feet not being in sync, but according to Seongjin's expectations, it was within the acceptable range that he could respond to.

'Now that there are no obstructions blocking the view...'

Perhaps, unlike before, I will be able to demonstrate my skills to my heart's content.

Moreover, because I was against it unconditionally, something about what I heard earlier bothered me.

-You will accelerate this flood of chaos and eventually cause the collapse of the world.

Considering Justitia's warning, Seongjin may not be able to stay here for very long.

In the meantime, if we don't do something about that fox bastard... ... !

[...] Let's do it.]

Eventually, everyone's faces brightened at Seongjin's heavy answer.

[Okay, well thought out, mo... Seongjin Lee!]

[what? Newbie. I thought you would be against it, but it's hotter than I thought.]

[If Seongjin Lee evaluates it positively, this plan definitely has a high chance of winning!]

okay. Think as you please.

Seongjin left the silent villains talking excitedly. It would be better to move without being nervous, which would further increase the success rate of the plan.

'Plus, if the situation arises, there remains a final means of escape.'

Seongjin looked at the group and smiled brightly.

[If there's a problem with the plan, Gureub-keul-lab-gurreub-bi-keul-leub will grab us and hang us from the ceiling. yes?]

Then, all you have to do is summon Hayes and wipe out all the mobs within range.

Then the beautiful ranger, who was dancing with joy, raised her slender arms and shouted confidently.

[The maze is not cold! Group, you can hang on strong forever!]

Okay, group.

At least you are the most trustworthy here.

297. Code Zero (2)

'The Orc King's Maze' is a three-pronged maze dungeon built on a huge square site.

The dungeon starts at one corner of the square, and a huge boss room is located at the end of the opposite corner.

[The time challenge starts as soon as you enter the entrance, so let's save time and decide on a general direction first.]

Dexter drew a brief picture on the floor with a staff. This was for Guest ID users who could not receive help from the minimap.

[I dictate the overall direction. Due to the nature of the maze dungeon, the path does not appear on the mini-map, but we can still determine our approximate location.]

[Group! Dexter is someone you can rely on!]

[good. Once you enter the entrance, everyone runs to the right. The leader goes to Owen or Hatasu Titi. The placement of the Orc subunits is determined randomly, but more than half of the first hitters are close-range fighters. and...]

[Why don't you go to the center?]

At that time, Seongjin cut off his explanation and asked.

Are you heading to the boss room at the end of the square? Well, it's common sense that the shortest distance is to just cross diagonally, right?

[They say it's quite easy to get lost and wander around the central area. It is said that there are many side roads and roads that go

backwards are often created. If you follow one edge, the risk of losing direction is much reduced.]

[Hmm.]

[In addition, the central maze is a passage where the three mazes merge once the alarm goes off incorrectly. If you do something wrong, hundreds of mobs may pour in without time lag.]

okay? Then what?

Seongjin nodded, thinking nothing of it.

[Then isn't it the same for the left? Why are you on the right?]

To Hatasu Titi's question, Dexter answered clearly.

[On the right, the deployment of long-distance small units is relatively high. It is difficult to deal with them in large numbers, so it would be more advantageous to defeat them one by one when the opportunity arises.]

[aha!]

After completing this rough briefing, they entered the dungeon one by one, maintaining a somewhat pleasant level of tension.

But the last time was when Seongjin stepped into the dungeon.

Crackling-

For a moment, a subtle noise caught his eye and then disappeared.

'... ... ?'

Surprised, Seongjin blinked for a moment, but fortunately his vision didn't change much.

'what?'

He squinted his eyes, feeling something unpleasant, but Owen looked back at him and smiled cheerfully.

"What is it, newbie? Are you suddenly nervous? Anyway, you are part of the short-range team, so this time, don't run around alone. Stay quietly behind me or Titi. Because it's dangerous. Did you understand?"

Seongjin glared at him with a sullen face.

No, this fox bastard still treats me like a beginner?

"Leaving aside Dexter, who is a real newbie, why am I still treated as the youngest member of the party?"

"hmm? But isn't that friend higher level than you now? "Not only did I complete my job change yesterday, but I also found some full-strengthening items somewhere and am wearing them."

"... .."

I had nothing to say about him.

Dexter. They backed off and said they wouldn't do that, but ended up committing a considerable amount of money in one day. Isn't this the sprout of a truly excellent gamer?

And soon three passages appeared.

The group started running straight toward the maze entrance on the right, as instructed by Dexter.

No, I tried to do that.

If only Seongjin hadn't suddenly become startled and stopped walking.

"... "Are you a newbie?"

"Why are you doing this, Seongjin Lee?"

Everyone stopped and called out to him, but Seongjin did not answer and just stared down the dark central passage.

Tingling.

Immediately, I felt a strange pain around my eyes...

sparkle! Something like a solid silver line shines in the central passage and then disappears in an instant.

'That...'

This wasn't Seongjin's first experience.

When was it? When you were dealing with the demon beast using the demon lord's spiritual eyes, didn't you somehow feel something similar to this back then?

[middle.]

[what?]

[Let's go to the center!]

In a strange, inexplicable confidence, Seongjin gave succinct instructions and immediately ran toward the center.

Bwak bwak bwak bwak!

There was no time for the group to stop them. Before we knew it, the little goat had completely disappeared beyond the darkness of the central passage, leaving behind only petal-shaped footprints!

[hey! Don't jump out, newbie! It's dangerous!]

Owen, scared, hurriedly follows him -

[Hurry! Or be left behind!]

The group that jumped out behind them began to run lazily after them.

[There's a change of plan! Let's go, Dexter!]

Finally, when Hatasu Titi moved his body without much agitation, Dexter, who was embarrassed, also hurriedly moved towards the central maze.

Hey, what on earth is this? What about our briefing?

Can anyone explain this situation properly?

* * *

The first small unit they encountered was, as Dexter expected, close-range Orc warriors.

The fierce, muscular monsters armed with sharp war clubs glared at Seongjin and the others with glowing red eyes.

Crrrrr...

Although they were Orc warriors with a relatively narrow detection range, it was still not enough for them to not notice the group approaching.

However, before they were ready for battle.

Phew!

The beginner's sword that flew in from afar pierced right between the eyes of the Orc warrior in the lead. Although the destructive power it contains is not that great, the attack is enough to get a vital point!

Wow!

With a loud scream, half of the orc's HP disappears in an instant.

[Ahh! wait for a sec! At least give me some time to prepare for a follow-up attack! At close range, you have to use a follow-up magic attack to be compatible... No, but did you throw the sword? So, is this a close range decision or a long distance decision?]

Dexter panics and struggles to find a disposable magic scroll.

Clumpy.

Suddenly, ominous black smoke began to rise around the mountain goat.

[Have you called this servant? Lord of my soul!]

Whoa!

The black smoke quickly expanded in volume, soon covering the passage and enveloping the orcs.

Gurgling.

Gurgling... ..

That was annihilation. The small unit of Orc warriors could not even scream properly and dissolved in vain, leaving behind only a few items.

[...]]

Dexter gaped in shock, but Seongjin picked up the beginner's sword that had fallen on the floor and spoke calmly.

[As expected, it is a close range decision. Seeing as they melt into nothingness more than a low-level Ice Banshee, it seems like they got a proper nerf to their magic defense.]

[No, mo... Seongjin Lee! You are real!]

It was at that time that Dexter, who was in tears, was about to pour out a bunch of complaints.

Kurrrrrr-

With a heavy noise, the entire dungeon shook violently. This is a signal that the dungeon will be reassembled after a certain period of time and that part of the maze will change.

Deukdeukdeuk!

The single path in front of them also split into two paths, with pillars rising and part of the wall collapsing.

sparkle!

For a moment, a strange silver glow appeared in the baby goat's eyes and then disappeared.

[This time it's the right path.]

Seongjin spoke briefly and turned around.

[Hey, you now... .. !]

[Time continues to pass. Don't hesitate and let's go to the next location. hey! Leave items that fall on the floor alone! I think it would be better not to touch that!]

[Group? Is that so?]

The beautiful ranger who was tapping the fallen war club with her foot straightened her posture and raised her head.

[Anyway, hurry up! Gureupppwalapgurureub bippuleulleup. I have a feeling that you will have to start the attack next time.]

After giving such rough instructions, the baby goat started running the maze again.

Bwak bwak bwak!

There would be no mini-map, but it was truly an unstoppable move.

[...] Does that guy even know what he's doing?]

Dexter is in a daze...

[Then I am next! The warrior's intestines are on fire!]

Meandering.

With movements that seemed strangely slow, the group quickly began to follow Seongjin.

[You're really buying and playing well today, newbie.]

Owen sighed and ran after him, asking.

[Anyway, group, what on earth do you believe in and why do you just do whatever the newbie tells you to do?]

[Lee Seong-jin never gets the name wrong! He is wise! His judgment is trustworthy!]

It was a very absurd reason.

[What is it? You have to make sure the name is correct, right? Isn't that too blind?]

Then, while maintaining its running speed, the group twisted its neck back more than 120 degrees and looked back at Owen. Her flexibility was so extreme that it was scary.

[If you doubt my judgment, why don't you just say my name, Owen?]

[Gurrppa...]

[you're right! That's why I never trust your judgment!]

[what? Hey, man!]

Behind the bickering two, Hatasu Titi, carrying a large shield, ran carefree and shouted.

[Both of you, please focus on the battle! Seongjin Lee ordered the group to take the lead next, so Owen and I, and our close-range fighters, should be in charge of the follow-up attacks!]

[Oh, that's right!]

[Group! I reflect!]

Dexter, who was listening, was dumbfounded.

Wait a minute, isn't Hatasu Titi the most blind person out there? How on earth can you completely believe such groundless instructions?

But something surprising happened. The small unit they encountered next was indeed an Orc longbow unit!

'... Really?'

While Dexter was shocked, the excited group took the lead and aimed an arrow.

[good! I've been waiting for this moment! I'm going with maximum power!]

The demonstration with thin arms pulling desperately was truly unreliable.

Wedge!

However, as soon as it was released from the guy's hand, the arrow shot forward with a terrifying booming sound.

Flutter!

And he pierced two Orc archers at once and pinned them to the maze wall.

[...] ... !]

A high-level ranger conversion skill that has been used in practice for a long time. There was no need to calculate the lost HP.

Slurp.

The orcs died, disappearing as a ray of light in the air.

Wow!

Oh my!

The remaining unit members protested with red eyes shining, but the necessary 'conditions' had already been met.

[Break through, Owen!]

[Okay, leave it to me!]

The two warriors who stormed into the unit next struck down the shower of arrows with relative ease and wiped out the unit. Thanks to this, the party was able to maintain their running speed and completely defeat the long-distance troops.

'If things continue this way, there will be almost no mobs left in the central maze, right?'

Dexter thought as he walked after them.

There was no doubt that it was sufficient power, but the current situation was going even more smoothly than Dexter had expected.

[Hey, Titi. Don't just lean against the wall.]

[I understand, Seongjin Lee.]

This time, Seongjin did not come forward. Silent villains do not stop you from picking up items. I just watched the silent villains in action and then spewed out pointless nagging.

And by then, Dexter was starting to have a reasonable suspicion.

'Wait a minute, Seongjin Lee. Are you avoiding the alarm right now?'

The key to this time challenge was to ring the alarm at the right place to drive away the mob. An alarm that was pressed unintentionally could have put party members in danger in an instant.

The problem was that in the case of trap alarms that occurred randomly, it was nearly impossible to completely avoid them.

These can appear out of nowhere on the floor or hide in walls, and sometimes exist in items dropped by mobs.

'I've tried to familiarize myself with all known alarms as much as possible...'

To be honest, Dexter was prepared to step on one or two trap alarms.

That was why he tried to avoid the central passage as much as possible. Because the total length is short, there are many side roads and many trap alarms.

Whether it's a standard event or a time challenge, there's a reason why most parties don't choose the center aisle.

[This time, everyone just follow behind me. Don't just walk around here and there. This road is on the left.]

Bwak bwak bwak!

As Seongjin started running again after giving concise instructions, Dexter's doubts slowly turned into confidence.

'Do you really think you know the location of the alarm? Seongjin Lee, what on earth is he doing?'

298. Code Zero (3)

Seongjin and his party, running at high speed, had already covered half of the central maze. Without any crisis situation or even without stepping on the trap alarm once.

Where is that? By following precise instructions and working closely together, they even cleaned up the mobs they encountered on the way!

'This is definitely not a coincidence!'

Dexter thought as he adjusted his crooked goggles from running.

How many crossroads have they passed so far? But running smoothly through a continuously changing maze without a set route, without encountering a single dead end?

'Lee Seong-jin, what on earth is he doing?'

Bwak bwak bwak!

Dexter looked at the back of a small goat running majestically, making cute footsteps.

Now that I think about it, did you say that that guy is the son of the highest person in the Delcross dimension?

'I thought he was a brat who fearlessly resorted to fraud based on the power of those in power...'

That may not be all.

Once I close the connection, I'll have to ask the old man in detail about that guy. Dexter promised that.

[This is going to be too easy, right?]

[Relax! Just organize everything as you go!]

[You can't let down your guard, but as the group said, there's no need to be overly nervous!]

At this rate, after arriving at the boss room, you only need to worry about attacks coming from the two remaining directions.

Everyone was relieved to think that, but surprisingly, the face of Seongjin, who was leading them, was not that bright.

"There are points of slight discrepancy... .."

"huh? Newbie, what did you say?"

"No, it's nothing."

Seongjin waved his hand at Owen and then looked back at Dexter.

"Even though it's faster than expected, we don't have that much time to spare. "You know that too, right?"

"... .."

Coincidentally, Dexter was thinking the same thing.

The reason they chose a defensive battle was probably for the safety of party members.

Move forward by defeating the mobs that gather along the way. And after completely passing through one maze, you fight a defensive battle against the mobs that come from there.

If you have enough power and luck, it is obvious which one will be faster.

'Lee Seong-jin is right. There won't be much difference in the time required for a defense battle no matter how many times you do it. In the end, the key to determining the success of our plan will be how quickly we get through the maze in the first place!'

In 'A Terrible Fraudster', he is a guy who has an uncanny talent and is also quite smart.

Dexter's perception of Lee Seong-jin was slowly changing in that way.

[Gurreubpplabgurlubrp.]

sparkle!

Seongjin, with a strange sparkle in his eyes again, calls out to the group.

[Is the longbow unit next? good night! This body, take the mound!]

Just by being called, this strange ranger understood Seongjin's words perfectly.

Meandering.

He pulled the strings while making funny gestures that I couldn't tell if he was dancing or a warm-up move.

[Go the strongest! Prepare for shock!]

It was right then.

Dudduddu!

A sudden change occurred in the dungeon. As soon as we were faced with a small unit from a distance, the maze changed a beat quickly.

[...] ... ?!]

[Oh! Blocked!]

[Just step back, group!]

[what? Change is too fast?]

Kurrrrrr...

And by the time the maze was finally re-established, the Orc longbow troops on the other side of the passage had already recognized them.

Peeing! ping! ping!

As soon as the road opens, arrows come raining down from them.

[this... .. !]

A longbow that is evaluated as extremely ineffective in narrow dungeons.

However, since they could not close the distance in a straight passage, there was no more threatening curtain of arrows.

[Group! First you have to attack them! Even if we move forward while blocking with a shield, we won't be able to last long there unless we resolve the 'condition'!]

Hatasu Titi held out his shield and shouted, but Gurup violently shook his hair in denial.

[It's impossible here! The longbow has a long range! I need to dig deeper!]

That's right, the group's weapon is a composite bow that has been modified to focus on power rather than range. It was an obvious choice to run through the dungeon.

[Then what? Are you going to jump in like this?]

[Let's ask wise Dexter! Is there some easy strategy?]

[huh? No, that's it... ..]

Dexter looked at the rain of arrows with a perplexed expression.

'what? As the maze changed, a long straight passage was accidentally created. Thanks to this, the Orc longbow units are making full use of long-range special skills. 'Is it possible for there to be a space within the maze that allows this much range?'

Moreover, their skill cooldowns had somehow been reduced, and strangely enough, the spacing between the arrows flying felt very tight.

"Your eyes are red... .."

"... ..?"

Suddenly, I turned my head to see Seongjin Lee rubbing his eyes with his hoof and making a serious expression.

"eye? What eyes?"

"Their eyes are gradually turning red. "Don't you know?"

Dexter looked in the opposite direction in confusion, but the evil eyes of the orcs staring this way were not much different from the first time.

You'll still earn it, right? What on earth has changed?

"But why do you keep rubbing your eyes? "Where does it hurt?"

"No, the noise... .."

"noise?"

At that time, Owen grabbed the ax and stepped forward.

[Why are you so embarrassed? Just because you've achieved some easy results these days, it's natural that you can't always get away with it, right?]

[Owen?]

Perhaps because he had been on the front line for a long time, he seemed completely unfazed even in this situation.

[Don't waste time looking for a way out, just do what you always do. First, Titi takes Gurup and approaches the guys as much as possible. Then, when it reaches the range, the group immediately leaves the shield and fires an arrow!]

Then Hatasu Titi looked straight ahead with a worried face.

[But the moment you leave the shield to attack, you will be defenselessly exposed to their special skills.]

[Don't worry too much about that. I will go with you by your side.]

Owen slowly turned his shoulders and raised the corners of his mouth.

[When the right time comes, I will first focus their attention with 'War Cry.']

War Cry.

A basic aggro skill possessed by melee warriors.

[...]]

Everyone was silent and looked at Owen. What he said was clearly a correct method, but there were two big problems with it.

Hatasu Titi's shield can additionally protect only one group. And the attacks of the Orc longbow unit are not that light to induce concentrated fire with War Cry.

In other words, Owen approaches the enemy's arrows with his bare body and makes dangerous noises that will eventually focus the attack on himself.

[What's wrong with you? are you okay. This is something that can happen at least once in a defensive battle anyway...]

Wow!

[...] 100 million!?!]

Owen, who had been talking cheerfully, fell backwards, clutching his forehead from the sudden shock.

'... what?'

He was hit so hard that some of his HP was blown away. For a moment, he thought he had been hit by an orc's blind arrow.

When he looked up in confusion, he saw a small mountain goat glaring at him with very murderous eyes.

[You man, do you usually go around like this?]

[...] Are you a newbie?]

[After all this, you've been nagging others like they shouldn't die and telling them to take care of themselves, which doesn't work? Isn't this guy completely lacking?]

It was an unprecedentedly harsh criticism.

[No, newbie. But there's no way, right? What would you do if you caused damage to a party member in a situation like this?]

Owen protested fiercely, but what came instead of an answer was another night.

[You deserve it even if you get hit!]

Wow!

[What!?!]

Owen rolled on the floor again, holding his forehead and making a puzzled expression.

what? It's just one night, why can't I avoid it? And it hurts like this?

Next to Owen, a potion bottle wrapped around his hair creeps up.

[Have you tried drinking the HP recovery potion?]

[ah. Thank you, group.]

Seongjin looked at Owen with pitiful eyes for a moment as he gulped down the potion, then turned his head towards Hatasu Titi.

[TT. What is the scope of War Cry? Can we influence them here too?]

Then the quick-witted shield warrior quickly nodded.

[Of course it's possible. War Cry is a skill that is mainly used in large fields.]

[Then there is no need to follow the group's range. Here, protect yourself with a shield and use your skills with that idiot.]

[But Lee Seong-jin. Even if we get their attention from afar, if the group moves closer, their goals will likely change. War Cry is powerful, but not to the point where it completely ignores enemies that come close.]

[But while the goal is changing, there will definitely be a momentary gap in that arrow curtain.]

After answering like that, Seongjin took out his beginner's sword and called out his name.

[Gureupkkeullabgurleup bikyoleulleup. follow me.]

[Group?]

[...] ... ?]

Before everyone even understood what it meant-

Wow!

The mountain goat hit the ground with force and shouted.

[Let's hit the ceiling like before! First, let's catch up with them!]

[hey! Newbie!]

Startled, Owen belatedly got up and shouted, but-

Wow!

Seongjin, who had already stepped onto the relief of the stone wall, slightly twisted his body to avoid an incoming arrow, and jumped straight up toward the high ceiling.

Wow!

Eventually he reached the corner of the passage. A blind spot that narrowly escapes the curtain of arrows.

Dexter was shocked by the unimaginable sight, but surprisingly, the other silent villains seemed quite familiar with the sight.

[Newbie guy, what are you going to do if you end up screwing up a lot of people and then getting out like that?]

[Owen. Think about it later and focus properly! Soon the group comes into range. In order for him to be able to use his skills, we need to get their attention properly at least once!]

After that, it was simpler than I thought.

A war cry that violently shakes the passage. That one-second gap where the Orc archers were momentarily distracted.

[now!]

At Seongjin's signal, the group clinging to the ceiling pulled the bowstring vigorously with its hair.

ping! Wedge!

Ugh... ... !

With a tremendous sound, the Orc archer in the lead died. The arrow that was aimed properly at Uldae pierced the guy's neck and cut it off!

[good!]

The condition has been resolved!

After confirming that the mob had completely melted, Seongjin easily kicked the wall one last time.

Wow!

And it gently landed at the rear of the Orc unit, which was shaking and confused about the priority of the goal. Just by running up and down the wall, I really caught them off guard.

After that, it's purely a close-range warrior's interval.

Seongjin kicked away the cumbersome longbow of the guy closest to him and plunged the knife right into his clearly exposed carotid artery.

Sigh!

Keke!

A critical hit appears immediately, and 2/3 of HP disappears in an instant.

Puff puff!

However, it was the arrows of other orcs that completely finished him off. Before the archers' arrows left the field, Seongjin pulled the sword from the man's neck and turned it into a shield.

Slurp-

The guy whose HP was low quickly melted into a handful of light. The cover that covered his body was gone, but Seongjin had already kicked off the floor and dug deep inside, sinking his sword into the heart of another guy.

Phew!

[Newbie! It's too dangerous! Don't dig in alone!]

[Lee Seong-jin! Please wait!]

Owen and Hatasu Titi came from behind Seongjin, and the battle situation took a dramatic turn. They literally started slaughtering their enemies like crazy.

puck! Flutter! Phew!

Owen smashed their heads with one sharp blow every time, and Hatasu Titi wielded his shield like a weapon and knocked down the archers.

In that way, the Orc small unit was completely eliminated in an instant.

[What is this...]

When the matter was resolved more smoothly than expected, Dexter slowly approached them with a blank expression on his face.

No, let alone the other guys. Seongjin Lee What on earth is that guy doing that makes him move like that? Are you saying that you are the well-bred son of a high being?

Perhaps aware of Dexter's suspicious gaze, the little goat, who was sharpening his blood-soaked sword, answered indifferently.

[They're all low level mobs, right? There aren't many off-beats in the attacks, and there aren't any complicated skills. The AI is very simple, so it is not difficult to respond.]

[...]]

As the saying goes, the things that appear in C-rank dungeons are relatively low-level monsters. Like elite mobs or bosses, they do not use complex skills such as 'skill absorption' or 'damage reflection'. That said, there isn't that much to calculate.

but.

'It's suspicious. 'You're so suspicious!'

Dexter repeatedly promised himself that he would definitely find out about that guy when he got back.

* * *

After that, there were no more situations that would hold them back.

Although there were times when the maze's deformation and the attack's tempo were slightly off, we were still able to continue the attack relatively smoothly.

Above all, as long as they followed Seongjin, they never lost their way. It also takes less time than expected.

So Dexter thought everything was going well. Except for the

occasional muttering from Seongjin behind me.

"It's still within the range of response, not yet... .."

Every time he did that, a strange feeling of anxiety came over Dexter. Doesn't this guy who has shown inhumane tricks on several occasions keep repeating those words make people more anxious?

And unfortunately, Dexter's fears became reality the moment he reached the boss room.

Bleep-

With an ear-piercing alarm, the boss room suddenly opened and a huge orc came out.

Wow!

"... Orc king? Why all of a sudden now?"

thud! thud! thud!

Every time he takes a step with his heavy body, the entire dungeon shakes violently due to the recoil.

At the same time, Dexter's mind gradually turned white. what? What's this? I don't know anything about this situation... .. !

[Everyone come to your senses!]

Just then, there was a voice that seemed to pierce into his brain and awaken his mind.

[We expected attacks from three sides from the beginning! yes?]

[Lee Seong-jin... .. !]

[The center has been swept clean, so all that remains is the corridors on both sides, the boss, and attacks from three sides!]

Dexter couldn't stop talking.

No, that's not true, Seongjin Lee.

Bosses are different. AI is different. This is not a simple opponent that matches like rock, paper, scissors!

But even so, Seongjin's next words had a strange power that touched Dexter's heart.

[You just have to proceed with the defensive battle as planned! Leave everything else to me!]

299. Code Zero (4)

Uncertain factors appeared steadily from the beginning.

Crackling- Chicking-

Forgettable noise that disturbs vision, and timing that slightly deviates from expectations.

but.

'It's still within the scope of response, not yet...' ... '

Seongjin moved forward, checking the clear blueprint drawn in his mind each time.

Maybe I overdo it a bit and get scolded by my father. But in the end, if I were to take Owen out and attack him, wouldn't he be forgiven for giving me a single slap?

[Arrived!]

In this way, the group completely escaped the maze and finally arrived in front of the huge stone gate.

[This is the boss room of this dungeon, 'King's Hall.' According to the strategy book, Raigas, the orc king who built the maze, appears as the boss.]

The tightly closed stone gate was filled with ornate carvings befitting the name 'King's Hall'.

Bright golden torches were placed on both pillars supporting the door, and the elaborate relief shadows swayed as if they were struggling, drawn by the movement of the flames.

[Rigas is a boss with a fairly complex pattern for a C rank. Everyone, you remember what I explained about the Orc King, right?]

Then the silent villains quietly avoided Dexter's gaze and looked the other way.

[Hey, anyway, you can expect to be ranked, right? Passing the maze was faster than expected!]

[That was a good strategy, Dexter! Your plan is great!]

[Wait a minute, don't jump in, guys!]

However, unlike the party members who were noisy with relief, Seongjin's expression was not so good. He frowned and looked around the stone gate with a disapproving expression.

"hmm..."

Not good. From a while ago, I had a strange premonition that was getting stronger.

'It's still within the range of response, but...'

Crackling-

Just then, a strange noise sweeps through Seongjin's vision once again.

[Now that the central maze has been cleaned up, there will be more room for defense. Now, we're going to set off the trap alarm. Everyone, get ready.]

Dexter said that and walked towards the stone gate.

[Do you know where the alarm is, Dexter?]

[Of course. There are quite a few fixed alarms in front of the boss room. Just when you feel relieved that you have completely passed the maze, it is the final trap to catch the user in the back.]

[It is of very poor quality!]

[But they are already too well known to be a trap. These days, they say it's just used to check if there are any excessive mobs.]

After explaining this, Dexter placed his hand without hesitation on a gargoyle statue decorated to the right of the stone gate.

It was right then.

-Kiki kick.

A small laugh came from Seongjin's ear. It was just a faint noise, like the sound of the wind passing by, but-

'... Justitia?'

There was no way Seongjin could not recognize that unpleasant voice. A wet, faded voice of confusion followed him from the dark abyss.

Seongjin, who instantly grasped the situation, shouted.

"Hey, Dexter! for a moment... ..!"

But it was late.

At that time, Dexter had already turned the gargoyle's head completely to the side.

"huh? why?"

Dexter looks around in confusion.

Bleep!

A sharp, tearing alarm sound cut through the air.

[...] ... ?!]

Whoa!

At the same time, the surrounding torches, which had been shining gold, suddenly turned red. Even at a glance, you can tell that something is seriously wrong.

[W-what is it?]

[Dexter! It's a little strange! This doesn't seem to be a normal trap alarm!]

And then something unbelievable happened before their eyes.

Kurrrrrr...

With a heavy vibration shaking the entire dungeon, the untouched stone door to the boss room suddenly began to slowly open!

[...] ... !]

Due to the unexpected situation, everyone in the group froze in place.

[...] Why is the boss room suddenly open now?]

[The alarm pressed by Dexter was wrong?]

[Is that possible? Unless you open it directly with the key, there is no way the boss room will just open!]

Leaving the panicked party members behind, Seongjin stood still and waited for the enemy to appear. A powerful enemy arranged for him by the goddess, twisting the rules of the solid normal world.

-You who destroy the order of Pangea...

Eventually, at the completely opened entrance to the boss room, there was a huge orc standing over 5 meters tall.

Wrinkled skin symbolizing age and red eyes with a bright glow of anger. And a heavy double-edged ax slung over his shoulder.

It was the dungeon's boss, the Orc King Raigas.

Coo!

With a heavy vibration, the Orc King takes a step straight towards them. As soon as the boss room opened, it seemed like they recognized them as enemies.

-Ominous one who was once prophesied by the goddess...

thud! thud! thud!

Every time he takes a step with his heavy body, the entire dungeon shakes violently due to the recoil.

-Just as the goddess said, you ended up in front of this 'wise Raigas'!

Is this some kind of cut scene for the main story? It is a very intimidating appearance.

Every time he uttered a word in a low voice, his cold breath spread into the air and the auspicious energy grew stronger.

-You will make a clumsy excuse saying that the sins you committed were only for the sake of Pangea.

-Know the topic! The more you struggle, the more you become nothing more than an insignificant fish that pollutes the puddle...

Flash!

The Orc King's sharp gaze scans Seongjin's group.

'... That, that thing is a C rank boss?'

Dexter turned pale and took a step back without realizing it. Even though I know it's just a game, the guy's bloody energy makes my stomach tingle and my legs feel weak.

The problem was the silent villains who did not understand the Orc King's words at all.

[It's different from other dungeon bosses, isn't it? Talk to us. But why are you so angry?]

[He praised himself for being wise? It can never be wise!]

[First of all, conversation seems possible, but is it possible that they mistake us for someone else?]

The silent villains, very nervous about the unexpected situation,

exchange urgent glances and thoughts.

Since they had never properly followed the main quest before, their confusion was probably natural.

[...] The Orc King tells us the main story. According to the game settings, the user is 'Thunderstorm Bone', who was prophesied to disrupt the order of Pangea. It could be said to be a kind of anti-hero... ..]

Dexter tried to explain belatedly.

[Don't worry too much about that.]

Seongjin immediately cut him off and stepped forward. The arbitrarily set main story is something I need to know.

[That's just data that recites the given lines like a play. It doesn't matter to him who we are. So everyone, get ready to fight!]

Bingle.

The Orc King's eyes turned to the side for a moment and looked directly at Seongjin. Red eyes that are filled with extreme anger, but also show calm wisdom at the same time.

But it was truly a fleeting moment, and the Orc King, who had turned his gaze, began to recite his last lines into the air.

-I will personally take away that feeble struggle! I, wise Rygas, great lord of the orcs!

Its loud cry resounded throughout the dungeon and echoed to the other side of the maze.

-This body rejects prophecy! I'm going to fight fate!

-So hurry up and attack, Thunderstorm Bone! The one who will bring a thunderstorm and destroy this world!

Wow!

The roar it let out caused strong wind pressure, and the surrounding torches shook as if they would go out all at once.

[That guy, that... what. Attack, I said it was very complicated, right?]

It doesn't look like it's easy to deal with. Owen decided so and made an urgent suggestion.

[I heard the ax grows and shoots some kind of magic? Then, how about retreating to the central maze and attacking slowly from a distance?]

Seongjin was a little dumbfounded.

That's all you remember about the Orc King's special moves? It was clear that he had completely forgotten Dexter's detailed preliminary briefing.

[Good idea, Owen!]

[Let's go back now! It's safe!]

Hatasu Titi and Gurup agree with that opinion and quickly turn around.

But things did not go as easily as they thought.

Crrrrr...

Kuok, Kuok.

A small unit of Orcs appeared from the maze on both sides, right and left. They probably all flocked here the moment the alarm went off.

[this...]

With a sigh, the silent villains hesitated and raised their weapons. For the first time, a faint sense of despair and urgency appear in their eyes, which had never lost their composure until now.

[...] What I touched was, of course, an alarm! But why...]

Dexter, looking pale, muttered.

[No matter how much I think about it, there is no way to do this! A boss invades a tightly planned defense battle. what? What's this? I don't know anything about this situation... ... !]

These guys are saying let's see now!

[Everyone come to your senses!]

Wow!

Seongjin took a powerful step forward and shouted, aiming his beginner's sword.

[We expected attacks from three sides from the beginning! yes?]

[Lee Seong-jin... ... !]

[The center has been swept clean, so all that's left is passageways on both sides, the boss, and attacks from three sides! What is the problem?]

Oh yeah. It did. The eyes of the silent villains slowly return to their original state.

Only Dexter had a desperate expression on his face, as if pleading, but Seongjin lightly ignored the minor anxiety of the personnel other than the power.

[You just have to proceed with the defensive battle as planned! Leave everything else to me!]

At the same time, a strange silver glow lingers in Seongjin's eyes and then disappears.

[Owen, take the right side! The group is on the left! Don't leave too much distance between the two of you so you can switch attacks right away!]

Seongjin briefly referred to the group's name for the first time, but there was no way there would be any objection to this.

Owen and Group grabbed their respective weapons and quickly ran

toward the direction indicated by Seongjin.

[Dexter, you are in the center. Don't just approach and try to use the magic scroll, give instructions from the middle so those two can switch appropriately!]

Then Dexter stopped groping in his arms and answered with his chin shaking.

[Ah Okay!]

[good. TT. You take your shield and follow me.]

We'll take on the boss together.

Hatasu Titi, who clearly understood Seongjin's eyes, nodded with an ever more determined face.

* * *

The defensive battle, which was originally scheduled to involve three people, became very tight due to the absence of tanker Hatasu Titi.

Even though the central maze was completely cleaned, the gap between the mazes was too far to continue the attack and defense going back and forth between the two sides.

Especially when small units of the same type appeared on both sides at the same time, Owen and the group had to be very busy.

Plop! puck!

The group that fired fatal arrows at both sides of the longbow unit poking out through the maze's entrance lightly threw its body back and grabbed its dagger.

[Long range conditions have been resolved!]

[good! This time I take the left! I'll sweep it first, so just hang on for a moment!]

Their attacks had a great influence on compatibility, so when

necessary, the group also joined in with swords. It was thanks to the fact that the weapons he had collected to defeat the Demon King remained in his possession.

On the other hand, in the case of the Orc wizards, both troops had to be dealt with by the arrows of the group.

[I apologize! I missed two!]

[HP is low, so I'll do something! Don't worry about that, just go here and solve the conditions first! This time, this is the archer unit!]

However, if the power of a wizard was needed, the two had no other option. All I can do is wait for Seongjin to help me appropriately.

[You are the true owner of my soul!]

Whoa!

Fortunately, black smoke came out from behind them with ghostly timing every time. The strange summoned beast, writhing as if it were alive, solved the conditions for the magician's unit at once and began mercilessly pounding close-range warriors coming from different directions one after another.

Kuok! Wow!

[Newbie!]

Just dealing with the boss must have been hectic.

Owen gets worried and turns around, but the stinging yell comes right back!

[Don't worry about this, mind your own business! You idiot!]

He was a really harsh guy who told me to be careful.

[Lee Seong-jin, be careful!]

Then Hatasu Titi warned. This is because the Orc King threw a huge double-edged ax towards Seongjin.

Kuaang!

A terrifying ax throwing technique that can kill you in one hit even with a decent amount of defense. 'The Fast and the Furious' shook the entire dungeon and created a deep furrow where the baby goat was standing.

Of course, Seongjin, who had sensed the attack, had already taken evasive action.

Wow!

Seongjin lightly got down next to Hatasu Titi and gave a warning.

[5 seconds after 'Fast and Furious', that guy completely absorbs all the impact. So don't attack for no reason and increase the distance! If you are too close, those skills may explode one after another like before!]

[I understand, Seongjin Lee!]

Hatasu Titi responds obediently and widens the distance to the other side of Seongjin.

Dexter, looking at the scene, inwardly stuck out his tongue.

'What is it, that guy? 'Are you fully aware of everything I briefly briefed you on?'

Unlike the defense battle, the boss battle ended relatively simply. Since it won't stick in your mind after passing the maze anyway, I thought I'd explain it properly in front of the boss room.

But do you remember the details that passed by in seconds?

Wow!

At that time, the baby goat hits the ground again. Hatasu Titi runs after the Orc King.

but-

Boom!

His mace was thrown back violently with a faint sound.

[sorry! I was a little fast!]

[no! It was exactly 5 seconds!]

Titi's attack had no problems at all. It's just that the time gap that surrounds the Orc King is getting worse.

[Considering a slight error, I roughly calculate it to 6 seconds!]

After responding like that, Seongjin turned around the Orc King counterclockwise. Then, when there was a momentary gap, he quickly slipped into the sword strike and swung his sword.

Sigh!

The excellently executed graphics clearly revealed the long torn wound on the Orc King's ankle.

-This scum!

Whoa!

The Orc King, who was screaming, suddenly thrusts his double-edged ax in front of his chest and his eyes flash.

[Ah, the 'Ring of Wisdom'! It is a wide-range magic that takes 1.5 seconds to activate and sweeps over 180 degrees in a circle!]

Then Hatasu Titi quickly ran towards Seongjin. This quick-witted shield warrior has learned that he can avoid a fatal blow once he is near the baby goat.

Hwaaaaaaa!

At the same time, the magic ring spinning around the blade of the shield began pouring out terrifying flames like a flamethrower.

Chijijiji-

A black, semi-circular mark is etched into the dungeon floor.

And after using a magic skill, there is a brief stiffness of 0.5 seconds.

Sigh!

Seongjin, not missing the timing, powerfully plunges his sword into the guy's knee. It is an accurate attack targeting the cruciate ligaments.

Kuuouk!

Thanks to this, the Orc King, who had difficulty moving, screamed in frustration and frantically swung his double-edged ax.

[Lygas is so huge! You can't easily inflict a critical hit with a beginner's sword!]

Quang! bang!

Hatasu Titi shouted, struggling to block the ax with his shield.

[are you okay!]

Because critical hits are being judged correctly.

Seongjin answered simply and immediately kicked his feet in search of the timing for the next attack.

Boop!

'After the Ring of Wisdom is activated, the time during which no magic is applied to the weapon is approximately 9 seconds.'

Bwak bwak bwak!

Seongjin ran diligently over the swinging ax and quickly reached the guy's nose.

The Orc King was startled by his sudden approach and bit himself, but-

Oh my gosh!

Seongjin slightly twisted his body and drew long cuts around the guy's eyes.

sparkle!

The wound briefly glows a faint light, indicating that it has been judged a fatal blow again.

'The one on the left is a wizard, and the one on the right is close range.'

Meanwhile, Seongjin's senses were also diligently detecting the orcs coming from the maze.

'The delay for the wizard to switch from buff mode to attack mode is about 1.5 seconds.'

And the moment the magician unit came out of the maze, Hayes' evil spirit was summoned again to solve the 'condition'.

[O Lord! It's your name!]

Woooooo!

A creepy evil spirit shedding black tears runs towards you with a distorted smile!

The only side effect I experienced after the graphics became normal was that the guy's creepy appearance was clearly visible.

'Melee warrior recognition delay 1 second.'

And before the orc wizards' screams could even end, Hayes' evil spirit attacked the close-range unit that had been defeated by Owen.

Wow! Wow! OMG!

'The time taken for annihilation is 4 to 6 seconds.'

Seongjin, who had timed well, immediately brought Hayes back. And he charges it straight towards the Orc King.

[Let the curse of hell be upon everything that stands in the way of my

master!]

Whoa!

The orc king staggered after receiving a considerable blow from the black smoke shouting out excitedly.

Phew!

A fierce sword strike that does not miss the opportunity.

'Knockback for 3 seconds, additional damage applied during that time.'

Phew! Sigh! Phew!

The staggering Orc King wriggled and moved the forearm holding the axe. Then Seongjin quickly stepped back and thought.

'No, there are still errors, so let's keep it within 2 seconds.'

Then, he widens the distance just before he activates 'Fast and Furious' and throws haze into the maze behind him again.

[Owner of my soul!]

Sigh!

At the same time, a long, fatal sword slash lands on the legs of the pursuing Orc King.

"This is crazy... .."

Dexter, who had been watching all those scenes from the beginning, let out a soft groan without realizing it.

what? How can a human do that?

Seongjin, who thoroughly understood the brief and experienced even the slightest margin of error, looked like a precision cutting machine in Dexter's eyes.

Wow!

Meanwhile, the mountain goat that hit the ceiling was shot down at almost the same speed as an arrow.

Sigh!

A sharp sword that cuts the carotid artery.

The orc king finally fell to his knees on the floor, unable to support his heavy body due to the sword strike that was sure to be fatal.

Coo!

-why!

The orc king, drenched in blood, screams desperately.

-Why do you look at me with such pitiful eyes? Why on earth are the bugs crawling on the floor?

Then Seongjin raised the corner of his mouth and fiercely exposed his teeth.

Ugh, this twisted mass of data.

It's too bad to beat you any more, so just die now!

300

300. Code Zero (5)

Endless waves of orcs pouring out of the maze.

However, after repeated mechanical sweeps, they were left with only one last longbow unit.

[This is a group now, I'll leave it to you!]

At Owen's sudden shout, the ranger who was wielding the dagger was startled and started shaking with his arms and legs.

[What do you say? Owen! As you know, the archer unit's compatibility is close range... ..!]

[I'm almost at the bottom of my life. Group, you're pretty good at cutting, aren't you?]

[oh? for a moment! Wait, Owen!]

However, Owen was so desperate that he ran straight to the boss room, ignoring what the group said.

[Newbie! TT!]

But what awaited Owen was an unexpected sight.

The king of the giant orcs, soaked in blood, was kneeling in front of a small goat and reciting his last words.

-How could this not be deplorable, Thunderstorm Bone... ..

Its battered body was glowing faintly and becoming increasingly blurred.

-Is this inevitable? Or was it just my lack of strength? I tried to stop you by gathering all the wisdom of my clan, but the foretold wheel of fate ended up sending your star into the orbit of destruction!

Seongjin listened to those words without answering. I felt a strange sense of déjà vu from his dark, sunken eyes.

-Don't you dare be arrogant, Thunderstorm Bone. The sins you have committed and the sins you were destined to commit. All of these things never deviate even an inch from the goddess's prophecy.

[...]]

-Nevertheless, if you dare to defy God, I will gladly laugh at you! There will never be anyone more foolish than this in the world...

Unlike before, when he was screaming in pain, his tone was strangely calm.

So Seongjin asked the guy.

[Since when did you know?]

... What are you talking about?

[Don't act like a fool. You knew that your mind was going back and forth, right?]

Wasn't it like that when you first saw me, and didn't we go back and forth a few times during the battle?

As Seongjin questioned him, he looked into the right eye of the man who was barely intact. Those eyes that reminded her of the Lycan Slope Road, Nebraska, whom she once met in the labyrinth.

At the same time, a bright silver-grey glow appeared in Seongjin's eyes for a moment and then disappeared.

[It's clear that Justitia was the one who did something, but it was purely your will to rush out of the boss room that wasn't even open. Isn't that right?]

Then the Orc King blinked his eyelids a few times and brushed away the blood pooling around his eyes.

-Now what should I hide? Yes. When the alarm went off, I knew there was an enemy, so I willingly opened the door and went out to greet you. How can a person with intact limbs sit still and wait for the enemy to attack?

okay. Perhaps that would be an appropriate response. If this wasn't a normal world.

A door that does not meet the conditions is opened. Isn't that a phenomenon that completely violates the rules of this world?

Then the Orc King looked at Seongjin with a strange expression.

-Something that could never have happened happened? If you do that, isn't it all your fault in the end? Thunderstorm Bone. The one who destroys the order of Pangea and leads everything to destruction. It's just as the goddess predicted.

However, even though he was saying the same thing as the first time, there was no longer any trace of anger in the Orc King's tone.

The guy looked up into space with calm eyes and muttered.

-But this is truly strange. As I approach the end of my life, something strange happens. Things that were so clear are blurring and losing their shape, and things that were previously invisible appear so clearly before my eyes.

[...]]

-When did the goddess leave me a prophecy? In the end, what was the order of Pangea that I so desperately wanted to protect? It's all so vague now...

As he said that, his eyes twinkled. He returned to Seongjin again.

-On the other hand, Thunderstorm Bone. Now I can clearly see a different side of you. On the one hand, you are like a child who has just entered the world, and on the other hand, you are like a vicious

evil spirit who has been wandering the battlefield for a long time.

Crackling.

Just then, a small noise appeared in Seongjin's field of vision again.

-... Ah, I see!

Then, suddenly, one of the Orc King's good eyes widened in shock. Its dilated pupils began to shake violently, as if it had seen something incredible.

-okay! That's how it happens! You must be ■■■... ..

[...] what?]

Seongjin asked back later, but-

Pass... ..

It was already too late. Before he could even utter those last words, the Orc King Rygas turned into a ray of light and completely disappeared.

At the same time, a small message window appeared in front of Seongjin's eyes.

☐Your party has cleared 'The Orc King's Maze' with excellent results. Depending on the party member's contribution, certain rewards are paid differentially. Would you like to receive your reward now?☐

☐Accept/Reject☐

'... ..'

Seongjin frowned and glared at the window.

Hey, wait a minute. Are you kidding me?

I think he was just trying to tell me something important, why now? uh?

At that time, Owen, who was quietly watching from behind, quietly

placed his hand on Seongjin's shoulder.

"Don't be too discouraged. "Newbie."

"hmm? what?"

"no. "You look kind of depressed."

What kind of nonsense is this guy talking about again?

Seongjin, dumbfounded, glared at him with a sullen expression on his face, and his next words were even more shocking.

"It's okay, newbie. When I first came here, I had a lot of agony because I had to kill strangers I had no grudge against. But everyone said that. "These are not real lives."

"... .."

"It is true that the Orc King showed an unusually vivid reaction, but that does not mean that the mobs in the dungeon are alive. Next time you go in, the same guy will show up just fine, right? So don't feel too sorry about it."

Seongjin was dumbfounded by the guy's unexpected consolation.

What does this mean all of a sudden? Is there anyone who doesn't know that? Have you ever seen such a no-nonsense guy?

Seongjin's absurd feelings were reflected in his fingertips.

Wow!

"What!?"

Owen suddenly gets hit with an unexpected blow and rolls around on the floor. After a while, he gathered himself together and protested with a very hurt face.

"no! Why are you hitting me again? "What did I do wrong this time?"

"Who are you giving advice to now? "Stop talking nonsense and mind your own business from now on!"

"What? Who is really giving advice now? Newbie, since when have you been nagging me like that... .."

Owen shouted and suddenly felt his anger subside.

It's not just because of the cute hooves proudly sticking out in front of them.

Even if I try to repay Takbam, the mountain goat in front of me is a bit small. Moreover, isn't his defense the worst among the party members?

"I'm so nervous about this that I can't even hit him."

Of course, Seongjin snorted in response.

"It's something to live for a long time. "There are people in the world who take such slow punches?"

"what? Live long? "Where did this little bastard get such arrogance from?"

"Who is the kid? Man, do you really know who this old man is?"

"You like the elderly! If you are an elderly person, I am an elderly grandfather!"

Meanwhile, Hatasu Titi and Gurup smiled happily as they looked at the two.

[The young people seem to become friends really quickly. I guess it's because they're from the same neighborhood, right?]

[Evaluate positively! This is very helpful for team morale!]

Of course, it was a misunderstanding that occurred because I could not understand what Seongjin and Owen were saying at all. Because the two were in the midst of arguing in the imperial language.

Right then.

[hey! Everyone, check this out!]

Dexter, who was manipulating the window by himself, suddenly shouted in a very excited voice.

[Can you believe this? Our party is now in first place in the entire server time challenge! That's an overwhelming time difference from second place! We did it!]

* * *

That day, Seongjin and his group decided to close the connection a little early.

Originally, they had planned to run straight to the B-rank dungeon, but everyone was feeling very tired due to the tension caused by several unexpected events.

Dexter readily agreed to this. This is because various minor frictions arose with the strategy he thought was perfect.

In particular, we had to accurately investigate the situation where the boss room was suddenly opened.

Even if it passes this time, if an accident like this happens again in a higher-level dungeon, everyone's lives cannot be guaranteed.

[Besides, our record will not be broken any time soon.]

Dexter looked at the ranking window that opened in front of him with a very proud face.

[It was a benefit that the boss room suddenly opened. Because it was like a defense battle and a boss battle at the same time.]

You can press the alarm and come back, or run to avoid the alarm like Seongjin and his group. No party will get through the maze as quickly as they do.

Plus, there was a boss fight right away. If things continued like this, this time challenge would probably remain as a timeless record in the history of Pangea.

[The reward for first place in the time challenge is indeed different.

The results are better than running through a dungeon all day.]

[I agree. Hurry up and take these back!]

The silent villains were also very excited.

Except Owen, of course.

"It's a newbie. Do you have to go too? "If there's nothing urgent, can you just hang out with me?"

Seongjin looked at the big guy who was acting uncharacteristically pitiful with a puzzled look.

Hey, I'm busy.

"If you want to play more games, play alone."

"But Sang Chang-chang does not leave guest ID users alone. "If everyone leaves, it's obvious that I will also get kicked out."

"Then why don't you rest early today?"

Then Owen muttered with a sullen face.

"Oh, I don't like it. "If things continue like this, the dream will definitely be fierce."

"... ... ?"

It was a reaction that bothered me, but the issue at hand was too important to listen to his whining.

Not only because of the several unexpected accidents, but also because the words Justitia had told him earlier kept ringing in his head.

-You won't be able to shake it off. □□□ □□. Justitia has already melted into the atmosphere of this place and can no longer be undone.

Crackling. Chick.

After leaving the dungeon, the noise frequency also became more frequent. He can never feel it, but perhaps that irritating thing is trying to cling to him again.

"It's a newbie. huh? huh?"

"Oh, kinda!"

After Seongjin managed to separate the grown child who was struggling and clinging to him, he hinted to Dexter.

"Hey, let's hurry to the workshop. "I have something I need to discuss with you."

301

301. Code Zero (6)

The moment I felt strongly that I needed to wake up, the connection to Pangea Chronicle was easily terminated.

[hmm? What, you came back early today?]

When I opened my eyes in bed, the devil gave me a rare welcome sound. It looks like he was quite bored while alone.

But Seongjin didn't have time to deal with him right now. As I lifted the silver disk heading straight to the workshop, the Demon King muttered sullenly.

[Well, that's right. you are good I always go out to fun places alone...
... .]

No, I'm not playing. You just go and do what you have to do.

And even if you found out what kind of disgusting guy I met earlier, would you be able to say something like that easily?

'... Should I ask the chef if he has any bear meat left?'

But instead of scolding the guy, Seongjin said something outrageous. Perhaps it was because I had direct contact with his soul, but his lonely mood was conveyed without any filtering.

[What? really? good!]

Fortunately, the Demon King's mood shows a sharp upward curve.

[Bear meat~ Bear meat~ Bear meat with a strong aroma and fiery taste~]

'... ... !'

You've eaten so much, aren't you sick of it? Such a simple guy.

Anyway, Seongjin, who was internally relieved, hurriedly operated the key and opened the portal.

"Wow, you came quickly."

When we arrived at the workshop, Dexter had already come out of the dive capsule and was turning on his laptop.

"So what? "Is this something you need to discuss carefully with me?"

Instead of answering, Seongjin pointed to his laptop with his chin.

"Ah, yes. Time error compared to the guidebook. "I thought I should look into it a little more closely."

Dexter's expression was quite serious as he said that.

"It was a problem that the boss room was just opened, but there were too many other small timing errors. Due to the way the Homunculus Engine operates, once a user logs in, there can be absolutely no lag. But there were so many strange things today."

"It's not just about time, is it?"

At Seongjin's point, the dwarf engineer asked with wide eyes.

"what?"

"The detection range of close-range warriors increased, and there was a fairly large error in the range of archers. "The orc wizard even tried to cast impossible high-level magic on low-level monsters."

That's because the evil spirit Hayes destroyed them all before casting.

"It's not just time, Dexter. "Everything was a mess, from the physical distance to the level and door opening and closing conditions."

Fortunately, just as Seongjin had predicted, it was all within a range that could be responded to, so no major damage was suffered.

If it had been any other party than theirs, they would have inevitably been wiped out.

"... Yes, that's right. "There are those too."

Dexter, who was nodding his head, asked a bit absurdly.

"But no matter how I think about it, it's amazing. "How did you catch all of that?"

"What are you talking about all of a sudden? "You told me the strategy in detail at the beginning, right?"

"No, but..."

Are you memorizing it all?

Dexter looked at him with a skeptical look, but Seongjin easily ignored such unimportant suspicions.

"So what? "The 'Thunderstorm Bone' the Orc King was talking about."

"Ah, yes. There was something strange about the boss from earlier too. "Then shall we start from there?"

Dexter displayed the Pangea Chronicle main screen with a shocked expression on his face. It was a screen showing the goddess Justitia, standing majestically with her eyes covered by a cloth, appearing in the foreground.

The illustration stands out with the golden window and long blonde hair that are familiar to Seongjin.

"Thunderstorm Bone, as explained before, refers to a 'user.' An anti-hero who destroys the long-standing order and brings about the destruction of the world. Well, it is a setting that ultimately brings a new order and prosperity to the world."

"It's not that fresh."

Dexter nodded at Seongjin's honest impressions.

"That's right. In fact, Pangea Chronicles is a game that has nothing special if you look at its content. "The main story is so-so, and the worldview is a mass-produced game made up of things you've probably seen before."

Since it is the only online game made with the Homunculus engine, it differentiates itself from other games by providing an unprecedented sense of play.

Isn't this the same as creating an actual normal world? As a result, it will provide users with a vivid sense of reality without any room for 3D motion sickness.

"This is also the case with the goddess Justitia, the most important setting in this game. "He is an old-fashioned character who has caused concern several times in the past in games released by Impulse Soft."

"It's inevitable since the game director is the same," Dexter added.

Click, click, click.

After he clicked on the site a few times, a site introducing classic RPG games appeared before Seongjin's eyes. But really, there was a clumsy drawing of Justitia made up of dots!

"Chronicles of Astria?"

"It's another name for Justitia. Starting with Part 1, 'The Call of the Goddess', to Part 8, 'Astria of Darkness'. "It's a popular game that launched a fairly long series."

"Hmm."

Seongjin caught his eye for a moment on the title of the last episode, 'Astria of Darkness'.

"The same goes for 'Thunderstorm Born', which refers to users. Traces of similar games remain. "If you think about it, the monsters and dungeons, as well as the kingdoms and place names on the world map, are nothing more than slightly modified versions of previous games."

In addition, there is a system where you can collect NPCs and use them as subordinates, or a mini card game that can be played in a tavern.

All types of popular games were installed in the Pangea Chronicle system, with some modifications.

There were many people who were clearly sarcastic about that point.

Among the sites that Dexter shows in passing, one picture that someone posted as a joke stands out.

A scene from another game where a warrior wearing a bone helm is engulfed in flames and shouts 'Perstard Los!' And below that, an image of Thunderstorm Bone yelling 'Mustard sauce!' while caught in a thunderstorm is synthesized like a meme.

"If there are many similar things to this extent..."

As Seongjin trails off with a not-so-good feeling, Dexter also nods as if he understands.

"okay. You might be right. "Maybe this isn't just a borrowing, but a game that actually exists."

okay. Why not?

The Homunculus Engine is a system specialized in taking sources from other worlds and transforming them to suit one's taste. In that case, there was nothing strange about using an already existing game as is.

-This world was forced to wake up from its egg before it was ready. So, to make up for the ridiculously weak tone, numerous rules were added in a disorderly manner. In such great chaos, the distortion of the world eventually arose.

Suddenly, the words that Justitia had uttered like a lament appeared in Seongjin's mind. Did you mean it was literally a game of randomness?

"I had a deep suspicion that it would be so. "This won't be a game

made through a normal planning process."

According to Dexter's explanation, it was so.

After the Homunculus engine porting was completed, the time interval between the actual Pangea Chronicle being officially serviced was too short.

"Can you guess how many people and how much work it takes to make one game? There is only one way to reduce that time. "We use old games as sources and put them all together with the Homunculus engine."

hmm.

Seongjin looked at the laptop screen and opened his mouth.

"But everything is just our guess. "Is there any way to definitely prove that?"

"well? Originally, this would have been unknown to anyone other than Impulse Soft insiders... .."

After muttering that, Dexter got up from his seat and approached one side of the workshop. In front of the [Homunculus Engine Editor], which was destroyed once before.

"But we have guest ID users and source editors! First, wouldn't it be a good idea to use an editor to analyze some of the items you stole from the game? "If anything comes from another game, traces of it will definitely remain in the source code."

"... Does that work?"

When I asked while looking at the tattered crystal boards that still couldn't find their place, Dexter frowned as if he was offended.

An engine editor that can be said to be the culmination of the Ionian civilization. Since Seongjin was the one who directly caused its destruction, his suspicions don't seem to be very pleasant.

"I just took a quick look. Even if editing is impossible, it is possible to

read the source code, right?"

"Well, okay. good."

Then there's something appropriate.

Seongjin searched his pockets and took out several items he had acquired from the Pangea Chronicle. It was several types of binding potions and a small leftover fish cake.

"... Are you saying you are the son of a noble family? But how can you easily put this kind of unidentified food in your mouth?"

Dexter accepted the fish cake with teeth marks with an embarrassed expression.

"Even though I'm a picky eater, I'm not a picky eater."

"No, picky eating isn't the problem... "Anyway, what is left over after eating?"

"I feel fortunate that there is at least something left to analyze. "I enjoyed it quite a bit, but for some reason I felt like I shouldn't eat it all, so I ended up leaving it behind."

"... .."

Dexter looked very shocked at Seongjin's confident answer.

But in the end, it turned out that Seongjin's premonition was correct. Dexter, who had wasted all the binding potions, reluctantly pretended to be fooled and found something in the fish cake he analyzed!

"also! Seongjin Lee, come here and take a look at this!"

The following text appeared on the screen he analyzed:

□High Grade 2*8d# Fish Cake #% Warm Snack Shop□

□Item grade: B□

□Price: 2 Diamonds□

□*Current server cannot be checked.□

Price 2 diamonds?

"what? "Isn't this an item description from Pangea Chronicle?"

To Seongjin's question, Dexter answered in a very excited voice.

"of course! For items transformed by the Homunculus Engine, the essence of the source is changed, and the previous information comes to the forefront! "It's like molting and the remaining shell remains on the surface!"

In other words, this fish cake is really a sauce from another game.

And soon, through an Internet search, they were able to confirm that a restaurant management simulation called 'Warm Snack Restaurant' was released by the same company.

"This is a great discovery, Seongjin Lee! Indeed, many of the items in Pangea Chronicle may come from other games! Then, even for rare items, as long as you find the original source... .."

Then Dexter suddenly chewed his tongue as if he had been stabbed in the back.

"hmm? what?"

"why?"

"No, wait... .."

And Dexter started searching the Internet as if he was possessed by something.

"I feel strangely uncomfortable. I feel like we're forgetting something important... .."

"what?"

Then, Dexter soon showed Seongjin a user bulletin board.

"Do you feel anything when you see this?"

Coincidentally, the place was plastered with posts from all kinds of users crying in search of rare job change items.

-Where can I find the 3rd job change item? π π

-Information on the former essential item, Ice Heart

-Ice Heart Auction House Price

'... 'Ice heart?'

Naturally, the information about the ice heart he had been fiddling with with Dexter vividly appeared in Seongjin's mind.

□ Glacier Troll's Ice Heart □

□ A new item obtained from the Gerardu Valley dungeon boss, the Glacher Troll King. You can set the activity conditions of the registered entity and give commands with simple sentences. □

□ Item grade: A □

□ *Currently unable to check Northland server. □

"No, but that was source material for a completely different game? So what about the Northland server..."

And while Seongjin continued speaking, he realized something.

ah! Source for other games!

"Back in the early days of this company..."

Dexter opened his mouth with a trembling voice.

"We once released a free mini-game. "If I remember correctly, the integrated server at that time was probably 'Northland.'"

And the game title popped up on the screen.

A simple illustration of a giant ape fighting a white yeti-like monster.

-Kong: Jurassic Island

"Lee Seong-jin... .."

The dwarf engineer looked up at Seongjin with shaking eyes.

"What on earth did we do with that rare transfer item?"

302

302. Code Zero (7)

"Ahhh... .."

The dwarf engineer, who was holding his head and fidgeting, sat down and lamented.

"I should have quit when I thought the data was strangely heavy compared to the functionality. Or maybe I should have analyzed it more properly then... .."

Stop being blinded by milestones!

Seongjin asked, looking blankly at Dexter, who was completely panicked.

"But what does it have to do with us that the Ice Heart is a former item?"

"Are you saying that now?! "We have made all the items that are causing shortages around the world unusable!"

Why is that? Isn't it a game anyway?

What Seongjin was worried about was something else.

'Besides me and the silent villains, there are more people who can extract items from the Pangea Chronicle to reality!'

What that fact meant was obvious.

In Pangea Chronicle, there may be other Guest ID users they don't know about. Or, someone directly involved in creating the game may have used some kind of method.

-Have you ever thought carefully about why there is a limit to the number of people entering the themed dungeon, and why the number of guest ID users has never exceeded three?

Assuming that Justitia's words are true, the possibility leans towards the latter. The problem is that whoever it was, it has a deep connection to the demon who attacked Sigismund.

While Seongjin was deep in thought, Dexter jumped up from his seat and shouted.

"Do you not understand this situation? Let alone the crisis in operating the game, think about the losses we have suffered right now! "By playing a prank that doesn't work out, you're destroying something that can't even be valued in money!"

Considering the worldwide popularity that Pangea Chronicle is currently enjoying, it is impossible to know how much the price of the Ice Heart will skyrocket in cash. Maybe it will reach astronomical numbers.

Because there are more people in this world who are more serious about games than you think.

"hmm."

Seongjin crossed his arms and thought for a moment.

A refrigerator for the salmon business and a Sisley teddy bear. And a heart of ice that might sell for a huge price.

"What the hell is the problem? I think I went to the right place and got my money's worth, right? "If necessary, I would have paid money to make them."

"Aaaah!"

Dexter, who had been stamping his feet in frustration, eventually began tapping on the keyboard with a determined look on his face.

"It won't work!" I should at least contact an engineer I used to know! I'm sure the phone number is here somewhere... .."

"oh."

Well, it's rather strange that you can't make phone calls when the Internet is available.

-Dexter! Where have you been hiding for the past few years and are you finally contacting me now? No, rather, do you know what time it is?

After continuing a loud conversation with someone for a while, Dexter hung up the phone with a very despondent look on his face.

"It's ruined. They say that unless at least one person completes a job change, the Ice Heart will no longer appear."

"why? "Can't the game company just arbitrarily increase the drop rate?"

In response to Seongjin's innocent question, Dexter shook his head.

"It's not that simple. Because Pangea Chronicle is an independent dimension that functions alone. Things that have many variables to consider, such as the amount of currency or monster item drop rates, are completely left up to the system by the game company."

The same goes for the first and second job changes. The system is said to have carefully reviewed the game's floating population and job change achievement rates and increased the number of job change items within an appropriate range.

Preventing oversupply is probably the most important factor in extending the lifespan of a game.

"For items released on the server for the first time, it is important to have an indicator to understand the 'initial consumption speed.'

"Maybe the Ice Heart is stuck there right now."

The initial consumption rate plays a critical role in helping the system determine the demand for an item. So, if no previous cases appear, it may be concluded that there is no demand for ice hearts at all.

"In other words, unless someone consumes the previous item in the future, new items may be difficult to drop."

"hmm... .."

Seongjin thought to himself, remembering the ice heart he had luckily kept secretly.

'So then what I have now could be the one and only heart of ice?'

In this situation, even if you change jobs safely, you will still get everyone's attention. If I were to hand it over to Owen, I might have to be a little careful.

"Anyway, what on earth is your mother doing? Did they really not know that important items were leaking out? If things continue like this, we won't be able to avoid criticism that the game operation is a mess... .."

To Dexter, who was muttering worriedly, Seongjin said something.

"If you're that worried, you can just contact me."

"... huh?"

"Call your mother now. "Is it possible?"

"what? No, that's true, but... .."

He was startled, but immediately shook his head sullenly.

"Is it really necessary? You're not anyone else, you're my mother. "I'm sure you can handle it on your own without me."

Well, guess what?

There are people in this world who, regardless of their abilities, receive great comfort just by saying that they will not be left alone.

However, since Dexter looked very distraught with his head down, Seongjin did not offer him any further advice.

"By the way, I also got a clue about using other game sources from a

colleague. "This is also a crucial reason why the company cannot directly control the item drop rate."

After a while, Dexter regained his energy and opened his mouth.

"I didn't go into detail because it was confidential, but it seems that during the game's development, the higher-ups suddenly and ignorantly urged us to hasten the release."

Thanks to this, game directors and engineers were able to create games in a hurry using all available sources.

However, as I crammed in as much sauce as I could get my hands on, the finished Pangea Chronicle ended up looking like a giant pot of spaghetti.

"The cord is so twisted? "It is said that the development team has already passed the stage where they need to take action, and that the system is somehow resolving its own errors."

Dexter, who was scratching his bushy beard, paused for a moment before continuing.

"At least in my opinion, as someone who was somewhat involved in engine development, there is only one technical way to solve this situation."

"what is that?"

"It is an expedient way to grant 'Code Zero' authority to the system control AI."

Code zero? What is that again?

To Seongjin, who still didn't understand, Dexter added with a serious face.

"The most mysterious code in the Homunculus Engine. "It is the authority called 'God's domain.'"

* * *

Numbering zero.

A strange code called 'Code Zero' among engineers.

Perhaps only Oracle, who first designed the Homunculus Engine, truly understands the exact identity of Code Zero.

In any case, Dexter recalled, Ionian engineers handled the code with great care.

Beings that humans can never control, or mysterious things beyond the scope of perception. Engineers used to assign zero codes with unique IDs only to these items.

"The game system and GM's numbering are unique. Numbering Zero is the strongest code that surpasses its authority. In other words, 'Code Zero' can also be called 'God's code.'"

God's code.

The resonance of that word was not simple.

"It's clear. In order to run so many randomly twisted codes without any problems, you need powerful authority that surpasses the authority of everything else. If not, Pangea Chronicles would have been recorded as the most buggy game in the world by now."

No, what are all the bugs? It wouldn't have worked properly from the beginning.

Leaving behind Dexter, who was hesitating, Seongjin slowly rubbed his chin and thought.

-Even I, the administrator of the world, cannot avoid the conditions that have already been established.

Justitia said so.

That means that the goddess herself is the system that manages the Pangea Chronicle.

-It is another Justitia born in great chaos. Zara has become the law of

this world in itself.

He also said that the unpleasant drowned body was born in chaos and became the law of this world just like himself.

This is what made all of this possible.

'God's code.'

Seongjin made up his mind right away.

"I'll have to ask my father about this first."

"... what?"

Then Dexter asked with a dumbfounded look on his face.

"Who is your father and why do you ask such questions?"

"What is it?"

My father is a man who knows nothing in the world. He is truly the representative of God!

When Seongjin responded proudly, Dexter stared at him with the eyes of a crazy fanatic who could not be saved.

what? why? what?

"... No, just. Because it's fascinating. "Is a father someone you can rely on that much?"

"Teach me everything and give me strength. "Aren't all parents like that?"

Then Dexter made a sour face.

"well? I grew up in a single-mother household. And although my mother was a great person, she didn't always give me an easy answer when I asked her something."

Dexter's mother, Matilda, would ask him this every time he asked him something.

Dexter. Have you done the best research you can before asking me a question? Have you first guessed the context in which the question arose and checked the assumptions you made? Have you looked for enough information in books and on the Internet?

"... "It was a very rigorous education."

"Of course, this doesn't mean that my mother's education policy is necessarily bad. Her home education must have had a big influence on my growth into a recognized engineer. But I still think like this sometimes."

And Dexter raised his head and stared at the machines in the workshop with slightly faint eyes.

"Was I so unreliable that I worried that I would keep finding the easy way out?"

"... .."

"Couldn't you have just given me an answer, at least once, as if giving me a reward?"

Seongjin looked at the sullen face of the dwarf engineer.

An emotion he has never experienced and therefore cannot properly understand. There is no way words of comfort can come out hastily.

Before he even realized it, a clumsy suggestion came out of Seongjin's mouth.

"Dexter. Would you like to come visit Delcross? "At least my father would try to give you some kind of easy answer to your question."

Then Dexter looked back at Seongjin with an absurd expression on his face.

"what? "What do I have to ask a Delcrossian?"

"Well, guess what? "If you find out who my father is, you'll think differently, right?"

And Seongjin carefully revealed the secret in his ear.

-Actually, my father is the Oracle of Kornsheim. He is the one and only person who can create milestones that you dream of meeting.

"... ..?"

At first, the dwarf engineer did not readily understand what was being said.

But after a while, astonishment slowly spread from Dexter's face as he realized the meaning.

* * *

Quang!

When the door suddenly opened and Prince Mores came out, Haven, who had been dozing off, suddenly got up from his seat.

"... Lowering?"

What is happening all of a sudden in the wee hours of the morning?

But before he could properly ask-

"Uh, Lord Haven. Are you on duty tonight? Good luck then."

Prince Mores didn't even pay attention to what he said and quickly ran down the hallway.

"Um, my name?"

Haven, who was standing dumbfounded, only realized the situation after the prince's presence had completely disappeared and became pale.

"Lowering!?" "Where are you going alone this early in the morning, leaving your escort behind?"

No, isn't he now someone who freely uses Auror concealment? You may have to consider yourself lucky that you went out to visit.

Haven, who became impatient, hurriedly ran to Lord Masain's room. He was a nobleman who lived with the prince most of the time to protect him and even had his own room in Jinju Palace.

"Lord Masaine! Sir Masaine!"

When Haven knocks on the door, the door is immediately opened with greetings.

As a senior knight about to become a Dekaron Knight, he seemed to have noticed the approaching presence of Haven even from afar.

"What's going on, Lord Haven?"

"Lord Masaine! You, you have disappeared! "He suddenly opened the door and ran somewhere, but he was moving so fast that I couldn't even ask him where he was!"

"... .."

Lord Masain's face hardens.

However, he was well aware of the prince's skills, so fortunately he did not criticize Haven excessively for his mistakes.

"Where were you headed?"

"I'm not sure because he disappeared so quickly, but he's probably heading towards the northeast... .."

Then, a faint light of relief appeared in the eyes of the driver who was assessing the direction.

"Then you probably went to the main palace. Don't worry too much. "If he was heading to a really dangerous place, he would definitely have sneaked out without being noticed by you."

yes? Is that how it works?

While Haven was dumbfounded, Sir Masaine soon calmly began to arm himself.

"Good job. "I will take you to the training hall, so you can report to your superiors and change shifts on time."

Crash.

Lastly, Lord Masain, wearing the faintly golden Mysra, took a long stride and disappeared right before Haven's eyes.

"her..."

At his unexpected reaction, Haven stood there for a moment and gaped.

'That guy has changed a lot too. When I first came here, I think I acted carelessly when it came to the prince. I mean, people have suddenly become that calm.'

Anyway, I thought it would be a big surprise, but it's a good thing. Haven felt relieved and headed to the knight's quarters.

But his peace did not last long. After all, the head of security that day was Sir Maria, who was known for being strict.

"You idiot! So now you're telling me you left your guard over to Sir Martha and just came back?! You bastard, won't you come to your senses? huh!?"

'... Well then. There's no way I can just get over it.'

Haven, who suddenly received a cheer at the dorm, sighed as if the ground was sinking.

303

303. Demon King No. 2 (1)

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who ran out of Jinju Palace, quickly arrived in front of the main palace. This is because he increased his speed by swinging his aura to his heart's content.

[what's the matter? What's happening all of a sudden, Seongjin Lee?]

The demon king was embarrassed and asked several times, but Seongjin's heart was so anxious that he couldn't answer properly. Because there were a lot of things that needed to be discussed with Seonghwang right away.

-father! Looks like Owen is caught up in something strange! As we wait and see, the increasing level of danger seems to be the influence of something called 'God's code'. What should I do? Would it be better to just get Owen out?

-ah! But something really strange happened earlier. I was captured by something I don't know if it was a goddess named Justiti or her system, but suddenly Demon King No. 2 appeared there! It is clearly a normal world, but flames could also exist. Just like that [niche] from before! What happened?

-really! By the way, Dad, do you remember the dwarf engineer you met at the old man's workshop a while ago? This is a friend named Dexter. Is it okay if I bring him to Delcross? It's because I find it fascinating. If he can come here, he will definitely be of great help to the empire in the future!

However, the moment I arrived and looked at the dark view of the main palace, I realized something.

'Oops! It's dawn now!'

I was so anxious that I didn't even think about the visiting time.

"... "Your Majesty Mores?"

"What are you doing without an escort at this hour?"

The knights of the Royal Guard were on high alert, but soon realized the identity of the visitor and asked in confusion.

"... .."

Seongjin, who was at a loss for an answer, hesitated for a moment whether to go back. This would have been the case if one of the attendants had not suddenly approached him.

"I was waiting for you to come, Your Majesty Mores."

Seongjin was greeted with polite courtesy by a tall servant whom he had never seen before.

"What about you?"

"My name is Raphael, sir. "At this time, I am assisting His Majesty the Holy Emperor on behalf of the Chief Chamberlain."

Well, old Louis won't be able to stay by Seonghwang's side all day.

"Go ahead and eat it. "Your Majesty is waiting."

I went up to the second floor with Raphael's guidance, and fortunately, the office was brightly lit. And Seonghwang was sitting in his office waiting for him as usual.

"Mores."

"... .."

Seeing that neat appearance as usual, Seongjin forgot to say hello and inadvertently asked a question.

"No, what are you doing if you're not sleeping at this hour?"

Then Seonghwang looked at him blankly, tilted his head to one side

as if he was a little puzzled, and asked a question.

"Weren't you looking for me at this hour?"

"... .."

Does this mean that he was simply waiting for his arrival?

Seongjin was speechless for a moment.

'In Delcross... ..'

In this dimension, there are people who are willing to welcome you even if you knock on their door unexpectedly.

Seongjin, who had been dumbfounded for a moment out of strange emotion, came to his senses when Seonghwang made a quick gesture and approached him.

Wow.

With the pouring out of divine power, the fatigue of the whole body is relieved and fatigue comes. Only then did Seongjin realize that her condition was not that good.

I was so excited that I forgot about it for a while, but today I had a really hard time going through the dungeon and got bitten by something that looked like a leech.

Tuk.

When the treatment was over, I felt a shock to my forehead that was difficult to even call it a shock.

"... ..?"

As I looked at Seonghwang in confusion, Seonghwang lightly tapped Seongjin on the forehead again and spoke.

"He may seem a little immature to you, but he is still your senior, Mores. "Do you think you can use it without using your hands like that?"

"... ... !"

"Since that child has shown generosity in willingly forgiving your rudeness, you should also respect that child."

Seongjin felt a little dispirited.

Oh yeah. Of course my father knows. There was no need to rush like this, right?

"But am I mistaken? "Father, do you somehow feel refreshed?"

Then a firm answer comes back.

"Not like that. "Of course, it's your mistake."

"but..."

"No, Mores."

"ah... yes."

Seongjin gave him a suspicious look, but Seonghwang politely tilted his chin and pretended not to see him.

"Sit down."

As soon as I sat down, as if he had been waiting, Raphael appeared with warm tea.

Rattling.

Although it was not comparable to the Chief Chamberlain, his Melbourne was also very good.

After taking a couple of sips of the fragrant tea, Seongjin soon felt the excitement from earlier subsiding.

"I'm so sorry for interrupting your rest at such a time, Dad."

"No, it's okay. "There was probably something he wanted to ask me urgently."

"Uh, yes. That's right."

Seongjin nodded, feeling a little moved for no reason.

-Couldn't you have just given an answer, at least once, as if giving a prize?

Even though Dexter said so.

Look at this, Dexter. My father is a man who willingly accepts questions from his children even in the wee hours of the morning!

"Your father already knew that Owen was guided by the State Window, right?"

When Seongjin asked a question with a strange sense of satisfaction, Seonghwang slowly nodded.

"How could you not know? "He told me directly before he left."

Oh, it was like that.

Seongjin also heard from Dasha the story of Owen running away from home.

-Father, Soja is trying to become stronger with the power of this status window. So, unfortunately, I will have to leave my father and brothers and sisters for a while.

By the way, did you really say that out loud to your father? Owen, isn't this guy even more screwed up than you think?

It seems like those thoughts were clearly expressed on his face. Seonghwang looked at Seongjin with slightly stern eyes.

"Remember, Mores. "That boy is your senior."

"Ah yes."

Seongjin answered hesitantly, paused for a moment, and then continued.

"Then, the milestone that Owen has, is that something left by his

grandmother?"

Then Seonghwang obediently said yes again.

"okay. I gave the sign to his mother and personally blessed the newborn Owen."

"Then what about others? Pangea Chronicle, there are other people called Guest ID users. "They all have their own signposts from the Oracle."

"It's probably someone else's milestone. "For some reason, it must have been left behind by previous Oracles."

After answering like that, Seonghwang rested his chin and thought for a moment before continuing.

"Normally, there are not many milestones that one oracle can create. Although he was also a strong oracle, he only left three milestones in his life. "Mores, don't you know better where each of them is?"

Seongjin nodded.

Seongjin and Amelia's broken milestones. And Owen's milestone, the only one left intact. There were three in total.

"Opportunities are limited. Therefore, oracles always create milestones with important and clear goals. If those milestones remain even after death, it is because the future that the oracle who created them foresaw and sought to prepare for has not yet arrived."

"... .."

Hatasu Titi, and Gurreupppwalapgurureub Bipyelleup.

This probably means that they were all arranged in advance by an oracle of Kornsim in an unknown past.

Seongjin tilted his head.

"What is the purpose of bringing them into the Pangea Chronicle now?"

"Well, that's fine. At present, it is difficult to fully understand what the Oracle of the long past was thinking. one... .."

Seonghwang, who had said that far, slowly raised one corner of his mouth.

"If he was a proper oracle, he would at least not have tried to make arrangements against my will."

"... .."

Seongjin, who felt a creepy feeling for a moment, trembled and thought.

This guy laughs really scary sometimes. Have you never once in your life heard someone laugh so viciously?

[...] Who are you saying that to now?]

At that time, a low muttering sound comes from Seongjin's head. He was a devil bastard who never opened his mouth when he was with the Holy Emperor.

'... Hey, devil? 'What are you talking about all of a sudden?'

[...]]

However, the Demon King once again locked himself inside the flame crystal and kept his mouth shut.

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

'I'm going to see all these boring guys...''

Seongjin grumbled internally and continued asking questions to Seonghwang.

"Are you saying that Grandmother arranged the future for Owen?"
"Why?"

A signpost that shows the path Oracle must take.

Just three chances to change the future. But why did she leave a

milestone for her godson, not Seonghwang or anyone else?

Then Seonghwang looked at Seongjin blankly for a moment.

"I cannot fully understand the deep meaning of Eomamama. "One thing is certain."

"What is that?"

"If something were to happen to Owen, Mores, wouldn't you do whatever it takes to protect the child?"

"No, well... .."

Embarrassed, Seongjin pouted his mouth shyly.

Of course, there are many things I dislike about him, and the more I look at him, the more foolish he becomes. Still, it's not like I have no intention of helping the people of Seonghwangga.

"So, the arrangement for that child is ultimately an arrangement for you as well as an arrangement for me."

"hmm."

Right. It seems that my wise grandmother decided to take care of the poor boy instead of my busy father.

Seongjin came to that conclusion clearly.

"But there's still something I don't understand. The Pangea Chronicle that I experienced, that is, the normal world that Owen got caught up in. "Unlike the normal world, it was a very unstable and dangerous place, father."

"okay. "It seems like that."

In the eyes of Seonghwang, who answered calmly, a faint silver glow lingered for a moment and then disappeared.

Maybe now, in his eyes, he can really see the various incidents that Seongjin and Owen went through. Seongjin continued asking

questions with such strange confidence.

"Then what is the real reason Grandmother dragged Owen there? He said he needed to find something important, but the status window didn't give him a specific way to get it."

"... .."

"That's why I have this suspicion. Perhaps the purpose of the status window is not to focus on items, but simply to keep Owen in the Pangea Chronicle for as long as possible. And father... .."

After pausing for a moment, Seongjin looked directly at Seonghwang and asked the question he had really wanted to ask from the beginning.

"Don't you already know that, father? So even though Owen is wandering around such a dangerous place, you are just leaving him alone, right?"

Seonghwang then looked at Seongjin with a strange expression, and then slowly lowered his eyes without answering.

Seongjin was confident about this.

Yes, this gentleman's silence is positivity.

"... "There are two reasons why I leave the imperfect normal world alone."

After a while of silence, Seonghwang finally opened his mouth quietly.

"First, unless the safety of Delcross is greatly threatened, I cannot step forward and interfere with other dimensions first."

"... "It's an agreement."

Seongjin immediately pointed out what he had not said.

Of course, that doesn't mean it's literally impossible. Isn't he the type of person who can create new dimensions whenever he puts his mind

to it?

This is probably a strict restriction from the 'Council of Six' to not carelessly interfere with other dimensions unless there is a proper cause and effect.

Seongjin's words seemed to be correct, and Seonghwang continued without further comment.

"And the second thing, Owen, is because he unconsciously wants it."

"... yes?"

Seongjin blinked at that unexpected answer.

"He wants it? He's putting himself in danger?"

"Is that possible? "Owen just wants to lose his mind in the normal world."

Seonghwang shook his head bitterly and continued.

"If you don't, you'll never be able to sleep properly."

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304. Demon King No. 2 (2)

"One day there was a very large fire in Rohan. "Most of the buildings are made of wood, and with the long drought, the damage is said to have grown out of control."

Seongjin also heard about it from Dasha. A nobleman's estate was completely burned down.

At the time, Rohan's ambassador said that he had accused Owen of arson.

"Luckily, Owen, who happened to be outside the territory at that time, escaped the attack. However, she lost both of her parents in a fire. Perhaps that is why, even after she entered the imperial palace and became stable, she was unable to sleep properly."

Owen had openly said that he was not his biological son, but neither Seonghwang nor Seongjin paid any attention to that.

"... "I have nightmares about that time."

I could guess the reason right away. Didn't Owen say that to Seongjin before terminating the connection?

-Oh, I don't like it. If things continue like this, the dream will definitely be wild.

I wondered why the grown-up was suddenly whining in an unusual way, but it seemed like it was a desperate reason of his own.

"okay. It must have been extremely painful to vividly experience the loss of your parents every night. So, isn't that why the child sent me that gift?"

After saying that, Seonghwang turns his head and looks at the desk for a moment.

As I followed his gaze, I saw a white rabbit eye patch lying there. This is a limited edition eyepatch of the mental attack resistance S+, similar to the one Sisley showed earlier.

It was a whopping price of 3,999,000 P Cash.

"Sisley said it was something that would ward off nightmares. But why did I tell my father... .."

When the puzzled Seongjin asked, Seonghwang slowly shook his head.

"There is one reason I can think of. "I once said this to that child in passing."

Seonghwang, who was busy with construction work both in the face and at night, sometimes called Owen, who could not sleep, and showered him with divine power to pass the time.

-lung... Isn't your father sleeping at this hour?

It is said that to the boy who was still unfamiliar and hesitant, Seonghwang at that time casually answered:

-There is no need to sleep because you have divine power. Since my dream would be messy anyway, I think it would be better to finish at least one task during that time.

Seongjin, who was listening, became bewildered.

"... Just because of that?"

"okay. "Owen is a child with a quite delicate side."

Come to think of it, Sisley also said this before.

-Owen may seem like he goes around without thinking, but when you get to know him, he is a very attentive and kind person. I once told him that I had a nightmare, and he kept forgetting about it for years

and then sent me this.

Since nightmares are what he struggles with the most, it seems like he didn't listen to what other people said in passing.

However, after purchasing two such expensive items with the cash I saved, and sending them off, I am actually afraid of nightmares? Does that mean he still hasn't found anything for himself?

"Why don't you write it first...?""

However, Seongjin was able to guess the reason as soon as he spoke. The day we first met at Pangea Chronicle, Owen said this to him with a serious expression.

-Now they are the only ones left to me in this world. You can't lose your precious people twice. Now I can do anything to stop it.

Needless to say, he was putting the people of Seonghwang family above his own safety.

'Besides, I wasted the cash I didn't have enough to buy another animal skin that wasn't available.'

He was truly an idiot fox who only did stupid things from start to finish.

* * *

Since then, Seongjin spent quite a long time in the office. Thanks to this, when the conversation with Seonghwang was completely over, dawn was already breaking brightly outside the window.

"I don't know if I made you wait too long."

Seongjin, who was leaving the office, heard Seonghwang muttering worriedly.

"... ... ?"

I was puzzled for a moment, but Seongjin soon realized that it would happen. It must have been a day or two before that guy said

something incomprehensible.

Anyway, it was a leisurely morning after a long time. As he left the office under Raphael's guidance, Seongjin thought happily.

'Thanks to my father, I'm in good shape. Shall we devote ourselves to swordsmanship training today for the first time in a while?'

Sir Masain said that we will soon be able to completely remove Banajas Type 8. Seongjin, who at first only knew how to use his fists, has now joined the ranks of full-fledged Auror practitioners.

Seongjin, who was so preoccupied with other things, only when he arrived at the entrance of the main palace did he sense a familiar presence.

"... Sir Masaine?"

"Lowering."

Masain, who happened to spot Seongjin at the same time, takes a step forward and bows.

'No, a gentleman who should be warming up in the Jinju Palace exercise hall by now, why did he suddenly appear at the main palace?'

However, Seongjin, who was walking towards him at a brisk pace, soon flinched in surprise and stopped. As expected, in Masain's hand he was holding the nutcracker he had left in the room.

Because of this, it was impossible not to know who Masain had been chasing all the way here since early morning.

"hmm... .."

As Seongjin was secretly observing him, a knight with a grave expression approached him and politely offered him a nutcracker.

"Lowering. No matter how busy you are, you must not forget this important weapon."

"Oh, thank you. Lord Masaine."

As Seongjin received the sword and put it on his waist, Masain turned and continued speaking.

"I apologize for taking your sword without permission. First, I prepared in advance because I thought I would go to the morning training right away. "Then shall we take you to the training hall like this?"

"Well, is that so?"

Seongjin thought as he followed him obediently, feeling a strange sense of guilt.

Why does this guy seem to be getting used to my unexpected behavior? Is this okay?

[Are you okay, you troublemaker? Look at that face that looks much older than before!]

... Oh, shut up!

* * *

"Are you talking about Prince Owen's nightmare...?"

On the way back to Jinju Palace, Seongjin was able to hear more about Owen from Masain.

"The prince has been like this since he first came to the palace. "He couldn't sleep well at all."

Sir Masain is actually of royal blood, but has now become a mere knight. It would be easy for him to ignore Owen, but I guess it's characteristic of him to be polite and not forget to use an honorific.

"I remember waking up screaming almost every night. So, the other princes and princesses at the time were very worried."

It is said that the children of the Seonghwang family made a lot of effort for Owen.

Amelia, who had a lot of knowledge about miscellaneous things, would always bring herbs and scented herbs that were said to be good for sleep, and Logan, who lived with her in the Blue Rose Labyrinth, would spare no effort in giving him hush tea every evening.

Sisley, who followed Owen very well, visited him every morning and gave him divine power with his small hands.

Then, it was almost a year after he came to the imperial palace that Owen began to stabilize. No, rather than finding stability, he was closer to the onset of another insanity.

-I had a very strange dream yesterday. I have been hunting hard in some unknown place. But it was a very strange place where money appeared out of thin air when you killed game.

Owen, who had had a quiet night for a long time, continued speaking while pointing his finger in the air.

-But can you still see the letters you saw in your dream? Can't you see these letters?

Could it be that the stress caused by the nightmare has reached its peak and he is finally going crazy?

Everyone was worried about him, but surprisingly, Owen brightened noticeably from then on. As the depression caused by the nightmare completely disappeared, his naturally cheerful personality began to surface.

Except for the occasional growl with Mores, daily life in the imperial palace continued peacefully for a while.

I thought everything was resolved like that...

"... "He suddenly left for the southern front, saying he wanted to become stronger."

Masain nodded at Seongjin's words.

"Yes, that's right. And he actually became very strong."

From then on, Owen continued his brilliant performance as if he were possessed.

Defeat the marines, reorganize the front lines, rescue stranded missionaries, etc. I made small achievements. And since when did you start cutting down enemies at the forefront of the front line?

One boy who had not even signed a contract completely changed the situation on the southern front, which was in decline!

"You have truly fulfilled your 'noble man's duty'. He is a person worthy of being a member of the Seonghwang family. Sometimes unscrupulous people try to diminish his achievements, but that is purely... .."

That was when Masain spoke up to that point.

Wong wong!

Max, who recognizes Seongjin from the training ground in the distance, comes running towards him, wagging his tail excitedly.

This guy was disturbing the training knights for a while, and he seemed to think it was some kind of game that was repeated every morning.

"Max!"

Seongjin barely caught the guy who ran at him with all his might without falling and hugged him tightly.

"You man. Why are you disturbing the knights? "Didn't the leader play properly?"

Then, from afar, Director Bruno raises his empty hands with an aggrieved expression. What he wanted to say was clear.

'I would like to play, but now there are no dishes left.'

In the meantime, it looks like he ran away with all the newly made plates in his mouth.

[Aren't we all asking too much of a stupid mixed breed dog?]

The Demon King sarcastically said.

I know? Isn't it time to properly 'ask'? I wonder if he's a bit stupid for a dog.

"Max, you guy! Where did you hide all the dishes? huh?"

When Seongjin scolded, Max tilted his head with innocent eyes.

Kiing?

'... Hmm, since she thinks she's cute, I guess she's smart too.

In the end, Seongjin gave up trying to retrieve the plate and gently scratched the boy's ears.

"Okay, okay. What if I'm a bit stupid? "It's so cute."

Meanwhile, I catch a glimpse of Sir Haven cheering on one side of the training hall.

Of course, Seongjin didn't care much. Since you are Lord Haven, you must have made another big mistake.

[I think I know what that mistake is. how about you?]

'okay? I have no idea.'

[...] Seongjin Lee. How is it that you're getting better at acting like a fool?]

'shut up!'

What is pretense! Don't start slandering people for no reason in the morning, you devil!

* * *

Tap, tap, tap.

Owen's nightmares always began on a shaking cart.

It was a day not much different from usual. The day I regularly went to town to sell skins with my parents, who were hunters.

-Wake up, Owen! Are you planning on coming to town after a long time and sleeping in?

The voice of his father who wakes him up from his slumber, rolling around in his cart.

Now that several years have passed, his face has become blurred in my memory, but his strong arms and copper-colored hair, just like Owen's, still remain deep in my mind.

-Owen, wake up quickly, take this and go to a nearby church. I guess I'll have to ask the priests for a blessing.

My mother's face as she said that was also blurry. Her mother's worried voice and the bright red color of the pendant she holds out are so vivid.

-Bart's gift? Why is that?

-These days, I have nightmares every time I sleep with this necklace on. It's a scary dream where everything is engulfed in flames.

-okay? Nothing like that has happened until now, right?

-huh. So, first, let's get Owen to show it to the priest. There may have been something wrong with it.

After his parents' quiet conversation, the scene quickly changed, and before he knew it, Owen was at a church on the outskirts of town. In one hand, she was holding a bright red pendant that her mother had given her.

Tuk!

However, Owen bumped into a strange person at the entrance of the church. A man wearing luxurious clothes and a strange half-mask that did not suit him.

[...] What is this again?]

Behind the half-mask, eerie eye lights glowed yellow.

[Why is this here? Why is this guy who should be dead walking around just fine?]

The moment he met that gaze, an indescribable fear came over Owen.

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Owen froze in front of the man. It was probably the fear instinctively felt by a creature facing an absolute predator.

This strange man wearing a half mask reminded Owen of the huge seawater he had once encountered in the mountains.

-Owen. Lower your posture and hold your breath. Don't let it find us.

His father's hand was pressing down on Owen's head, wary of the saber-toothed bear that made a threatening low-frequency sound every time it exhaled.

Even my father, who I thought was the best hunter in the world, had memories of a terrifying predator that could only lower his head and quietly wait for it to pass by.

-Why is this guy who should be dead still walking around?

Above all, what the man said. It was familiar to Owen in a different way. His parents had a habit of repeating this to Owen whenever he forgot something.

-If it wasn't for Bart that day, mom wouldn't have been able to give birth to you safely. Isn't all of this the Lord's care? So Owen, don't forget to be thankful for everything.

What is interest? How do you know about yourself? Above all, why can't my whole body stop shaking like this?

I winced. As Owen became thoughtful and took a step behind her, the man smiled, tearing the corners of his mouth beneath his mask.

[He's a kid with pretty good sense. But there is no need to be so

nervous.]

Fortunately, the man didn't seem to have any intention of harming Owen right away.

[I love the little sparks that young children like you have. Even though it is a weak thing with no possibility of burning, the slightest possibility it contains shines truly brilliantly.]

Tuk-tuk.

[Of course, that may have been a while now.]

The man who tapped Owen's shoulder half-heartedly left behind those incomprehensible words and disappeared far away.

However, Owen, who got goosebumps even at the slightest touch, stared blankly in the direction where the man had disappeared for a while.

Afterwards, Owen went into the church with the man and met the priest, but he did not remember the details of what exactly they discussed with him.

The next scene that came to mind clearly was a town engulfed in massive flames.

A yellow and red fire was burning fiercely, engulfing the entire village. People who can't even bring themselves to fetch water due to a long drought can only stare at the scene in shock.

-... mother...

The sea of fire burning like the hell in the scriptures and the smoke spreading thickly are extremely unrealistic.

Owen headed toward the fire as if possessed.

-Ah, father! mother!

Hey, what is that guy?

Wait, you want to go in? Hurry and catch it! Stop me!

Owen, who was hurriedly running toward the fire, was caught by Wen Janghan's hand and violently thrown to the floor.

Tuk!

It was right then. A flint sticks out of Owen's pocket. It was an object that even Owen himself couldn't figure out why it was there.

... What is that?

And at the same time, there was a strange voice ringing in everyone's head.

[Did that huge fire just happen by accident? Coincidentally, a guy with a flint appeared at the scene of the fire. Very suspicious.]

In an instant, the villagers' eyes changed.

-That's no ordinary flint! It is a precious stone found in some parts of Ortona!

-Why does a child have such expensive things? Is that guy an arsonist?

-I don't know what it is, but catch it first!

Owen struggled with all his might in the hands of suddenly rough people.

-Let go of this! My parents are in there... .. !

However, the agitated people's dissuasion soon turned into merciless violence directed at the boy.

That was when Owen was helplessly reaching out for the fire.

Grumble!

Suddenly, a scene slightly different from his original memory unfolded before Owen's eyes.

The fierce fire that had burned the village and the people who had beaten him were gone, and now there was an unfamiliar sight of hell where the whole world was covered in fire.

-... What's this!

The sky and the ground, everything is just as dark red as blood.

Owen took a deep breath and looked around.

Now he is no longer the young boy he was back then. Owen of Delcross. An invincible warrior who stands at the forefront of the southern front and slaughters the enemy.

Nevertheless, in this scene of complete hell, Owen had no choice but to be as completely helpless as he was then. It was so infuriating and despairing.

-... ... !

But for some time, a boy had been standing in front of Owen.

Even though it feels like I'm seeing it for the first time, the back view feels strangely familiar. A dark red aura bloomed from the sword the boy was holding, and his light blonde hair also reflected the fire and glowed with an ominous dark red light.

Jeez.

As the boy took a step forward, Owen desperately shouted at him.

-Don't go in! Where are you now... ... !

Owen, whose body was now free, was running, calling out to him without realizing it.

-hey! Stop right there! Newbie...

"... rain."

"Lowering."

"I'm a newbie."

"Lowering!"

Flashing.

When he opens his eyes to the sound of an urgent call, Alicia, who was shaking Owen, asks in a worried voice.

"Sir, are you okay?"

"... Alicia?"

"Yes, sir. That's me."

"... .."

The feeling of extreme desperation disappears like the ebb of the tide at the same time as one becomes aware of reality.

When Owen regains his composure and stands up, Alicia quickly picks up a blanket and wipes his forehead, which is covered in cold sweat.

The escort driver who had been assisting Owen for the past few years was well aware of the nightmares he sometimes suffered from.

"Sir, if you're being rude, I think you should go out for a while."

After seeing that Owen's breathing had calmed down, Alicia spoke in an urgent voice.

"Some Barcelona people have been looking for you since morning."

* * *

"I am a warrior of the Purma tribe, Bartoja! "I have come to ask Owen of Delcross for the price of the clan leader's life!"

A group of Barça warriors were gathered outside the fence. It was a majestic general and many warriors guarding him.

Janghan Bartoza, holding an ax and having a bushy beard, was screaming so loudly that the entire Delcross camp rang.

"So come out quickly! Come out and join me in arms! "I hope you're not a lousy coward who avoids a duel that demands blood justice, Owen!"

As Owen approaches the fence, a middle-aged knight bows his head politely. This is Sir Abigail, the leader of the 4th Knights of the SS and the person in charge of the southern front.

"That ignorant heretic has been saying such nonsense since a while ago, sir. "Even if I warn you to go back, you don't listen at all. Isn't that truly reckless?"

"hmm."

Owen nodded, stood side by side with her, and looked down at the outside of the wooden fence. Then, Jang Han's spirit becomes even stronger when he spots him outside.

"Come down here right now! Owen of Delcross!"

Then Alicia got angry and shouted in Barça, which she was quite good at.

"Do not call the name of the Precious One carelessly! Your tribal leader lost his life on the battlefield. Do you think it is justifiable to demand payment for that blood now? "Don't cause any unnecessary trouble and go back!"

But it didn't work for Jang Han.

"Shut up, Owen's dog! You moved like hands and feet next to him, and now you even want to speak for his mouth! "Isn't it shameful for a proper warrior to voluntarily become a dog!"

Puhahaha!

Behind him, other Barçaians are laughing heartily. They were people with whom I could not communicate at all.

"They are not from the Purma tribe. "It's Karazhan."

Owen, who was looking at them closely at that time, said.

"Are you sure, sir?"

"okay. Except for the guy holding the ax and screaming, everyone in the back are warriors from the Karazhan tribe. Although the appearance is well disguised, the fingering method of holding the axe is clearly different. "Seeing them make mistakes like that makes them look like they're still kids."

Although Barsha's tribes were mostly similar, there were sometimes unique differences depending on tribal traditions.

Owen, who has been with the Volanta tribe for a long time, is able to clearly perceive the subtle differences that the imperial people can easily overlook.

"Is this Karazhan...?"

Lord Abigail's face became a little more serious at that.

"If what you say is true, you need to be careful. Wakana Tusai, that old fox is up to something again."

Aside from occasional local clashes, the southern front has been showing a lull recently.

There is also regular exchange of cultural goods with some gentle tribes. The Volanta tribe, whom Owen frequently visited recently, was one of these moderate tribes.

On the other hand, in the case of Karazhan, the situation was different.

The most powerful and warlike tribe in Barça. In particular, their chieftain, Wakana Tusai, was someone who consistently maintained a hard-line stance against Delcross. They are quietly waiting with bated breath for the embers of battle to be lit again at any time.

"How disappointing, Owen! "Is the eldest son of the Delcross tribe a coward who hides behind a woman and trembles!"

Owen grabs the ax from his belt as he sees Janghan yelling loudly. Then Lord Abigail stopped Owen.

"Lowering. There is no need to respond to their childish provocations one by one. "If only young warriors had been sent, it means that Wakana Tusai would have been prepared to be annihilated as well."

But Owen shook his head.

"Barsha's Thanksgiving is coming, Lord Abigail. "Sooner or later, a grand meeting will be held where all the tribal leaders of Barsha will gather."

From what I have observed on the battlefield for many years, Wakana Tusai was a man who was as intelligent as he was warlike.

Even now, when I think about how much sabotage Owen received from her before he could properly interact with the Volanta tribe, I still feel angry.

"Karazhan's position remains firm. If you don't respond, it's as if you don't respond, and if you're annihilated, you're annihilated. "They will insist on starting a war with us once again under the pretext of a just blood price."

"That is just a far-fetched claim."

"But it will work effectively for other elders who have antipathy toward the empire. Ignoring them like this will only end up playing into Wakana Tusai's will."

"... .."

Sir Abigail's eyes briefly land on the handle of the ax that the prince is stroking. However, she did not go against the prince's will any further.

Who is Owen?

In a chaotic battlefield, isn't he the prince who easily breaks through Barsha's elite warriors on his own and cuts off the head of the tribe leader?

There is no need to fret over such poor warriors.

"... hmm?"

Suddenly, Owen's eyes narrowed as he noticed something.

"What does this mean all of a sudden? "What do you want me to collect?"

Although invisible to others, a new quest window was flashing before Owen's eyes.

[Surprise Quest - Collecting Amazing Poison Stings]

[Quest Grade: A]

[An engineer in Karazhan recently developed a new weapon. It is an innovative weapon that can be secretly hidden inside a shield and perform secret assassinations. All of Barça's warriors will be unable to hide their shame when they see this weapon, but who knows? It might seem quite useful for the old fox of Karazhan. Collect a sample of the sting.]

[Reward: 60 P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window. If you can survive in the future.]

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306. Demon King No. 2 (4)

Purma's Bartoja.

He was shouting confidently in front of the Delcross camp, but inside he was full of anxiety, contrary to his appearance.

'... I didn't want it to get this big!'

The Purma tribe is in decline after losing its chief twice in a row in the last war.

Although he was pushed out of the race for the tribe's leader, Bartoja was a rather ambitious man. Accordingly, he decided to abandon his tribe and entrust himself to Karazhan, one of his most powerful tribes.

-Now our tribe has become shameless cowards and is falling into decline!

Of course, when he came face to face with Wakana Tusai, Bartoja did not forget to show off his betrayal in front of the old fox.

-So I abandoned the tribe to avenge the tribe leader! I even gave up my pride as a warrior for revenge!

-Ho... ..

-This Bartoja, riding with the bravest brothers of Karazhan in Varsha, seeks to completely drive the hordes of the Empire from the land of their ancestors! So give me another chance to take up arms!

However, the Karazhan chieftain, who was quietly listening to him, said this with an amused expression on his face.

-excellent. Bartoja.

Contrary to its reputation for being stubborn, it is a compliment that only sounds pure. Bartóza looked up with a glimmer of hope. And, he just froze in place.

The old tribal leader, Wakana Tusai, was looking down at himself as if he were giving a final review of a sheep about to beheaded. He had beastly eyes that reflected a dangerously shiny light.

-Have you abandoned your pride as a warrior and even thrown away the opportunity to stand before the souls of your great ancestors? That would mean that his desire for revenge against the empire was enormous. If you do so, I have a suitable way to help you.

... This isn't it.

His chin began to visibly tremble due to an ominous premonition, but the old fox above his head added patronizingly:

-It just so happened that a young man from the tribe created something very interesting. If this were the case, he would be able to kill Owen of Delcross right now. So that you can pass on your feats to future generations, I will also give you our warriors.

-Well, Chief... ..

-What. It is a tribute to a steadfast warrior who is determined to be lonely forever even after death. As a brother of Barça, this is a natural help, so please do not hesitate.

-... ..

He even received a cup of wine from the chief, and was forcibly brought here along with a group of warriors who could not tell if they were there to help him or to watch him.

I looked for opportunities to escape several times along the way, but there was no other way. The moment he shows any signs of strangeness, the weapon aimed at Owen will be fired straight at him.

"Come out quickly! Owen of Delcross!"

So, even as he calls out to Owen to leave, he keeps repeating this to himself.

'Don't come out, Owen! Please don't come out!'

Bartóza's eyes looked around anxiously.

Coincidentally, there were not only people from the empire around them, but also a few people from the Barsha tribe interacting with them. That may be why the warriors sent by Wakana Tusai disguised themselves, however clumsily, as Purma warriors.

'Success or failure, what happened today will eventually spread throughout Barça!'

For him, it was best for Owen not to respond to this provocation. If that happens, Karazhan can be trusted with the reputation of scaring the famous Owen.

But if Owen says he wants to duel-

'Even if we succeed, the people of the empire who lost the clan leader's son will not want to keep us alive...'

And unfortunately for Bartoja, Owen was a brave warrior who lived up to his reputation.

Creak-

Soon the door of the wooden fence opens, and a tall young man wearing light armor approaches Bartoja. He was holding a large blunt weapon in one hand.

The young man's long hair had so many feathers fluttering in the gentle breeze that it was hard to believe that it was a battle over a short period of time.

'This is what happens in the end!'

At that moment, Bartóza prepared to die.

Hehehehe.

Every time Owen takes a step, the blunt object in his hand drags on the floor, raising an acrid cloud of dust.

A heavy war hammer with clunky decorations attached to it. It was an item that was quite familiar to Bartoza's eyes.

"that... ... ?"

"Do you recognize this? "Of course it should be."

Owen grinned, showing his teeth.

"At least the four of you who proudly mentioned the blood price of the tribe leader should not be Karazhan."

"... ... !"

Do you already know the identity of the group?

As Bartoza broke out in a cold sweat while aiming the axe, Owen roared at it! He threw her to the floor and released her shoulders.

"This is the trophy I got after defeating the Purma tribe leader. If you can kill me and avenge the tribe's defeat, I will gladly hand this over to you. "Take it back to your tribe and let us all honor the spirit of our chieftain."

An indirect promise that even if he dies, he will not kill Bartoza, who won the duel.

'... Is it true?'

The Imperials cannot be completely trusted. But now the only thing Bartosa can cling to is Owen's light words.

"Aaaah!"

Finally, Bartoza made up his mind and desperately rushed towards Owen.

* * *

Pow!

Bartoza's ax strikes senselessly at the chieftain's hammer standing on the ground. This is because Owen jumped into the air to avoid his attack.

Bingle.

Owen, holding the handle of the hammer with one hand, turned around and kicked toward Bartozza's head.

Although it looks light, it is a heavy blow loaded with aura.

'... ... !'

Bartoza managed to avoid the attack by lowering his body. Of course, I couldn't help but have a bunch of decorated feathers fall off along with the hair on the top of my head.

Anyway, my body was already covered in small wounds, so it was just a hair like that.

'... 'There's this much difference?'

Bartosa took a step back, taking a deep breath. Then Owen doesn't chase him, but just looks at him blankly.

It was a car that felt strange from a while ago. Owen wasn't too desperate to attack him. That's right, he was moving without taking his hand off the chieftain's hammer stuck in the floor.

It uses the handle as a shield or as a support to turn its body and never neglects to be alert to its surroundings. An attitude as if he didn't care about things like Bartóza at all.

'I'm sure they didn't notice the poisonous sting...'

Who in the world would have expected the Barça warriors to make a sneak attack? This must be purely belittling Bartóza!

What's even more infuriating is that Owen shows no signs of picking up his favorite disease yet!

"Ugh..."

As I let out an exasperated groan, Owen spoke up.

"I'll give you one last warning. Are you going to continue this meaningless fight? "You and those young warriors have become nothing more than Wakana Tusai's discarded members."

"... .."

"If everyone becomes a fugitive and wanders the plains, at least they can survive."

Although he was speaking to Bartoza, Owen's eyes were focused on the Karazhan warriors standing behind them, holding their shields. It looks like they are already figuring out who is in charge of this situation.

"Don't be ridiculous, Imperial! "Don't you dare insult the honor of a warrior!"

Bartoza, sensing that the atmosphere among the Karazhan warriors was becoming more sinister, grabbed the ax with his numb hands and shouted.

If they had all been killed horribly, it wouldn't have been so funny. Owen's intention is to completely tarnish the warriors' honor and make Wakana Tusai's plot meaningless.

'If things continue like this, even if I survive here, I will die! Die at the hands of Wakana Tusai!"

Bartoza, who hit Bae Soo-jin, lunges at Owen again-

The split second when Owen's eyes turn to his axe -

The Karazhan warrior in the lead holding a shield puffed out his cheeks without warning.

Shoo!

Accompanied by a slight sound of wind, a sharp poisonous needle shoots towards Owen. It was a timing that even Bartóza could not have expected at all.

"... ... !"

But then, the handle of the hammer that Owen was holding slowly tilted forward.

Tang! Tang! Tang!

As if being sucked in, all the memorized energy that hit the wide sack is thrown outward.

"Uh, how... ... !"

Bartoza's eyes widen...

Hiss! Whoosh!

Two Karazhan warriors nearby threw additional poisonous needles. It was a thin, small memorization that could not be seen by the average person, but-

Bouncy!

Owen seemed to have expected it again and deflected all the poisonous needles with the handle of his axe.

"It's memorization! "They use memorization!"

Sir Abigail, who realized the situation a little too late, fired an arrow from behind the fence.

Wedge- Puck!

One of the Karazhan warriors behind was hit squarely in the forehead and fell backwards.

The archers and Alicia who soon joined in fired arrows without giving the remaining warriors a chance to remove their weapons.

Plop! Buck!

The gathered warriors fell to the ground without even being able to do anything.

"... ... !"

Arrows raining down on my head.

Bartoza was at a loss due to this sudden situation, unable to do anything.

At that moment, a warrior who had fallen on the ground slowly raised his head and put a poisonous needle in his mouth. The intention was to completely destroy the evidence that they were Karazhan and not Purma.

Flutter!

However, his attempt was thwarted by a flying one-handed axe. Owen, who had already put down the hammer handle, pulled out his ax and threw it at the guy's head.

"How is it? "Do you think I received blood money for saving your life?"

Owen grinned as he caught a glimpse of the frozen Bartoza, then bent down and diligently collected the poison needle and weapon. She then raised her head and checked the newly popped up quest completion window.

[Surprise Quest - Collecting Amazing Poison Stings]

[Quest Grade: A]

[General comment: You detected the poisonous stinger hidden by the enemy and successfully collected it. However, if it had been possible to stop it before it was launched, it would certainly have been possible to collect complete memorization. I am sorry for your lack of quickness, and I hope you will work hard to build your skills further in the future.]

[Completion Grade: C +]

[Reward: 60(-20) P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

'Sang Sang-chang's warning was true.'

Owen stuck his tongue out.

Using a poisonous needle in a fair duel was something that would have been impossible for the original Barça warrior.

Thanks to that, if I let my guard down, I could have been hit by a poisonous needle at a critical time. What if there wasn't Sang Tae-chang's quest.

There is only one case where Sang Chang-chang's compensation was so blatantly low. It was a warning quest thrown to you as if you were being generous.

'Thank you, Sang Tae-chang.'

As Owen expresses his gratitude and expresses his gratitude, a spear appears again.

[Nothing extra will be dropped even if you say something. I am sorry for your extreme lack of quick thinking, and I hope you will work hard to improve your skills in the future.]

[Completion Grade: C +]

[Reward: 60(-20) P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

Ah, yes. I feel so grateful.

"Now these weapons are rightfully mine. "I will collect this as is and show it to the elders of Volanta."

Owen looked down at Bartóza, who was still stiff, and spoke softly.

"You go. "Go and tell Wakana Tusai."

For a moment, to Bartoza, Owen of Delcross seemed a more threatening beast than the old fox of Karazhan.

"If you want to embroil all Barsha tribes in war, then do whatever

you want. "I swear on Owen's name that no one in Karazhan will survive that battlefield."

* * *

Meanwhile, at the same time.

Seongjin arrived at the Silver Rose Labyrinth at Amelia's call and met an unexpected person in the reception room. It was Isabella Scarzzapino, whose eyes widened as she drank tea.

"Huh?"

When Seongjin glares at her with evil eyes, Isabella hastily spits out the tea with a pale face and spits it out into the teacup. Such undignified and degrading behavior that you would never imagine seeing a social queen.

Cluck cluck!

Hearing the frantic coughing that followed, Seongjin furrowed his brows.

'What kind of reaction is that again?'

But more than that, why on earth is that bastard in the Silver Rose Labyrinth?

307. Demon King No. 2 (5)

It was almost noon when Seongjin received Amelia's visit request.

Seongjin, who was working on the monster task force at the time, was contemplating a few minor monopoly transactions that the Milo merchant group had.

'Should we just intercept the good ones from 'Bertrán & Lee'...'

Originally, it would have been handed over to the administration to review applications from other parties, but it was obvious that if it were delegated to that side, it would either end up in the network of high-ranking priests or become an excuse for bribery.

That should be it.

'... 'No.'

But Seongjin soon changed his mind.

Since it was a small and medium-sized top company, I didn't really care about it, but there was a high possibility that if I intercepted it for no reason, I wouldn't get much benefit and would end up in the middle of a rumor.

'If I'm going to take a big hit, I should intercept something decent when it comes out.'

Moreover, now is the time to pour all the tight funds into the northern project. In addition to the salmon business, we must make every effort to secure the northern distribution network safely!

[How long are you going to stick with that pointless business?]

'shut up! After all, Bertran & Lee's first business is a salmon specialty store!'

Seongjin, who scolded the devil, was lost in thought as he gathered the documents one by one.

'Now that I think about it, do you think you will ultimately receive Amelia's approval for this matter?'

I heard that Amelia, who has recently been prominent in political affairs, has taken over a lot of the miscellaneous tasks of the Holy Emperor. In that case, it might be better to hand it over directly to the main palace rather than through the administration and let the older sister wield authority from the beginning.

It seems like my sister wants to expand her influence within Delcross little by little these days.

"Your Majesty Mores. If your schedule allows, Princess Amelia would like you to stop by for a moment."

At that moment, a maid from the Silver Rose Labyrinth comes to visit Seongjin. So, with a happy heart, he took the documents for Amelia and left her monster task force.

"... hmm?"

However, when Seongjin arrived at the Silver Rose Labyrinth, he met an unexpected person in the reception room. It was Isabella Scarzapino, Sigurd Sigurdsson's doll.

"Huh?"

Isabella, facing Seongjin, held the tea she had just sipped in her mouth and made a sound of deflation.

'Why on earth is that bastard in the Silver Rose Labyrinth?'

When Seongjin glared at her with a sinister look, Isabella hurriedly spat out the tea with a pale face and spat it back into the teacup. It was a very disrespectful act that one would never expect to see from the queen of society.

Cluck cluck!

Hearing the frantic coughing that followed, Seongjin furrowed his brows.

'What kind of reaction is that again?'

Isabella, who noticed Seongjin's discomfort, shouted urgently without even wiping the tea from her mouth.

"Oh, I'm mistaken!"

"misunderstanding? "What misunderstanding?"

"that... Whatever it is, any illusion! "What you are thinking is a misunderstanding!"

"What, you bastard?"

How do you know what I'm thinking right now?

As Seongjin smiled cruelly and took a step closer, Isabella trembled and clung to the back of the sofa.

"Aren't you thinking that I'm trying to harm Princess Amelia right now?!"

"... Isn't it?"

"no! So you're not saying that's not the case!"

"Then why are you here?"

"There are circumstances that make this all unavoidable!"

Seeing him desperately shouting with his chin shaking, it looks like he has no clue about plotting something.

Anyway, what happened to that tone of voice?

"Dude, if you don't agree, didn't I tell you to pretend to be Isabella Scarzzapino? uh? "Do you think what I'm saying right now is funny?"

When Seongjin reminded her of the previous warning, only then did Isabella make an expression of regret and soon became tearful.

"... Heep!"

"... .."

"Hi! Whoop! Hi! "Huh!"

It was truly an explosive hiccup.

'... 'What on earth is this guy doing?'

I was so dumbfounded that I just watched, but fortunately for Isabella, Amelia came into the living room just in time.

"Ah, sorry for leaving you for a while after calling you, Mores. An administrative priest came to me with an urgent approval request... .."

"Ah, sister."

Seongjin frowned and looked back at her.

"it's okay. "I just arrived too."

"You're busy with work, so I didn't call you for no reason?"

"no. "I also have something to discuss with my sister."

"That's a good thing. however... .."

Amelia, who was approaching with a smiling face, suddenly noticed the strange atmosphere of the living room and stopped in shock.

"... "You two, what happened?"

"Your Majesty Amelia!"

Slap!

Isabella suddenly got up from her seat and quickly hid behind Amelia as if she had found the only rope.

"Hey, look at this. Prince Mores... .."

"huh? "Mores?"

"that... .."

Isabella pursed her lips as if about to say something more, but then froze. Because her Seongjin narrowed her eyes and gently gave her her gaze.

"eww... Hi! Hi!"

"... ..?"

"... Well, I'm sobbing after not seeing you for a while! You've become so devoted, haven't you? I'm so overwhelmed... Heep!"

Isabella tried to remember an excuse with tearful eyes. She couldn't possibly confess that she had been threatened.

okay. Unless he was out of his mind, he wouldn't have dared to slander another royal family in front of the royal family without any evidence.

The problem is whether this half-baked excuse will work for a smart woman.

"Hehe."

It was all Seongjin's luck. The princess, who was looking at the two while tilting her head, smiled brightly as if a flower had bloomed as soon as Isabella finished speaking.

"As expected, it's the Lady Scarzzapino! As I heard, you have great insight. "As expected, the right thing to do was to ask you for help!"

"... ..?"

"Our Mores looks a little too admirable. Hehehe."

This time, it was Seongjin and Isabella's turn to keep an eye on Amelia.

Is that serious now?

[...] It seems that having a protruding arm is after all hereditary.]

In the awkward atmosphere, the demon lord sighed as the flame crystal disappeared.

* * *

"Yes, Mores. "I specially invited Lady Scarzzapino today."

Anyway, the refreshments continued haphazardly.

Seongjin looks very uncomfortable, and Isabella looks visibly hesitant. And Amelia sits between them, happy alone.

"Lady Isabella has been receiving help in many ways recently. "No one knows more about the latest trends in the salon or new artists she should keep an eye on than she does."

"Is that so?"

Then Isabella pursed her lips with an aggrieved expression towards Seongjin.

"I didn't say there were circumstances that made it unavoidable!"

Of course, when Seongjin frowned, he quickly averted his gaze and started hiccuping again.

Hiccup! Hi! Hey!

He looks so dazed that I want to make a body gag right now. Seongjin looked back at Amelia, feeling her pounding headache.

"... By the way, if you are a new artist, are you looking for someone to support you?"

"That's not true. I was just looking for a good painter. "If possible, it is better to entrust the work to a painter recognized at the salon."

"Are you angry?"

"Well listen, Mores. Lady Isabella happens to be sponsoring the most famous portrait painter in the imperial capital? So she was specially invited along with her painter. When asking a painter who has a personal sponsor to work, it is customary to ask the sponsor for permission whenever possible."

portrait? Someone's?

As Seongjin blinked, Amelia smiled proudly and stood up.

"Well, now that you're here, there's no need to waste any more time. "Why don't you go to the painter together?"

"... yes?"

And Seongjin, who was taken to Amelia without knowing why, soon found out who the owner of the portrait was.

I had to strike a cool pose while holding the black Henesys longsword in front of the huge emblem of the main god. He even wore a black cloak of unknown origin!

'Why on earth am I doing this?'

I was looking at the painter across from me in bewilderment, and he gave an order to Seongjin with a big smile.

"Please ease your expression a little, sir. "Can you give me a confident smile worthy of a handsome gentleman?"

"... .."

"How about changing it to a more dynamic pose? Mores, could you please try the Banajas 5 formula that I showed you earlier one more time?"

I don't know what this is all about.

But for now, it's my sister's request.

Seongjin endured the rising embarrassment and swung the Henesys long sword in a convincing manner in front of everyone.

Immediately, loud praise pours in from all directions.

"That's it! Lowering!"

"Ah, that looks like a really cool portrait, Mores!"

"It is exactly as you said, Amelia!"

"Kyaa! "You look great, Prince Mores!"

Even the maids of the Silver Rose Labyrinth joined in and made such a fuss that the back of my head started to tingle.

The only person who took a step back from this commotion was Isabella, who, as expected, looked at this scene with a cold expression.

I never thought I would form a consensus with that guy in a place like this.

Fortunately, the embarrassing time didn't last too long. This is because the artist, who only understood the rough composition and atmosphere, took all his tools and disappeared.

It seemed like he had a lot to prepare to set up his studio in earnest.

"Would you please stop by the Silver Rose Labyrinth from time to time in the future? Just take a moment when you have free time. "Because the artist decided to stay at the imperial palace until the portrait was completed."

Seongjin sighed inwardly at Amelia's request.

Uh, okay.

That doesn't mean it's all over in one day.

'But if you are a member of the royal family. It would be right to leave at least one portrait in your lifetime... ... '

If you're going to get hit someday, it might be better to get hit quickly.

"But can't I just hold a nutcracker? Why the Henesys longsword?"
"This sword is purely a gift to my sister."

When Seongjin asked while handing over the sword, Amelia smiled meaningfully.

"Hehe, Mores. Do you know why I cherish this sword so much?"

... Isn't that what you like?

As Seongjin was confused, his delicate fingers took the black Henesys long sword and lightly grasped it.

"Because this sword is a sword that suits someone I know very well."

After saying that, Amelia held up her long sword and slowly took a stance.

The sight of an angel-like girl wearing a white dress, elegantly swinging a sword with hideous protrusions that could easily be called a magic sword.

At that moment, everyone in the room held their breath and looked at the sight.

"I also wanted to be like that person. I decided to become that strong. That's why I always chase after that figure in my memory and keep imitating him."

At that moment, the beautiful girl seemed to be enveloped in a bright glow. Even the ugly sword, which barely reflects light, gave the illusion that it was glowing black.

While the scene was very heterogeneous, there was a place where it harmonized exquisitely, like a still life carefully arranged by a painter.

This is probably the absolute beauty that catches everyone's attention!

'... Wow, sister. amazing!'

Seongjin thought with a strange feeling, not even paying attention to what she had already said.

'In fact, isn't this the scene that the artist should really leave in his paintings?'

And for a moment, Seongjin thought he had said that thought out loud. This murmur was heard right next to me.

"... Wow, Mr. So cool! This must be left as a portrait... ..!"

"... ..?"

When Seongjin looked at Isabella, she was startled and blushed furiously.

"Why, why do you look at me like that?"

"... .."

"ah! There is absolutely no other meaning! Don't misunderstand! As someone who pursues dramatic aesthetics that make one imagine a narrative, I mean that the princess's appearance is very inspiring to all artists... ..!"

Uh, no. Don't be nervous. It's just that, for some reason, I just felt like you really looked like Isabella.

'Anyway, I have to get what I get from this bastard.'

Seongjin, who had made up his mind, spoke softly.

"Stop talking nonsense and just give it to me."

When Seongjin suddenly gained weight, Isabella became very nervous and asked back.

"what... "What do you mean?"

"That painter. First, hand over his recruits to me."

Then Isabella became thoughtful and whispered urgently.

"What do you mean all of a sudden? The author has nothing to do with Sigurd Sigurdsson! He's just a talented painter! Even if you torture them, nothing will come out!"

No, what on earth does this bastard see in people?

"What nonsense are you talking about? That guy is the best at drawing portraits in the ecliptic? The client for the next portrait is me. "I'm going to draw my sister."

"... .."

Then Isabella looked at Seongjin with a puzzled expression.

what? why? what?

308. Demon King No. 2 (6)

After some wrangling, Seongjin succeeded in completely taking over the job of painter from Isabella. Instead of fully supporting him, they decided to commission a painting first.

Since this is a world without cameras, I decided that it would be a good idea to have at least a skilled painter by my side.

"Good for you, Mores."

Amelia, who had no idea that she had been chosen as the model for the next tentative portrait, was overjoyed that Seongjin had an artist he liked.

"Now is the time for you to pay attention to culture and arts. "You should start going to famous salons and start your own social gatherings."

"Is there really a need for me to do that?"

When I asked again reluctantly, Amelia answered with a stern expression.

"Of course, Mores. "In order to attract young talents who will become the mainstay of the imperial capital in the future and to properly listen to their voices, we must not neglect such meetings even from now on."

"Uh, yes... .."

"Our Seonghwang family members all have such tendencies. "While they try to look out for and protect their subjects, they actually neglect the physiology of the nobles and high-ranking priests who

will act as their hands and feet in the middle."

So, you must become a politician who knows how to look everywhere. Amelia added:

"... .."

Seongjin looked at Amelia blankly without answering.

I've been thinking about it for a while, but strangely enough, this sister seems to have no doubt that I will become the crown prince.

Why?

"Of course, that may not be what I want to say. I've only recently started paying attention. "I'm still clumsy in many ways, but I'm still getting a lot of help from Lady Scarzzapino."

To that guy?

When Seongjin turned around, thinking it was unexpected, Isabella showed a sullen expression.

'Now, did you hear? Even so, this body is Isabella Scarchapino, the queen of society. He is such a great being that the princess asks for help.'

Seongjin was dumbfounded by his confident expression. Where on earth has the guy who was shaking with fear gone just now?

Anyway, even after the portrait case was concluded, Seongjin continued to stay in the Silver Rose Labyrinth and spent some time.

Although she seems very sloppy now, Isabella has a personality that is almost identical to Sigurd Sigurdsson. He was too anxious to be left alone with Amelia. Needless to say, Isabella's face crumpled every moment.

Of course, Amelia, who did not know such circumstances, expressed pure joy that Seongjin stayed for a long time.

"Lowering. Magistrate Dorian requests to see you."

How much time has passed like that? One of her maids spoke carefully to Amelia.

"Administrator Dorian?"

"yes. He said that if I tell you that it is about the latest events in Cyprus, you will know."

"... okay."

Amelia nodded and stood up with a slightly serious expression.

"I'm sorry, but I have to go now, Mores. "If he came all the way to the Eunjang Labyrinth in person, he would definitely be saying that this is an issue that needs to be discussed urgently."

As for Administrator Dorian, Seongjin also knew him to some extent. He was so trusted that the Emperor sometimes entrusted him with the royal seal.

Amelia seemed to be diligently helping her father with his work recently, but it seems that Amelia is involved in more political affairs than expected.

"Don't worry about me and just go now, sister."

"okay."

Next, Amelia's sorrowful gaze landed on the embarrassed Isabella.

"Anyway, I feel really sorry for Lady Scarzzapino for having to leave early. He planned to spend time until evening and then go to the salon together. "Maybe this is a good thing."

what? You're going to stay with that bastard until evening? That was something that should never have been said.

Before Isabella could say anything, Seongjin quickly answered Amelia.

"Don't worry, sister. "I will take Lady Isabella to her mansion on my way back."

"... ... !?"

While Isabella was shocked, Amelia smiled.

"Oh my, would you please?"

In this way, Seongjin and Isabella left the Silver Rose Labyrinth together.

"Come to think of it, it's been a long time since you two saw each other, right? "Let's have a leisurely chat on the way."

Isabella stiffened and reluctantly got into the carriage where Seongjin was riding as the princess, who knew nothing, sent her off happily. Her confident attitude from before was gone again.

Seongjin smiled without even realizing it.

'Such a simple guy...'

It is so insignificant that one naturally loses one's guard.

If Sigurd Sigurdson is acting with intention, I feel like I have no choice but to admit this.

Many, many, many.

In that awkward atmosphere, the carriage began to move.

"..."

Isabella hesitates and looks at Seongjin.

It seems that she is now worried that she missed the opportunity to pretend to be Isabella by meeting Seongjin before she could prepare herself.

Seongjin, who was looking out the window sullenly, furrowed his eyebrows at the anxious gaze.

"what? "If you have something to say, say it."

Then Isabella cautiously opens her mouth.

"I... "I'm not usually like this."

"what?"

"It was a mistake that happened because I was in a hurry today. "As you know well from what I heard from the princess earlier, I am living as the flawless Isabella."

okay. It seems like that.

Seongjin answered half-heartedly without looking away from the window.

"okay. I'll just skip it this time. "First of all, it looks like you can be useful to Amelia."

"... .."

But that wasn't the end. She quietly looked at Seongjin's expression and then asked again.

"Why don't you ask me anything?"

What does that mean?

When Seongjin turned his head and focused on Isabella, she spoke with a very determined expression.

"Why don't you try to get any other information from me? "You probably have a lot of questions about Sigurd Sigurdsson."

"... .."

"I understand Seonghwang's attitude of leaving me alone. Since he is an oracle, there is nothing more you need to know about the dimensional storyteller. The reason you kept me alive is nothing more than an act of generosity out of sympathy for Isabella, who was used as a doll. "But aren't you different from him?"

"different?"

"exactly. "You have no memories of the past, do you?"

The question was valid. Sigurd Sigurdsson is almost like a parasite that only carries souls without any substance. There is no way he would leave any traces on the world.

Currently, Isabella will be the only clue to catch him.

"The vast amount of knowledge he left behind is gradually being forgotten, and memories also fade with time. If you want to ask me about the Storyteller of the Dimension, now would be a good time."

Then Seongjin looked at Isabella with a sullen face.

Of course that's true. Since Seonghwang's father will already know what he needs to know anyway, wouldn't it matter?

Besides, I have a feeling that if I try to find out something from you, it won't turn out very well.

What Seongjin was curious about was something else.

"Why are you deliberately bringing this up to me?"

Then Isabella answered with a somewhat desperate look on her face.

"In exchange for my cooperation with you, I want my safety guaranteed. "I don't want to worry anymore about when I might die by your hands!"

What kind of boring sound is that again?

"Who said they would kill me right away? I told you this before. Just become Isabella properly in front of me. Or at least pretend to be her. Then everything will be resolved."

Then Isabella screamed in disgust.

"That's really unreasonable. "It might not be possible in front of other people, but at least in front of you, it's impossible!"

"what? why?"

"Think about it carefully. Don't you know and I know who I really

am? But you're telling me to pretend not to know anything and act coquettishly, pretending to be your fiancée? "Isn't this really embarrassing for both of us?"

... Coquettishness? Originally, Isabella didn't do that to me either? Plus, we're not even officially engaged.

Seongjin was taken aback, but he realized that there was no need to miss this opportunity since the other person was willing to answer anyway.

"Well then, let me ask you one question. Do you know who the doll Sigurd Sigurdsson is currently hiding in?"

Then Isabella answers firmly.

"I know, but I can't tell you. He also provided minimal protection to his dolls for his own safety. "The moment you try to say that, Isabella will lose her consciousness and turn into a complete idiot."

"... "So can you tell me what his next plan is?"

Then Isabella shook her head again.

"Of course, I have a guess. Likewise, Isabella would become an idiot the moment she attempted to directly interfere with his actions. So I can't tell you."

Such a useless guy.

That thought seemed to be clearly revealed in Seongjin's expression. Isabella shot back with an angry look on her face.

"Can you please use a roundabout way of reasoning or a metaphor? "People are willing to cooperate at best, so ask in a more noble way!"

Uh, I don't know. Something like that.

Seongjin fiercely raised his eyes.

"There's nothing I can answer for you anyway, so why are you willing to cooperate?"

"Or what about things that happened a little earlier than the immediate problem? "If that's the case, you'll probably be able to answer without any restrictions."

"What is the standard for 'old days'? Do you really think we should at least conduct a census of this guy? "Do you want me to dig into your family relationships step by step?"

"Sigurt."

"what?"

When Seongjin asked again because he did not understand the meaning, Isabella spoke again in a low voice.

"His family. Her father, who was her only family, made a living by selling stories to people. "She was called Sigurd by the people, just like the storyteller of the dimension."

"... .."

"His father, and his father's father. Everyone was Sigurd. Sigurd Sigurdsson does not just refer to a storyteller, but is a historic name that has been passed down from generation to generation."

I don't know when his ancestors started passing down his name.

Sigurd's son, Sigurd.

Also his son Sigurd.

The name that lasted for such a long time was on people's lips and gradually transformed into something like a byword for a storyteller.

So, by the time the dimensional storyteller was born, the name Sigurd Sigurdson itself had become imbued with powerful power. As long as he is part of the story he creates, he has the power to even cross the boundaries of other dimensions.

"Every story has the powerful power to evoke imagery. "In particular, an image that arises strongly becomes a solid dream and also a meditation."

The storyteller, who had the ability to freely create desired images in those who listened to the story, used this power to travel through various dimensions and perform numerous miracles.

A power that can easily raise a country with just three inches of tongue, and can also cause the world to flounder in complete collapse. This power, which is beyond the scope of humans, can probably be compared to a king of one dimension.

Sigurd, who became arrogant, had no hesitation in calling himself the 'Demon King of Dreams'.

"Then one day, as he was walking around the world of flames as usual, he discovered it. "In this world, there are great rules that create and maintain the dimension itself, rather than simply creating a single thought."

"... "The normal world."

When Seongjin answered indifferently, Isabella nodded.

"Your guess is correct. While Sigurd wasted his time playing with the power of dreams brought about by stories, the laws that make up the beautiful world called the normal world were born in this world. and... .."

After a brief pause, Isabella continued speaking with slightly deepened eyes.

"There was a mysterious being who created this, the Oracle."

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309. Demon King No. 2 (7)

Sigurd traveled through all sorts of dimensions and experienced extraordinary miracles.

I saw a prophet create solid prayer images as easily as if he were breathing.

I have personally witnessed the scene where a faint sigh uttered by a high-ranking demon lord transformed into a strong flame and eventually became a complete dimension.

"But nowhere in the world have I seen anyone who creates the laws that form the dimensions themselves."

The laws of the normal world were truly amazing.

Let there be light.

If you specify the code like that, light of a certain intensity will shine down on the world forever.

Let there be life here.

By manipulating the code like that, strange life forms that had completely skipped the process of origin and evolution came to life.

The codes didn't even have physical limits.

If you specify coordinates, it will happen as you specify, and if you accelerate time, it will accelerate as you specify. Infinite worlds that expand as far as the creator wishes.

"Do you know what the most mysterious thing is? "The truth was that the Oracle who created those beautiful codes was just a human

being."

It is not a god, or a high-ranking demon lord somewhere.

Oracle of Kornsheim.

A spiritual leader of a small clan who was overlooked as one of the ordinary prophets.

"Oracle. "For Sigurd Sigurdson, who had no doubt that he was the most special being among humans, he was like a profound challenge thrown in front of him."

The code designating fire means fire, and the code designating water means water. The same code always produces the same image.

As Sigurd observed the standardized rules, he couldn't help but think of the people who were fascinated by his story.

'Singing a comedy brings excitement and joy, singing a tragedy brings sadness and frustration... . 'Everyone had exactly the image I wanted.'

So Sigurd thought like this.

'Maybe it's possible for me too?'

The images evoked by those who hear the same story are always similar.

So, wouldn't it be possible to make my story itself function like a piece of code?

'Couldn't we collect and collect stories and finally make them into a grand rule that constitutes the world?'

That glimpse of possibility was a fascination strong enough to immediately captivate the heart of the storyteller, who was feeling a kind of boredom from the long pastime.

'okay! I want to become a great story that will be remembered forever, not a player chasing a one-time dream! 'I want to be the only story, the only rule that penetrates the world!'

In this way, the storyteller who walked through a thousand dreams began to passionately travel around the world of reality in search of material for a story.

Seongjin clicked his tongue after hearing that. The more she listened, the more dumbfounded she became.

What on earth is that supposed to do?

"That's Sigurd Sigurdsson's ultimate goal? "You're kidding, right?"

"... "Isn't it grand and beautiful?"

In response to Isabella's question, Seongjin frowned and snorted.

"no. No matter how much I think about it, it seems like I'm obsessed with something so useless? "If I had just slept during that time, at least it wouldn't have been a waste of time."

Then Isabella looked at Seongjin with a bitter smile.

"I don't think that reaction has changed. "Before you lost your memory, you didn't seem to empathize with this story at all."

"... .."

"But have you ever thought about it this way? The reason your heart doesn't move is probably because you are the next Oracle. Since he has already been promised to go beyond the limits, he may not be indifferent to all of this."

Well, guess what?

Seongjin looked out the window with a sullen expression. As we talked, quite a bit of time passed, and the carriage had already reached the corner of the road leading to the townhouse.

"Sigurt Sigurdsson has lived for a long time. He accumulated more knowledge than any other prophet, and he was able to create artistic images that were unrivaled by any demon lord. But from the perspective of kings from other dimensions, his limitations were clear."

Just an exceptional human being.

No matter how much he calls himself the 'Demon King of Dreams', no one seriously listens to him.

"So he lived his whole life refusing to be just a human being. But if there is an even more special person called the Oracle, wouldn't we have to overcome him first to truly advance to the next level?"

At that time, Seongjin sensed the faint feeling of self-deprecation mixed in her voice like a ghost.

"You, too, think that that child's dream is a bit foolish. is not it?"

"... ..!"

Then Isabella closed her mouth and looked at Seongjin with round eyes.

"Sigurt Sigurdsson is an irredeemable idiot. He made so many mistakes for a goal that wasn't even meant to be. But at least now that you've stopped doing that, you're in a much better position than that guy."

"... .."

"So, forget about such trivial dreams! How long are you going to be influenced by that kind of psychopath's thinking? "He's never coming back again."

"... I don't think it's that foolish. "I, too, was once strongly fascinated by that ideal."

Isabella answered with a trembling voice and followed Seongjin's gaze as she gazed at the scenery passing by outside the window.

"Besides, the most intense passion usually comes from simple motivation. "It is not incomprehensible that Sigurd Sigurdson, who lived a boring life for many years, became so obsessed with that dream."

"... .."

"Now that things have turned out this way, I feel like everything is pointless. As you said, it looks like the storyteller will never come back to me again."

And with that, the two stopped talking and each fell into silence.

This is because the topic of Sigurd Sigurdson was not a very pleasant topic for both Seongjin and Isabella.

Rattling.

Soon the carriage arrives at the townhouse mansion and stops. Seongjin got off the carriage first and silently extended his hand towards Isabella, who was late to get up.

Etiquette is nothing special. However, it was a moan that had a slightly different meaning to Isabella.

Isabella, who had thought that she would never truly be treated as a lady, hesitantly took Seongjin's hand with a surprised expression.

"Let me ask you one last question."

Seongjin, who lightly lowered her to the floor, opened his mouth.

"The gray plague that spread across the ecliptic some time ago, was it the work of Sigurd Sigurdson?"

Then Isabella looked at Seongjin with strange eyes for a moment.

"You pretend not to have any questions, but you don't miss the most important questions."

"... .."

"Well, that would be good."

Isabella let out a small sigh and paused for a moment to choose her words.

"I cannot tell you in detail what I know about the Gray Plague. This is because it is also closely related to Sigurd Sigurdsson's future plans.

however..."

Bright blue-green eyes, reminiscent of summer greenery, meet Seongjin's gaze directly.

"At least the ignorant act of planting monster eggs directly on people was not his doing."

Then the demon king, who had been listening to him with bated breath, gave an answer before Seongjin could ask.

[It's the truth.]

'... okay.'

Seongjin instinctively realized that Isabella's answer just narrowly missed the line set by the puppeteer.

At least what that guy said about cooperating with Seongjin was true.

"Lady Isabella."

Seongjin slightly lifted her hand close to her face and let go.

"I hope that you will continue to provide a lot of help to Amelia's work in the future."

As she gives such a polite greeting and raises one corner of her mouth, doesn't Isabella's face suddenly turn pale?

"Hey, hey! Heep!"

"... ... ?"

Seeing Isabella starting to visibly tremble, Seongjin tilted his head.

what? They say they will save you for a while. No, why does he peck at me like that even when I treat him well?

[Please, why don't you look in the mirror first before smiling at others?]

What are you saying? Anyway, you didn't threaten me outright,

right? Then it's done, isn't it?

[...] You said that wasn't a threat to kill you if you don't become your sister's slave and take care of yourself?]

Shut up, you ungrateful devil who can't even pay for the bear meat you got!

Whose side are you on? uh?

* * *

That night.

Owen, who stayed up late at the Volanta tribe discussing the poison sting incident, accessed the Pangea Chronicle a little later than usual.

When I arrived at the meeting place with the group, I was greeted warmly by friends I saw all the time and by a mole rat engineer who had recently joined the group.

[Owen, you're a little late today.]

[Welcome! Waiting!]

[Nice to meet you, friend!]

[Woah, everyone waited!]

Owen waved cheerfully and took a seat.

[But what about newbies?]

Then the group suddenly raises its hair and points to the opposite corner of the restaurant.

When Owen turned around, he saw a small goat sitting by the window in the corner, staring blankly outside.

[Lee Seong-jin said earlier that he had something to think about!]

[I told them to call me when everyone is gathered, but they seem to be concentrating so it's hard to touch them.]

[...] okay?]

Just as they said, the air wrapped around the baby goat was somewhat serious and heavy.

'It's a newbie's topic, but sometimes you put that weight on it... ... '

Creak.

Owen stood up and slowly walked towards the mountain goat. He was a little concerned about the guy.

'Newbie guy. Do you have any concerns? In that case, it would be better if you didn't suffer alone and confide in everyone.'

Meanwhile. Contrary to everyone's worries, Seongjin was just spending time recalling various things in a stream of consciousness. She was filled with a strange feeling that something would happen soon.

'Isabella said that. The same code always creates the same image... ... '

That's what she said. The shape of the normal world is a perfectly standardized image.

Its essence is also a solid image.

'Come to think of it, my father also told me that story some time ago.'

It was probably the day Seongjin suddenly visited me at dawn.

Seonghwang told a story about a wizard who was famous on Bertrand Street a long time ago. Before he disappeared due to controversy over heresy, he was said to have gained popularity as a famous figure in the imperial capital.

-He used to show off powerful magic that spewed out five-colored fire from his hands. He was quite a spectacle.

-But there is no magic in this world, is there?"

At the time, Seongjin thought strangely. At least he had never seen a phenomenon that could be called 'magic' in the original dimension of Delcross.

Even the items in the imperial palace treasury, which are said to be magical items, are all items from the normal world made in Ionia.

Sure enough, Seonghwang nodded.

-okay. In reality, he was a skilled Auror user. The flame created by mixing the drugs was created simultaneously with the external air to deceive people.

-what. Isn't that just a scam?

Seongjin looked dumbfounded, but Seonghwang added with a faint smile.

-Never forget this, Mores. In every world, there exists a fundamental power like these aurors. If you see a mysterious phenomenon that appears to be of extraordinary power, always think carefully about what lies beneath it.

okay.

Seongjin looked blankly into space and thought.

'There is magic in this world, like a game. There are special skills such as aurors. But the root of it all is just burning. That's all there is to it.'

Just like my father's salmon that I saw in a crevice a while ago.

Like my Demon King No. 2, who burned Black Justitia.

Grumbling.

At one point, a vivid flame rises before Seongjin's eyes. It's small and insignificant like the devil, but once it catches fire, it's a dark red fire that never goes out.

It was Demon King No. 2.

[omg? It's a newbie!]

Owen, who was approaching, was scared and ran -

[Magic? Is it magic?]

[Lee Seong-jin! Is it someone's attack? But this is a green zone?]

The other silent villains also look at Seongjin in shock.

"ha ha ha... .."

Seongjin laughed at the phenomenon that occurred more easily than expected.

'okay. If the normal world is structured by an oracle so that standardized images can easily be realized... ..'

There is no reason why Demon King No. 2, who has become completely standardized in my consciousness, should not appear easily!

310. Underwater (1)

"Send a punitive force and schedule a regular inspection of the church. "This is Amelia's idea?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Seonghwang was sitting in his office looking through a pile of documents. Next to him, as always, Administrator Dorian is bowing his head, waiting for his final approval.

It was about the Cyprus Union, which has been whining and sending messages with frequent frequency recently.

"It's not just a day or two that they request a maritime demonic beast subjugation team. "There is no clear damage yet."

"Hana, Princess Amelia, paid particular attention to this fishing suspension situation. Of course, she said that sending a punitive force from the empire would do more harm than good."

"So you're saying you're conducting a church audit in parallel?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. It is expected that costs can be significantly reduced by carrying out the work simultaneously. In addition, since their unreasonable request is being granted, they said that even if a high-intensity audit is involved, there will not be a big noise from the union."

Seonghwang rested his chin and thought for a moment.

Amelia, I had no idea that the child knew the truth of what was happening on the coast of Cyprus.

But Amelia clearly said that she returned from the future to the past.

If so, she may be preparing the child for something of her own.

'I tried to move Sir Leandros first, but it wouldn't be a bad idea to set Amelia up like this... ..'

It seemed like a good idea to conduct a church audit without giving any time to prepare. It will be an opportunity to tear apart the Cyprus union and church forces, which have recently been trying to come together.

Seonghwang's thoughts were moving positively, but Dorian hesitated and added a word.

"Plus, what happened to Prince Logan... .."

"Logan?"

"yes. "If Prince Logan finds out about this, he will not just sit back and watch, but will organize a punitive force."

"... .."

That's right.

No matter how much they persuaded him to increase his allowance, the upright child had the temper to ignore the hardships of his subjects.

Seonghwang, completely convinced, nodded.

"Execute it immediately."

"If you do... .."

"If Amelia judged it that way, then so be it. "It seems like there is no need for the administration to reconsider her."

"... .."

thud.

A royal seal that is stamped very easily. Dorian was speechless for a moment and looked at the castle.

Even Dorian was skeptical about the princess's political skills, which were not appropriate for her age.

However, no matter how I looked at the success, I felt that it was going too far. They sometimes show an incomprehensible level of trust in their children's judgment.

"If you do, we will immediately create a budget and execute it together."

"I know."

It was just as Dorian was about to hand over the documents that had been approved.

Startle.

Seonghwang is suddenly startled by something and stares blankly into space with a stiff face.

"... ... ?"

Thanks to this, Dorian, who had been holding out his hand, hesitated and raised his head in confusion.

In the past, I would not have dared to look directly at the representative of God, but after working closely with him for a long time, I now sometimes feel bold enough to look at the Holy Emperor's expression.

And there, there were strange eyes that Dorian was familiar with. Eyes that give off an inorganic glow and are somehow out of focus.

The air in the office suddenly freezes as Seonghwang stops moving. An eerie silence, as if even a speck of dust sparkling under the sunlight had been stuffed into the air.

'Has something big happened...?'

Under heavy pressure, Dorian doesn't know what to do and just breaks into a cold sweat.

Tuk.

Only Chamberlain Louis, who was standing behind him, accepted the royal seal that was about to slip from the Holy Emperor's hand with a calm face.

How much time has passed?

Blink.

Eventually, Seonghwang blinked once, and his eyes returned to focus, and the silver glow slowly faded away. At the same time, the frozen air in the office becomes light as if it were a lie.

"Phew... .."

I don't know what it is, but it looks like it's over.

When Dorian, relieved, let out the breath he had been suppressing, Seonghwang opened his mouth and handed him the document as if nothing had happened.

"Dorian, are you getting married soon?"

Dorian lowered his head in sadness at that unexpected question.

"yes. "Yes, Your Majesty."

It's still just a covenant between the parties, so how do you already know? Such questions would be meaningless in the face of God's representative.

The person with whom Dorian promised his future was a fellow employee in the administration, and unlike his weak self, she was a very confident young woman. He was drawn to her and committed a speeding violation, even though she was belatedly making her hasty wedding preparations.

However, as Seonghwang looked back at Dorian, a strange joy appeared in his eyes, even if it was only for a moment.

"okay. From now on, prepare your heart well. "Children are always

beings who far exceed their parents' expectations."

"... yes?"

"When you teach them one thing, children are able to think through their application skills to the point of feverishness. "When I taught him how to draw with tree branches, he stopped drawing the picture I was told to draw and before I knew it, he was trying to play with fire with the tree branch in his hand."

"... ... ?"

I don't know what to say and my mouth is gaping...

"Puuk," Seonghwang sighs deeply and adds softly.

"So, I wish you good luck too."

"..."

Dorian hesitated, not knowing what to say. Then, my eyes met with Louis, the Chamberlain, who was standing behind the Holy Emperor.

Then the old man smiled warmly and slowly shook his head at Dorian. Even though he didn't say anything, the meaning of that smile was clear.

-Don't worry. Could it be that there are other people in this world like the princes and princesses of the Seonghwang family?

ah.

Suddenly, I felt very sorry for the representative of the Supreme God, but-

'No, what am I thinking!'

Dorian quickly shook his head hastily, shaking those unholy thoughts away.

* * *

[What is it? Is it magic?]

[Lee Seong-jin! Where did this fire come from? Have you checked the opposing wizard?]

[Magic? Was there such magic in the Pangea Chronicle?]

Little Demon King No. 2 blazing, revealing an alien presence in the air.

The silent villains and the mole engineer approach in a panic. Seongjin looked at them and smiled a little proudly.

How do you feel? The power of this body. Very surprising, right?

[Newbie. It's dangerous, so get away from there.]

At that time, Owen pushed Seongjin away with a worried look and tried to put his hand on the flame. It may have been an attempt to roughly scatter it, but-

Wow!

He fell backwards before he could even touch the flame. Because the baby goat's hoof hit Owen's forehead hard.

"100 million!"

Owen screamed and fell backwards.

Degurrrr-

"Why are you hitting me again?"

After rolling a few laps, Owen jumps up and shouts with an aggrieved expression. But instead, Seongjin raised her voice and she became angry at him.

"men and horses! Now you know what this is and you're trying to mess with it! uh?"

"... huh?"

No matter how much my father told me to be polite, what can I do when his behavior is so poor! If you do something wrong, you should

get it right!

"Do you know what happens once this gets on your body?"

"What happens?"

But even without Seongjin explaining, everyone soon knew the answer.

Grumble!

While Seongjin was turning towards Owen, Gureub gently touched the flame with his hair.

Dark red flames quickly spread through the beautiful ranger's hair.

[Ugh!?!]

[this? Group!]

Everyone was shocked, but the solution was quick. This is because Seongjin, who had pulled out his sword, swung his arm towards him like lightning.

Shukang!

As the beginner's sword drew a long solid line, the ranger's long hair instantly became stronger.

Hood!

Hair fluttering in the air is engulfed in flames and quickly disappears.

Eventually, Demon King No. 2, which completely burned the group's hair, burned alone in the air for some time before finally disappearing without a trace.

[...] ... !]

Everyone gaped at the sudden situation.

[Damage was inflicted on a group with high fire defense! That seems to be a higher level magic than it looks!]

[But my leg was cut off by a party member? how? This is the green zone, right?]

[for a moment! Now it's not hair, it's legs?]

For some reason, the hair had moving joints, and it seemed like the group had attached one of its remaining legs to the avatar's hair.

"Now, did you see it? "What did you just almost touch?"

Seongjin frowned at Owen. But for some reason, Owen was staring blankly into the empty space where Demon King No. 2 had disappeared with her hardened face.

Why is that guy acting like that all of a sudden?

"... Newbie, are you hurt anywhere?"

Eventually, Owen comes to his senses and approaches Seongjin and asks.

Seongjin glanced at him, then responded with a sullen expression.

[The accident occurred because it was Gurreup-keul-lab-geul-leub-bi-keul-eul-leub, so why are you asking me?]

[Ah, that's right. Are you okay, group?]

Then the beautiful ranger, who was tracing the back of her hair with one hand, smiled. Luckily for her, there didn't seem to be any major damage to the group.

[No need to worry! As long as I have one leg left, I will always be alive and well! Thank you for your quick judgment, Seongjin Lee!]

[Good luck, friend. But what really was that fire just now?]

On the other hand, there was someone who was looking at them with a rather serious expression. It was Hatasu Titi.

[Group. It's really strange that you didn't react at all to Lee Seongjin's attack.]

Of course, Seongjin's actions were purely to help the group. But that's just a consequential story.

Didn't he swing the sword first without any hesitation? It seemed like Gureub, the hero of the reversal, would react in some way, at least reflexively.

Doesn't this seem like he firmly believes that Lee Seong-jin will never harm him?

[No matter how you look at your reaction to Seongjin Lee, it is not rational at all.]

Among the silent villains, Hatasu Titi was the one who obediently followed Seongjin's words from the beginning.

However, it was based on a reasonable judgment that it was worth following him. Surprisingly, among the current silent villains, he was the one who was treating Seongjin the most selflessly.

'Lee Seong-jin is a strange being...'

A fourth guest ID user that did not exist before.

A strange flame that suddenly appeared and disappeared.

Hatasu Titi could not have known that every time she was with Lee Seong-jin, completely unexpected things would happen.

However, Lee Seong-jin's response to this is also understandable every time, so I have followed him without any hesitation until now.

'But everyone's reaction is somewhat strange.'

Look at Owen, who treats Lee Seong-jin, a beetle, as his neighborhood brother, saying it's his hometown.

Before, I thought he was a pretty strong person, but now he's still laughing and thinking it's cute even after being hit on the head by a baby goat several times.

Contrary to their sloppy appearance, the same goes for the group that

rarely gives their hearts to others. For some reason, I sincerely believe in Lee Seong-jin so much.

'Isn't this like being fascinated by something?'

A terrifying ability possessed by evil things that the elders always warned about. Somehow, Hatasu Titi had no choice but to think carefully about Lee Seong-jin's identity once again.

At that moment, the beautiful ranger's glass-clear eyes stared at Hatasu Titi.

[Hatisu Titi. [I can understand what your concerns are.]

[Group. Are you aware that the current situation is a little strange?]

[Know. But I believe what my gut says inside me. A warrior's intestines never lie.]

[...] Is that so.]

Hatasu Titi is a purebred Mashu tree. There was no way I could understand the feeling of my internal organs pounding.

I just felt that the group's almost blind attitude made my wariness towards Seongjin melt away.

'but. So far, Seongjin Lee's judgment has been extremely trustworthy. Besides, don't the rewards and records so far speak for themselves? It would be difficult to have preconceptions about him out of unnecessary anxiety.'

Meanwhile, the mole engineer fiddled with his goggles and opened his mouth.

[Anyway, how long are you going to spend your time here? This time, I brought a perfect strategy without any errors! Let's quickly conquer the next theme dungeon?]

The Orc King's Maze had many variables.

Plus, the strange accident that just happened.

[...] Is it okay?]

The eyes of the silent villains, including Hatisu Titi, naturally focus on the baby goat.

[are you okay.]

And Lee Seong-jin's strange answer, as if he had expected it.

With that, the party's path to the dungeon was decided. Hatasu Titi's eyes deepen as she sees everyone standing up from their seats casually.

[...]]

It's also strange. It's really strange.

Hatasu Titi thought so for a moment, but before he knew it, he too was gathering equipment along with the other silent villains.

* * *

okay. Seongjin decided, 'It's okay.'

The moment I stepped into the themed dungeon, I knew that someone impatient would immediately contact me.

[What are you doing! □□□ □□!]

Suddenly, darkness enveloped his son-in-law, but Seongjin was not embarrassed at all. She soon saw a goddess appear before her eyes and shouted in a trembling voice.

[Woman, Justitia.]

[How have you accepted my warning so far! Good luck to you in this unstable world! Well... ... !]

The goddess's golden spear and bloody eyepatch were the same as before. The only thing that has changed is that my complexion has become whiter than before.

Is it okay to go back to a themed dungeon where something

unexpected might happen?

Oh, it's okay. I'm going to kill the guy who is the root of it anyway.

Ugh... ..

You can also feel an unsightly presence rustling in the back.

Justitia of Darkness.

The guy who had tasted the bitter taste of Demon King No. 2 before had parts of his body and seaweed-like hair disappearing in clumps.

The parts that were still intact were soaked in black blood. Physical damage, not burn marks.

okay. If I hadn't cut off the healthy part, Gehenna's fire would probably have burned to the end.

[You managed to survive?]

The guy gritted his teeth in response to Seongjin's light greeting. It's amazing how you can feel the gaze of hatred in the gaping eye sockets.

But when the guy tried to approach Seongjin again-

Grumble!

Little Demon King No. 2 appears in front of Seongjin again.

Kieeek!

The dark Justitia could not bear to approach again and widened her distance.

okay. I think we're finally in the mood to have a proper conversation. Seongjin looked at the two stiff goddesses alternately and raised the corner of her mouth.

[If you have anything to say, let's finish it quickly. I have to go quickly and go through the dungeon.]

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311. Underwater (2)

[Didn't I ask you not to disturb the order of this world any more?!]

In the pitch-black darkness.

The goddess's voice cries out as if screaming, making the son-in-law cry loudly.

[I told you so, please don't provoke it and bring about chaos! □□□
□□, do you really want to hasten the collapse? Are you really trying to see the end of this world?]

The sharp feeling of resentment contained in that voice is conveyed vividly, as if it were a dagger piercing the skin.

However, Seongjin glared at Justitia without any response.

[If things keep going like that, neither of us will get very good results, right?]

[What? What is that... ... ?]

[I'm saying don't blame others for nothing. If you keep acting like that, do you think your position will be at least a little bit advantageous here?]

[...] ... !]

At the unexpectedly strong reaction, the goddess is speechless and opens her mouth blankly.

Grumble!

In the meantime, Seongjin moved Little Demon King No. 2, checked

the leech crawling from behind once more, and then continued.

[For now, without further ado, let's just look at the immediate results. I am the only one in this world who can harm it. Isn't that right?]

[...]]

It seems like it was the perfect answer. As proof of that, the goddess's fierce momentum suddenly subsided.

Justitia pursed her lips and glared fiercely at Seongjin through her probably gaping eye sockets.

'also...'

Seongjin laughed inwardly after confirming that his guess was correct.

-This world was forced to wake up from its egg before it was ready.

Pangea Chronicle was created by running out of time and randomly cramming together existing game sources.

-In order to make up for the ridiculously weak tone, numerous rules were added in a disorderly manner. In such great chaos, the distortion of the world eventually arose.

A huge pot of spaghetti where source clashes with source and code misaligns.

Perhaps the dark Justitia can be said to be chaos itself, born from errors and growing by eating errors.

The problem was the method Impulse Soft chose to solve it.

Didn't Dexter say that too?

-There is only one technical way to solve this situation.

-what is that?

-It is an expedient method to grant 'Code Zero' authority to the system control AI.

Code zero.

A mysterious authority that is at the highest level in the normal world, also called the realm of God.

-Imagine if an ideal world consisting of only ideas or concepts exists.

Early that morning, I ran to the main palace as if I was possessed.

Seongjin talked with Seonghwang for quite a long time. And he was able to get a glimpse of 'God's code'.

-Everything in the world can exist only through designated ideas. But what would you do if something appeared there that absolutely could not be defined by a single idea and whose limits could not be grasped?

A designated idea? I guess it roughly refers to the codes that make up the normal world.

Seongjin, who guessed that, answered appropriately.

-Can't we just define it as a similar concept or ignore it altogether?

Then Seonghwang scolded Seongjin with stern eyes.

-You're saying something really dangerous. Have you already forgotten, Mores? What was the result of a book I defined incorrectly the other day?

-uh...

You mean that day when you exploded a book in the air and even did a self-harm show?

When Seongjin looked at Seonghwang with a cold expression, he cleared his throat and slightly looked away.

-It is too large to be contained within a border, and its existence is too obvious to ignore. However, if we do not define it somehow, the foundation of the world made up of ideas will collapse in vain.

No, but how do you define something that cannot be defined?

When Seongjin made a puzzled expression, Seonghwang gave the answer easily without any further annoyance.

-Wouldn't it be better to create a separate concept called 'things that cannot be defined'?

-Something that is impossible to define...

-okay. By pushing it completely outside the boundaries of ideas, the world inside the boundaries can maintain complete stability without ignoring it.

Something that is impossible to define.

God, or the unknown force that moves the world itself.

Naturally, 'Code Zero' was bound to remain a mysterious code to engineers. It itself contained the concept of 'something that cannot be defined'!

-Pangaea Chronicle. The system that manages the normal world was given zero code and gained 'divine authority'. But why, even with such strong authority, has it been unable to completely resolve the error on its own, increasing chaos?

Then, Seonghwang looked at Seongjin with deepened eyes for a moment, and then asked in a low voice.

-okay. What is the real name of this thing called 'chaos'?

-... ... !

From that question, Seongjin was finally able to understand everything.

Justitia. Or dark Astria. A goddess of chaos with the same name as the goddess borrowed from the classic RPG game 'Astria Chronicles'.

Impulse Soft not only indiscriminately added the source code of Astria Chronicles to the game, but also committed the atrocity of

granting 'Code Zero' authority to that lump of error along with 'Justitia', which was designated as the system AI!

Ugh...

The leech, no, the dark Justitia, is struggling to approach Seongjin with less than half of its body remaining. However, the guy was frightened by Demon King No. 2, who swung at him again, and retreated backwards.

Seongjin, who had been looking at that pitiful figure without much emotion, turned his head back to Justitia in front of him.

[If my guess is correct, you would have expected this result from the beginning.]

Justitia had clearly made this recommendation to Seongjin that day.

-Or would you like to use your unique ID now? ☐☐☐ ☐☐. Get rid of everything that bothers you like before.

As if hoping for a collision with 'chaos'.

[Do you think this is a pointless reprimand? As I said before, all of this is chaos caused purely by your presence. So it makes sense that you have to put it to sleep.]

Unlike the first time, Justitia protested in a calm tone.

[Well, how about that?]

It is probably true that the growth of 'chaos' has accelerated slightly with the appearance of Seongjin.

However, it is ultimately a collection of errors that were created along with the Pangea Chronicle.

Moreover, on the day he first encountered it, Seongjin set a fire in 'Chaos' that could never be extinguished. That alone would have drastically weakened its power. Because I could no longer cling to Seongjin or obstruct his vision.

Now Seongjin was no longer experiencing graphics problems. Still, the only reason he was sticking to his infant skin was because he still felt uncomfortable revealing his identity to Owen.

[okay. That guy can no longer use his strength like before. But strangely enough, the number of errors in dungeons has increased since then. The system is not correcting errors properly. [It's as if he's intentionally encouraging a conflict between me and that.]

[...]]

[So don't go round and round and say what you want to say straight away, Justitia.]

Seongjin now spoke firmly towards the goddess, who was clearly looking frustrated.

[Please completely get rid of that thing that is not good enough for you!]

[...] ... !]

Grumble!

As if reflecting Seongjin's mood, Demon King No. 2's flames flicker wildly.

Wow... ... !

While the leech was frightened and writhed around its body, Goddess Justitia was silent for a while with a stern expression on her face.

How much time has passed like that? With her small sigh, the goddess finally quietly opened her mouth.

[...] Do you know? In a place where even the smallest breath of the most insignificant life is determined by code, how unusual is it to create and use a new flame image? That's purely because of the code given to you.]

[code?]

[exactly. Apart from having a guest ID, you are assigned a unique code and ID from the beginning. That's it... ..]

[stop! Enough about this, let's talk about our transaction.]

Exciting-

Seongjin consciously calmed down something that was beating violently and roughly cut off Justitia's words.

[I will get rid of that completely. We will immediately wipe out the errors you are neglecting without being able to do anything about it. So, you too, pay the appropriate compensation!]

[...]]

Justitia had a shocked expression on her face, but there was no way she could dare refuse the offer when the survival of the world was at stake.

It was actually the leech that reacted violently to Seongjin's words.

[Whatever you want! Don't decide things like that on your own! Why should I die obediently?]

No matter what he did, he seemed to think that he had no talent to defeat Demon King No. 2, so he bit his body helplessly and shouted at Seongjin.

[I, I was just born! Someone gave me power, and I just became the rule of this world and acted according to my nature! But why is it my fault?!]

The leech's argument also had a point.

The one who made the mistake was the game company that didn't take proper measures, and they probably didn't want to be born like that from the beginning just because it was a leech.

However, Seongjin just responded with an expressionless expression despite the desperate scream.

[If you stay like that anyway, you won't last long. If this continues, you will completely collapse the Pangea Chronicle, and you too will meet a meaningless end along with the world. What does that mean to you?]

At the same time-

Grumble!

Demon King No. 2 burns even more fiercely and moves towards the leech.

Then, black tears of blood poured down from the gaping eye sockets facing Seongjin.

iced coffee... ... !

A soft sigh flows from blood-soaked lips.

[Even so, the brief moment given before destruction is completely mine... ... !]

[...]]

A being that is bound to be wrong from birth. A being inevitably destined to ruin everything. Suddenly, Seongjin felt deep empathy and compassion for the guy.

However, because of that, Seongjin was able to speak more firmly to the guy.

[I guarantee it. Whatever it is, it's good for you to just end it here.]

[what... ... ?]

And those questions were his last words.

Grumble!

Demon King No. 2 quickly rushed at him, instantly creating a huge flame and engulfing the dark Justitia.

Kyaaaaa!

A terrifying scream echoes through the darkness. The guy struggled like crazy, tearing at his own body, but the flames didn't retreat at all and consumed his body step by step.

... ... !

The 'chaos' covered in dark red flames soon completely disappeared, leaving behind only a handful of black ash.

The enormous errors that had been accumulating disappeared at once, and Pangea Chronicle instantly regained complete stability.

[...]]

Seongjin, who had been looking at the remaining ashes for a moment, turned to look at Justitia, who was silent.

[This won't be the end, right?]

[...] As long as this world lasts, it will not completely disappear but be reborn. Didn't you tell me? It is already the law that makes up this world, the atmosphere that has dissolved here.]

As Justitia said that, a single tear flowed from her red eye patch. Only you can know whether those are tears of relief or mourning.

[And as long as you remain involved in this world, it will grow rapidly again. So, can you completely leave this world right now?]

However, Seongjin complained and shook his head.

[You need to think carefully, Justitia. Would it be better to ostracize me from this world just because the growth of chaos accelerates a little? Or would it be better to politely ask them to sort it out periodically?]

[...]]

[It's very shameful that they put pressure on me and made nonsense, such as saying that it was because of me that chaos was caused and that I was going to destroy the world. Still, if you see that you're pulling tricks like that, you're a pretty smart guy. So, why don't you

show your gratitude to me now and prove it with a proper reward?]

[...] I guess you've become more clever than I thought.]

Justitia lowered her head in resignation.

Rather than engaging in a pointless fight, he decided that it would be more advantageous to please Seongjin as quickly as possible.

[Yes, good. What kind of compensation do you want?]

Then Seongjin grinned and raised the corners of his mouth.

[What I want is...]

* * *

"... rain!"

... huh?

"... It's a newbie! Wake! are you okay?"

Seongjin opened his eyes to someone shaking his shoulder roughly. And then she flagged down, facing Owen, who had his face right in front of her.

Wow, what is it?

Out of shock, my hand reflexively went out.

Wow!

"100 million!"

Owen, who was hit defenseless, rolled around on the floor. Owen immediately stood up and shouted at Seongjin with a face full of resentment.

"No, what! Why are you hitting me again? Even if you worry, it's a mess!?"

"Uh, sorry."

Seongjin, who had inadvertently let go, apologized obediently.

I feel a little sorry. I think it's become a matter of inertia to give a damn to your guy.

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312. Underwater (3)

"You did that last time, and this time you're losing your mind again. Newbie, where are you hurting?"

Owen followed Seongjin and asked persistently.

"Because it's no big deal. don't mind."

"but... .."

It wasn't just Owen who was worried about Seongjin. The silent villains and Dexter were also watching him with concerned faces.

Since the so-called party leader was mesmerized as soon as he entered the dungeon, their concerns were not something I could understand.

"What should I do? "Do you want to just rest this time?"

Tsk, what a fuss.

Seongjin didn't even look at Owen and just waved his hand as if he was annoyed.

"Say what makes sense. You heard it from Dexter earlier, right? The role of the wizard is the most important in this dungeon. But how are you going to clear this place without me?"

Theme Dungeon B Rank, Witches' Coven.

Unlike the 'Orc King's Maze', where mobs of various classes were evenly distributed, this was a dungeon mainly dominated by wizard-type mobs that used mental magic or summoning.

Naturally, the magician's power is absolutely necessary to solve 'Justitia's conditions'.

In terms of type alone, it would be similar to Ice Banshee's dungeon. In that D-rank dungeon, didn't Seongjin and the silent villains almost die?

'Besides, the strategy Dexter came up with this time was probably supplemented based on my abilities. It would be absolutely impossible to clear it without me, right?'

Seongjin snorted inwardly and added.

"Don't forget, Owen. "We are still in the time challenge."

"That's true, but. If you overdo it and something dangerous happens...
... ."

"Ah, don't you worry needlessly? are you okay. "This dungeon will actually be safer than the Orc King's maze."

Seongjin's words were sincere.

He was confident that he could wipe out any dungeon in one go. No matter what anyone says, his condition is at its best right now.

Justitia of Darkness.

That thing that had been making errors big and small and gnawing at Seongjin like a leech, has now completely lost its power. So, no unexpected situations would occur for a while, and Seongjin's fatigue was also expected to be much less than before.

'Plus, there are things I stole from Justitia.'

However, despite Seongjin's confirmation, Owen's expression did not ease.

Why? The moment I saw the newbie standing next to the dark red flame, I suddenly felt a strange sense of déjà vu.

'what? 'Have you ever seen a scene similar to this?'

Owen thought through his memories, but no matter how much he thought about it, nothing came to mind.

[Now, stop concentrating.]

Seongjin warned Owen, who was still thinking about something else.

Meanwhile, they finally encountered the first mobs. They were witches wearing black cloaks.

Hehehehe...

Women emitting a cloud of black energy with ominous laughter.

Perhaps, the moment they enter their range of perception, mental magic will be poured mercilessly towards the party.

[Now, please. Seongjin Lee!]

As Dexter ordered in a nervous voice, Seongjin confidently stepped forward. This is to remove the condition through a magic attack.

Wow!

However, what Seongjin brought out this time was not Hayes' evil spirit.

"Ignition."

A short phrase that I have heard for the first time from the mouth of a baby goat is recited.

[...] ... ?]

Everyone was confused and didn't know what was going on, but then something amazing happened right in front of their eyes. Dark red flames erupted from the group of witches all at once!

Grumble!

Kyaaaaa... ... !

The fire burned briefly and fiercely. The witches burned up and

disappeared into thin air before their death spell was even over.

Without any conditions or anything, damage leading to instant death was inflicted.

[...] ... !?]

[Hmm, the problem is that the damage is too strong? There's no point in party hunting like this, right?]

Everyone was bewildered and their mouths were wide open, but only Seongjin checked the skill window with some strange worry. There, the new skill I had just acquired from Justitia was blinking.

□new! Unique Skill - Ignition□

□When the caster designates a target, spontaneous combustion occurs in an instant, regardless of the target's defense, reducing HP to 0.□

□Maximum number of possible targets: 5□

□Acquisition conditions - □□□ □□□

□MP consumption: 1□ per object

□Rank: SSS□

□Proficiency: SSS□

A skill that has no class or level requirements and is only available to Seongjin.

It doesn't matter how much life the enemy has or how much defense they have. There was almost no MP consumption.

It was a truly fraudulent instant kill that did not even require precise aiming.

[...] Just now, what is that?]

Dexter, who has finally come to his senses, asks in a trembling voice. However, Seongjin answered roughly and walked forward.

[Eh, no big deal.]

[wait for a sec! It's nothing special, hey!]

This skill, whose performance was so extreme that it was even crude, had just been created by Justitia with considerable effort. Seongjin didn't ask for it, but he voluntarily gave it to me.

-There is no need for this. Because I have Demon King No. 2. Just fulfill the requirements I mentioned.

Seongjin thought that his current strength was sufficient, but Justitia's position seems to have been very different.

-This is a gift from me, independent of your request, □□□ □□.

-gift? Without conditions?

-exactly. There are no conditions. So please, get these skills and never bring out that dangerous flame in Pangea Chronicle again!

A voice that seems quite desperate. Justitia was clearly extremely wary of Demon King No. 2.

Why not? Didn't he just witness a leech with the same name and status as himself disappearing in vain?

If we can eliminate the errors that have accumulated and become laws, then we can eliminate not only the correct laws but also the world itself without difficulty.

"Hey, Seongjin Lee!"

At that time, the mole engineer approached at a hurried pace and whispered urgently in Seongjin's ear.

"What happened to you? "You didn't have this skill before, right?"

However, Seongjin only responded calmly, gauging the distance to the next group of witches.

"There are other things too, so it's still too early to be surprised."

"... what?"

okay. Even the skill that Justitia had was [Ignition].

□new! Unique Skill – Lava Field□

□Creates the floor in the area designated by the caster into a lava field. It can be activated not only on the ground, but also on ice or water. Once trapped in the field, the target cannot escape, and regardless of fire defense, it receives additional damage of 30% HP upon activation and 10% HP per second thereafter.□

□Acquisition conditions - □□□ □□□

□MP consumption: 5□

□Rank: SSS□

□Proficiency: SSS□

This is also a trick that completely ignores the game's balance.

If 30% is cut when activated and an additional 10% per second, this means that it is possible to capture any target within 7 seconds.

'Shall we try it?'

There is no need to delay.

Seongjin muttered softly as soon as the witches came into view.

"Lava field."

Then, in the distance, the floor where the mobs were standing turned into an extensive lava floor.

Grumble!

Kia... ... !

This time too, the witches were wiped out before they even found Seongjin and his group.

[...] ... !?]

A sight you cannot easily believe even when you see it with your own eyes.

Dexter and the silent villains could only watch dumbly as the group of witches suddenly turned into light.

'Is it quite useful?'

okay. The only way to prevent Seongjin from bringing out Demon King No. 2 is to give him a morale skill equivalent to that.

Even if the balance is messed up, it seems like they thought it would be better than Demon King No. 2 unfolding indiscriminately again.

□new! Unique Skill – Flame□

□Applies a flame aura to the caster's weapon. Magic properties are added to the weapon's unique properties. 200% damage of attack is added.□

□Acquisition conditions - □□□ □□□

□MP consumption: 1□ per second

□Rank: SSS□

□Proficiency: SSS□

Kyaaa! Wow!

A beginner's sword engulfed in red flames slaughters witches.

[Lee Seong-jin! Not close range! To solve the 'condition', you have to use magic... ... !]

Dexter, who was embarrassed and tried to stop them, soon closed his mouth after seeing the witches disappearing into light.

A buff skill that allows you to receive a magic judgment even if you hit at close range. Of course, the damage increase is far outside the range of the buff.

'Anyway, if I have this, I can solve Justitia's [conditions] without a wizard.'

These were skills sufficient to run through themed dungeons. The intention seemed so transparent that I almost laughed.

'Aren't you telling me not to bring out Demon King No. 2 at all costs?'

Seongjin, who tested the last skill, was satisfied. First of all, I like that the startup language is intuitive and not grand. Probably because it was made in a hasty manner.

[Sorry everyone. I think I should take the test first when I have some free time.]

Seongjin asked for understanding from the group who were looking at him with wide eyes. He held his small hooves forward out of habit.

[Lee Seong-jin...]

[I'll give you a detailed explanation later, so for now, let's finish the dungeon. Because I'm still in the time challenge.]

Then, the tense atmosphere of the group softened like a lie.

[Yes, that's right! We need to save time now!]

[I understand, Seongjin Lee.]

Seongjin, who was looking at the group hurriedly maintaining the equipment, suddenly felt dumbfounded.

'no. I'm the one who said it, but why is everyone so obediently believing without any doubt?'

The mental world of thugs is sometimes really difficult to understand.

Anyway, Seongjin summoned Hayes' evil spirit as originally planned. The skill test was almost over, and I was about to follow the strategy that Dexter had worked so hard to plan.

'Besides, that guy is so quiet...'

Strangely, every time Seongjin fires a flashy flame-type skill here and there, Owen's expression gets worse. That has been on my mind since a while ago.

[Owner of my soul!]

Hayes' evil spirit appeared as if it had been waiting, and shot towards the witches, flowing black fog.

[let's go!]

With the baby goat's signal, the group began to run vigorously toward the boss room.

* * *

"All errors in the game have temporarily disappeared... .."

"Yes, it is."

Matilda frowned after receiving the report from her subordinate.

She is a senior executive at Impulse Soft and the chief engineer of the Homunculus engine development department. It was natural to receive real-time reports of events occurring in Pangea Chronicle, the first game to use the Homunculus engine.

"What is the cause?"

"We are still figuring it out."

"okay... .."

Matilda answered indifferently, as if she wasn't expecting much.

This is because I know better than anyone else that the game is already so twisted that investigating the logs is not easy.

"Let's just go. If there is anything unusual, report it and post it right away."

Matilda gestured to the employee and suddenly felt the concentration of nicotine in her blood drop sharply. Her beautifully lipsticked lips

flick on her new cigarette.

"Phew... .."

After inhaling a few puffs of smoke, the headache subsides a bit and the body relaxes. It was a sign of strong addiction.

As I've been paying attention to the precarious Pangea Chronicle, my smoking has noticeably increased recently.

"You sound like a damn director... .."

It was a purely lazy game director's mistake that caused this huge mass of errors to become a god.

In the process of refining the hastily created game, the author was ultimately unable to let go of the settings for his earlier work, Chronicles of Astria.

He loved his work and world view. I was particularly attached to his last series, 'Astria of Darkness', because it received favorable reviews for providing new tension by exposing the duality of a good goddess.

It was the golden age of that old-fashioned author.

"Isn't that why the hastily created world almost ended in vain?"

In any case, it was fortunate for both users and Impulse Soft that the error was resolved.

Matilda, who had been thinking for a while, suddenly realized that her subordinate had not yet left and turned her head.

"Is there anything else you want to say?"

Then the employee hesitated before opening his mouth.

"I... It's none other than the former item, the Ice Heart... .."

Ah, heart of ice.

That's a huge headache as well.

"They said they were asking the VIP carefully, but they said it would be difficult to return it in the near future."

"this... .."

Although it was expected to some extent, I was even more disappointed after hearing the results. I firmly believed that VIPs would not cause any problems.

But you can't blame only him. It was Matilda's arbitrary decision to rush the completion of the game even by pouring in sources from other games.

"I will try to find a solution. "Just leave now."

Matilda, who waved her hand to bite a subordinate, silently smoked a cigarette and looked at the pictures on the monitor for a moment.

It was a screenshot of the game taken by an observation drone from afar.

Sometimes it was hard to see because the focus was blurry, but anyway, the main character taking up most of the photo was a small mole wearing goggles.

"okay. "It seems like you are doing well after leaving Earth."

Matilda's short fingers carefully caress the monitor. It was a gesture that seemed fearful at first glance, but even so, what was contained in her fingertips was clear affection.

"But why, even with your new body in this new world, are you still as small as before, Dexter..." .."

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313. Underwater (4)

Seongjin and his group arrived at the boss room in an instant.

Since there were no forking paths like in the 'Orc King's Maze', they were able to take a single path and conquer the dungeon as expected this time.

[The ranking is certain, and if we do well, we can aim for first place again.]

Dexter says, looking around the window.

The time challenge results so far have been very good. Dexter's strategy was effective, and Seongjin's greatly reduced time at the beginning of the dungeon must have had a significant impact.

[As I explained earlier, the boss here uses a variety of mental magic. Among them, there are three ultimate skills that can kill a user in one hit. So everyone, be careful not to fall within the witch's attack range...]

Dexter stopped explaining and suddenly turned to Seongjin. A carefree baby goat with not the slightest trace of nervousness.

"why?"

"Well, it's nothing...""

Dexter shook his head and picked up the keys.

'Is there really a need for a detailed briefing? That guy would already know everything about the boss.'

Moreover, isn't this one the best when it comes to fraudulent instant

fraud?

[...] let's go!]

The key to the boss room is inserted and the huge stone door opens.

Drurr-

Along with the dull noise of internal organs moving, a chilling wind came out from the crack in the door.

Wooooooo...

What follows is a gloomy sound that cannot be distinguished whether it is moaning or crying.

With gray dust blowing in the air, the huge dungeon boss that was crouching slowly rises.

[...] ... !]

Eventually, the person standing straight towards the group was a huge woman, as skinny as a mummy. Her white-powdered face and black eyelids are extremely grotesque, as if she were a rotting corpse.

[...] B-rank boss, Hexenjavat of Remorse.]

gulp.

Dexter muttered, swallowing dry saliva. He was walking backwards, shaking his legs without realizing it.

Why not?

The ominousness emanating from Hexenjavat. It was different from the powerful force that Orc King Rygas exuded, and it evoked a feeling of suffocating fear that was slowly eating away at the body.

-Thunderstorm Born...

Creak.

Staggering like a broken doll, Hexenjavat approaches the group. With

each step he took, a thick cloud of dust rose from his old lace-covered muslin dress.

-The one who will mercilessly kill this world and also cruelly revive it from death. What on earth did you hope for that brought you to this place full of regret?

An unpleasant voice, as if scraping old metal.

It's probably about the main story.

However, just because he was reciting the given lines, Hexenjavat felt a strong sense of discomfort somewhere.

Seongjin carefully observed the boss's movements and soon found the cause of the discomfort.

'eye... ... '

okay. Hexenjavat's eyes, filled with deep intelligence, are fixed straight on Seongjin. Like Raigas, this would not be a typical boss mob reaction.

Seongjin, realizing this, took a step forward and said.

[I'll do it. There's no need to hit me for a long time.]

Strange reactions from boss mobs. Until now, I thought it was simply the work of the dark Justitia.

However, seeing as it continues to do this even now that it has completely lost its power, there may be a fundamentally different reason for their strange reaction.

[It's good.]

[Then please, Seongjin Lee.]

The group immediately understood Seongjin's words. It must have been reminiscent of the extremely cruel end of the Orc King Raigas.

As everyone retreated to the entrance of the boss room, Seongjin

glanced at Owen's face.

Sure enough, his face as he looks at Seongjin is stiff with tension, unlike usual.

'I guess I'm not afraid of fire anymore... ..'

Even when the Orc wizard threw a huge fireball at him, he rushed at him without even blinking an eye.

Where is that? Just before coming here, didn't we make a bonfire together and talk about strategy? I couldn't even guess why it was happening.

-I have nothing more to lose, but a deep resentment remains in my heart. If you are truly going to carry the world, you must be able to handle the resentment, regret, and even anger of this world.

Meanwhile, Hexenjavat, who has become quite close, is muttering a very insincere line. Seongjin hesitated for a moment, but soon made up his mind.

'okay. '7 seconds at most.'

Let's learn about Owen slowly.

First, let's kill the boss quickly and gracefully.

"... "Lava field."

At the same time as the small starter word is spoken-

Grumble!

The entire boss room, except for part of the entrance, was surrounded by red-hot lava. A fraudulent floor vending machine with no specific scope limitations.

Rattling!

In an instant, 30% of Hexenjavat's HP disappears. The old witch, completely engulfed in her flames, stared at her true form without

even thinking about unleashing her incredible magic.

-It is merciless kindness...

2 seconds.

Hexenjavat seemed to have completely given up on reciting the set lines and spoke to Seongjin, raising the corners of his mouth. The black mouth that curves over the white face is truly bizarre.

-Don't be so sad.

4 seconds.

Nevertheless, her appearance evoked strangely sad feelings in Seongjin. The hem of a thin dress, engulfed in flames and burning, flutters as if it were wings.

-Now I know what awaits at the end...

7 seconds.

HP goes straight to 0.

Wow.

The boss is transformed into light and completely disappears, and the lava field that was boiling on the floor disappears in an instant.

The boss room was empty, just like it had been from the beginning, leaving behind only a hollow sound.

[...]]

Seongjin and the group fell into silence for a moment, looking into the empty space where Hexenjavat had disappeared.

Although they cleared the dungeon easily without the slightest crisis, none of them showed signs of joy.

[...] It's a really strange feeling.]

Finally, Hatasu Titi opened her mouth quietly.

[They are just one component of the dungeon. Still, for some reason, I sometimes get the feeling that they are really alive.]

Then the group also nods its head.

[I understood. I too am strange! When I hear of the boss's death, my insides are pounding hard!]

At this point, Seongjin became very curious.

What on earth do the intestines of a group do? Isn't it just a digestive system? Or is it a translation problem?

[Okay, everyone, stop talking nonsense.]

Pointy!

Seongjin clinked his hooves together, somehow drawing the attention of the gloomy group.

[Everyone, make sure you have enough inventory. The reward will be quite good this time.]

I personally trained Justitia, and my ranking is probably quite high.

Now it was time to check the results for myself.

* * *

[First place! 1st place again!]

Dexter looked out the window and shouted excitedly.

[The time gap with second place is quite big, right? I don't think our record will be broken for a while!]

This is probably a natural result. Because I defeated the boss in 7 seconds.

Thanks to this, the rewards they received were also spectacular.

[Golden Lion Shield! The best armor in existence, surpassing the Red Lion series!]

Shield Warrior Hatasu Titi shouted in surprise.

[Golden Lion Bow! The best bow has arrived! There is no problem in using it. Now Dexter strengthens it!]

The ranger, Gurup, also danced, waving his arms and legs.

[Oh, the golden lion axe! It's been a while since a very rare weapon came out?]

Ax Warrior Owen's face also brightened a little after receiving a good weapon.

[hmm? however...]

Dexter's face, who was smiling brightly at the party members' achievements, suddenly distorted.

He looked at his inventory with a serious look, and then took out a golden staff shining from there.

[Golden Lion staff...]

It was from then on that the group began to feel something strange.

[what? Does this actually come up this often?]

[I heard that it is difficult to even drop one per day. So, as soon as it goes up to the auction house, it sells out quickly.]

[Plus, I heard that he always avoids the acquired user's class...]

[What is it? How does it fit so tightly? Is this a bug?]

The group, who were chatting with their heads together, all looked back at the baby goat as if they had made a promise.

At that moment, Seongjin was just taking out a golden sword from his inventory.

[Oh, the golden lion sword! After all, good weapons are different! Even though it's not reinforced, it's much better than a full-strength beginner's sword?]

Seongjin, who was happy, suddenly felt the gaze of the group and turned his head.

[what? why? what?]

[...]]

[Everyone, don't worry about unnecessary things. We won first place in the time challenge, right? I have to give this much.]

Is that so?

The group tilted their heads at Seongjin's shameless attitude.

But they soon became preoccupied with their respective inventories. The remaining rewards were also very satisfying.

[There are only rare potions. So many potions instead of useless junk! At this rate, there will be no problem with the clan's land for a while!]

[Is that interesting? I only have bound weapons? First off, it's good! Take it all back and share it with your colleagues!]

[okay? I got more cash than items.]

Only Dexter, who has game knowledge, looks at Seongjin with very suspicious eyes.

But Seongjin didn't have time to really pay attention to him. He thought for a moment and was just about to hand something to Owen.

[ruler. Take this. Something strange came out, but I don't need it.]

[...] huh?]

Owen, who was frantically checking the reward, held out his hand without any doubt upon hearing the baby goat's words. And when she touched the cold block of ice, she held it in her hand and blinked her eyes blankly.

[What is this... Huh?]

Owen, who was checking the item information without much thought, was startled and let out a strange scream.

what? What is that lame reaction?

[This is... ... !]

[Why are you doing this, Owen?]

[What is it? I see it too.]

Silent villains approach with curious eyes. Dexter, who had been looking at Owen's hand, sighed and sighed.

"Wait a minute, Seongjin Lee! Why did you give that to that friend...
"No!"

Dexter, who was shouting in panic, was soon stepped on by Seongjin and rolled around on the floor.

"Kwaaah... ... !"

Meanwhile, the silent villains shouted in excitement.

[Look at this! It really is a heart of ice!]

[Could it be that precious job change item?]

[How on earth did this happen?]

Everyone looks at the baby goat, hoping for an explanation. But Seongjin just shrugged her shoulders with her usual expression.

[I know. That really came out. I don't need it, but Owen, don't you need it? You said you were meeting a goddess?]

Then Owen looked at Seongjin with trembling eyes.

[I really... Even if you give me something so precious...]

Oh, what do you say? Are you saying it's useless to me?

As Seongjin frowned and waved his hand, the silent villains patted Owen on the shoulder and each said congratulations.

[Good, Owen. I was finally able to meet the goddess!]

[Congratulations! I believed that Owen would never achieve his goal! I reflect!]

Nevertheless, Owen still looked at Hatasu Titi and Gup in turn, as if he couldn't believe it.

[everyone... We all went through the dungeon together, is it really okay for me to have this?]

[This is what Seongjin Lee got. Of course, Seongjin Lee has the authority to dispose of it.]

[correct! I am not changing jobs. Goddess, we will not meet.]

Owen bowed his head with a very touched face at that selfless answer.

[every... thank you!]

So Owen quickly manipulated the quest window to meet the goddess. And then he soon disappeared from the spot without a trace.

After completing the pre-received job change quest, you were automatically moved to the reward zone.

It seems that after meeting the goddess, you will return to your original place. So Seongjin and the silent villains sat in the boss room for a while and waited for Owen.

[This is a really good thing.]

[I confess honestly. Owen thought he would never be able to leave this place.]

[Okay... Oh my, my feet!]

However, after a while, Owen's expression appeared in the boss room

again and his expression was unusual.

[Owen! Met a goddess?]

[Is there a problem? Why are you doing that?]

"Sniff... .."

Owen kept his mouth shut and did not respond. Seeing him even with tears in his eyes, the flagship Seongjin gritted his teeth.

'what? Justitia you bastard! You asked for the right conditions! 'What on earth did you do to that guy?'

But it was Seongjin's luck.

"at las... .."

Eventually, Owen opened his mouth and his voice trembled. His voice was clearly agitated, as if he had completely forgotten to speak out of resignation.

"I can finally go! "The quest is completed, and I received a new quest!"

... what?

Everyone was confused, but Owen suddenly raised his head and shouted in a voice filled with joy.

"It's a quest that takes you to the ecliptic! know? "I can finally go home!"

314. Underwater (5)

It was some time later that Owen calmed down.

[I still can't believe it. This damn quest has really been completed! If I couldn't get a job change item in this theme dungeon, I was thinking of moving to the capital and at least following the main story.]

Owen looks into space with a voice full of emotion. Perhaps in his eyes, there is a new quest window that is invisible to the party.

[You know what? I-I've been really wanting to go home for so long! Did you say that the faces of your father and the people of the family, especially our cute little Sisley, flashed before your eyes every day?]

[...] But why don't you just come back?]

Seongjin asked with a sullen face. Instead of inadvertently asking, 'Why didn't you go?', the question became, 'Why didn't you come back?'

Because it was so natural, Owen didn't notice anything strange and shook his head.

[Newbie, you wouldn't know. There are many miscellaneous quests that Sang Tae-chang gives me every day. This is mostly what needs to be done on the southern front.]

Defeat the sea creatures living near the power lines. Attend events of the tribes of Barça, especially the Volanta tribe. Boost the morale of soldiers serving on the southern front.

With all these quests pouring in, Owen couldn't leave the southern front at all.

Moreover, the status window showed the future main stream.

[Main Stream 3 – Save Castle□!]

[Main Stream 4 - Save Castle□!]

[Main Stream 5 - Let's defeat □□□ □□!]

For some reason, these are contents that are expected to have a significant impact on the well-being of the people of Seonghwangga in the future. How could Owen know this clearly and then ignore it?

Thanks to this, Owen had no choice but to carry out the miscellaneous quests presented in the status window. His only comfort was that the stream's achievement gauge was slowly filling up.

[Is that all there is? If you fail to perform these within the deadline, there is a huge penalty every time!]

Threatening to cut Cathy, who was the size of a rat's tail, into pieces was a good thing.

If anything goes wrong in the quest, a huge friction will suddenly arise in the relationship with the Barsha tribes, or an incident will occur where the trust that had been built up will be in vain.

There were times when Owen's life was in immediate danger.

[amazing! My status window just tells me to get a certain amount of items. It sets you free!]

[If there is a penalty, it is definitely tight. Well, thinking about the events so far, Sangtae Chang, who leads Owen, seems to have a particularly formidable temper.]

Seongjin, who was listening to their conversation, secretly frowned.

'What on earth was Grandma thinking?'

I simply thought that Owen was doing something for his family. Now that I look at it, doesn't it seem like her grandmother had a higher

stake in Owen's runaway from home than expected?

No, what are the criteria for the status window to issue quests in the first place? How can a guest ID user be enforced in such detail?

[Anyway, how was the goddess? Was she really covering her eyes and holding a golden spear like in the picture in the book?]

At Dexter's sudden question, the silent villains looked at Owen with curious eyes.

Why not? Since everyone had been working on the Pangea Chronicle for quite some time, she had some basic curiosity about the absolute growing goddess of this world.

However, since they are Guest ID users who cannot use high-end facilities, they will never be able to meet the goddess in person in the future.

[hmm...]

However, Owen's expression became a little more subtle.

[okay. It's exactly the same. I was covering my eyes with an eye patch, but somehow I felt like I could see clearly. Plus, he looked very strong. He definitely deserved to be called the strongest person in the world. but...]

[but?]

[I'm not sure if I should really call it a goddess? Rather, I had a strong feeling that it was like a business.]

... Business? It was quite an unexpected sentiment for Seongjin.

Isn't Justitia quite a temperamental person? Moreover, although it was a bit vague, it had its own absolute 'class' that was worthy of 'Code Zero'.

[When I gave her the change item, the goddess praised her excessively, saying she was the first on the server. And aren't you going to try to sell me something by talking about specials and all?

They said it was a never-to-be-received opportunity, so they gave me a huge discount. So I politely declined and returned.]

"... "What, man?"

Seongjin jumped up and shouted. It was so absurd that I didn't even realize that I had uttered the imperial language without realizing it.

"hey! Why miss that great opportunity? "If you don't have anything to buy, just take a look!"

"hmm?"

Then Owen looked at Seongjin and blinked.

"But 1/10th of the regular price, isn't it too suspicious? Does that make sense? It somehow seems like a scammer to keep trying to get you to buy something... .."

"what... ..!"

"Is that so? No matter how good the conditions are, the essence of business does not change. Anyone who wants to sell something always aims to get the most benefit from the customer. "Would a bastard like that sell a decent product for 1/10 the price?"

Seongjin was speechless at that bold answer.

'No, this guy always shows his sloppy side, but why is he so strangely strict in important places?'

I pressured him into handing over the items he needed and handing over the limited edition eye patch and other necessary items at a low price. So then my hard work is now useless!

As Seongjin held his head, which was giving him a headache, Owen asked him worriedly.

"what's the matter? "Where does it hurt, newbie?"

"Okay... .."

Oh, it's noisy. You are the cause of my headache!

Ah, you idiot. How on earth do they do this?

Seongjin, who thought for a while, held out a small hoof in front of Owen with a feeling of desperation and said.

"I'm sick and I'm going to die. "You don't need anything, I'll buy it for you, so just give me your cash."

"... .."

Then Owen looked at Seongjin with an unknown expression.

Well, they are trying to force you to hand over money, but is there any way it will work? No matter how stupid this kid is.

however-

"hmm? Do you need cash? "Okay, how much can I give you?"

Absurdly, this guy, Owen, is responding obediently and manipulating the trading window again! In the end, a blood spurt appeared from Seongjin's forehead.

"Hey, you stupid guy!"

Wow!

"Ahh!"

Owen, who had suddenly been hit hard, cried out while rubbing the dark petal marks left on his forehead.

"Why are you hitting me again?!"

"You man, do you want to keep talking nonsense like that?"

"Why do you get angry when I give you cash?"

"Who in the world would give away cash just because they asked for it? "I'm telling you, you better come to your senses!"

"What, is that the reason? I just can't figure it out! Then don't ask for it in the first place!"

"You man, you don't understand at all! The problem isn't that I asked for it, the problem is that you just gave it to me! "Don't you know that yet?"

Looking at the two people pressing their foreheads together and shouting, the silent villains who knew nothing laughed happily.

[good night. Are we getting closer?]

[okay. Young people seem to make friends very easily.]

Of course, it was a misunderstanding that occurred because I could not understand the imperial language at all. Only Dexter, who receives full translation services, looks at them with a dumbfounded expression.

'What on earth are they doing? 'Why are you fighting over such useless things?'

* * *

Fortunately, Owen's chance to make up for his mistakes came quickly.

Taking advantage of the moment when the party left the dungeon, the goddess summoned Seongjin back to her space.

[...]]

As I looked back into the darkness that I had become quite accustomed to, Justitia, facing Seongjin, blurted out this.

[I tried!]

[what?]

[I tried to sell the items you mentioned to that guest ID user as much as possible!]

... Uh, okay.

Let me admit that you worked hard. How dare you think that Owen would think of you as a complete fraud and not a goddess?

[are you okay. I will buy it, so just sell it to me.]

[...]]

At Seongjin's answer, the goddess looked very disappointed.

I was just trying to sell one item, but now it looks like I'm feeling a strong sense of skepticism.

[Wouldn't you have just bought it from the beginning?]

[Isn't it strange that I suddenly buy him an item? Besides, I didn't have much money earlier.]

Are you there now? Of course.

In the end, despite all the fighting, Seongjin managed to steal an appropriate amount of cash from Owen. The guy was very embarrassed when he handed me the money.

-Why on earth did I get hit?

Anyway, Seongjin searched the store menu provided by Justitia and quickly found the item he wanted.

☐Would you like to purchase this item?☐

[*Verification is cancel =

Seongjin clicked the button while inwardly sticking his tongue out.

'Wow, this is still evil even though the price has been reduced by 10%.'

After quickly making the payment and putting the items into the inventory, the goddess looked at Seongjin in confusion.

[Why do you need that? ☐☐☐ ☐. There is nothing in this world

that would dare interfere with your mind...]

Noisy.

Suddenly, he felt a chill in his heart, but Seongjin cut off the goddess's words without thinking.

[Isn't it cute? It's a limited edition...]

[...]]

[what? why? what? Don't meddle in unnecessary ways.]

It was when I was glaring at Justitia who looked dumbfounded. Suddenly, something moving behind her caught Seongjin's eye.

Wiggle.

[That...]

It was a black lump the size of a finger. It was changing direction and moving slowly, like a small lump of dust rolling in the wind.

But it was clearly a conscious being. As soon as I met Seongjin's gaze, I was startled and hesitated, and then quickly disappeared into the darkness.

The goddess, who noticed Seongjin's gaze, opened her mouth.

[Originally, it would have taken a little longer for that thing to move. However, thanks to unreasonable manipulation of the probability at your request, it grew faster than expected. It will take shape soon.]

okay. Justitia of Darkness.

As long as this game runs and as long as errors accumulate, it is a being that continues to be born and grow.

Grumble!

Demon King No. 2 reflexively appeared in front of Seongjin. However, instead of throwing fire right away, Seongjin quietly stared into the darkness where the bastard had disappeared.

[...] Why don't you get rid of it this time?]

Justitia asked, looking a little pale as she faced Demon King No. 2.

[Well, there will still be time for you to grow out of control, right?]

So, wouldn't there be a need to make people experience death one after another within a short period of time? He's a guy with a predetermined outcome, but when I think about it, it's a bit pitiful.

Slurp.

As if reflecting Seongjin's will, Demon King No. 2 suddenly disappears in thin air.

[you are...]

Seongjin spoke to Justitia, who seemed to have a lot to say.

[It's okay. Anyway, the business is over now. So hurry and let me out.]

When Seongjin came to his senses, he once again faced Owen, whose face was right in front of him.

This time, the guy was in the middle of a fuss, saying that the newbie was still mesmerized even after leaving the dungeon.

'... ... !'

Wow, that was just dangerous.

I almost reached my forehead out of habit!

And Owen opened his mouth dumbly when he saw an item suddenly thrust in front of him.

"Limited edition rabbit eyepatch? Newbie, how did you do this..."

"Oh, there's a way to everything."

It was like that.

The baby goat was suddenly holding out a black limited edition rabbit eye patch with a proud expression.

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315. Underwater (6)

[Now, everyone, open the status window.]

Seongjin focused the attention of all party members.

[There was another perk of getting a job change item for the first time on the server. If you look out front here, there will be a temporary discount store opening. Without having to go to the village store, you can immediately purchase items at a low price through the status window.]

[what? I looked carefully, but there was nothing like that before... Sigh!]

A mole engineer gets stepped on by a baby goat and falls on the floor.

[So I chose the most expensive item there. It seems like you only get one chance, so everyone choose carefully.]

Then the silent villains hurriedly opened the status window.

[really! Just like what Seongjin Lee said! There is a store!]

[There are also rare items that are not sold in regular stores! I thought I wouldn't even be able to see it if it weren't for the auction house!]

The silent villains who discovered the store shouted with joy. Hard to find items are gathered together, and the price is also 1/10th of that, so where else can you get an opportunity like this!

Even Dexter eagerly searches the store while lying on the floor.

Seongjin looked at the scene happily.

'Regardless of shame, it's rewarding to have cleaned Justitia again.'

Thanks to Owen, who threw away a golden opportunity, all party members now have the same privilege.

Thanks to this, Justitia of Darkness, which was just the size of a bean, has now grown to the size of an adult's fist.

"Now, take this too, and quickly open the status window."

Seongjin held out his eye patch and urged Owen.

Unlike other silent villains, Owen did not even think about opening the status window and was looking at Seongjin with a strange expression.

Why not? Coincidentally, a newbie would bring out the item he needed the most. If it were a coincidence, it would be a truly strange coincidence.

"Newbie, why are you buying this eye patch?"

However, despite Owen's doubts, Seongjin was confident.

"Isn't it best to discount and buy the most expensive items?"

"... "But why do you do this to me?"

"When I actually bought it, I realized I didn't really need it. "I bought this with the cash I received from you from the beginning, so just keep it."

"what? but..."

"It has high mental resistance, so it prevents things like nightmares. So, stop talking nonsense and use this from now on. Don't whine like you did before about why you're losing your dreams. "It's annoying even for me to play along with the rhythm."

"hmm..."

Then Owen carefully took the eye patch and lowered his head to play

with the rabbit's black ears.

"... For now, I'll take it well. Thank you very much. "It happened to be exactly what I needed."

It was nothing.

Seongjin looked a little smug and raised his nose.

"As expected, looking at it again, it's a cute eyepatch. "But why did you choose black?"

"uh? just. "That seemed the most plausible?"

In fact, Seongjin didn't think much about the design of the eye patch. He just picked the one that stood out the most.

Maybe Amelia's tastes have changed without her knowing it all this time.

"And shouldn't it be black so it doesn't get dirty easily? "If you can't wash your clothes often, there's no other color that matches it."

"That's right. I happen to be in an environment where I can't do laundry often... .."

Owen, who spoke awkwardly, looked at Sangjin carefully with new eyes.

"It's all a coincidence, right? "There's no way you, newbie, know me."

"... .."

"Now that you think about it, it's really strange? "Why does the more I look at you, the more I feel something familiar?"

Seongjin, who was feeling annoyed for no reason, was secretly trying something different, but Owen looked straight at Seongjin and asked in an unusually serious voice.

"It feels a little strange to ask this now. It's a newbie. "Have you ever met me in Delcross?"

"... .."

Seongjin thought for a moment.

It wasn't that I was trying to hide my identity, but now that I had revealed myself as Mores, it was somewhat of an ambiguous situation.

From what I heard, it doesn't seem like they had a friendly relationship in the past either.

If I mentioned Mores for no reason, wouldn't it be possible that Owen might be suspicious of Seongjin's intentions and insist on not receiving the eyepatch?

"well? Maybe we really met. But at least not in my memory."

So Seongjin decided to quietly pass over this place. It's not like I'll be seeing it in Pangea Chronicle for long anyway.

Well, this isn't a complete lie.

"okay? I see... .."

Owen had a puzzled look on his face, but he nodded in understanding. And he belatedly opened the status window and started looking around the store.

Of course, when the item list was revealed, his expression suddenly changed and he whistled.

[Hwiyu! Is this really amazing? There are so many good ones that it's hard to choose what to buy, right?]

[That's right, Owen! The limited edition potions here will be enough to sustain the land of whatever clan you choose for many years!]

[There are also limited edition weapons that are sold out! The power against the Demon King becomes enormous! Courage is surging!]

Hustle and bustle!

It is truly ironic that the nickname of those guys who make noise with their thoughts is 'Silent Villain'.

Seongjin, who was looking at the group with satisfaction, suddenly felt a strange feeling as if his vision was being pushed backwards.

It was truly strange. Neither he nor his companions moved from their seats.

'This...'

At the same time, a strange feeling of weakness arose in my body. The reins, which were held tightly in one hand, suddenly lost their strength and felt slack.

Seongjin felt it right away.

'... That's it for now.'

Enlightenment came naturally.

That most of what he could do for Owen and the silent villains was over. I know that I won't have to deal with them anymore for a while.

And Seongjin's half-signpost will never lead him here again.

'Well, it doesn't really matter anymore?'

If you think about it, Seongjin's purpose of accessing Pangea Chronicle has been fulfilled. I helped Owen complete the quest, and ultimately succeeded in getting him to come to the imperial capital.

'It was quite fun to see the foolishness of those guys, but...'

It would be a lie if I said I wasn't a little disappointed. However, Seongjin knew well that it was right to end anything when you felt the time was right.

Anyway, the longer you stay here, the faster the dark Justitia will grow and the sooner you will die.

Also, I didn't want to face any more boss mobs that seemed strange when they were in front of me.

Wow.

Seongjin took a step forward toward the group and calmly opened his mouth.

[Okay, everyone got their rewards, right? So, let's end the Theme Dungeon Time Challenge here. From now on, I'll only focus on safe dungeons like before. okay?]

Did he sense the strange atmosphere contained in those words? The silent villains took their eyes off the store window and looked at Seongjin with serious faces.

[...] ... ?]

[No challenge today? Or will it continue to be like that in the future?]

Contrary to its flaccid and sloppy appearance, a group with a rather sharp edge asked with a serious look on its face.

[Lee Seong-jin, you're not coming anymore?]

[...] ... !]

Everyone in the group was startled by that question and rushed towards Seongjin.

[what? Really? Newbie, why all of a sudden? why? why?]

[What's going on, Seongjin Lee? Has something big happened to you? Or is your status window leading you down a completely new path?]

[What are you talking about out of nowhere? hey! Does it make sense to bring people into a game and then not actually come? huh?]

Owen grabs Seongjin's neck and shakes him wildly, and Gureub also wraps his long hair around Seongjin's arm. Even the gentle Hatasu Titi was clutching one of Seongjin's hoofs.

[Newbie!]

[Lee Seong-jin!]

[Lee Seong-jin! Seongjin Lee!]

The fuss is incomparable to when you look at the special gift shop.

As I looked at all these confusing faces, I realized once again that my role among them was not that small.

Seongjin tried to hide his awkward feeling and answered in a blunt voice.

[wait for a sec. Why is everyone making such a fuss? I'm not saying that this is the end forever. Because you can see it again at any time.]

[but...]

[Just because I have achieved my urgent goal for now. Now, I and you all need to focus more on our own work. don't worry. I will come back later when I have the chance.]

These were not empty words. Because I had that strong feeling for some reason.

Although we will be separated from them for now, the strong relationship once formed will continue in the future.

[So, never do anything dangerous when I'm not around. okay? If I need to conquer a dungeon in the future, I often seek Dexter's help.]

[Lee Seong-jin...]

Then, realizing that Seongjin's decision could no longer be changed, the group fell silent for a moment.

How much time has passed like that?

[...] right! This is not the end!]

The beautiful ranger, who was sniffing, raised her head and shouted.

[Lee Seong-jin will always be my friend! So believe it! A warrior's guts never lie!]

There were tears welling up in the eyes of the silent group. No matter what the avatar looks like, his insides are probably shedding hot tears right now, to use the group's expression.

[We will not forget our leader, who always shined in moments of crisis. Pureblood Mashu Tree, this Hatasu Titi will always remember you, Seongjin Lee.]

The serious shield warrior also seemed resigned, clutching the baby goat's hoof and declaring in a solemn voice.

[It's a newbie. No, Seongjin Lee.]

And Owen.

With an unusually serious expression on his face, the guy repeated the same thing over and over as if he was making a promise to himself.

[You said you live in the ecliptic, right? I'm waiting for you. okay? When I return to Delcross this time, I will definitely find you!]

Uh, well? How about... ..

Seongjin thought with a shocked face.

'There's no need to go out of your way to look for the wrong place. I'll be in the imperial palace anyway.'

Of course, even if I meet him, I have no intention of revealing my identity.

Perhaps Owen's search for newbies will become a never-ending search.

[Then Dexter, please take good care of these guys in the future. Now you are the only one who can create a proper strategy. Because you can always trust the strategy you created.]

[Uh, uh...]

Let's even say hello to the mole standing blankly holding the goggles

Crackling.

As if I had been waiting, noise appeared in my vision and I suddenly began to feel drowsy.

This phenomenon occurred every time I closed the connection. But Seongjin intuitively knew that this time it felt a little different.

Perhaps Oracle's milestone was the decision to completely expel Seongjin from the Pangea Chronicle.

[Lee Seong-jin... ... !]

At the same time, the group's presence began to fade.

No, maybe it's just Seongjin's vibe that feels that way, but what's actually blurring is Seongjin's own avatar.

[Keep this in mind. Everyone, don't ever think of challenging A or S ranks without me. okay?]

Finally, Seongjin gave another request and smiled brightly at the group.

[It was fun so far. see you later!]

Hwiik.

At the same time, consciousness is suddenly pushed away, and the world of Pangea Chronicle becomes far away.

[Connection terminated. The deletion of the guest ID has been confirmed.]

and.

One after another, a soft electronic sound was heard faintly in my ears.

[The existence of a unique ID has been confirmed. In accordance with the emergency protocol regarding 'Code Zero', IDs are temporarily frozen... ..]

* * *

□Guest ID !N;3\$\$ti0m@. The connection is terminated.□

Gurreub-lab-gurreub Bi-keul-leub opened his eyes in reality, feeling tears overflowing from his intestines.

'... ..'

Degurrrr-

When I turn the biggest pupil in the back of my head and look around, what comes into view is my hometown, devastated as always.

The sky turned red like blood after the Demon King descended, and the black earth was covered with turbid mud.

'Someday, I will see Lee Seong-jin again. A warrior's intestines never tell lies.'

After contemplating his emotional turmoil for a moment, he immediately raised his heavy body from where it had been lying.

Kurrrrrr-

Then the mud stirred by hundreds of feet shook, and a dizzying commotion arose in the humid air.

'So, I believe in the destiny ahead of us and will silently continue the warrior's mission.'

It is the mission of the one who has the most legs among those who survived and the one who leads them all with the hottest intestines.

Gurreub-keul-lab Gurreup Bi-keul-leub resolutely opened the inventory. Now it was time to reorganize the power of myself and my colleagues with the weapons brought from the Pangea Chronicle.

* * *

□Guest ID #A&**d#!#. The connection is terminated.□

As soon as Hatasu Titi opened his eyes, he realized that his henchman was staring at him from the side.

"... "What's going on?"

Creak-

When the long body stands up, the joints that have not moved for a long time crumple and make a stiff friction sound.

"Sorry to disturb your rest, Hatasu Titi. "I had no choice but to come to see you because an urgent meeting of elders was being held."

"A council of elders? "At this hour?"

"yes. "It is said to be a request from Yanara Tale, the head of the Barum Trees."

Yanara Taleh is his long-time political enemy. Lately, no matter what efforts they have made, they are ignoring some of the elders and are becoming more and more arrogant day by day.

Hatasu Titi frowned.

"Do you mean to hold a meeting and look at it before reviewing the appropriateness of the request? Now the authority of the Council of Elders has fallen to the ground."

Why not?

The 'oldest tree' that once led the clan has now lost all of its former wisdom. All that is left to him now are the twigs shaking loosely and the faint thoughts that occasionally escape as if they were the sound of the wind.

[If you can't turn it back, at least I hope your heart is at peace...]

I couldn't rely on him anymore.

So what should we do? Even though it's cumbersome, you have no choice but to move your body yourself.

"let's go. "Now is the time to put an end to the political war with the Barum trees."

"That means... .."

"okay. Put everything I brought on the cart, leaving nothing behind. Now the elders of the clan will know in detail which of us is contributing the most to the clan."

Hwiik.

Hatasu Titi, wearing a briar crown, wrapped her golden-brown cloak around her and strode her long legs.

"And in the end, the one who will inherit the [key] to the clan will be none other than me, Hatasu Titi!"

* * *

And the southernmost part of the continent, the Southern Front Delcross camp.

□Guest ID Qr#^^E&. The connection is terminated.□

Another guest ID user returned to reality.

But instead of opening his eyes right away like he always did, Owen stirred for a moment and then fell back to sleep.

My first proper sleep in years. How could one not be helplessly dragged along?

"Lowering. "Did you cough?"

After a while, the tent is lifted and Alicia carefully comes inside.

Normally, it would be time to wake up early and warm up outside the barracks. Strangely, the quiet prince became concerned and came to check.

"... ... ?"

And what Alicia found was Prince Owen, asleep on the bed, oblivious to the world.

A strange black cloth that I had never seen before covered his forehead, and he didn't even move even when she walked right next to him.

It was absolutely impossible for the prince, who was a skilled Auror user, to allow the presence of another person so close to him.

"... Lowering?"

At first, Alicia was secretly worried that she might be unwell.

However, upon closer examination, the prince was sleeping more comfortably than ever before. This is a very rare sight for someone who often suffers from nightmares.

'What should I do with this? You said earlier today that you had business to do with the Volanta tribe...'

However, after thinking for a moment, Alicia decided to let the prince rest a little longer.

"... Hmm. Newbie..."

The prince mumbles something unintelligible in his sleep for a moment and then exhales evenly.

Alicia looked at him for a moment and then quietly left the tent.

And to prevent the slightest bit of sunlight from coming in, we carefully covered the entrance with a windbreak.

316

316. Change (1)

Dusky dawn.

Four wagons were running at high speed through the wasteland, which was becoming increasingly desolate as fall approached.

Rattling rattling.

Even though the road condition was not that good, the carriages remained stable without much shaking. It was clear that the bottom of the carriage was equipped with a simple shock absorber. Advanced equipment that is too high to be used as a wagon.

Above the pure white packaging of those carriages, you can see the clean name of the top where the paint has just dried.

-Bertrand & Lee

The place where the carriage is running is an old trade route connecting old Ortona and Regina. It was currently an abandoned road with few passers-by.

It is very unusual for a cart from the upper level to travel to such a deserted place without an escort.

just as expected. There was a group of bandits lying low under the sparse bushes, waiting for the carriage to approach.

"It's true! "The upper carriage is really coming this way!"

"okay. "The Marquis d'Arciano's information was correct."

"That's true, but are you sure there's no harm in stealing that, boss?"

Then their leader, the hairy boy, reassured his ragtag group of untrustworthy subordinates.

"Don't worry. I heard that it is a small merchant ship that has just started to ascend. Moreover, a carriage traveling on a remote road like this would definitely not be trading honorable goods."

"Is that so?"

"Of course. Now, look over there! The only people left are the four drivers who drive the carriage. "How badly would you want to keep it a secret?"

It certainly was. No matter how much I wash my eyes and search, I can't see any sign of anyone except the coachmen at the top.

In particular, the coachman driving the lead carriage is a curly old man who is dying! The tension disappeared from the thieves' faces, and a hint of hope slowly began to appear.

"Even if I end up completely penniless, I won't be able to go anywhere and complain that it's unfair. Now, stop worrying about things and let's go!"

With the furry boy in the lead who jumped out of his seat, the thieves quickly ran down the street and blocked the front of the carriage.

Hee hee hee!

The old coachman was startled and pulled the reins, and suddenly the bit was tightened and the horses let out a pitiful neigh.

After confirming that the carriages had come to a complete stop, the furry boy took a step forward and shouted triumphantly.

"Inspiration! Leave those carriages and get out of here right now! Then I'll spare your life!"

But at that moment, something very surprising happened right before the thieves' eyes.

Fight! Tuk!

Suddenly, the packaging was torn violently, and large boxes popped out one by one from each wagon.

"... .. ?!"

They were not surprised by the box flying in the air -

Slam! Slam! Coo!

The carriages gathered in one place twisted around and merged, eventually transforming into a gigantic giant. A terrifying ice monster that appears to be almost 10 meters tall!

Wow!

The thieves were startled by the beast's furious roar that spewed out into the air, and looked up at the monster with their jaws hanging open.

"Huh?"

"What, what! "What about that?"

But that wasn't the end.

Meeeee!

The coachman, who suddenly looks like a small goat instead of an old man, rises into the air and glares fiercely at the thieves.

Long horizontally slit pupils and sharp horns sticking out from the top of the head. The body exudes a full black demonic energy, which is clearly a sign of the devil.

"What on earth has this been like? Why do you keep attacking Bertrand & Lee's carriage? "The packaging doesn't last properly!"

Goats are the devil's lower class.

His master is the lieutenant demon Glumgos, who currently serves as the branch manager of the logistics relay station under the identity of Wilhelm Schmidt.

The goat was on its way back from Barletta, north of Ortona, driving a cold wagon at its owner's command. It was a carriage loaded with expensive, perishable foods, including the precious salmon.

"Once this is combined, it's very difficult to undo it!" "If you're bothering me like this, you all have to be prepared!"

"Ugh... .."

"Ugh... .."

The thieves let out an inarticulate groan and hesitantly stepped back. Because I couldn't believe the nightmare-like reality I was facing before my eyes.

But they weren't the only ones surprised.

"ji... "What, what came out of the carriage just now?"

"monster! "It's a monster!"

"Ugh! "It's the devil!"

The three drivers behind him were also so shocked that they jumped out of the carriage. Not only was their boss a devil, but they seemed to have no idea what they were moving.

Then the goat looked back with a very disappointed look on its face.

"this... Should we erase the memories of the coachmen again? Not once or twice, but how long do we have to keep doing this?"

Upon encountering the strange eyes of the goat, the white-faced coachmen desperately rushed towards the thieves who had attacked them. I decided that was the best place to lean on.

"Hi! Also, run away!"

"Die! "We're all going to die!"

In this way, a serious situation occurred where the attacking thieves and the attacked coachmen grouped together and ran away.

And the ice monster chases after them with a clumsy run!

Boom boom boom!

Every time the giant steps forward with his heavy legs, the weak ground caves in and the entire ground shakes unstably. The goat was scared and quickly flew towards the ice monster.

"for a moment! Come back now! "All the things inside are all messed up!"

In the midst of the chaos, fortunately, there was no situation where the ice monster trampled people miserably.

It is adjusted to automatically attack the enemy, but since it is two Glacher Trolls combined into one, its movements are not as smooth as before.

Meanwhile, the little goat hurriedly found the controller and ice heart that had been given to him by his owner.

Let him manipulate it-

Jiing-

Crash! Crash! thud!

The giant ice monster disintegrated into four boxes with a loud noise. And then they all flew into the carriage as if nothing had happened.

Whisper - boom! thud!

"... ... !?"

The son-in-law suddenly becomes quiet.

Now the only traces of the earlier commotion were the tattered pavement of the carriage and the floor, dented from the immense weight.

But the distraught people did not stop running away.

"Ah, it's the devil!"

"It's a glamor troll!"

"Oh my god!"

Meeeeee...

The goat, looking at that scene, became tearful and sighed.

"Now, when I go back, I must tell my master. "Wouldn't it be much better to form a proper bodyguard?"

The dejected devil lightly jumped up and blocked the people who were running away.

"Ugh!?"

"Well, then there will be more people to clean up after, so it might be more troublesome..."

The goat's horizontally slit eyes stare at people in fear.

What followed was a loud voice that shook their minds.

[Now, everyone, look into my eyes. You guys are happy!]

"... ... !?"

While the eyes of the thieves and the coachman turned hazy as they encountered the goat, the sun, as bright as usual, was rising on the other side of the wasteland.

* * *

"Sir, you are very focused today! "What happened yesterday?"

Early morning training ground.

Masain, who was watching Seongjin's training, asked with a surprised face. That's how much Seongjin was focusing on his morning training like never before.

Why not? The troubling problem of the Pangea Chronicle has been resolved, and the progress is in the 8th and 10th forms of the

Banahas exercise.

The end of the tedious Auror tying was in sight. From now on, Seongjin will no longer be lacking in the ability to call himself a proper prosecutor.

"Phew... .."

After completing the training satisfactorily, Seongjin wiped his sweat and asked.

"So, Sir Masaine. What's next for Form 8 and Form 10? "Am I now learning the old sword techniques?"

Old swordsmanship is the prototype of the standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights. However, even with Seongjin's experience, it was assumed that the two sword techniques had quite different methods for binding Aurors. I think it would be a good idea to try learning it at least once as an experience.

But Masain thought for a moment and then shook his head.

"The old sword method has already been completely refined by the genius swordsman Banajas. The standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights and the Banajas technique are already complete swordsmanship in themselves."

"okay?"

"yes. I also didn't learn the old sword techniques in depth. "Especially for someone like Ha Hae who easily focuses on one thing, it would be more efficient to dig one well to the end."

And that opinion was also shared by the unofficial Sword Master, Logan.

"I believe that the standard swordsmanship techniques of the Imperial Knights are in no way inferior to the old swordsmanship. If you have time to learn another sword, it would be better to learn a new Henesys technique with me."

"... "You really don't know how to give up."

Uh, Logan.

I understand very well, so don't secretly sell Ortona's swordsmanship.

"Anyway, what are you doing here this morning?"

Seongjin asked as he walked towards Jinju Palace. Normally, wouldn't this guy be busy with the knights' work by now?

"I was supposed to go to work at the monster task force today. I'll take a look at your condition while I'm on my way."

"me?"

"okay. You've been feeling really tired every morning lately, haven't you? Sisley is very worried about you."

With those words, a hand filled with white divine power touches Seongjin's shoulder.

'Now there will be no more staying up all night playing games. 'Because the business at Pangea Chronicle is roughly finished.'

Seongjin thought about declining for a moment, but soon changed his mind. Although she mentioned Sisley, she also read a faint look of concern on Logan's face.

Moreover, although not as strong as his father's, Logan's divine power is also quite refreshing. He felt like his tired muscles were quickly recovering from the intense morning training.

"Anyway, what have you been doing these days so busy that you don't even have time to come to the monster task force? "What do the Knights of St. Bastian usually ask the prince to do?"

But the answer that came back from Logan was unexpected.

"Strictly speaking, it was an extension of the work of the monster task force. "I personally observed the search and seizure of the Milo upper terminal."

"Observing? "You yourself?"

"okay. "In particular, when the Inquisitors were arresting employees and laborers, I had to stand by and supervise each one to see if any demon energy was detected."

Logan responded calmly and kindly added another explanation to Seongjin, who still had no idea.

"As you know, merchant Giacomo Milo is suspected of being a devil contractor. Then what will happen to the remaining people at the top?"

"... ..!"

Oh, come to think of it, I hadn't thought of that.

I only thought about the law enforcement agencies of the old Earth, and thought that the devil worshipers would be filtered out on their own during the investigation. So they were only focusing on the properties and monopolies that were being confiscated.

'But if you think about it, it's natural.'

Delcross is a theocratic society. Isn't this a place where demons would react extremely excessively? Anyone involved in the Milo clan would probably be taken to the Heresy Tribunal and tortured to death until they confessed falsely. That's why Logan volunteered.

It may not be just because of his title as the second prince of the empire. Logan is secretly rumored to be the youngest Sword Master, and he is a famous paladin who personally leads the Lilium Detachment and watches over his subjects.

Logan personally guarantees that he is innocent, so who would dare accuse an innocent person of devil worship?

'but... ..'

Nevertheless, Seongjin couldn't shake the feeling that Logan worked too hard.

Giacomo Milo's crimes were spread across the continent, and his quick-witted employees had already fled in all directions for fear of

being implicated in the incident.

Is it really possible to go through the arrest process without any effort?

'Even though they are subjects of the imperial capital, if you think about it, to this guy, they are just citizens of an enemy country...'

Does this guy have high morals, or is he just a mindless brat?

Seongjin, whose mind had become complicated, was looking at Logan blankly, and Logan, noticing his strange gaze, turned his head as if puzzled.

"... why?"

Uh, just.

I was worried for a moment about how far you could be caught.

317. Change (2)

A trial date has been set for the Giacomo Milo case.

The criminal had not yet been arrested, but that did not really matter. In fact, his death sentence was already confirmed, and the cleanup of the Milo family was also coming to an end.

Rather than a trial, it was just an announcement of his disposition.

"Thanks to Prince Logan, the current interrogation of the criminals is going very smoothly. If this continues, we will probably be able to find additional charges and evidence against Giacomo Milo before the trial date."

Logan's face darkened slightly as he listened to Inquisitor Valery's report. Because I knew very well that the 'smooth interrogation' that Sir Valerie was talking about was a terrible process filled with blood and screams.

Moreover, the fates of the criminals currently being interrogated are in fact drastically different depending on Logan's nomination.

But Sir Valerie smiled and added without even noticing.

"Didn't you drastically reduce the number of suspects? Thanks to this, the interrogators, who were nervous that they would be busy for a while, were completely let down."

"... .."

"It's hard to say it's a substitute, but the weaker interrogators are concentrating their time and effort on torturing a small number of criminals... "Huh?"

The Inquisitor suddenly stepped on his foot and rolled on the floor.

While everyone in the monster task force was shocked by the sudden situation, Seongjin grabbed Valerie's report with a nonchalant expression and criticized it.

"That's pointless. Is that something worth reporting on purpose? Sir Valery. Keep it simple and to the point. "To begin with, you say too much nonsense."

"No, sir... .."

"I'll take care of the rest, so you can take a break."

It will be difficult to move for a while. I stepped on it a little hard because I had an Auror on it. Of course, you don't have any special feelings.

Sigh-

While Rep. Djibril sprayed some sweet perfume on Sir Valerie's feet, Seongjin flipped through the report and confirmed the main details.

Maybe it's because I focused on fabricating the Articles of Grace, but now I have the literacy skills to read official documents like this without any problems.

Meanwhile, there was a part in the prisoners' confession records that particularly caught Seongjin's attention.

"uh? "Is there any mention of a workshop here?"

"work place?"

"huh. They say they received raw materials from the merchant once a month. "You delivered it to a place called a workshop, but you didn't know what it was used for?"

"It means that there are products produced and distributed by the upper level."

Seongjin carefully recalled the details he had received so far. All

items and transaction details handled by Milo Merchants are known. There is only one item whose acquisition route has not been disclosed.

Then, Logan quickly realized what Seongjin wanted to say.

"... 'It's a medicine car thing."

"Oh, I guess that's true too?"

Until now, the route of obtaining medicinal tea was surprisingly shrouded in mystery. This was because it was only supplied in small quantities to the Sigismund Territory, and no one within the trade knew the source of the tea.

The only place we could hope for was the Scarzzapino family, who first arranged the exclusive deal between Sigismund and Milo.

'When Orden first requested the medicine truck, he said that there were circumstances in which he received the product directly from Ricardo Scarzapino in the early stages of distribution...'

But it was a strange thing. Despite the intensive investigation so far, there is no evidence linking the Milo merchants to Scarzapino. As if someone had erased all traces in the middle.

'Of course, Sigurd Sigurdsson would not have handled the job so sloppily...'

Giacomo Milo's wanted order was issued after he unexpectedly abandoned Riccardo and Isabella and ran away. There's absolutely no way it was the bastard's doing.

My guess is that Scarzzapino's breath has reached him. It would be correct to think that the Scarzapino family, the wealthiest family on the continent, has eliminated the possibility of being implicated in the crime of devil contract.

Perhaps there was also help from within the Heresy Tribunal, which did not want to intrude on a powerful family.

'Who are you? 'Who did Scarzzapino's work?'

At that time, the face of Scarzzapino's eldest son, Dominic, whom he had met at the birthday party, suddenly flashed through Seongjin's mind. That face resembled Isabella's but did not resemble her, and was extremely cold.

'Let's touch on that bastard first.'

Seongjin, who was organizing his thoughts for a moment, opened his mouth.

"Anyway, this is the only clue we have about the medicine cart. "I need to dig a little deeper into this place called the workshop before the trial date."

Then Logan responded as if he had been waiting.

"I will look into that."

"Uh, you? Aren't you busy? "What about the knights' work?"

"I can manage to do it in parallel. I just need to sleep a little less and deal with it whenever I have time. The knights of Lilium are also helping me a lot."

"... .."

Seongjin, dumbfounded, looked at Logan blankly. Even so, a guy who only believes in divine power and Aurors and is overworked gets more work done here?

"Furthermore, seeing as it is so tightly hidden, it probably won't be an easy place to find even if there is an open investigation. "It would be faster for me to move alone than to mobilize the Inquisitors."

Of course, Logan is very sensitive to demonic energy and can sense lies like a ghost. Moreover, since he is a Dekaron Knight, he will be able to hide and hide himself better than any other veteran informant.

But is it because of my mood? For some reason, I got the feeling that this guy was rushing the investigation unreasonably. So Seongjin asked directly.

"What's so urgent these days? What's wrong with you? Are you going to subjugate outside the imperial capital again?"

Then, as expected, Logan flinched and looked at Seongjin.

"How did you know that?"

... what? Really?

"It hasn't been decided yet. However, these days, requests to exterminate maritime monsters are steadily coming in from the Cyprus Union. After all, the only force that can move lightly right now is the Lilium Detachment, so it will be a foregone conclusion that I will form a punitive force."

"... .."

"If official approval is received from the Holy Assembly soon, I will be even busier than I am now with preparations. So, I thought I should finish what I could as much as possible before leaving."

"No, you are the only talented person in this big empire?"

This is truly absurd.

He may say it to himself that he is in his 70s, but no matter who sees him, Logan is still a young kid! How long has it been since he's been home that he's sent all the way back to subdue it?

"Tell the others to go! "There are a lot of knights playing around, right?"

Then, Logan cautioned Seongjin with a puzzled expression.

"Lee Seong-jin. The prince must not say such things in front of others. The knights of the empire are all working sincerely on their assigned missions. "Don't insult their hard work."

"what? Is it time for you to think about the other knights' positions?"

"Not only that, but the empire's position is also at stake. Think carefully. We must also take into account the fact that a large

maritime power as large as the Cyprus Union would ask the empire to subdue the demonic beasts."

As if comforting an upset Seongjin, Logan spoke calmly.

"They don't want half-hearted help now. "No matter what the actual strength is, we hope that the most famous punitive force on the continent will come."

"The reputation of the punitive force is more important?"

"okay. Only then can the side that asked for help save face, and the empire can easily maintain its political advantage over them. The reputation of the Lilium Detachment in other countries is no different from the reputation of the empire itself. and... .."

After hesitating for a moment, Logan smiled a faint but somewhat sad smile.

"It is also important to me that many of the Ortona refugees came to Cyprus. They work at the lowest level of the fishing industry and make a difficult living from day to day. So, subduing sea monsters and stabilizing the fishing industry is ultimately for their own good."

"... .."

Seongjin was completely speechless. It's not because I understood Logan's explanation. This was because it was even more absurd than before.

'No, what are you? Why on earth are you carrying the reputation of the empire and the fallen people all by yourself?'

Is that a lot of weight for one person? It's so valuable that a talented guy like you is completely buried without even being able to live his life!

At least you got a new life! Don't you plan on living a life of your own security, relying on your father's prestige, enjoying your status as a prince?

Seongjin could not understand Logan at all. Only the irritated feelings

welling up inside me were expressed in unfiltered criticism towards him.

"... "It's foolish."

"huh?"

"You, man! "You're so foolish!"

"... .."

Then Logan blinked and looked at Seongjin. For some reason, I felt a strange sense of déjà vu from Seongjin's words.

But the thought didn't last long.

-It means that you are needlessly foolish.

A long time ago, a boy criticized me for being foolish in a sharp voice. Isn't the boy with the same gray eyes as back then right in front of me right now?

"haha."

Logan smiled with a somewhat relieved expression.

"I guess that was true. I've heard something like that from someone before. "Seeing as the evaluation is still the same, it seems that people do not change easily."

Of course, it goes without saying that Seongjin's stomach was even more upset by that carefree response.

Don't laugh, you bastard!

"Lord Sharon!"

At Seongjin's sudden name, the exorcist, who had been struggling with documents with his head down, looked up. As always, he looks haggard with dark circles around his eyes.

"Yes, sir?"

"You will be free for a while after Giacomo Milo's trial, right?"

"yes. Probably yes. Of course, unless you tell me to do something else... .."

"good. "Then I will give you a new mission."

Seongjin nodded and spoke firmly.

"I order you to investigate the Cypriot maritime magicians. Follow the Lilium detachment. Go and investigate everything you can about the demonic beasts that appear at sea!"

"... yes?"

Investigating magical beasts?

The exorcist blinked in confusion at Seongjin's unexpected instructions.

"excuse me. Lowering... .."

At that time, the red-haired Inquisitor, who was healing his own feet with divine power in the corner, raised his hand.

"With all due respect, the Monster Task Force is a department with a clearly defined field of responsibility. "It's about [monsters] in general, and not about demon beasts, right?"

"so?"

"Of course, we have no hesitation in following your orders, but cooperation with other knights is a slightly different matter. "If we do not properly specify the tasks we are responsible for in seawater subjugation and also clarify our cooperative relationship with the subjugation force, big problems will arise in the future."

It was definitely a valid point.

The same goes for the trial of Giacomo Milo. Now, how displeased is the Heresy Tribunal that the Monster Task Force has secretly intervened in the devil contract case?

"What nonsense? Sir Valery. What do you think of me? "Do you think I am someone who manipulates departments under the executive branch for personal purposes?"

... Then isn't it?

Sir Valerie, who could not bear to ask that question, made a shocked expression. But Seongjin was confident.

"The investigation of sea monsters is an extension of the work of the monster task force. "Isn't it natural?"

"... yes?"

"Now, think about it carefully. Sir Valery. "How can you be sure whether the sea monsters that have appeared so far are really monsters, or monsters that have not yet been properly understood?"

"yes? Lowering. But a demonic beast is a demonic beast. Sea monsters have been around since ancient times... .."

"It has been known as a demonic beast for a long time, so it must be a demonic beast. That is a very narrow view. The same goes for the Glacher Troll, for example. Although it has been classified as a demonic beast for a long time, can we still say without a doubt that it is a simple demonic beast? "First of all, they don't have any magical energy at all?"

"... uh?"

After listening to it, it seems like that?

Seongjin spoke in a cold tone to the Inquisitor, who had lost confidence.

"Lord Valerie. It hasn't been long since reading the Other World's Apocalypse was allowed. "It is only now that the Holy Assembly has acknowledged the limitations of interpreting the scriptures and has given the name [monsters] to the evil things that deviate from the standards of demon beasts."

"... .."

"Then what is the ultimate mission of the monster task force? Do you still think that we are simply a department that handles monster-related incidents?"

Before I knew it, not only Sir Valerie, but also Logan and Sharon, and even Councilman Jibril were listening to Seongjin's words with an overwhelmed expression.

"No, absolutely not. We are like pioneers setting foot on a horizon where no one has walked before. So, isn't the true mission of our department to clarify the ambiguous boundary between demons and monsters, and to present that standard to others and move forward?"

At that time, I heard a voice like a sigh in my head. He was a devil bastard who had become less talkative recently.

[This is my first time seeing a crazy person put this much effort into nonsense...]

shut up!

Seongjin was pricked on the inside, but did not show it on the outside and added to Sir Valerie.

"how is it? Would you like to follow Sir Sharon? Sir Valerie, you are the one who has the best understanding of the [Apocalypse Now].
"Wouldn't you be the best at comparing and analyzing monsters and beasts?"

"uh..."

The Inquisitor made an intrigued expression.

"... ... ?"

While everyone was quiet, Seongjin looked triumphantly at Logan, who still hadn't figured out the situation.

Come on, Logan. So, this time, you should meet Sir Sharon and his father.

Every time you overwork yourself or do something foolish, your

father will probably be happy to give you a hard beating.

318. Change (3)

Suddenly, half of the monster task force's staff was sent on a long-term business trip.

Nevertheless, Seongjin felt uneasy for some reason. I know well that Logan goes out every year to subdue the sea, but this time, I felt particularly uncomfortable.

[If it bothers you that much, you can go together too, right?]

Is it because I have an excuse to escape the stuffy imperial capital? The devil bastard asked vaguely.

'Well, I'd like to do that too, but... ... '

But Seongjin still had a lot of things to sort out.

It would be great if we could catch him before Giacomo Milo's trial. We also need to separately investigate Margrave Sigismund's scheme.

Where is that? The investigations into groups entrusted to Dasha are slowly showing visible results.

'Plus, Leonard of Lohan... ... '

The thing that bothered me the most was, of course, him. A moody bastard who hangs around his sister.

At the last birthday party, I thought he was acting too close to Seongjin, but as expected, as soon as he returned to the imperial capital, he was sending me letters requesting a meeting every day.

It was clearly visible that he had impure feelings for Amelia and hoped that Seongjin would build a bridge in the middle.

'As expected, I have to be in the ecliptic now. Owen will come back soon too.'

[Owen? You mean the 1st prince? How do you know she's coming back?]

'Oh, there is such a thing.'

Seongjin responded roughly and quietly frowned.

Oh, it's really uncomfortable. I guess I'm anxious. We need to come up with some more measures.

* * *

But surprisingly, it seemed that Seongjin was not the only one who received such a premonition.

It's been a while since I had some free time, so I went to the training hall of the Knights of St. Marsyas to check out Sisley's training.

Cough!

Before you even reach the entrance, you see armor flying powerfully into the air with a loud noise. Perhaps Sisley is accelerating his training.

"wow! "That's really cool, Sisley!"

On one side of the training hall, I saw Seo Yi-seo cheering with excitement.

What is he doing here? You're a saint in name and appearance, but don't you have an official schedule?

"... ah? Brother Mores!"

At that time, Sisley, who noticed Seongjin's presence from afar, waved his flail and gave a fierce greeting. I could see that the little boy's mood had improved significantly.

"Aren't you busy with the task force these days? "What's going on

here?"

"Well, I was just passing by and stopped by."

It seemed like a lot of changes had occurred in Sisley's training while I hadn't seen him.

First of all, the little boy has thrown off the cumbersome saint's clothes and is wearing proper knight's attire.

Additionally, held in a small hand, was an ugly flail with spikes sticking out here and there.

Seeing that his posture was quite stable even while holding a weapon that seemed heavier than before, I was able to guess how intensely the little boy had been training.

"The distance of the armor has increased 1.5 times compared to usual. "That's incredible power."

"Your hitting is becoming more and more accurate. "It's increasing every day, so what's new?"

"But today I feel particularly strong. "Is something troubling the saint?"

"Now that I think about it, I feel an impatience that has never existed before regarding the use of Aurors."

The biggest change is, of course, the Inquisitors training together. They must have gotten used to this sight, and now they have enough time to chat about trivial things.

And Seongjin was able to immediately hear from Sisley the reason why he was impatient with the training.

"I'm going to follow Brother Logan this time."

"you? "You're applying to the punitive force?"

"huh. Although it is still far from sufficient, I think it is sufficient to not interfere with the activities of the punitive force. Even if I can't

do the job of a single knight, there are ways to contribute to the subjugation team as a healer."

"hmm."

"Don't even think about stopping me, brother. There is no other reason why I usually do not neglect training. "It's all to prepare for something like this."

Seongjin took a close look at Sisley's determined expression.

Of course, the little girl had done volunteer work as a saint before. However, I could not shake the feeling that this decision to carry out the subjugation was sudden.

"why? "Did you have a precognitive dream or something?"

Sisley then flinched and looked at Seongjin.

"ah? Well, not really..."

"then?"

At the series of urgings, Sisley looked worried for a moment and then let out a small sigh.

"Well, the only person who can fully understand my current situation is you."

"It's about the Delcross Chronicles?"

"huh. that's right."

Recently, Sisley has not had nightmares disguised as precognitive dreams. Seongjin strongly advised me not to believe it, and the rabbit eye patch that Owen gave me was working properly.

However, the contents of the Delcross Chronicle, which he had pondered over and over for years, still remained a strong memory in Sisley's mind.

"I know that? "Since my brother started working on the monster task

force, a lot of things have changed since the Chronicles."

According to Sisley, from what he had read, there were no incidents of Lycanslopes on the move in the north. Instead, during the same period, a large number of sea demons occurred disturbing the coast of Cyprus.

So, instead of going to Sigismund territory, Logan in the chronicle seemed to have formed a punitive force and headed to Cyprus as usual.

"Are those the same demons that caused the problem this time?"

"I don't know that. Since the chronicle mostly revolved around the imperial capital, only the simple results of the subjugation were described. But since the timing is similar, I think it's highly likely."

"What is the result of the subjugation?"

"That's what Brother Logan does, right? Of course, I came back after cleaning up."

After responding like that, Sisley continued speaking with a slightly more serious expression.

"But it is said that during that subjugation, two Liliun knights who followed my brother passionately lost their lives. So, it is said that Brother Logan was depressed for a while after that."

"okay?"

These are knights who follow with enthusiasm.

The first thing that comes to mind is the extreme trio of Otto, Ellie, and Duchamp.

"Anyway, it's unusual for there to be deaths in the punitive force."

The biggest reason why the Liliun Detachment's reputation is so high is that the number of casualties is almost non-existent. Every year, we take the lead in carrying out large-scale seawater suppression, but the damage is so small that it can be considered a miracle.

The world often talks about this as proof that the Lord's blessings are with Lilium. Of course, Seongjin knew very well Logan's true power, so he thought it was a natural result.

'But even though Sword Master Logan's eyes are still open, the knights of Lilium have lost their lives?'

This had great implications.

Considering that the Delcross Chronicles was created based on reality to some extent, the recent actions of the sea monsters may not be ordinary riots that occur every time.

Perhaps the scale is much greater than reported.

"Or, even though it is not specifically stated in the chronicle, it could be that something happened to Brother Logan himself."

After saying that, Sisley raised his clear gray eyes and looked up at the distant northeastern sky.

"Is that why? Brother. Ever since I heard that a punitive force was being formed, I've been feeling uneasy. "I have a feeling that something evil is lurking on the black coast of Cyprus, trying to devour Brother Logan."

"... .."

"Of course, it might be a needless worry. But rather than staying like this, I thought I should do whatever I can."

Seongjin was able to fully understand Sisley. Until just now, wasn't he also anxious due to a somewhat uneasy premonition?

'but... ..'

I realized this the moment I heard Sisley's decision. There are clues to a solution.

"Whatever is waiting there, you want to see it with your own eyes and stop it."

"huh. I trained hard for times like this. "I'm building my strength to protect myself and my family."

Sisley nodded and tightened his grip on the flail.

Although the boy's small hands were already red from the arduous training, although he was unlikely to get hurt thanks to his powerful divine power.

"I know that? At first, I thought you were the key to all these changes. So he thought he should help his brother somehow. However, after joining the Knights of St. Marsyas and devoting himself to training every day, he gradually came to realize this."

Sisley, who had said that much, turned his head and looked straight into Seongjin's eyes.

"Just waiting for someone to bring change is not the way to go. When I think about it, who would be the horse I could most easily move to change the Delcross Chronicles? "It's me, right?"

"... .."

"So how can I dare expect positive change in the Chronicles if I don't change myself first?"

Seongjin silently looked down at his younger brother, who sounded quite dignified.

What can I say, until now I just thought of him as a little boy who needed to be looked after. Now that I see it, I see that he is a more reliable ally than I thought.

"... Sisley."

He did not want to remind people of the contents of the Delcross Chronicles as much as possible, but after thinking for a moment, Seongjin soon made up his mind and opened his mouth.

"Actually, there's something I've wanted to ask you for a while."

"huh? What?"

"Perhaps. "Does the Margrave Sigismund also appear in the Delcross Chronicles?"

"Margrave Sigismund?"

"okay. The current margrave, Hendrik Sigismund. Since he is the father of the main character, Or Den, he probably appears often."

Then Sisley, who had been reflecting on his memories for a moment, shook his head.

"well? Was there sometimes minor friction with the Archduke?"

"Given the fact that I don't remember much of his actions, it seems like he hasn't been a very important character until now."

hmm. Is that so? I thought there might be a clue to the Margrave's plans.

-I am just standing by and watching him commit a serious and irreversible sin.

My father definitely had those thoughts at that time.

-If you knew that, you definitely wouldn't try to stop me.

In that case, it means that you must first find out what the Margrave's intentions are, so that you can prevent what your father has planned in advance.

However, Sisley, who noticed Seongjin's dejected expression, spoke carefully.

"Is it important? "Then shall we take a look at it from now on?"

"hmm? how?"

"I'm having a precognitive dream again. "Go into that dream and read the Delcross Chronicles from beginning to end."

... what?

When Seongjin opened his eyes, Sisley smiled softly.

"In order to change the future, you must first fully understand the intended future."

"But Sisley. As I said before, that's not the right future. "It's just a ploy by a bad guy looking for your destruction."

"If it's not really a precognitive dream, then yes. "If it's just someone's prank like my brother said, then knowing all the details will be a clue to what he's aiming for."

It's not that Seongjin didn't think of that, too.

There was just something that bothered me about recommending it, because I knew better than anyone else what the Delcross Chronicles meant to Sisley.

It must have been a truly merciless sentence of death. The little boy in front of you must have endured the fear of death alone for years without being able to confide in anyone.

But going through it all over again?

"It's okay, brother."

Sisley, perhaps understanding Seongjin's complicated expression, answered calmly.

"I'm already dead in the chronicles anyway, right? "Now that the most nerve-wracking story is over, all you have to do is feel a little more comfortable and read the process of the world being destroyed."

"... .."

"Of course, it is still scary to face the end of each Seonghwang family member."

Still, if you repeat that it is not true and that it is something to prevent the future, it will become bearable.

Sisley said that and tried to comfort Seongjin.

'uh... ..'

Seongjin realized something again. The fact that our little boy is a child with a really strong spirit who does not give in to external pressure.

In the end, Seongjin decided to let me do whatever I wanted, and had no choice but to respond to the little boy like this.

"But don't push yourself too hard."

"of course. As long as you sleep well, it won't interfere with your training. "I will sleep without the eye patch only once a day when I have free time."

Sisley, who burst out laughing, continued speaking.

"Now that I think about it, is there a story I heard before? Before His Majesty carried out a large-scale subjugation, that is, when the power of the Dark Church still existed in the imperial capital. "I heard that the apostates of the church at that time volunteered to become victims of human sacrifice on a large scale in order to enjoy eternal [rest]."

Clearly, human sacrifice is an unacceptable heresy.

Sisley added, though, that he thought about how difficult life must have been at the time and how he would have hoped for salvation from death.

"I'm only saying this because you are my brother, but sometimes I feel that death has the same meaning as 'rest.' Same goes for me. Once I experienced death once in the Chronicles, I felt a little more at ease... .."

It was right then.

[Nonsense!]

Someone's sharp voice interrupted their conversation.

[Do not fall for the deception of false things, my descendants! How can something as ominous as death become 'rest'?]

At some point, Seo Yi-seo was glaring at Seong-jin with fierce eyes. Her eyes, which were originally dark brown, suddenly changed to bright gold and began to sparkle.

Cadmus appeared.

[What are your intentions? How far are you trying to control and sway my descendants!?!]

However, the yelling from the old man in the back room did not reach Seongjin's ears at all. An important realization struck my head in an instant.

'... Oh my!

When Seongjin chuckled and raised one corner of his mouth, Cadmus, who was startled, got angry again.

[Why are you looking at me like that! What kind of plan are you planning again, you evil bastard!]

'Yes, Cadmus.'

Now I feel like it's finally coming together.

If Sisley goes, that guy will end up being part of the punitive force, right? This would be a pretty solid appointment, right?

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319. Change (4)

Cadmus.

The first great emperor who was once even called a demigod.

Although he is currently trapped in a human body in the normal world, his power cannot be underestimated.

'When we first confronted each other at the main palace, it felt like his energy was almost equal to that of my father.'

Still, I didn't think my father would lose.

'But that won't be all about Cadmus.'

There is something more. For some reason, Seongjin was sure of that.

Although it is difficult to clearly understand due to numerous restrictions, the faint sign of something shaking below is clearly a storm of enormous and barbaric power.

'If Cadmus can completely escape from Seo Yi-seo's body... ... '

No, not just Seo Yi-seo, but if he could escape from Seonghwang's coffin altogether. If that happens, how strong can the author become?

As he was looking at Cadmus blankly and assessing his potential power, he shouted at Seongjin again.

[This! Are you listening to me now!? How dare you ignore me now!]

"Uh, sorry."

Did you say something important to me?

Because your usual words and actions were the same, I didn't pay much attention to what you said.

But before Seongjin could say anything more, Sisley got angry at Cadmus.

"Lord Cadmus. "Why do you show up out of nowhere and start a fight with the wrong person?"

Sisley's cheeks, which were usually as red as a crystal shard, turned red. In rare cases, he is truly indignant.

Cadmus was embarrassed without realizing it and stuttered.

[No, a fight... Descendants! I will do everything for your safety...]

"If there is anyone here who poses the greatest threat to my safety, isn't it you, Cadmus?"

[that...]

"And what on earth did Brother Mores say that you're trying to frame by saying it was all a trick or a ploy? "Onii-sama was just listening to my advice!"

Cadmus gaped stupidly. Looking back, it's true that Seongjin didn't say anything.

In the end, he rolled his eyes awkwardly and muttered in a slightly weakened voice.

[...] You must not look down on their power, descendant. The very existence of false things deceives humans and ultimately clouds their judgment. so...]

But his excuses had no effect on Sisley.

"At least it becomes clear who the person with the most impaired judgment here is. "You should be ashamed of yourself for being indebted to me so much and not being grateful!"

[No, what does that mean? What do I owe to that...]

"Then think about the food expenses Cadmus spends every day at the Pearl Palace. "To whom do you think the Jinju Palace budget, which covers such enormous costs, comes from?"

[...] ... !]

oh. Seongjin was a little impressed.

There is nothing more sad than mistreating people over what they eat.

"Excellent, Sisley. "Do you know how to properly stick a dagger in a painful spot?"

"It's not the time to talk like that, brother."

As Sisley said that, he pursed his lips. She had a face that was somewhat unfamiliar to a saint, and seemed somewhat sullen.

It's a good thing that she has moved away from her previous doll-like appearance and has been able to make various facial expressions recently. Where did you learn that weird expression?

"You said that before, right? Before the enemy attacks me, first seize power and bring the enemy down. But why are you actually putting up with such a ridiculous slander?"

"hmm..."

Actually, rather than putting up with it, it's closer to not paying much attention to it.

Seongjin put his hand on Sisley's shoulder with a serious face.

"Sisley. "I will teach you another important lesson."

"what is that?"

"Please understand. "It is a dagger of words and actions. The more you wield it in public, the duller the blade and the less powerful it becomes."

Then the little saint tilted her head.

"It's just a word, why does it happen like that?"

"That is because it is a double-edged sword that erodes your character and reputation the moment you use it. So you have to aim at the most valuable target at the most appropriate time."

"The most valuable target... .."

Seongjin nodded his head seriously, looking into his bright, clear eyes.

"If you live as a member of the royal family from now on, you will often get caught up in useless gossip. Even homeless beggars walking around in the slums can be criticized for no reason. But are you going to respond verbally to them every time that happens?"

"then?"

"You should ignore it. No matter how hard they try to sharpen their blades, the attacks they receive are so insignificant that they can't even cause a scratch. If you react in vain, your reputation will only be tarnished. So it's not even worth worrying about."

At this point, Cadmus couldn't tell who Seongjin was criticizing.

[What? How dare you... ..!]

His face wasn't even red right now. Seongjin, who caught a glimpse of Cadmus, raised the corner of his mouth and made a comment.

"Do you understand, Sisley? So, when a poor, helpless person who can't have any influence on the world barks, all you have to do is look at him warmly and with pity."

Wow!

Cadmus suffered deep internal injuries and stumbled.

"Is Cadmus pitiful and helpless? What a success!"

"Why not? Its very existence is already dependent on Seo Yi-seo. No one but us knows of his existence, and as a result, he has virtually no political presence. "All I can do is shout and swear at his descendants."

"hmm..."

"Even without Seo Yi-seo, you're the type of person who can't even eat properly on your own, right? It's a waste of time to respond to people like that one by one. "It's difficult to even exhale or move your tongue to make a sound."

[...] ... !]

Sisley then looked at Cadmus, whose complexion had turned dark from shock.

"okay. "When I think about it that way, I feel a little pitiful."

big... Wow!

A shock hits my heart again.

Cadmus, who finally came to his senses after stumbling around for a while, felt anger rising again the moment he made eye contact with the siblings in front of him.

[Ugh... ... !]

That's right, two pairs of identical gray eyes, as if they were molded, were looking at him with a light of deep compassion!

-It's tight.

-huh. That's right. It's really pitiful.

[Hey, look at those irreverent faces! That evil thing is really putting a bad strain on my descendants! Such elegance... ... !]

Seongjin and Sisley resumed their conversation, leaving the angry old man in the back room jumping in place.

"Anyway, is it okay? "If two saints are absent at the same time, will the Holy Assembly obediently give approval?"

"of course. "The cause of helping Cyprus is clear, and the Crusade will be hoping that I will have made a tangible contribution by now."

[Hey! Listen to me, you guys!]

"From the church side? why?"

"Think about it, brother. It hasn't been long since you recognized me as an 'apostle,' right? So the Holy Assembly will need more solid evidence to support their decision. "Proof that I am a special person given by the Lord."

[Don't you dare ignore this body!]

"Right. "I still don't know much about the physiology of the Orthodox Church."

"That's because your brother has rarely encountered Orthodox people. Besides, I guess this time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will probably give me strength."

[Kaaaaaaaa! Whoops!]

"Ministry of Foreign Affairs? "Cardinal Cesare?"

Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cardinal Cesare.

They said he was probably the person who took the lead in framing the kid in the Delcross Chronicles. Why is someone like that suddenly?

When Seongjin asked curiously, Sisley answered with a confident voice.

"huh. Isn't it a matter of temporarily getting rid of the thorns in the Orthodox Church's saints? "Maybe Cardinal Cesare will be happy?"

"But if you actually make a contribution and come back, wouldn't that ultimately give the Orthodox Church and Archbishop Wesker

even more power?"

[You guys...]

"Do you really expect me to perform well? Even if you make an insignificant contribution, it will likely be buried under the brilliant reputation of the Liliun Punitive Force."

"..."

Seongjin closed his mouth for a moment and stared into Sisley's deepened eyes. Without losing sight of the slightly childish heroism hidden beneath calm eyes.

"... But you're planning on majoring properly and coming back, right?"

Then Sisley burst into a light smile.

"huh. Just wait and see. "It will surprise Cardinal Cesare and the elders of the Orthodox Church."

[Tch! okay. As for your helpless and pitiful ancestors, get the hell out of here! These shameful things...]

"Then what if I buy into his vigilance for no reason?"

"After all, it's someone I have to face, right? In that case, wouldn't it be more advantageous to explore this area carefully and prevent it from being touched for a while?"

Are you planning to attack head on instead of hiding? Seongjin looked at her little saint with new eyes.

"I've been thinking about it since the accident at Tansinyeon, but are you secretly reckless?"

"huh. "This is all thanks to you."

... Yeah, really?

"It's not just that. I'm always working hard to learn things from my

brother. "Because one day, like my brother, I will work hard until I can carry out propaganda and fabrication as naturally as breathing."

"... Uh, um. Well, I'm glad I can be of help."

Seongjin felt a strange sense of guilt.

Although it wasn't his intention, it seems true that he had a strong influence on the innocent little boy.

"Anyway, be careful. "If you install it for no reason because you are so obsessed with publicness, if you do it wrong, your forehead could be on fire."

"Yes?"

A bright face tilting its head and rubbing its forehead.

"What does that mean? Why is my forehead suddenly on fire?"

"Uh, no. nothing."

Seongjin thought as he glanced at Seo Yi-seo's eyes, which had already returned to dark brown.

Well, Cadmus will accompany you, and it looks like it will be an easy subjugation in the end, so there's no need to tell you about Sir Sharon in advance, right?

* * *

That night, the Green Zone of Pangea Chronicle.

As always, Dexter and the silent villains who had gathered at the meeting point sat for a moment, feeling extremely empty.

[...] Seongjin Lee, you really don't come. Very lonely.]

[Isn't there an old saying that says, "I don't know where I am, but I know where I am?"]

[Is there a saying like that there too? It's similar to Earth. If you look at it, it seems like the proverbs are all there, right?]

With those words, the group was silent for a moment.

How could the empty space for a small baby goat be so big?

[...] But what about Owen?]

[I logged in briefly earlier and then left. He said there were a lot of things he had to sort out before leaving for his hometown.]

[Is Owen also slowing down now? My insides are filled with loneliness!]

In a calm atmosphere, the group walked around the field for a bit and then parted ways earlier than usual.

"... .."

And the old man's workshop.

Dexter, who opened his eyes on the full dive machine, slowly got up and recalled Lee Seong-jin's words.

-Dexter. Would you like to come visit Delcross?

I know. If she had known that they would break up so suddenly, she should have at least made a proper appointment to visit.

-Actually, my father is the Oracle of Kornsheim. He is the one and only person who can create milestones that you dream of meeting.

I also wanted to properly check the truth of what he said. Not only was Lee Seong-jin showing off his extraordinary abilities recently, but the more you got to know him, the more suspicious he was.

'Originally, I was going to ask the old man about Lee Seong-jin right away... ..'

Coincidentally, the elderly have rarely been here recently. As if something urgent had happened, he was busy wandering around somewhere all day.

Thanks to that, I didn't have time to talk to him face to face.

'But it's not something to put off any longer.'

Dexter, who was fiddling with the half-signpost in his hand, soon composed himself and started walking.

'As expected, I should properly ask the old man about Lee Seong-jin. If I can't see you right away, I'll have to leave a quick note.'

I also need to find out if I can visit Delcross.

After making that decision, Dexter took off his goggles and walked out of the workshop.

"... Ah, old man!"

But maybe I was lucky.

Dexter, who was heading to the old man's room, happened to meet the old man who was busily walking somewhere.

[Oh, yes. Dexter. Has anything happened so far?]

"Yes, it's all thanks to the old man taking care of me."

As Gongsun bowed his head towards the majestic ancient dragon, the elder smiled with satisfaction. Because he cared for this talented dwarf engineer enough to give his entire workshop to Dexter.

[But what happened? It's a big deal that you found me first.]

"Oh, it's not a big deal. "I just have a little question."

However, the smile was short-lived, and the old man's face soon hardened to the point of being scary when he heard about Dexter's business.

[...] What did that creepy thing say to trick you?]

"yes?"

[No, it's nothing.]

Hmm.

The old man quickly calmed his expression and opened his mouth politely.

[Dexter. Let me make this clear for now. There is nothing good about staying close to it, so just forget about it. I don't want to go into too much detail about that either.]

"yes?"

Although I was taken aback by the unexpectedly strong reaction, the dragon continued speaking firmly.

[And you are not allowed to visit Delcross.]

"... "Why?"

When everyone told me no, my curiosity arose.

"Elder, can't I just watch from afar? I swear that I will not allow the people of Delcross or their technology to be affected in the slightest. As you said before, so as not to harm the causality of the dimension in the slightest."

When Dexter added that, the old man looked a little embarrassed.

[You're misunderstanding something, Dexter. This is all for your safety.]

"My safety?"

[That's right. How should I explain this... ..]

The old man frowned and thought for a moment, then sighed softly.

[Dexter. Unfortunately, the souls of Delcross are already subordinate to high-ranking demon lords. Still, would you carelessly step into that dangerous place?]

... Are you subordinate to a high-ranking demon lord? What does that mean?

When Dexter blinked at the incomprehensible sound, the old man

smiled bitterly at him.

[Do you understand? Although things seem to be going pretty well now, that fragile world is already collapsing little by little from the inside!]

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320. Change (5)

Thousands of years after the era of gods and demon dragons ended.

People called the period when powerful ancient dragons ruled the Delcross dimension, 'the era of the three ancient dragons.'

In a way, the disorderly era that lasted for a long time was also the time when the power of the Delcross dimension was the strongest. It was a time when the boundaries between history and legend were blurred, and mythical creatures were alive and breathing.

However, the era of the three ancient dragons, which seemed like it would last forever, eventually came to an end. As the dragons began to gradually lose their power as they got older, the invasion of the dimension by high-ranking demon kings, who had been waiting for an opportunity until then, began in earnest.

[Repentance], one of the five demon kings of the Apocalypse, descended, and in the aftermath, the sleeping demon dragon was resurrected. The continent fell into great chaos, and mythical creatures urgently fled to another dimension.

Only humans.

Until then, only the humans who had lived in a sparse gathering without any significant power were about to be driven to death and fall into the hands of the demon kings.

-How could you not feel pity for it?

The last god remaining in Delcross at the time could not stand by and watch the miserable end of humans.

However, if you actively confront the high-ranking demon kings, not only can you not guarantee your odds of victory, but the entire dimension is likely to be shattered in the aftermath of the struggle.

In the end, after much deliberation, Shin came to make this proposal to the remaining four demon kings.

-Stop the invasion. If you do that, I will hand over to you the souls of all humans who die in the future.

In any case, there was a difference between late and early, and these were souls that the demon lords could extort right now.

-It won't be such a bad offer for you either. If you include souls that are constantly being reborn, the total amount of souls you can obtain will be much greater than now.

It was a pretty good proposal even for the demon lords to hear. Because I was able to easily obtain souls without fighting with God.

From their perspective, whether it was a hundred years or a thousand years, it was only a moment, so waiting was not that difficult.

-So, please allow us to maintain this dimension for a thousand years from now, just a little longer. So that humans can enjoy complete peace at least as long as they live.

Thanks to that mortal contract, Delcross was able to gain some reprieve until the demon lords descended.

[That is the original [agreement]. In exchange for that contract, the main god of Del Cross lost his name and disappeared completely from his world. Now, the only evidence that he existed is the occasional display of divine power in humans.]

"Is that so?"

[okay. Since then, all human souls in the Delcross dimension have been subordinated to the Demon Lords. If you try to steal even one soul of the dead from them, you will have to pay an equally large price.]

During the time when the original agreement was signed, there were tremendous changes in the Delcross dimension. A new barrier that resonated with Ionia was created, and the border races took charge of its management.

Some of the Kornsheim clan even crossed over to the Delcross dimension.

It was at that time that the human hero, Cadmus, appeared, defeated the demon dragon, and established an empire.

"Uhm. "I see."

Anyway, it's a different level of history.

The old man hurriedly continued his explanation to the dwarf engineer who was gradually losing focus.

[The agreement applies not only to souls that existed at the time. All souls born after that, or even souls who visit Delcross by chance. All souls belong to high-ranking demon kings.]

"hmm."

Dexter nodded half-heartedly. I wasn't that interested in the afterlife or the afterlife anyway.

Wasn't the reason he came to believe in the existence of the soul thanks to meeting Ionian engineers and being exposed to various new knowledge?

There was only one thing he was curious about now.

"Then wasn't Delcross a dimension that would be destroyed in a thousand years anyway? But you create a barrier that resonates together. Did Ionia obediently allow it?"

[Why not? The resonance of two dimensions is a very powerful force. Besides, isn't it obvious that once Delcross falls, the next invasion will be Ionia's turn?]

Additionally, it is said that the oracle of the Kornsim clan at the time

actively supported the creation of a new barrier.

-If there is a delay of a thousand years, there is a possibility that the invasion can be overcome somehow.

He was considered the wisest person in Ionia, so it would have been natural for a consensus to gather around him.

Anyway, at least one thing was clear.

[At the time, no one thought that Ionia would fall first.]

How much less would they have thought that they would be swallowed up not by the invasion of the demon lords, but by a [disaster] of their own making. The old man sighed softly, and then added the final explanation with a confused look on his face.

[Do you understand? Dexter. If you are heading to Delcross now, the original 'agreement' will most likely apply to you as well. Even if you die, you will never be able to escape the hands of the demon lords. So don't ever say that you want to go there again.]

However, despite the elder's stern warning, Dexter was having strange thoughts inside.

'The destruction of the Delcross dimension is just around the corner? Then doesn't that mean there isn't much time left?'

If you don't go to Delcross as soon as possible, you may never be able to meet the Oracle like this. You may not be able to find out more about the milestone.

'And Lee Seong-jin... ..'

Although he was an unpleasant conman, Lee Seong-jin still didn't seem like a bad guy. No, has he already gotten the point about being a fraudster?

Anyway, I thought that if a big crisis had come to the Delcross dimension, I should also warn Lee Seong-jin, who lives there. I tell him all the stories the elder told me.

'Well, even if I can't go, there is still a way to meet Lee Seong-jin.'

The dwarf engineer tightly grasped the half-signpost in his hand.

'Because the rental period is fixed. As long as he has this, Lee Seong-jin will definitely return to the workshop someday.'

* * *

That night, Seongjin meditated leisurely for the first time in a long time.

And Seongjin, who went to bed quite late, tried to sleep while hugging Lee Jeong, just in case.

Of course, instead of waking up in the Pangea Chronicle, I just heard the following hard electronic sound.

[Check the user's access history. Complete erasure of ID has been confirmed.]

As expected, I can't use the guest ID anymore. While I was a little disappointed, a faint electronic sound continued to hit my ears.

[The user's unique ID has been confirmed. Would you like to activate the frozen ID?]

no? Speaking of unique IDs, for some reason I don't feel like it.

Seongjin clicked his tongue and stood up.

'At best, I gained some fraudulent skills. Have all the levels and skills I raised so far disappeared like this?'

I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel sorry for it. If I wanted to, I could probably wipe out all the rankers in Pangea Chronicle and monopolize the rare items.

Of course, if you do something like that, the dark Justitia will eat your errors and grow even faster.

'Once you go to the workshop, there won't be any solutions... ... '

Seongjin thought as he found the silver disc lying on the nightstand.

There may be a full dive machine in the old man's workshop, and maybe it will be possible to create a formal user ID rather than a guest ID.

But Seongjin soon changed his mind.

Why? Strangely enough, I had a feeling that it would be a good idea not to see Dexter for a while from now.

'Well, Owen will be back soon, and everyone will be having fun. You can visit Dexter slowly later...'

As Seongjin changed his posture and lay down comfortably, the demon king in his head asked a puzzled question.

[hmm? Are you gone yet? Is there anything special happening at this hour?]

'uh. just.'

[Then go quickly. It's time for me to start too.]

Now that I think about it, the devil's whining has noticeably decreased these days. Is that it? I feel like I've become particularly quiet and less talkative lately.

'why? 'What are you going to do after I'm gone?'

To Seongjin's question, the demon king answered in a bright voice.

[huh. I was trying to play around the corner.]

'Play around the corner? what is that?'

[It spins around the edge of the salt crystal. It's a game where you go around every corner without missing a beat, with minimal overlapping paths. Since this is a concave 24-sided shape, there are more routes than expected. When you do this, you lose track of time all night long, don't you?]

'...'

[So I was waiting for you to go to Pangea Chronicle. If you go around thinking about burning crystals while you're awake, don't you think you'll be quite crazy?]

It was somehow a miserable game. While Seongjin has been neglecting reality lately, it seems that the demon king, unable to overcome his boredom, has come up with a self-help plan to kill time.

I couldn't say anything more, but the demon lord added excitedly.

[That's not the only creative play I've made. After all, the ending of the game is the seven arched protrusions on the flame crystal.]

'... 'What is that again?'

[Yes, it is a game where you go round and round seven rings at once while gradually accelerating. Since each curvature is different, it kills the sense of drift when turning a curve, and when the acceleration increases, it feels like riding a roller coaster!]

'uh...'

... I'm sorry, devil.

You've been really bored!

Seongjin changed his mind about going to bed and jumped out of bed.

'well. Let's put off playing with salt crystals for a while. 'I'm going to take a walk around the imperial palace for the first time in a while.'

[what? Aren't we going to Pangea Chronicle today?]

'uh. 'Not just today, it won't happen for a while.'

[okay...]

The Demon King answered faintly.

My heart is pounding.

In my head, I could clearly feel the sense that his soul was shaking with joy.

[Hmph! Are you not going out alone anymore? Well, then there is nothing we can do about it. I have no choice but to put off the exciting salt-and-pepper racing for a while.]

Seongjin slowly opened the terrace door, grumbling like a demon king trying to hide his true feelings through one ear.

To test the level of Auror concealment for the first time in a while, should we go to the Blue Rose Labyrinth this time? Let's see how close we can get without being discovered by Logan, the Dekaron Knight.

'By the way, you. How do you know what I mean by drift or roller coaster? 'You are the Demon Lord of Gehenna, right?'

[hmm? well?]

Then the Demon King also wriggled his soul as if he was puzzled.

[I haven't really thought about it until now? Come to think of it, I already knew about Sigurd District 34 well before the invasion.]

Is it just about the Earth? When I think about it, there was another interesting thing.

Considering that it has been built up since he flew to Delcross, isn't the demon lord's understanding of humans also inexplicably high?

[Well, it's nothing that strange. Because knowledge is deeply related to the state of the soul. Isn't it because I am such a great Demon King?]

Seongjin, who was dumbfounded by the devil's strange response, let out a laugh.

It's great, but it's shit.

Anyway, Seongjin, who started his midnight walk, was able to wander around the palace quite freely.

In the meantime, his auror concealment skills have improved dramatically. He leisurely passed by the knights on guard at night, so he said everything.

Even the senior knight, Sir Kurt, was able to fool him so well.

[Wow, this is really exciting!]

Kongdakkongdak.

The Demon King enjoyed the walk, concentrating as if it were a thrilling game.

[Isn't there a good chance of success against your nanny at this level? Would you like to try it somewhere?]

'Who's the babysitter, who's the babysitter!'

But it was as expected.

No matter how good the Auror concealment was, it was impossible to completely avoid the senses of the former Sword Master and Dekaron Knight. Not long after heading to her office's labyrinth, Seongjin was able to face the tired face of Logan who came to meet her.

"... "What are you doing without sleeping?"

Logan didn't even take off his knight uniform, and even had Arjuna on his belt.

I guess this guy hasn't been working all this time?

"I'll give it back exactly as it was said. Seongjin Lee, what on earth are you doing this late at night?"

"Well, just. Since I couldn't sleep, I thought I'd take a walk for a while... .."

Then Logan looked at Seongjin with a worried face.

"okay? "Are you in any pain?"

"Oh, isn't it?"

"Then go back and sleep. "You need to sleep well when you are growing up."

"what? "Is it because of the age difference between you and me that you treat me like a child?"

When Seongjin, who was offended by the sarcasm, responded sullenly, Logan rebuked him in a calm voice.

"You should also consider the position of the knights guarding Jinju Palace for you. Also, what about Brother Masain? "If he finds out you're gone, he'll definitely be very worried."

"Uh, um... .."

As expected, Seongjin had nothing to say to that point, so he turned his head away with a sullen expression. However, what Logan said next was not surprising.

"Now, listen to me, okay? I'll take you there now, so shall we hurry back to Jinju Palace? "If you can't sleep, I'll give you some lullaby tea."

"... "What, man?"

A gentle soothing form, no matter who sees it, dealing with a child who does not listen.

Seongjin's eyes suddenly became sharp.

Oh, this guy secretly pretends to be his superior whenever he gets the chance? So, don't treat me like a child in public!

321. Workshop (1)

"Let's go to Jinju Palace, Lee Seong-jin. "It's still too late."

"I'm going in after a walk? So, go ahead and get some rest."

"Listen to me. "If you go to bed, shouldn't I go back to the Blue Rose Labyrinth and rest in peace?"

Despite Seongjin's insistence, Logan's appeasement continued.

"So, have a cup of warm hush tea and go to sleep. I have to wake up early tomorrow morning and focus on training again. "Maybe it's because I've been busy with work these days, but the speed at which your aura levels build up has become much slower than before."

But the more Logan did, the more Seongjin's doubts grew.

'Why is this guy trying so hard to appease me? He always pretended to be a superior, but he never treated me like a child to this extent.

And around that time, Seongjin felt the presence of a stranger. A faint trace of Aura concealment was following them from the Blue Rose Labyrinth.

My head spins quickly.

'There's no way Logan doesn't know about that presence, which I also know.'

In other words, he was someone Logan knew.

'You're quite good at hiding Aurors. Keeping your level as a senior knight in mind, keep your distance so you don't get caught by me.'

Then there is only one possibility that can be thought of. Logan's exclusive informant, whom I had only heard about.

'At this distance, it would probably have been impossible to detect Lord Masaine.'

Considering the level of Seongjin's Auror class, it could be said that he is being overly cautious.

The problem was Seongjin's sensitive senses. His aura was already far beyond that of a high-ranking knight or even a Lord Masaine.

'You probably have no idea that I'm noticing it... ... '

Anyway, Logan, we're not done yet. You're going to do something with your informant now!

'Moving secretly alone with a confidential informant means that there is business outside the palace, not inside. Of course, it's not the official business of the Knights of St. Bastian.'

So, is it also related to Ortona? Or maybe it's the monster task force work.

Seongjin, who was so sure, pretended not to be able to win and started walking after Logan.

Then, Logan is visibly relieved and strides toward the Pearl Palace.

"Logan."

It was around the time when the fence of Jinju Palace could be seen in the distance that Seongjin opened his mouth again.

"Where are you going again?"

"huh?"

"Are you trying your best to get away from me quickly so you can sneak out somewhere alone?"

"... ... !"

Then Logan stopped walking and looked back at Seongjin with a new expression.

"... "Is that a sign?"

It's true. But is it really that easy to confess?

While Seongjin was dumbfounded, Logan nodded as if he had understood something on his own.

"Well, you've had a good sense of useless things since you were young. "I was wondering why I suddenly came for a walk to the Blue Rose Labyrinth in the middle of the night."

Well, it's just a coincidence.

Seongjin didn't really refute anything and waited for Logan to explain the situation.

"It was like that before. "I was always amazed at how the maids found the hidden tapestry like a ghost and wore it every time."

... Mores, or rather, what was I doing back in the day?

Anyway, Logan seemed to have given up hiding it any longer and confessed it.

"You're right, Seongjin Lee. "I still have some research to do."

"After all, it's not official business for the Knights, is it? So, this late at night, I waited until the fierce Lilium Knights were completely gone."

"okay. So, why don't you just pretend not to notice today?"

At that time, Seongjin was able to get a rough idea of what Logan was trying to do. So he flatly refused.

"no."

And then, to the guy's embarrassed face, he recited it clearly.

"I will follow, too."

"Lee Seong-jin."

"That's the monster task force's job, right? Aren't you planning to secretly go to a place called 'workshop'?"

"... ..!"

Logan then visibly panics.

Tsk. Who on earth are you going to fool with that innocent face that can't control your expressions? uh?

"Listen carefully, Logan. Investigation into the workplace is the job of the monster task force. You are just helping us with our work, but I am an official advisor to the monster task force. So of course you should take me!"

"That's true, but... .."

"Oh, and you. Don't even dream of using your auras to escape alone. I will put the imperial palace on emergency alert right away."

"... what?"

"I'll tell the neighborhood that the 2nd prince has disappeared! Shouldn't all the off-duty Royal Guard knights be suddenly called out? "Why is that so pitiful?"

Heng! Seongjin looked confidently at Logan, who was puzzled. He's taking the Royal Guard knights hostage, so it's a threat that's almost too far-fetched. Still, I have the confidence to commit face confiscation!

[...] Are you proud of being shy now?]

The demon lord, who was no better, muttered softly.

Nevertheless, since Logan had a complicated expression as if he was hesitating, Seongjin made one last push to help him make a decision.

"Of course that's not all, Logan. "Should I run to the main palace right now and tell my father?"

"... ... !"

"How do you feel? "If you don't want to be called to the main palace at night and spend the night, wouldn't it be better for you to just take me with you?"

Then Logan looked at Seongjin in astonishment. He seemed to be wondering if he had just heard correctly.

However, Seongjin remained confident.

"I will tell everything to my father. "Why do you think I can't do it?"

"Ah, I understand. Okay, please calm down! "We can go together!"

Only then did Logan come to his senses and hurriedly comfort Seongjin. Considering Seongjin's usual personality, it seemed like he judged that the possibility was quite high.

Moreover, the waves felt from Seongjin are truly genuine.

[A shameful person no matter where you put him...]

In my head, I heard the demon lord's soft sigh.

Shut up!

You devil bastard, an outsider who races in people's heads!

* * *

"The location of the workshop where the prisoner confessed is near the Imperial Capital. "Even if we move diligently from now on, we probably won't be able to arrive until close to dawn."

Logan walked at a fast pace and explained to Seongjin.

They had to travel only on foot. Even if the words were spoken without the guard knowing, it was impossible to completely erase the presence of the words.

"Couldn't you run faster? Don't try to match my pace, just go as fast as you can. "Logan."

I run pretty well.

Seongjin is plump to prove that point! Using the aura like a spring, it rose into the air. The purpose was to help Logan's investigation, not to interfere with it.

Then Logan looked at Seongjin with puzzled eyes.

"You're performing an amazing feat. Is this the principle of focusing the aura on the feet? "That is also a method of operating Aurors that I have never seen before."

"Call me Schneeshuhe. "This time, I went to Sigismund Territory and learned."

"... "The Schneeschhe I knew wasn't like that."

Of course, if Orden or the Wolf Knights had heard this, they would have reacted in bewilderment. This isn't a typical schnee shuhe after all.

But the point wasn't much different. All you have to do is change the shape of the intention that guides the Auror from snowshoes to springs. It's so simple!

[Lee Seong-jin.]

It was a time when I was feeling proud. Suddenly, the demon lord whispered cautiously in my head.

[Now a soul bead is behind us. It's a small terminal that doesn't communicate with words.]

'Ah, as expected.'

Arenja has arrived. Although she guessed that if she went out of the imperial palace, she would usually follow her.

In any case, this probably means that our movements are being heard in real time by our father.

'Actually, the threat of reaching my father was of no use... ..'

Because you probably know everything anyway.

As he was looking at Logan with slightly pitiful eyes, the guy who had no idea what Seongjin was thinking made a soft signal.

"Okay then, shall we go?"

Logan slowly increased his speed, conscious of Seongjin. Of course, Seongjin followed behind him without much difficulty.

How much did the speed increase like that? Before they knew it, they were galloping down the streets of the Imperial Capital faster than a horse.

Occasionally eluding the capital guards on night patrol, they passed through Via d'Este in the blink of an eye and entered the road leading to the outskirts of the Imperial Capital.

'At this rate, we'll be able to go outside the ecliptic sooner or later, right?'

Of course, this may not have been the Sword Master's best. Seongjin also still had quite a bit of leisure time, but he didn't intentionally say anything about speeding up.

That's because they sensed that Logan's informant was following them at a fairly close pace. It's a pretty good skill, but it looks like it's all there in the end.

'If it were us Dasha, we would have followed sooner. After all, there is no informant like Dasha? 'I must tell you later!'

[Are you serious? I don't think he would be very happy if I praised him like that, right?]

Seongjin felt sick to his stomach at the devil's point.

Why not?

-Lowering. And you went out of the palace without even telling me? This is not why I taught you about Auror concealment! Are you really trying to watch me burst to death? yes?

Oh, I can already see Dasha's face full of resentment.

'... I have to hide it until the end.'

[okay. Well thought out.]

While they were chatting with the Demon King, Seongjin and his group had already reached the vicinity of the western gateway of the imperial capital.

As we left the ecliptic, the number of buildings rapidly decreased, and a panoramic view of wide fields and sparsely standing farmhouses unfolded.

By that time, Arranger's soul terminals following Seongjin and his group had also increased to three.

"Logan, do you know the exact location of the workshop?"

Seongjin cautiously asked Logan, who was running without hesitation between fields. According to the contents of the statement I saw during the day, the location of the 'workshop' was described very vaguely.

It wasn't really the fault of the prisoner or the interrogator. In the first place, this happened because accurate addresses were not given to each temporary building in a nearby farmhouse.

But Logan nodded without even looking back.

"Of course. Only after we had already completely compared the contents of the statement with the farms reported residing in the vicinity. There were a few empty buildings nearby without residents. "We are heading there now."

Hoo. He boasted that he would take charge of the investigation, and the work was done quite efficiently.

"But there has been so much effort so far that there should have been a large-scale investigation into the top. Wouldn't everyone have withdrawn on their own by now? "There may not be a single piece of evidence left."

"Even if the evidence disappears, it's okay. "If there was some unsettling movement there, there would most likely be a faint intention to remain."

... Intention to remain?

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

"You can specify a workplace just by using your remaining thoughts?"

"okay. That alone is enough for me. Because disturbing thoughts are bound to have at least a little bit of demonic energy mixed in. And you know, I am a demon, no matter how small... .."

After speaking up to that point, Logan paused, taking a deep breath as if something was bothering him.

"Logan?"

"... huh. "I never miss a suspicious sign, no matter how small it is."

hmm.

It felt like he changed his words in a hurry, but Seongjin decided not to ask any more questions. This was because Logan, who was a little downcast, seemed to be carefully observing her feelings.

After running for a long time, the group arrived at a shabby barn at a remote farmhouse. And before they even stopped there, both Seongjin and Logan noticed something strange.

"... Didn't you say it was empty? "Is there someone inside?"

"Did you feel it too? Besides, it looks somehow familiar. "It definitely seems like someone I've met somewhere before."

I'm sure the workshop is still in operation.

Seongjin and Logan exchanged glances for a moment and then quietly approached the building as if they had made an appointment.

And with a small wink as a signal -

Jump up!

The barn door was suddenly opened.

OK-

"Uuhiiik?!"

The person hiding screamed as if the wind had been knocked out of them. Then, I saw him crawling to the other side of the barn, struggling with his limbs.

"... ..!"

A dark night without the moon.

Seongjin, whose eyesight was enhanced by aura, was able to see the man's face clearly even in the dark.

"... Belinda?"

It was like that.

Surprisingly, there, the remnants of the Penitent Church, all completely disfigured, were crouching in fear.

322. Workshop (2)

Belinda.

He is the branch leader of the Penitent Church and the person who summoned the Demon Beast and wiped out the Milo Sangdan.

She should be being tortured at the Inquisition right now, so why is she hiding in the workshop like this?

"... Belinda?"

At the sound of her name being called, she flinched and shrank further into the corner of the barn.

"Why are you here... .."

As Seongjin asked a question and took a step closer, Belinda screamed, shaking her twisted limbs in a panic. A harsh, animal-like moan escapes from her blood-covered lips.

Uhhhh-

"Whoa! calm down!"

When Seongjin stopped and held out both hands, she could barely keep her mouth shut.

However, he still looked anxious as he rolled his eyes and examined Seongjin. The appearance that once proudly shouted at Inquisitor Valery's torture is now completely pitiful and unsightly.

"Do you know?"

In response to Logan's question, Seongjin explained quietly without

taking his eyes off Belinda.

"Uh, they are the remnants of the Penitent Church. "He was taken to the Heresy Tribunal for investigation for the crime of summoning the Demon Beast from the North."

"ah... .."

Logan seemed to think of her then too.

"okay. Come to think of it, he came down from Sigismund with a group of prisoners. Was it managed by Inquisitor Valery? "Among the prisoners, the author remains in my memory because he had a particularly strong spirit."

And Seongjin and Logan closed their mouths at the same time. Because my mind was very complicated with various thoughts.

'Escape from the infamous Heresy Court, where once you enter, you have to die to get out? no way?'

One thought that immediately came to mind was whether it was a trap set by the Heresy Tribunal.

The goal is to make Belinda, a fairly high-ranking member of the Penitent Church, run away, and follow her to find the headquarters of the underground religious order.

It was assumed that it was probably to track Giacomo Milo's whereabouts.

"... "It's really strange."

Logan must have thought that too, as he concentrated for a moment and then opened his mouth.

"If it was intentionally released, there will definitely be a pursuer nearby. But no matter how much I look, I can't sense any sign of anyone with military force, let alone an Inquisitor, in the vicinity."

It is the Sword Master's judgment, so it must be accurate. Seongjin had also not sensed any significant presence, except for Logan's

informant.

'He really escaped on his own?'

But no matter how much I thought about it, the possibility seemed slim.

Just look at Belinda's condition. He doesn't appear to be in his right mind, and there's not even a single trace of his body intact. But how?

"For now, treatment seems to be the priority. "After that, we will ask you how you came here and take you back to the Heresy Tribunal."

Logan said and slowly walked towards Belinda. Because her condition was too bad to ask questions or investigate anything.

"Do not be afraid. "I won't hurt you."

Perhaps because she controlled her presence as gently as possible, Belinda did not react as violently as she did at first even when Logan got closer.

As if influenced by the gentle aura the guy was wearing, he just stared at him in a calmer state than before.

But just as Logan was about to receive treatment, something unexpected happened. When Belinda saw the divine power shining white in his hand, he turned pale and then his eyes widened!

Argh!

"Belinda!"

"Aaaah! stop! Please stop! "You devils!"

"Calm down. "I'm just trying to heal."

"Kwaaaah! go away! go away! "Go away!"

Belinda, who was screaming like crazy, soon started foaming at the mouth and having a seizure. As it seemed like he was going to die at any moment at this rate, Logan hurriedly withdrew his divine power

and stepped back.

"What on earth happened in prison?""

Well, isn't that obvious?

Considering the meaning of the act of healing to the prisoners imprisoned in the Heresy Tribunal, it was not an understandable reaction.

The same is true in the case of Inquisitor Valery. Didn't they carefully pull out the prisoners' teeth one by one and then use sacred power to implant them one by one? So that I can pick you again next time.

"... That prisoner is clearly a criminal who drove many people to death. But is it really right to hand it over to the Heresy Tribunal and subject it to endless torture? It would be better to end my life here...
... ."

Logan mutters with a very confused expression. Looking at Belinda in front of him, he seems to be reminded of the prisoners he had previously singled out and handed over to the Heresy Tribunal.

As someone who is not a master at digging, that guy is once again falling into needless guilt.

'Well, what about...'

Seongjin just looked down at Belinda's pitiful appearance and thought.

'Who would dare to judge the appropriate punishment for human sin? At least Logan, you don't have to decide and take responsibility for that now.'

Now that I think about it, my father once said something to me.

-There is no need for you to be forced into that choice yet.
Sometimes, wouldn't it be okay to leave that burden to someone else?

Perhaps Mores was saying that since I am his family, you are willing to take my place.

Seongjin thought for a moment, then made up his mind and called Logan.

"Logan."

"huh?"

"Would you like to go to the imperial palace now?"

"... what?"

"If you were alone, you would be able to get there and back much faster than before, right?"

Logan seemed quite taken aback by Seongjin's sudden words. But Seongjin paid no heed and continued his explanation with a calm expression.

"I think it is in order to bring Inquisitor Valery here. We must first clarify whether there were any operations or discussions regarding Belinda within the Heresy Tribunal. "It's not a matter for us to decide."

"... .."

"If Belinda really escaped from prison, that also needs to be properly investigated. "It means there is a serious flaw in the functioning of the prison."

Logan hesitated for a moment. However, in his opinion, there was no flaw in Seongjin's words.

Whatever the reason, it was right to leave Belinda's treatment in the hands of the Inquisition.

"why? Is there something wrong with you?"

"... no. Seongjin Lee, I will do that."

When Seongjin urged him again, Logan responded weakly.

Then he looks outside for a moment and clicks his mouth silently. It

seemed like he was secretly giving instructions to the informant.

Seongjin listened out of curiosity, but he could not hear any details, as it seemed like Logan was controlling the sound with his auror.

What on earth are you talking about?

"Get back as quickly as possible."

Finally, as if he had finished giving instructions, Logan turned to Seongjin and made a serious request.

"I don't think anything special will happen, but just in case, I'll leave my informant here."

"What?"

Seongjin pretended to be surprised and looked around, blinking excessively.

"Is the informant here? where? where?"

"haha."

Then, Logan finally broke free from his gloomy expression and laughed softly.

"Don't pretend not to know. "You knew from the beginning, right?"

"huh?"

"Even though it's pretty close now, you're not surprised at all. This means that they were aware of the existence of the informant from the beginning. "You could have gone faster earlier, but did you intentionally keep pace with him?"

"... .."

Oh, I thought he was just a cool guy, but this guy is sharper than I thought?

When I looked at Logan blankly, he narrowed his eyes.

"Are you thinking of being very rude to me right now?"

"uh? no? at all? "Why do you think that?"

Because everything you say now is a lie.

Logan thought so, but didn't say it out loud. He just cautioned Seongjin.

"Bring Sir Valerie. "I will come back quickly, so in the meantime, don't cause any trouble and just stay calm."

In conclusion-

Hwiik.

The Sword Master hit the ground and instantly disappeared from nearby. Seeing that it escaped Seongjin's detection in the blink of an eye, it was incredibly fast.

'I need to hurry... ... '

Seongjin roughly estimated the distance from Logan in his head and slowly placed his hand on his waist.

Sereung-

The nutcracker's blade, pulled from its scabbard with a clear sound, catches the faint starlight and sheds a faint reflected light.

"Hehehe... ... "

As the long blade slowly approached her eyes, Belinda let out a bizarre laugh as if she had guessed her fate. She seemed relieved or sad.

"Belinda. "Is there any last thing you want to say?"

Seongjin's eyes were extremely quiet as he asked that question.

Belinda's eyes began to slowly return to reason, as if she was sympathizing with Seongjin's aura.

"Prince Mores... .."

It looks like he finally recognized the person in front of him. After staring at her face blankly for a moment, she continued speaking in a trembling voice.

"okay. I thought that I could one day approach God beyond the pain. "I had no doubt that there would be a perfect other side."

"... .."

"You who are prepared. Aren't you wondering why I'm here? "Why don't you ask me how I escaped that hellish place?"

okay. I don't ask.

There's no need for me to know that now, and my father already knows everything.

I'm sure you will take the most appropriate action. I can definitely see that.

Seongjin raised the blade towards Belinda's neck without answering. Then she continued her words, shedding a single tear.

"Hehe. Do you know what? You who are prepared! I have received a calling from the Lord! At a moment of extreme pain, a bright light and strange letters appeared before my eyes. "It was a letter from God saying he would send me wherever I wanted!"

... God's letters?

"You accepted? Of course I accepted! "Because I finally knew that my repentance had reached the Lord, and that the path to Him had been opened!"

accept?

It was a somewhat familiar word.

[Lee Seong-jin. This can't be... ..]

Perhaps remembering something similar to Seongjin, the demon lord in my head opened his mouth in a serious voice.

Why not? Doesn't it seem like the laws of the normal world were deeply at play in Belinda's prison escape?

'When I came back from the maze before, or when I went to and from the dragon's workshop. A confirmation message appeared asking if I wanted to move with a bright light.'

If he had used the [portal] of the Gyu-sang world, it would be understandable that he would have escaped the prison without difficulty.

'Did they try to get Belinda out of the Penitent Church? Or someone else... ..'

Seongjin continued to think for a moment and then shook his head.

okay. Who cares who it is. There's no way to find out now anyway.

Belinda seems to firmly believe that this is a calling from the Lord, so no matter how many times she asks, nothing will come out.

'If we don't end this now, Logan will be back soon.'

Seongjin, who had composed himself, spoke one last time to Belinda.

"Belinda. I really don't like you guys, the Dark Church. "You are cancerous beings who are eating away at the empire and this continent."

but.

"That said, I don't think it's reasonable to continue living a life filled with only pain. So, I can end everything here and help you find rest."

"Everything... "Finish it?"

The blade slowly rises. Belinda's eyes, staring at it, sparkle with strange heat.

"Finally, I come to the Lord's side... ... !"

Well, guess what? Wherever you go when you die, it probably won't be by the Lord's side.

Seongjin was just about to swing the nutcracker while thinking such nonsense.

"Lowering!"

Someone suddenly appeared and shouted urgently, blocking Seongjin's path.

"Please wait, sir!"

Prostrating in front of Seongjin was a short man wearing a black stealth suit. He is Logan's secret informant who has been keeping an eye on him.

"What about you?"

When the young prince asked without the slightest agitation despite his sudden appearance, the informant paused for a moment and then slowly bowed his head.

"I apologize for not showing proper courtesy. 'I am Number 19, Logan's exclusive informant.'"

'No. 19? 'It's a very strange name, isn't it?'

But regardless of whether that was his real name, his behavior could be said to be very unexpected.

Dasha told me that informants rarely reveal themselves to anyone other than those they serve.

The prince probably felt that the matter was quite urgent as he personally drew his sword towards the criminal.

"Didn't you also say that the order of treatment for escaped prisoners is to hand them over to the Inquisition? So, can you please calm down and wait for Prince Logan and the Inquisitor for a moment?"

I felt like he was quite loyal to the royal family, to stand in the way of the prince who was about to kill him at any moment.

Of course, I had no intention of listening to him.

Jeez.

As he passed by him without answering, No. 19 quickly backed away and prostrated himself in front of Seongjin again.

"Lowering! This is Prince Logan's earnest request to prevent the decline. Please count!"

"... ..!"

At those words, Seongjin couldn't help but pause for a moment.

Logan.

Although he was somewhat suspicious of my intentions, he said he would back down obediently. To ask an informant like that, he's a strangely sharp guy.

"As the prince of the Holy Empire, I cannot release the remnants of the Dark Church. However, handing it over to the heresy court like this is too cruel. "Don't you think so?"

Number 19, who glanced up at the cold voice, was startled to see that the prince's eyes looked unexpectedly unimpressed.

For a subject who speaks as if he sympathizes with the prisoner, isn't that an overly dry point of view?

'I guess I can't stop this person somehow... ..'

Number 19 realized this and made one final plea in a desperate voice.

"If you do, can you at least allow me to get my hands dirty?"

"... .."

"I have been personally ordered by His Majesty the Emperor to assist

the prince and princess with all my heart! So please be generous so that I can fulfill my mission!"

Yes, there was a father too. Somehow, even though I'm causing this mess, Sir Sharon hasn't shown up.

Seongjin somehow felt relaxed.

"... "I allow it."

"Thank you so much."

When permission was given, No. 19 slowly stood up. As he turned towards Belinda-

Wow!

Hot blood spurted from the prisoner's neck and sprayed in all directions.

323. Workshop (3)

A long time had passed before Logan arrived at the workshop with Inquisitor Valery.

This is because after first confirming that the Inquisition Prison was truly empty, the horse was properly led back from the stable.

"Oh my, Belinda..." ... !"

Valerie ran into the barn, found Belinda's body, and was momentarily speechless. It was as if he could not believe it even though he was seeing it right in front of his eyes.

"There was no arrest, just surveillance. I feel like I'll die right away if I even touch it. But wouldn't he suddenly lunge at me while I let my guard down? "It was so sudden that my escort had no choice but to quickly take action."

Valerie blankly looked to the side at Seongjin's explanation.

As he said, a strange man was standing next to the corpse, holding a blood-stained dagger. Even at a glance, it is impossible to know who did the work.

"Because my safety was at stake, I had no choice but to end the prisoner's life. "If the Inquisition holds me accountable, I will gladly accept the punishment."

No. 19, who had just taken off his stealth suit and was wearing a beard on his nose, bowed his head and apologized.

When a person appeared in such a low manner, Valerie also had no choice but to face him indifferently.

"Above all else, the safety of Seonghwangga members is our top priority. "I understand your position."

First of all, the red-haired inquisitor did not particularly take issue with the prisoner's disposition. He just seemed very heartbroken over Belinda's death.

Only Logan, who guessed the inside story, looked at Seongjin with a slightly confused face.

"Together with Lord Valerie, I came to check the prison where the prisoner was imprisoned."

In the heavy atmosphere, Logan opened his mouth softly.

"They say she was imprisoned in a small, windowless cell. But I really couldn't understand it. "The guards were in good condition, and the inside of the prison was a completely secret room with no blemishes."

I asked the guards and guards simple questions, but none of them said they had any clue about the circumstances of the prisoner's disappearance.

Perhaps Logan's investigation is true. Because he catches people's lies like a ghost.

'As expected, the portal to the normal world was at work. 'Who on earth opened the portal?'

Whoever it was, Seongjin could not guess his intentions.

Either he was trying to save Belinda, or he was trying to kill her and destroy the evidence. How could it be possible to deliberately summon someone to a remote barn like this and then leave them there without doing anything?

What on earth were you planning to do?

"... "It is truly a shame that Belinda lost her life."

Gently closing the wide-open and cold prisoner's eyes, Inquisitor Valerie said sadly.

"Even though things are like this, they haven't revealed anything about the headquarters of the Penitent Church. "Isn't it easy to guess how strong her spirit is?"

It straightens out twisted and disheveled limbs and straightens wrinkled clothes. At first glance, it seemed pious, as if it were commemorating the death of a saint, so Number 19 became puzzled and asked Valerie.

"Aren't they just remnants of the Dark Church? But it looks as if the Lord mourns her with all her heart."

Then Valerie nodded solemnly.

"Why not? "Belanda had a way of capturing people's hearts in many ways."

"... Captivate?"

"That's right. I have yet to see anyone who endures her tortures with such courage as she does. Oh, of course she has Seo Yi-seo, who recently became a saint, but she can't think of him as an ordinary human... .."

Sir Valery paused for a moment and made the sign of the cross towards the blood-soaked Belinda with somewhat sad eyes.

"Of course, Belinda is an unquestionable heretic. He is a sinner. However, no matter how wrong the belief may be, wouldn't it be possible to evaluate uprightness as being quite noble at this point?"

"... .."

"That's why I hope that at least after she dies, she goes where she truly wanted to go. Of course, it is a very blasphemous idea to hope that the Lord's lost lamb falls into the hands of the devil."

Number 19 closed his mouth as if speechless.

If it were any other paladin, I wouldn't have dared to say it for fear of being brought to trial for heresy. But this Nalali Inquisitor picks up such scary words without any hesitation.

Seongjin looked at Valerie blankly with a new feeling.

"Are you in a position to say something like that now? "He was the one who was most eager to torture her until now."

"I will not deny that, sir. But at least I didn't want her to die this way. "She wanted to be influenced by me, the cause of her pain, instead of her demons controlling her."

Valerie, who answered in a quiet tone, raised her head and looked up at Seongjin with a smile on her face.

"Belinda definitely deserved that much. He was a high-ranking member of the Penitent Church, which meant that he still had many secrets that he had not revealed. But perhaps that's why someone truly wanted her dead."

"... .."

"Belinda probably had an assistant who helped her escape. If she really escaped prison on her own without any help, wouldn't she deserve a more detailed investigation into the circumstances? But now with her death, the whole truth has become a mystery."

Valerie, who had shed her usual inertial smile, had a rather cold-looking face.

"Lowering. "It would be presumptuous of me to ask you now, but I am well aware of your skills."

"... Sir Valerie."

Logan, who guessed what he was trying to say, tried to dissuade him, but Valerie did not hide her suspicions toward Seongjin at all.

"I do not dare to believe that the prisoner, who was completely injured due to torture, would have felt a threat to his life if he suddenly attacked him. And yet you had to kill her anyway?"

At least it seemed certain that this Inquisitor was truly heartbroken by Belinda's death. Otherwise, there would be no way for him to reveal his fangs, which he had been hiding so skillfully, so

defenselessly.

Seongjin responded by making a complaint.

"Even if you think so, I have nothing to say. "I may have let her guard down, but there must have been a better way to stop her."

"... .."

"But know this, Sir Valerie. I also feel very sorry for her death. "She had so many things I wanted to ask her."

"... "Is there something you want to ask?"

Yes, Sir Valerie.

I still vividly remember how you blocked my path the other day and forcibly covered Belinda's mouth. Belinda definitely said that back then.

-No, I'm dumbfounded to hear such a question from you, not someone else. Don't you know anything about yourself?

Also, didn't you ask Seongjin this before you died?

-Prepared one, aren't you curious why I am here?

If you carefully reflect on those memories, there is only one keyword that can be identified. Seongjin, who had come to that conclusion, opened his mouth in an awkward manner towards Valerie, who was still giving him a suspicious look.

"Is that so? Finally, as Belinda lunged at me, she shouted: So, obviously, you told me she was [prepared] or something, right? But before I could even wonder that, my escort cut her throat... .."

Breathe!

Valerie suddenly came to her senses and attempted to resolve the situation by hastily interrupting Seongjin's conversation.

"no! That is a misunderstanding after all, sir! It's not that I

particularly suspect degradation. I just meant that someone in the Inquisition might have this suspicion! So, don't pay any more attention to what the remnants of the Dark Church say!"

Well, Seongjin also had that level of risk in mind early on.

Could it be that that prince has some connection with the Dark Church? So maybe they tried to kill the prisoner and destroy the evidence?

Isn't it suspicious that he was the first to find the missing prisoner? Could it be that he was the one who helped escape?

'It's obvious that suspicion is predictable.'

What should I do? I knew it and did it anyway.

As I once said to Sisley, fanaticism can only be covered with more fanaticism, and doubt with more doubt.

"okay. If anything catches you, do whatever you want. I will also obediently participate in the investigation. "If possible, I want to be cleared of the charges."

"... yes?"

"So it would be best to properly publicize this matter, Sir Valerie. To do that, we must first let the world know that a prisoner who was on the verge of death succeeded in escaping from the tight prison of the Inquisition."

"that... .."

Valerie's expression becomes mysterious.

Why not? If that were really the case, there would be concerns that the high status of the Inquisition would be seriously damaged.

Seongjin clapped his hands towards him, who seemed to be thinking about something complicated, and continued speaking.

"Now that I think about it, I was a little suspicious about how Belinda

escaped from prison, right? "If there is a helper, wouldn't the inside of the Heresy Tribunal be the most suspicious?"

"Oh!"

"So, the Heresy Tribunal's own investigation cannot be trusted. Should we just file a formal complaint with the Holy See and request a large-scale investigation and audit?"

"No, sir. for a moment... .."

The red-haired Inquisitor's complexion turned pale.

Even so, after the Demon Gate was opened in the Imperial Capital, the Heresy Tribunal went through a difficult time hunting down the remnants of darkness.

But repeating that crazy thing again?

"Wasn't he a precious prisoner with many secrets that he hasn't revealed yet? So, I highly doubt who stole her on purpose and tried to cover up everything about her. "I'm sincere."

When Seongjin repeated exactly what she had heard earlier, Valerie stared at Seongjin with a bewildered expression.

-No sir, are you openly threatening people now?

-Then you don't think so? Everyone is self-employed. First of all, who was it that went against my will?

After a moment of silent glances, the Inquisitor began to laugh weakly.

"I understand what you mean. But I am only an Inquisitor. "I have no authority to ignore such a big incident."

"Well, how about... .."

Of course, Seongjin didn't believe him at all.

In addition to freely reading banned books that others were afraid to

even mention, he also resolved the issue of the Knight of Grace against the strict Cardinal Benitus without making a big fuss.

Where is that? He even had the audacity to arbitrarily place the god's symbol on the chest of the magical beast, the Glacher Troll. How can someone like this just be a lowly Inquisitor?

"Well, it seems like the Heresy Tribunal has more power than I thought. Is it just my imagination?"

"... .."

"So make the most reasonable choice for the Inquisition, Lord Valerie."

Unless you plan to completely overthrow the Inquisition starting tomorrow.

"If you are going to conduct your own investigation, stop at the line of re-inspecting the prison and preventing escapes. Let's not tire each other out with unnecessary doubts. Or, from this side, I can show you for myself how far your doubts go."

Parr.

Seongjin looked straight into the eyes of the Inquisitor, who was shaking with embarrassment, and smiled warmly.

"Do you know? I have a lot of faith in your abilities and rely on them. Sir Valerie."

At least what he said was Seongjin's sincerity.

* * *

Sir Valery, feeling discouraged, quietly returned with Belinda's body.

Seongjin stayed behind with Logan to investigate the workplace.

I wondered if the matter would end so peacefully. If only Logan hadn't carefully started talking to Seongjin, who was looking around the barn.

"Lee Seong-jin. "You can't just live in this world like that."

"... what?"

Seongjin blinked his eyes. She had heard something she never thought she would hear in her life.

But doesn't Logan's eyes look sad and he smiles softly as if he understands everything?

"I can completely understand your sympathy for the prisoner's situation. I guess he wanted to help her in any way possible. But in such times, it is more important to have a cool-headed attitude to properly consider the position you are in."

"Huh?"

"Being kind is not the answer. You must also know how to be selfish in everything you do. "How are you going to get through this difficult world from now on?"

"... .. !?"

It was so absurd that my mouth fell open without me realizing it.

wait for a sec. It would be sad to be the second-best child in this world. What are you saying to someone now? uh?

324

324. Workshop (4)

"Are you in a position to show off like that in front of your elders?
"He's a world-class martial arts master!"

"Look at this, he's climbing up arbitrarily again! "If your superiors are worried, be obedient and listen like a younger brother!"

"You like your superiors! Who says what to say now! "You're still 640 years too early, you brat!"

"Oh, Seongjin Lee! "Can't you let go of this right now!?"

There were some difficulties, such as Seongjin and Logan taking turns putting headlocks on each other, and in the meantime, there was a bit of a rough argument.

However, the situation was soon resolved, and the two soon began to steadily investigate the workplace as if nothing had happened.

"... .. !?"

Only No. 19, who received a huge shock during the process, just stood there for a while with a dumb expression on his face.

-There is no way my prince could be this childish!?

It was a naked emotion revealed on his pale face.

Number 19 had just witnessed the unbelievable appearance of his gentle master, whom he had served with pride for the past several years. How could you not be shocked!

"hmm? Are you uncomfortable? "I will treat you now, so speak comfortably."

"... Oh, no. Lowering... .."

Poor Number 19 answered with a trembling voice and crawled into a corner of the barn.

"hmm... .."

An old table and a few empty baskets. Broken junk and bits of dried grass rolling around here and there.

At first glance, the 'workshop' seemed to have nothing special about it.

"It seems like everyone has withdrawn as expected. Well, there's no way he left any evidence... .."

As Seongjin muttered in disappointment, Logan picked up a few intact blades of grass and asked.

"No. 19. What kind of plant is this? "Can you find out if it is commonly grown on farms?"

"Yes, sir."

Number 19 took the grass and held it to his nose for a moment, but then frowned slightly. The entire barn was vibrating with the smell of Belinda's blood, and his sense of smell was not functioning properly.

"It seems like a type of herb, but the scent is very weak. At least it doesn't seem to be the type commonly found in Delcross. "For now, let's take it and investigate separately."

Meanwhile, some time passed, and a faint dawn began to break out in the dark sky. It was enough time for the three people to thoroughly inspect the narrow barn.

"As expected, there doesn't seem to be anything special, sir. "How about you return to the imperial palace at this point?"

But Logan's thoughts seemed a little different. He calmly looked around him, pushing his spirits to the limit.

"Not like that. Something related to [monsters] definitely happened here. "That unique feeling, different from Magi, still vaguely lingers in the air."

"okay? "Maybe it's just my mood?"

Seongjin was skeptical about that opinion.

Even I, who prided myself on being more sensitive to the spirit of monsters than anyone else, still couldn't feel anything special.

It was right then. A broken piece of porcelain caught Seongjin's eyes.

Somehow, possessed by a strange premonition, Seongjin picked it up as if possessed.

And the moment-

"... ... !?"

Seongjin could feel it too. In that small piece, the spirit of the monster remains, even if only slightly.

"Ah, there it was! "It was so sparse that it was difficult to determine its location."

Logan approaches with a smile on his face.

"What is this?"

"It looks like a vessel containing something. "I can't tell the exact truth from this piece alone."

When I gently sweep the porcelain surface, a little bit of dust-like powder comes out. According to Seongjin's guess, this would be a monster, or rather the powder of Loferum eggs.

This is probably the item that the prisoner who testified about the workshop said he received from the Milo merchant and brought to the workshop.

"Anyway, there seems to be no doubt that this is Milo Merchant's

'workshop.'"

"Okay, Logan. "When the sun rises, it would be better to conduct an official investigation, even if it is only a procedural matter."

Seongjin responded like that and called out to the devil in his head.

'How do you feel? Demon King. 'Is this powder the egg of Loferum?'

Then the demon lord thought for a moment and answered in a slightly uncertain voice.

[hmm. If you look closely, you can feel a bit of the monster's spirit, right? But I'm not sure if this is really Loperum's egg or the traces of another monster. Because there is so little remaining.]

Why not? It's just dust-like crumbs, so how can you determine the type of monster using this?

If I were to find the presence of a monster here, I would rather... ..

flinch!

Seongjin, who suddenly remembered an unpleasant fact, turned his head towards Logan, overcome by an ominous premonition.

"What's wrong, Seongjin Lee?"

Logan blinks his eyes in confusion.

"uh... Logan. Just in case, you... .."

"huh?"

"You can detect this small amount of powder, right? So, if there were more traces of [monsters] nearby, maybe it would be easier to spot them, right?"

"hmm? iced coffee. "What else can I say?"

Logan smiled brightly at Seongjin, who was very nervous.

"You mean the one you always carry with you? I already know about

that medicine cart. "Because I can feel the evil energy of the monster well."

"what... ..!"

Wow, is this real!

Seongjin flinched back without realizing it and fumbled for the item he was carrying in his arms. As Logan said, it was a small bag containing medicinal tea powder.

After a large number of medicinal vehicles were confiscated in the Sigismund Territory, Seongjin stole some of them and always carried them with him.

The reason was simple. This medicine cart was like the last bastion to prepare for emergencies.

Didn't my father say that before too?

-Don't you know, Mores? Now that you have activated the channel, you are no different from a complete oracle. Even if I didn't tell you, you would have gotten all the answers just by asking questions.

okay. The medicine cart is currently the only means of turning Seongjin into a complete oracle.

If something happens that cannot be overcome by ordinary means, and unexpectedly, you cannot rely on your father.

'This medicine cart will definitely be the last means to properly tell me the path I should take.'

Considering its utility, my father never told me not to touch the medicine tea from now on.

I just warned you not to drink it carelessly if possible.

"Uh, Logan. So this is... .."

While Seongjin was flustered, not knowing how to explain, Logan smiled faintly.

"What's new... .."

"huh?"

"You only showed off your 'unique presence' once or twice."

"... ..!"

At that moment, Seongjin was able to immediately realize the reason why Logan had changed his words in such a hurry when he came to the workshop earlier.

-You know, I am a demon, no matter how small... ..

-Logan?

... huh. No matter how small the sign, I never miss a suspicious sign.

Ah, I see. This guy has always sensed a certain amount of demonic energy from Seongjin!

Didn't you warn Seongjin before Sisley before? You can feel the evil energy around you, so be especially careful when meeting high-ranking priests.

At the time, Seongjin thought of himself as an evil spirit, so he didn't think much of it and just moved on. I was just amazed and thought, 'They left the demonic alone. The children of the Seonghwang family are not as devout religious people as I thought.'

'but... ..'

I was in a completely different position now than I was then. Anyway, Seongjin was Mores, and he was the prince of the Holy Empire Delcross.

Therefore, a strong sense of obligation to somehow explain this situation in a way that was understandable dominated Seongjin's mind.

"Uh, Logan. So, that's right. Well, this Magi... .."

... But how? How do you explain it?

This was when Seongjin, whose mind had turned completely white, was stuttering.

"haha. don't mind. "Because you've always been like that in the past."

... Even before?

Seongjin looked at Logan with surprised eyes.

'What does that mean? 'When before?'

While he was taken aback by the unexpected answer, Logan narrowed his eyes and smiled at Seongjin.

"Lee Seong-jin, you have been unique in many ways since you were young."

It was a smile that was so vague that it seemed as if it would disappear into the early morning air at any moment.

* * *

The outskirts of the ecliptic. A small cabin on the side of a mountain.

In a dark basement without even a faint torch, three people who rarely get together were groaning with their heads together.

"doesn't exist. "You didn't come to me?"

As the old man in old priest's clothes frowned and spoke, the small blonde girl also slightly shook her head.

"I don't see any new souls in my area either. Romain, did you check properly?"

Their identities are great high-ranking demon kings who are worshiped by all demons. It was [Sowing] and [Greed].

Of course, there was not a single speck of dignity visible in the unsightly form squatting on the dusty ground.

"That can't be possible. "We confirmed that the target's life was definitely ended."

And in front of them, a half-masked Romain was struggling to properly operate a large crystal ball.

"Are you sure it's working properly?"

"Yes, Sowing. "I have used it several times before."

"Maybe it's broken? "Knock once and see what spring is like."

"No, Greed. This is not broken, and knocking on it will not fix it. "It's just something from the normal world, so it's a little difficult to apply it to the real world."

They were now struggling to control the 'temporary portal generator', one of the old Ionian legacies. It was a rare item that Romain stole from a puppeteer a long time ago.

"Is there any reason to test humans within the ecliptic as targets? "It's troublesome to check whether it was successful or not."

"Have a little more patience, Sower. "Isn't the ultimate goal for this machine now in the imperial palace?"

The final target Romain was thinking of was the rose of the imperial palace, Princess Amelia.

I needed a way to get her out somehow. Even if the relationship between the princess and Prince Leonard comes to fruition, I don't think the Emperor will just sit by and watch.

"Isn't the problem of targeting too far away in the first place? "I wish we could just take this to the ecliptic and test it right next to the target."

"Ah, greed. If you did something like that within the imperial capital, wouldn't you be discovered by the guardian of Delcross right away? He will probably be very angry and destroy this precious machine in one fell swoop."

After responding like that, Romain lowered his head and carefully inspected the machine once again.

I looked at the point where the portal first opened and looked at the record of the target's movement. And we confirm that his life ended naturally.

Well, there's nothing wrong. How did this happen?

"Why did you choose a prisoner from the Inquisition?"

When things were not going smoothly, Pajong raised an objection with a dissatisfied face.

"Well, if you suddenly offered to move somewhere, who else would accept it without hesitation?"

It made sense.

The prisoners of the Inquisition, who are currently in a situation worse than death, would be willing to run away even if it were hell.

"And in the real world, even if we know the starting point of the portal, it is not easy to specify the destination point."

So Romain had to use a quite cumbersome method.

First move the target somewhere and then check that the target's condition is stable. And it naturally kills the target by summoning only the soul.

The soul in this dimension becomes the property of a high-ranking demon lord the moment it dies, so the demon lords intercept the soul and check where it died.

Therefore, there was no reason not to select prisoners for whom sudden death would not be a problem as the first test subjects.

"Please take a good look, great demon lords. According to the records, the target died naturally shortly after moving. "The spirit must be wandering around somewhere."

Then Pajong frowned and responded in an annoyed voice.

"Do not be ridiculous. After all, newly dead souls have not come to our realm."

"Is that so? That's really strange..."

Romain looked into the crystal ball in his hand with a serious face.

"I thought this was the only way to steal the princess without her knowledge, but the results are disappointing. "Maybe we should find another way."

325. Days of No. 21 (1)

It was relatively recently that Seongjin learned about the existence of the 'workshop.'

However, going back in time, when he was struggling against the great Lycan Slope army in Sigismund Territory, there was an informant who had already looked around the place and reported to the Holy Emperor.

Enrique, another name is No. 21.

As an informant directly under the Emperor, he had toured empty farmhouses on the outskirts of the imperial capital at the Emperor's order.

-Check for any suspicious signs.

-yes? your majesty. Why are the farmhouses suddenly empty?

-Just take a look and return to the palace immediately. Do you understand? Fighting and pursuit are absolutely prohibited.

-... ... ?

That was all the order was. Since there were no separate instructions, even the purpose is unknown.

Number 21 walked out of the imperial palace with a shocked expression on his face. It had already been several years since he had assisted Seonghwang, but there were many times, like now, that No. 21 had no idea what he was doing.

'What on earth does he want me to do? I mean, say everything properly!'

Although I thought he was quiet in the past, it was not easy to guess the intentions of Seonghwang, who has been extremely reticent recently.

But what can you do? I have no choice but to at least pretend to do what my boss tells me to do.

Number 21 finally sighed as the ground gave up and began wandering around the outskirts to look at the farms.

'hmm?'

But soon after, No. 21 was able to discover a truly suspicious barn.

In the dark of night, a group of men had gathered and were busy packing their belongings without turning on the lights. Also, some of them are collecting items that cannot be moved, burying them deep in the ground, and frantically pouring dirt on top of them.

'What are they doing again?'

Even if you wash your eyes and look, it is a suspicious nighttime escape scene!

Realizing that something unusual was happening, No. 21 tried to make his way towards the barn cautiously, avoiding any traces.

'... ... !'

Unless you suddenly felt an eerie feeling running down your spine.

A sign of extremely skillful auror concealment!

'... assassin?!'

It was like that. Among the men, there was one strong assassin who seemed to be in total command of the nocturnal escape.

At the same time, the other assassin must have sensed No. 21's presence, and quickly turns his head to shoot him.

Whick!

In the pitch-black darkness, the round eyes facing him directly shed a murderous glow. It was a strange woman, with bare eyebrows standing out beneath the black hood that was tied around her head like a scarf.

'He's not an average person!'

Before he could even recognize it, No. 21's body was reacting quickly.

Shoo!

At the same time, the opponent's sharply fired stiletto grazes No. 21's shoulder. Without even having time to feel the stinging pain, No. 21 rolled his body forward and blindly launched the dagger. There was no time to aim properly, it was simply an attack to keep things in check.

Hiss!

Naturally, the blind dagger flew in the wrong direction to avoid the assassin. Instead of piercing the opponent's body, a sharp noise like something like a bowl being broken was heard.

Cheer up!

"omg?"

"Oh no, we've been found out!"

"Hurry and run away!"

The startled men began to run hurriedly carrying their luggage.

Tsk.

Number 21 clicked his tongue and stood up.

If things continued like this, it was clear that I would miss them with my eyes wide open. I want to chase him right away, but there is no way the other assassin will just sit there and watch.

Whirling- Whirling-

As expected, the assassin remained behind alone, standing there, twirling his pointed stilettos. The stilettos she twirls in her hands reflect her moonlight and give off a menacing metallic glow.

'We have to kill that assassin first! But how?'

At that very moment, a memory flashed through No. 21's mind.

-Firefighting and pursuit are absolutely prohibited.

iced coffee. this.

'There was a reason why he gave that order!'

Number 21 bit his lip and faced reality. With his own skills, engagement and pursuit were probably impossible.

If there was a person with skills comparable to that assassin, it would probably be his distant senior, number 13.

'... ..'

Take a peek.

As No. 21 quietly bit the body while being wary of the other person, a strange look appeared in the eyes of the woman with fair eyebrows.

"like? "He's a guy who understands topics quickly."

The woman grinned and raised the corners of her mouth. Of course, her eyes were not smiling at all, so her bizarre impression only became even more dreary.

"Throw that dagger. "Children, are you from the [Oberon's Hand] faction?"

"... .."

"It seems like there are a lot of really cute kids there these days. Ah, you. Do you know a girl named Sabrina? I think he's probably a few levels above you... .."

The viciously spinning stilettos are ready to pierce No. 21's neck

whenever an opportunity arises. And yet, that woman was calmly asking about people's well-being.

As No. 21 slowly took a step back, very nervous, the woman narrowed her eyes and examined him closely.

"hmm. I thought he was just a kid, but does this mean he has reached a level of his own? Well, okay. "I don't have time to waste your time here either."

"... .."

"I'll let you go. So, let's go our separate ways. "Go to sleep, relax."

There was no way I could easily believe those words.

No. 21 did not let his guard down in the slightest and slowly retreated to a position where he believed he would not be able to reach her even if she threw the weapon.

Right then.

Flash!

The assassin with a murderous glow in his eyes suddenly threw a stiletto without any warning.

Thanks to its strong aura, a weapon with a significantly increased distance is aimed at his legs!

Tang Gang!

"... ... !"

But No. 21 struck it down with ease, as if expected. This is because the teachings that I have been hearing from others for years have already become deeply embedded in my mind.

-When encountering the same assassin, the time to be most nervous is when you think you are just out of the opponent's range. In particular, assassins from [Kaya's Breath] do not miss that moment of opportunity and specialize in neutralizing the opponent's feet from a

long distance.

"Tsk! Not fun... ..!"

Leaving behind the sound of the woman clicking her tongue in annoyance, No. 21 ran away with all his might, without even having a chance to stop the bleeding from his wound.

"You broke it properly. "Good job, Enrique."

When I returned to the palace exhausted, the Emperor, who did not seem surprised at all, greeted No. 21 with a deceptively calm expression.

"... "Did you know everything?"

Of course it is. Because that's what you do.

Then, the Holy Emperor looked at No. 21's face, unable to hide his bitterness, and then placed his hand on his wound and personally poured out divine power.

Just like it always was when I was young, so naturally.

"Why do you make that face after you finish your work well?"

"... .."

"Now, let's listen to the report. "What did you see there, Enrique?"

well. Do you really need to take the time to listen to my report? You probably already know everything.

"... "It's number 21."

Number 21 responded bluntly and tried to contain the inexplicable emotions that were surging in tears.

* * *

"Would I really be useful as his informant? With his power, he could have done everything on his own without me... .."

Number 21, who returned to the Monkey Watchtower in a slightly depressed mood, heard a lament that felt somehow familiar. His senior, number 19, was hitting his head on the table and moaning.

This senior is in a state of self-destruction. I wonder if it's only been a day or two.

"What is it? What happened with Prince Logan again?"

No. 19, Prince Logan's informant,

He was a veteran with quite an age gap with No. 21, but he had been living in quite an awkward position recently due to frequent encounters at the Monkey Watchtower.

"It's blasphemous. No. 21. "Can't you use honorifics properly?"

"yes yes. Logan Hwang, here you go. and what happened?"

If it weren't for his excessive loyalty to Prince Logan, he'd be a pretty good senior.

Then No. 19 turned his downcast face and looked at No. 21.

"hmm. Nothing happened. "I was just wondering whether someone of Prince Logan's caliber would be worthy of a poor informant like me."

"... .."

It wasn't a day or two.

Since he was first assigned to Prince Logan, No. 19 had been frustrated that he was serving someone he could not handle.

Why not? He is a prince who is better at killing people than informants, and his military power is incomparably superior.

Thanks to this, every time Prince Logan left somewhere with a punitive force, he was left alone in the imperial capital and wasted time investigating useless groups of traitors.

At that point, you couldn't help but wonder, 'Am I really of any use to

Him?'

"Senior No. 13 proudly followed Prince Mores to Sigismund Territory."

"It's no use complaining."

Number 21 responded sullenly.

"No matter how good my senior is, how can I be the only one? "I am His Majesty Seonghwang's direct informant."

Then No. 19 suddenly showed a pitiful expression.

"Oh, well... . Cheer up."

'shit! 'I feel bad for being pitied by that senior!'

If I didn't do that, I wouldn't have time to fool around with No. 19 anymore. If we don't leave for Asean right away, it will probably be difficult to keep up with the success and schedule.

"... "Are you on a business trip to Asin again?"

Number 19, who was staring at Number 21, who was hastily packing up his women's clothes, asked.

"yes."

"You are also very diligent. Can't we just leave the work to the agents at the Assin branch? "You don't have to go there every time, right?"

But No. 21's attitude was stubborn.

"Don't talk nonsense. When Your Majesty encounters the Homunculus, isn't it when His life is most at risk? But how can he entrust his side to just anyone?"

"... ... ?"

Number 19 made an absurd face.

Why not? I know better than anyone else the antipathy toward the

success of No. 21.

Number 19, who was silent for a moment as if at a loss for words, gave this evaluation in a low voice after a while.

"You know what? "You're a really weird guy too."

It's noisy. I will literally return it to my senior.

* * *

Even though I was number 21, I was not very happy about the business trip to Asean.

Cayenne Klanos. This is because every time I met Seonghwang's hidden illegitimate child, I had to have an extremely unpleasant experience.

There was no exception to that this time too.

"your majesty!"

Cough!

Seonghwang, who was eating normally, suddenly started pouring out blood from his mouth, and No. 21 got scared and ran away.

"... ..!"

-No, it's okay.

Instead of using his damaged vocal cords, Seonghwang slowly waved his hand at No. 21. In the meantime, Cayenne, the actions of that crazy bastard were unbelievable.

Percussion.

Kaien turned over the hourglass next to him and looked at Seonghwang, who was coughing up blood, without blinking.

"One, two, three... .."

He was leisurely counting the numbers.

'You crazy bastard!'

Number 21 gritted his teeth and glared helplessly at the boy.

If that murderous bastard had not been His Majesty's son, No. 21 would have driven the dagger into that young boy's forehead without any guilt.

'What on earth were the other guild members doing! 'Did you properly monitor that bastard?'

Fortunately, it did not take long for the corroded esophagus and airway to fully recover. Looking at Seonghwang, who quickly returned to normal condition, Kaien clicked his tongue slightly.

"Wow, you recover in just a few breaths? "With this, I was completely unable to escape today."

"... You somehow poisoned the food. "What kind of trick did you do?"

The guild members must have been keeping an eye on him at all times, and he was truly a talented child. As Seonghwang is thinking this, Kaien smiles brightly at him.

"That's a secret. "I just mixed it well."

"How did you get this poison? "It must be something that doesn't come around easily even in Asin's dark poetry."

"That's a secret too, father."

The boy who responded like that got up from the table and stretched leisurely.

"Anyway, what's going on these days? "Why do you come here more often than before?"

After Kayen settled in Asein, Seonghwang visited once a week for at least a month.

Then, around New Year's, the visits became quite rare, and recently, as if to make up for it, I have been maintaining my visits twice a

week.

Thanks to this, only No. 21 was dying while traveling to and from the ecliptic.

"You seem to have some free time during the regular audience recently. "Why don't you like seeing me often?"

"It's not like that. "Playing with my dad is quite fun."

Cayenne answered like that and twisted the corner of her mouth as she looked at the blood stains on the tablecloth. It's an eerie smile that makes it easy to guess what the scope of 'play' is.

"Anyway, dad. What are you going to spend time with me today? Are you playing chess or something again?"

The boy's face, asking the question with strong curiosity, seemed unusually innocent.

"Are you not interested in chess?"

"huh. To be honest, it's not very fun."

"For that matter, he seemed quite focused."

"It's a game. "Because I don't like losing anything."

Kaien pouted innocently and slowly walked towards the castle.

"Rather than that, how about we have a more in-depth conversation about something important that will happen in the future?"

And the boy flexed his black three-white eyes and made a rather gentle smile.

"huh? Tell me, father. "When are you going to kill me?"

"... .."

"I plan to kill you eventually. yes? So hurry up and say it. "Then, wouldn't I be able to prepare my mind and make various plans beforehand?"

iced coffee.

Number 21 closed his eyes tightly and thought.

'I feel like I'm going crazy just listening to that rich man's conversation!'

326. Days of No. 21 (2)

Cayenne's attitude wasn't like this from the beginning.

When he found a nice mansion in the Principality of Asein in accordance with his wish to enjoy life in a prosperous big city, the boy seemed to be happy with the help of the prosperous emperor.

He took full advantage of every opportunity given to him. Once decent clothes, good food, and basic education were provided, the transformation from a dirty country boy into a noble nobleman took place in an instant.

There were times when I looked at that pretty face and extraordinary hair and thought, "That person's child must be different."

Of course, when I happened to make eye contact with the boy, there were times when I felt that the endlessly dark three-white eyes were very creepy.

However, No. 21 was considered insignificant. Again, she thought it was just because she grew up rough and without her parents' care.

Rather, what was strange was Seonghwang's attitude at the time. The request was excessive to the extent that it seemed excessive not only to the guild members who took care of the boy, but also to No. 21, who frequently came and went to the mansion.

-Treat your child as businesslike as possible. There is no need to attract unnecessary attention by showing unnecessary emotions. Above all, you must be careful not to hastily make physical contact with that child. Do you understand?

At that time, No. 21 could not understand Seonghwang's impatience.

In his opinion, Cayenne was just an uneducated brat. That's probably why she behaves rudely with people and sometimes shows off her sharp side.

Then one day it happened.

As usual, Seonghwang, who entered the body of a homunculus at the appointed time, suddenly looked serious and called Kaien over and began scolding him harshly.

"Cayenne. How dare you disobey my orders? "Why did you do that?"

Everyone was puzzled. It seemed to them that the boy had been quietly following his routine all day.

But Seonghwang does not stop at this, and takes up a stick himself and harshly punishes the child!

"My sister emphasized this. This means that you should never cause harm to others. Nevertheless, since you violated this, shouldn't you now pay the appropriate price?"

Everyone could not help but be taken aback by the sudden situation.

But what was even more surprising was Cayenne's attitude. As if he knew something, he protested to the Holy Emperor like this.

"I was just a little bored. I needed some new stimulation! And take a look there. I didn't do him any harm. "I didn't disobey my father's words!"

"It didn't cause any harm, didn't the person's hair disappear altogether? "Did you think you could still avoid my eyes?"

"No, it's not the limbs, it's the hair too? What if that goes away? "What does it mean to live?"

At that time, No. 21 had no idea what the rich man was talking about.

It was like that when Seonghwang punished a child several times and hurriedly diverted one guild member to another task.

'... ... ?'

But not long after that, No. 21 realized something was strange.

The guild member who moved from department to department began to lose his hair one by one, despite his young age, and soon his forehead became noticeably refreshed.

If things continued like this, sooner or later, it was clear that he would become completely bald.

-No, it's not the limbs, it's the hair too? What if that goes away?

Number 21 suddenly remembered Cayenne's protest and quietly broke into a cold sweat.

Only then did he understand why the Emperor had cracked down on people so severely.

'... There is something! Cayenne sees something that others don't, and she has the ability to use it!

Anyway, such minor incidents continued after that. Since she was a young boy, no matter how much attention she gave her, she would not have been able to behave well in everything.

Cayenne sometimes got into physical fights with other kids his age, or sometimes ripped off something invisible from guild members based on their perception.

And every time that happened, Seonghwang without fail received a beating. Naturally, Cayenne's antipathy toward him grew stronger.

"How on earth do you know everything that happened during the day? Even the people watching didn't notice! "Aren't you just passing it on?"

"Didn't I tell you? Cayenne, you can't deceive my eyes."

However, what was surprising was that although the Emperor strictly disciplined the child, he did not attempt to lecture or lecture him in any particular way.

He simply strictly considered the harm caused by the child's actions and adhered to the method of punishing the child in the same way as he or she had hurt others.

Of course, Cayenne's temperament couldn't have accepted this gently.

"Mr. Lee. "Why are you hitting me?"

"You've been saying this all this time, haven't you? "Everything you do always comes with a price."

"But what I ate was someone else's finger! But what right does my father have to beat me?"

"I am your father, Cayenne. I have a duty to properly police you. But I can't rip your soul out in the same way. "Did you really want that?"

Then, Kaien would glare at Seonghwang with his fierce three-hundred eyes filled with resentment.

"Woo! It would have been better if I never met a father like him in my life! "You're the worst!"

"Well, guess what? As long as I kept my eyes open, you wouldn't have been able to hide from me your whole life. So just give up and listen obediently."

"shit!"

However, there was a part that No. 21 could not understand. Are the minor mistakes a child makes really so difficult to correct?

Cayenne was smarter than her peers and was able to have everything she wanted without having to conflict with others.

But why do you pick a fight with someone if you can forget it, and cause unnecessary problems so that the king can beat you up?

'... Could it be that you are intentionally inducing His Majesty's corporal punishment...? Surely that's not true?'

It was probably around that time. Seonghwang's corporal punishment

policy began to change little by little.

Instead of punishing Kaien directly, he began to lock him in a room according to the amount of time he did wrong, or order him not to go out for a certain period of time.

When No. 21 wondered about this, Seonghwang sighed softly and gave a short answer.

"It's because Cayenne is using herself to get revenge on me."

"... yes?"

"He probably thinks that the damage he inflicts on me is much greater than the corporal punishment he receives. Rather than being punished, I feel like I'm being punished. So this will never stop trouble."

At that time, No. 21 could not understand Seonghwang's words at all.

But surprisingly, as the time he was locked in his room instead of corporal punishment increased, Cayenne's troubles began to subside little by little.

'I really wanted to punish His Majesty... ... ?'

Whatever the truth, it seemed like peace came between them for a while.

However, this did not mean that Cayenne gave up rebelling against the Holy Emperor. Instead of decreasing the amount of trouble directed at others, direct criticism and backlash aimed at Seonghwang has increased.

Then, this smart kid gradually started to get a feel for how to deal with Seonghwang.

"This is not fair! You're being abusing me for not looking for me until now! "But why are you so anxious now that you can't interfere with me?"

"I told you this many times. Your soul has already reached its critical

point. "If you commit any more sins or attempt to feast, I can no longer guarantee what will happen to your soul."

"Then it's all your fault!"

"... ..!"

"The reason I see spirits is because I resemble my uncle! The reason my soul is in this state is because of flattery! So why do I have to pay the price for you!? "That's so absurd!"

"... .."

For the first time that day, Seonghwang was unable to give any response to Kaien. And No. 21 could never forget the three white eyes that flashed so brightly at that moment.

From that day on, Cayenne slowly began to express her aggression directly towards Seonghwang.

-Never harm others first.

The only rule that Seonghwang presented to the child.

However, the homunculi that were flourishing were not 'humans'. And among the father and son, it was none other than Seonghwang who committed the mistake first.

The only thing that escapes his rules.

Cruelly enough, the child quickly realized this fact.

* * *

"Phew... .."

"Mr. 21. What's wrong? "Why are you sighing all of a sudden?"

Asean branch of the guild.

Today again, No. 21, who stopped by there briefly before heading to Cayenne's mansion, was delighted when he spotted Aslan approaching from afar.

"It's been a while, Aslan. How do you feel? "Are you doing well with your swordsmanship training these days?"

"haha. well. "I don't know if I'm good at it, but I'm working hard anyway."

Aslan comes to the side with a bright smile.

The more I got to know this boy, who was concentrating on training with the goal of taking the Imperial Knight Exam next year, he was a really kind and friendly guy.

Because their first meeting was very special, even No. 21, who was not very friendly, was gradually becoming attached to the boy.

"You've grown a lot lately? "You will soon be like me."

"It's thanks to the guild being so kind to me. "I eat delicious food every day."

"okay. Branch leader Justin teaches you how to use the sword well?"

"Uh, um..."

Let's talk about the branch manager. Aslan looked embarrassed and looked away.

"He isn't really attached to the branch these days. "He must be very busy."

"okay?"

"But thankfully, they told me I had natural talent. So, he said that training on my own would be more important to me than the teachings of a teacher. "A genius has to figure it out on his own?"

"Well..."

okay. How could that damn branch leader so obediently call himself a swordsman teacher?

It seems like he hasn't been seen in the imperial capital's dressing

room lately, so what on earth is that person thinking?

"But, I... .."

Number 21 frowned and was lost in thought, but Aslan, who was watching him, quietly opened his mouth.

"Bart... .."

"huh?"

"No, how is your Majesty doing these days... .."

As No. 21 stares, Aslan suddenly loses his temper and scratches his head as if embarrassed.

"I feel like it's been quite a while since I haven't seen him."

"... okay."

'Is he that good?'

Although they had only seen each other for a few days, it seemed like he had left quite a strong impression on the boy.

but. Didn't No. 21 know better than anyone else what it meant to be the first guardian for a child who had no one else in the world to rely on?

"He asks how you are all the time. "I heard that you are receiving reports from Paula every time about your accomplishments."

"Well, really? "Then I'll have to work harder so I don't disappoint you!"

Perhaps it was the answer he was looking for, but the boy's face beamed with joy, unable to hide it. He is genuinely happy about Seonghwang's trivial attention and wants to repay it.

Number 21 thought bitterly.

'It's completely different from anyone else... ..'

How much better it would have been if this boy, rather than Cayenne, had been His Majesty's child.

I couldn't help but think that way.

327. Days of No. 21 (3)

A long time ago, there was a time when No. 21 deeply followed someone he had only known for a short time as a protector.

At the time, he was not yet called Enrique, but by his nickname, Cike. At the time, with the help of the Astros mercenaries, he was hurriedly fleeing the battlefields of the civil war to the south of the continent.

The journey quickly across the wasteland is not easy, even for the mercenaries accompanying you. Naturally, young Kike had to endure each day with all his might.

But to make matters worse, there was someone who made his life even more difficult: his father, Prince Benicio.

-Now even you, my son, look at me that way! Yes, I was jealous of my brother's throne and split this country in half! So do you think my appearance is funny too?

Pow! Kike was suddenly hit by a flying bottle of liquor, and fell to the floor and was unable to come to his senses for a while.

-You ungrateful bastard! I don't even want to look at it! Can't you just get out of here?

Benicio was drunk every day and tried to slap Kike.

I had to sacrifice the friend I trusted the most, and ended up hearing the news of his death. From then on, Benicio, who had been the spiritual leader of the Republican Party, collapsed horribly, unable to regain his former intelligence.

-Ah, father... ... !

-No, no. Let's just end it here. Please die with me so that I don't have to see this misery any longer! Well, how do you feel?

Although he was drunk, the moment in his father's eyes was that he was living with a clear spirit. Kike, who was very frightened, stumbled and ran outside, trying to control his dizzy head.

-Come here, Enrique.

The only comfort to Kike was Seonghwang, a boy called 'Bart' at the time.

-brother! Bart! listen! My father just tried to kill me!

-He was just very drunk. I absolutely don't mean it. Now, I'll treat your wounds, and from today onwards, sleep next to the mercenary campfire.

Bart was a mercenary I met at the front, and he was an amazing boy who was fluent in the Ortona language and even had healing powers.

Moreover, he was not at all bothered by Kike who followed him around, and in fact, he took good care of him instead of his father.

It was only Bart who always called him 'Enrique' instead of his childhood name.

'It would be better if Bart were my real father or older brother... ..'

Every night, Kike would wrap himself in a blanket next to his trustworthy guardian and fall asleep while imagining such absurd things.

Then one day it happened. One of the Astros mercenaries who was taking a break during the move witnessed something strange.

-Oh, look at that fox! They're all dying, but it looks like they managed to crawl all the way to the cave like that.

-That wound... Did you get hit by a weasel?

Hearing the noise of the mercenaries, Kike also looked at the small

crypt with curiosity.

Indeed, there was a fox there, deeply wounded and bleeding, staggering and slowly crawling into the burrow.

'Poorly. You wanted to close your eyes in your own nest... ..!'

It was a time when Kike was immersed in such pitiful sentiments.

Kyung! Keying! king!

Suddenly, a faint scream began to be heard from inside the crypt. It was a death sentence for little fox cubs.

-Uh, wait a minute! That, that... Are they biting all the babies to death?

-Tsk. Are you taking out your anger at the weasel on the cub? That's why they are beasts!

... what?

Kike's eyes widened in shock upon hearing the unbelievable truth.

'You get injured somewhere else and then kill your own babies who have nothing to do with it?'

I'm crying.

Kike felt strong anger welling up in his chest. So he picked up the biggest stone around, gritted his teeth, and threw it with all his might toward the crypt.

Perhaps it was because the fox that had bitten and killed its cub in a dying state reminded him of his father, Benicio, who had hysterically thrown a bottle of alcohol at him not long ago.

-You dirty beast! Just bury yourself in the dirt and die!

Pow! Patter-

The soil at the entrance to the crypt crumbled after the impact.

Nevertheless, Kike, whose anger had not subsided, had just picked up the second stone while grinning.

-Enrique.

Tuk.

Bart's hand lightly touched his shoulder.

-Don't do anything you'll regret later. Even if you don't do that, that mother fox will die soon anyway.

-So what? What about that?

Can something like that be forgiven just because you are about to die or because you feel pity? Does this mean that it is truly acceptable to take out one's anger on innocent children just because one's life is in danger?

-Brother Bart! Such a wicked beast deserves to die! You don't deserve to be a mother! I can never let you die in peace!

Kike shouted indignantly.

But Bart, who was looking down at him, smiled faintly without answering. The polite smile that Kike usually gave whenever he gave a wrong answer, as if he was saddened.

At that moment, Kike instinctively realized something.

Ah, I guess I did something wrong again.

- Think about it. Judging by the timing, those fox cubs may have just opened their eyes. Of course, I wouldn't have been able to wean it off. In this situation, what would happen if they lost their mother?

-... .. !

-okay. Shouldn't they cry next to their mother's corpse until they wither and die? Or, they will be cruelly eaten by predators who come after hearing that sound. Maybe the weasel that attacked its mother will come visit us in person.

A voice that continues quietly.

The strength suddenly left my hand holding the stone.

-So what is the last thing a dying mother can do for her babies?

-uh...

-Isn't the situation of the mother fox who had no choice but to make that choice truly pitiful?

-that...

'I never thought about it like that... ... !'

Patter.

Perhaps because the intensified emotions were accumulating again and again, tears suddenly poured out of Kike's eyes without warning.

Looking back now, No. 21 couldn't remember exactly what he felt at the time.

I just felt sorry for the mother fox in the den, and I also felt sorry for my father Benicio's situation, so I couldn't bear it.

Perhaps it was mixed with sadness for his father, who was so deeply buried in his own pain that he could not understand his son's suffering at all.

Tears were pouring down endlessly.

I still vividly remember the calm hand patting my head as if to comfort me.

-But everything in the world always works that way. So there is no need for you to be so sad.

* * *

"female! Kike! "You see me often these days?"

As he left the branch, a familiar person waved his hand warmly in

front of him. His behavior did not match his magnificent body, and he was so light that he seemed as if he would fly away.

"... "It's not Kike, it's number 21, Chief Justin."

"Okay, okay, Kike."

Justin Astros.

Former leader of the Astros mercenary group, and currently serving as the head of the Asean branch after the mercenary group was transformed into a guild.

Just like Seonghwang, it could be said that it was a fairly old relationship for No. 21. Of course, despite all those years, he was still a person I didn't have much affection for.

In the past, if the Emperor had stubbornly called him Enrique, that person was also steadfastly sticking to his childhood name for Number 21, who had grown up as he had.

It seemed like he was secretly treating people like children, so No. 21 would feel unpleasant inside every time he encountered him.

"I don't understand why I see you so often. I think it's been a few months since I've seen the branch manager. "I heard that you don't come to the branch often these days."

"what? That's because everyone doesn't know! "I was always attached to the branch!"

"But so did Aslan. "I said it's been quite a while since I've seen you, branch manager, right?"

"Haha, that's because she doesn't know. I come here every day and keep an eye on Aslan, right? "It's just that he either doesn't notice me or doesn't remember meeting me at all."

"... ... ?"

Don't you remember meeting? What on earth is this person talking about?

Number 21 furrowed his brows.

If you think he's serious, he suddenly says something nonsense, and if you think he's joking, he immediately looks straight. Although he had thought about it since he was young, Justin Astros was a person who could not easily understand his true feelings.

"Anyway, how are you? I heard everyone is busy these days with Bart's troublesome son? how is it? Do you two seem to be getting along well?"

"If that were the case, why would I go through this trouble?"

Number 21 sighed softly.

"There is so much trouble every day that the mansion is never quiet. Several guild members in charge have already changed."

"If you are having a hard time, leave it to the Asean branch. Is there a need for such tight security from the side? "It's not like Bart's personality told you to do that, so why do you voluntarily go through the trouble of going back and forth between the imperial capitals every time?"

"But can you leave it to just anyone? "If I don't see it in person, I become more anxious and can't rest comfortably."

"hmm..."

Then Justin narrowed his eyes and looked at number 21.

"But I've been thinking about it for a while, but it seems like you really like him being 'Bart'."

"yes?"

"Every time you use this guy's homunculus, your face gets especially bright. "Don't you know that yourself?"

"... "Not at all!"

Number 21 responded firmly.

There are so many things to worry about every time you move a homunculus, so how can you say that you enjoy the hardships?

'Of course, the burden on my mind to assassinate that person as soon as possible is somewhat reduced.'

In any case, the Homunculus is not the true body of the Holy Emperor, so there is no use in trying to take his life.

So, all you have to do is perform your duties as an exclusive informant by your side. That's all.

"Branch leader, don't you know how weak a homunculus' body is? However, it's not like His Majesty really cares about that. Thanks to that, there are more than a few times when I feel nervous just watching him do what he does next to me."

"What?"

"I don't know how many times I've warned you not to use dolls because it's dangerous. But every time, you don't even pretend to hear."

Then Justin Astros' smile disappeared and he asked in a very serious tone.

"Hey, Kike."

"This is number 21. "Branch manager."

"Yes, Kike. "Aren't you making a big mistake?"

"... yes?"

"Do you, Bart, look like he's really weakened? "Just because I'm in the body of a homunculus that breaks easily and I can't use my aurors properly?"

"... .."

"There is no one else in the world to worry about. Hey, since he seems to be being incompetent on the outside, do you think you

should do the opposite and help him this time? "Are you thinking that you are Bart's protector?"

Number 21 was unable to answer that question readily.

'Guardian... . Yes, it would have been better if that had really been possible.'

No. 21 filed a complaint.

This was because I had never felt so helpless since I started walking the path of an assassin.

328. Days of No. 21 (4)

Branch Manager Justin held on to No. 21 tenaciously until the very end.

-A hundred guys like you should attack him all at once. Bart doesn't even blink! So, just relax and leave this guy to the Asean branch!

Of course, No. 21 snorted inwardly.

Could it possibly be so? He is quite excellent in [Oberon's Hand] and is the only one among the same trained riders to have received a 'number'.

Of course, this is not to look down on Seonghwang, but the limitations of the homunculus' body were very clear.

The load is too small and the durability is so poor that it is almost pitiful. Thanks to this, if you want to hit someone properly, you have to spin it around and around several times to get a usable hit.

Even so, if the other person gets bruised, the person who hit him or her will end up with cracked bones. At this point, there is a limit to how much divine power can be used to block it.

'More than anything, my senses have become seriously dulled. If I decide to hide, there are many times when I can't detect it properly even when I get close.'

So No. 21 was confident. For the Holy Emperor who is a homunculus, his presence is absolutely necessary. He said there was no doubt about it.

Nevertheless, there was another reason why No. 21 felt helpless

recently.

The biggest threat to Seonghwang, who had now become a homunculus, was his own son, whom Number 21 could never touch.

* * *

At first, Kaien charged directly at Seonghwang, brandishing his weapon. As for attacking Seonghwang himself, it was the result of confirming several times that he could not hold any books.

"After defeating my father, I can control the other guys' souls and get out of here!"

The weapons Cayenne wielded were diverse.

Sometimes it was a sword stolen from someone, sometimes it was a large rock picked up in the yard, and sometimes it was a small dish knife.

In this way, he hides the weapon without the guild members knowing, and attacks Seonghwang while he is at his most unguarded. The timing was so exquisite that even No. 21 sometimes clicked his tongue in admiration.

Quadang! Cheonggang!

Fortunately, before No. 21 or the guild members could step in, Seonghwang successfully subdued the boy every time.

"Tch, it's a waste! "It's almost done!"

"That's your mistake, Cayenne. "You will never succeed in the future, so why not give up now?"

Seonghwang used to gently scold him each time, but at the point where he was competing with the young boy on equal terms, he was already very unreliable.

'If more time passes...'

Number 21 naturally couldn't help but think of that assumption.

What if Cayenne grows up and one day surpasses the homunculus's physical capabilities? And even then, if the relationship between father and son does not improve at all. Will the attempt to assassinate Seonghwang, like now, end up as a simple incident?

If Seonghwang gets to the point where he can no longer control the child, how will the others, who have difficulty even contacting Kaien, stop him?

In this way, the days of successful practice continued, day after day, amid complex thoughts.

Around that time, some changes occurred in the relationship between Seonghwang, Kaien, and No. 21.

At some point, No. 21 began to feel that he and Cayenne were making frequent eye contact.

'... what?'

At first, No. 21 was a long time ago.

Before and after attacking Seonghwang, the boy seemed to be watching him, but he thought it was just his mood.

I guess the Cayenne doesn't have any reason to do that. She has never even spoken directly to me.

But it didn't take long to realize that it wasn't an illusion.

So, it must have been some time after Prince Logan led the Lilium Detachment to rescue Lord Sigismund, who was in danger.

For some reason, Seonghwang missed the morning political meeting and suddenly ended up going to the prayer room.

-If you see a guild informant who always comes here, tell him. I don't think I'll be able to go see 'that kid' for a while.

Number 21, who heard such a message from Chamberlain Lewis, wondered to himself.

Due to Seonghwang's nature, there was no way he could put off matters related to children unless it was quite urgent. Isn't it a promise to Cayenne, whom he has been especially concerned about lately?

'What on earth is it? 'What is going on around that person?'

Even after a full day, the Holy Emperor could not come out of the prayer room.

Number 21, who was looking around the palace with a nervous feeling, suddenly remembered the words that guild leader Greta had said with a serious face.

-Kike. There are some big conspiracies happening on the underside of the continent right now.

-Big conspiracy?

-okay. Without maintaining at least the form of this unreasonable empire, huge tasks that may be impossible to handle... ..

Were her concerns truly credible? If so, what is this conspiracy, and what is the Holy Emperor doing against it?

Going to the prayer room unexpectedly is becoming more and more frequent, but is it really something that he can handle on his own?

and-

'In this situation, trying to assassinate Seonghwang might be... ..'

Feeling a sense of intangible anxiety creeping in, No. 21 spent the entire week circling around Seonghwang.

Naturally, during that period, No. 21 also had no time to look at Cayenne. Just like that, several days passed by, leaving the boy's care solely to the Asin branch guild members.

If it's short, it's a short gap.

However, it was probably enough time for the brilliant Cayenne to

come up with a small plan.

"It's been a while, dad. "I was pretty bored during that time."

Kaien was especially happy to welcome the arrival of a homunculus in his body after a few days.

"I'm sorry I couldn't keep my promise. "Whatever I say will be an excuse, but I've been very busy with important work."

"no. It's okay, don't worry. Your uncle is the majesty of the Holy Empire, right? There must be a mountain of things more important than me, right? "I understand everything."

Kaien responded with a natural smile and invited Seonghwang to sit at the table with him.

"Anyway, dad. Would you like to have a meal with me after a long time? "If I think about it, I don't think I've ever eaten anything with you, except for the first day I came here."

"... .."

"You're family, right? However, don't just pretend to eat in front of people like you did before. "I didn't say much, but I was quite disappointed with my father that day."

Seonghwang stared at Kaien for a moment, then slowly sat down with a slightly stiff expression. That attitude was somehow unusual, so No. 21 quickly glanced at the guild members.

'Did anything happen while preparing the meal?'

'Yes, nothing happened. We were keeping a close watch without any leaks.'

'okay.'

Number 21 nodded, but still had a very ominous feeling.

Was it because Seonghwang's face looked unusually bloodless than usual? Or maybe it was because of Cayenne's pitch-black three-white

eyes, which showed no sign of laughter even as the corners of her mouth were raised.

"... Cayenne."

Seonghwang, who was holding his breath for a moment while looking at the food in front of him, eventually opened his mouth in a slightly cracked voice.

But before he could say anything more, Cayenne quickly cut him off.

"Wait a minute. Before that, do you want to hear what I have to say first, father?"

"... .."

"While my father wasn't coming, I was thinking about a lot of things on my own. About the situation I am currently in. And about how to solve this. "I worked hard to figure it out with the limited knowledge I had."

Kaien paused for a moment and looked quite innocent, resting his chin on one hand.

"Your father said that before, right? Because I am deeply hurt somewhere in my head, I am completely unaware of the natural emotions that other people feel. So, I have no choice but to carefully observe how ordinary people live and learn their reactions over and over again."

No. 21 also remembered hearing something similar. This was when he was asked why he punishes children but does not preach to them.

At that time, Seonghwang said it was not much different from Cayenne being born blind. So, he said that no matter how much he taught people about human emotions and good and evil, it was the same as asking a blind person to explain and distinguish colors.

"Honestly, I didn't feel good when I heard that. In my view, 'ordinary' people living in the city are also not that different from bandits in fundamental ways, except that their behavior is a bit calm. "They were all just thoughtless idiots."

"... .."

"But I have to observe and follow those guys? Does that make sense? If that's 'normal' and 'normal', then I don't need any of that! There's no way you'll be motivated at all, right? So I thought."

And Kaien pulled his body closer towards Seonghwang and raised the corners of his mouth with a grin.

"Who do I resemble to be like this? Isn't that flattering? So who is best to follow? Of course it would be flattering!"

"... .."

"To me, Abuji seemed quite different from other idiots. So I thought it would be quite fun to imitate you. Anyway, out of all the people I've met so far, I thought my father was the best!"

At first glance, it seemed like he was friendly. However, No. 21 could not take Kaien's words literally.

When a boy who doesn't know much about emotions says 'I like it', does it really mean the same thing as 'liking' or 'affection' that ordinary people use?

"But you know what? I definitely thought so at first. "If I decided to observe you for a long time, wouldn't I be able to see some pretty interesting facts?"

In the cold silence, only Cayenne's bright voice spreads with a strange resonance.

"Why on earth is my father so anxious that he always comes to see me? Why am I so anxious to control my actions? Why do you insist on punishing me even though it's so hard for you? why? "What does that mean?"

"Because you are my father? Because you have a responsibility to me? Do you cherish me as your son? There's no need to say things like that. "I don't understand it anyway, and I don't really believe it."

"Instead, I thought I should make a judgment that only I can make,

based on what I can see."

Kaien, who had said that, slowly raised one hand and spread it wide before the Emperor's eyes.

It's hard to believe that he's had a rough life, and his hands look clean and without a scratch.

"Now, look. There is gold in this hand, father. "It is a large crack that was created after swallowing Jerome completely, and will no longer heal."

... gold?

Number 21 couldn't understand anything Cayenne was saying.

But it occurred to me that perhaps there was something unseen there. This was because Seonghwang's complexion worsened as he stared at Kaien's hand.

"As I continued to observe you, I found out automatically. "What are you so worried about and why do you look anxiously all the time?"

Seonghwang looked away from the hand and looked at Kaien's face with sunken eyes.

"Cayenne."

"Yes, that's right! I finally realized why these cracks appear! It's not just about devouring souls! If I do something you tell me not to do, that is, if I commit that 'sin'. "Even then, the crack was still small, but wouldn't it be getting bigger little by little?"

"... ..!"

"And I often get the feeling that something is stirring a little inside! So I thought. If the cracks are left to open like this, won't something incredible come out of it someday?"

Wow.

Kaien clenched his fist as if he was clutching invisible gold, and

bared his teeth as he put his face close to Seonghwang's nose.

"how is it? Father. Am I right? "A person's soul isn't just a layer that appears on the outside, right?"

"that... .."

"If one day my soul is completely broken and torn apart, that won't be the complete end, right? "Is there something else hiding inside, just waiting for it to reveal itself to the world?"

I thought No. 21 had to be stopped now.

I couldn't completely understand their conversation, but I could tell just from the atmosphere that things were going in a not very good direction.

"Now, tell me honestly! That's what you're really scared of, right? I'm anxious because I don't know when it will pop up, and that's why they keep trying to control me! how is it? "Am I wrong?"

Above all, the face of Seonghwang.

Even though his expression is still sparse, his face strangely carries an uneasy atmosphere, as if he could disappear somewhere at any moment.

"your majesty... ..!"

That was when No. 21 took a step forward and tried to call him.

Rattling.

Slowly, Seonghwang, holding the silverware in both hands, opened his mouth in a calm voice.

"Don't spin the story around and say what you want to say, Cayenne. "Seeing as you're asking for a meal, you probably have something to offer me."

"... ..!"

Kaien opened his eyes wide for a moment and looked at Seonghwang.

And then soon after-

"Puhahahaha!"

I laughed out loud and went back. She laughed so excitedly that in the end, tears appeared in the corners of her eyes.

"Ahaha! The more you watch, the more fun it is! Actually, I don't really care what happens to my soul, but are you really willing to do anything for my soul?"

Kaien, who had said that, calmly closed his eyes and placed a hand on his chest.

"okay. I thought my father would have noticed a long time ago.

"Sometimes this gold grows, and sometimes it shrinks a little."

"... .."

"As you said before, I don't know what my soul really wants. So until now, I have been feasting on anything and everything and allowing my soul to be ruined. But looking at this gold, I knew at least one thing for sure."

Between the slowly lifting eyelids, pitch-black eyes that did not look human flashed eerily.

"My soul probably wants to repay my father for all these things, right? So, if I think that I have vented my anger on you even a little, this gap narrows noticeably."

Rattling.

A plate containing a strangely blue dessert was slowly pushed in front of Seonghwang with a gesture from Cayenne.

"And you know it too. So even though you know I'm going to attack you, you always pretend not to notice, right? "I know that just by making up my mind to harm my father, my soul is moving forward little by little."

Kaien, who had said that much, spread his arms wide and smiled brightly at the crowd.

If it weren't for the dark eyes that couldn't tell what was inside, it was a smile so pure that it could have looked like an angel in a sacred painting.

"So, I've prepared something for both of us! Come on, father! "Would you like to eat with me?"

That day, Kaien succeeded in poisoning the Holy Emperor for the first time.

At the same time, No. 21 became acutely aware that Cayenne's gaze, which he sometimes felt, was not just unfounded.

"your majesty!"

Number 21, who ran towards the crowd in panic, was met directly with the gaze of Kaien, who was openly laughing at him.

329. Days of No. 21 (5)

Even though they are guilty of neglecting their young son, how can a child do this to his parents?

Why does Seonghwang go to such lengths to keep Kaien by his side?

And every time Seonghwang gets poisoned and vomits blood, why does Cayenne's ridicule towards No. 21 become more intense?

"... shit!"

As time passed, No. 21 became so anxious that he almost died. No matter how much I monitored Kaien's every move and harshly criticized the guild members, it was of no use.

The time the father and son ate together increased, and each time, Cayenne would inevitably mix poison into Seonghwang's food. I had no idea when or how he was doing such a thing.

"It probably won't be prevented by ordinary means. Binding the soul and controlling it is something that is far beyond the scope of human knowledge. "If you know, stop harassing the poor guild members from now on."

When Seonghwang, who had just come back from death, reached the point where he was gently giving advice, No. 21 finally exploded.

"You are the problem, you! Even if your guild members don't know, don't you know it clearly? So, every time you choose poisonous food, you eat it and finish your meal quickly. "Where am I wrong?"

"no... .."

"First of all, forgive me for my disrespect, Your Majesty! "But are you

crazy now?"

Are you crazy?

Seonghwang looked at No. 21 with slightly surprised eyes. Although he sometimes shows that he lives cautiously, he has never once openly crossed the line.

But that was just the beginning.

"If scolding and cracking down harshly isn't enough, what on earth are you going to do if you're being treated with poison? Are you kidding me? "Why don't you know that Your Majesty's attitude is further encouraging Cayenne's recklessness?"

"Enri... .."

"And you're telling me not to even try to stop it because it's useless? This is absolutely ridiculous! What on earth does your Majesty think of those who follow you? Do you really want to see those below you explode and die? yes?!"

Grinning. Grinning.

Number 21, who poured out as many harsh words as he could think of to the most noble person on the continent, continued to wheeze for a while as his anger did not subside.

"... .."

Seonghwang was deeply embarrassed.

However, when his eyes landed on No. 21's face, which had been strained after being on high alert for several days, he quickly came to a conclusion.

'okay. I've been a bit rough on people lately.'

Tuk.

As if to appease, white light poured down on No. 21's head.

Now I was wondering what this was all about, but funny enough, his fraudulent divine power was quite effective. As the fatigue from his body slowly melted away, No. 21's anger began to subside, as if it were a lie.

"... "What should we do with all these blasphemous sins?"

Upon hearing Seonghwang's soft voice, No. 21's mind became clear as if he had been doused with cold water. The next thing that swirled through my mind was an indescribable feeling of self-destruction.

"..."

Fortunately, Seonghwang didn't seem to care much about his rudeness and asked again in a calm voice.

"Yes, Enrique. I admit that I did not understand the position of you and your guild members. "Then what on earth should I do with that child?"

-Just cut it down with one sword right now. Don't let that crazy guy commit any more crimes. Wouldn't that be best for both of us?

No. 21 truly wanted to say that to Seonghwang.

However, no matter how angry I was, I couldn't bear to say those words to the person who devoted so much devotion to his children.

"I just..."

"Having experienced it so far, you are well aware that Cayenne's abilities are extraordinary. So, I think you will understand that I cannot leave that child alone like this."

These guild members literally boast some of the best skills on the continent. Avoiding the eyes of those people, he proudly serves poison to His Majesty's table.

If Cayenne puts her mind to it, she will bring strong winds and waves wherever she goes in this world.

"Isn't it really fortunate that he just sits here quietly and focuses on

personal revenge?"

No, say that now!

Number 21 was about to get angry again, but Seonghwang continued speaking bitterly.

"And at first I had some expectations, too. "I wonder if this method will completely restore the child's spirit."

Number 21 refers to the 'gold of the soul' that can never be seen, but that rich people always talk about.

"your majesty."

"I won't ask you to understand Cayenne. But the punishment that the child's soul is receiving now is so painful and heavy that an ordinary person cannot dare to imagine."

And it must all be my fault. So it is only natural for that child to want revenge.

Seonghwang added that.

"But I don't think it's as fundamental a solution as I thought. We confirmed that the collapse was delayed, but that was all. So, I thought it was time to stop playing this game."

"... "Then how long do you plan on playing with that rhythm?"

When the true 21st asked with a cracked voice, Seonghwang slightly looked away and said something unintelligible.

"Well, how long will it last? "Perhaps you would be less impatient, or less angry with that child."

"... yes?"

* * *

Seonghwang once said this to No. 21:

-Because Cayenne is using herself to get revenge on me.

At the time, I thought it was something completely unknown.

However, recently, as he continued to come face to face with Kaien against his will, No. 21 slowly began to understand the crazy guy's unique ways.

As Kaien was busy preparing the poison and did not cause any trouble, Seonghwang naturally reduced the corporal punishment and seemed more at ease than before. If it was simply antipathy towards Seonghwang, Cayenne could have found other efficient methods instead of taking poison.

'Then who on earth is that crazy guy taking revenge on now using Seonghwang?'

Where is that?

As I thought about the blatant ridicule that was being directed at me with increasing intensity each time, a not-so-pleasant realization dawned on me.

... Surely, me?

"No, anyway, that's too much of a leap, right? Why did that guy... Yeah, no way. Even when I think about it, it doesn't make any sense... .."

"What nonsense are you talking to yourself? Are you out of your mind, number 21? "I thought you were on business trips a lot, but you seem very tired these days."

As No. 21 was shaking his head, No. 19, who came in carrying an armful of documents, scolded him.

"It's noisy. What is it all about anyway? "It seemed like you were a little free these days."

"iced coffee. This is a request from senior No. 13. Don't you think Prince Logan and Prince Mores will return to the imperial capital soon? "When you come, I'll tell you that you're starting a restaurant business, so I'll ask you to look for a good place in the downtown area."

"Restaurant business?"

Number 21 blinked.

What kind of nonsense is that all of a sudden?

"okay. "I hear His Majesty Mores is opening a salmon specialty restaurant soon."

"... A salmon specialty restaurant? "What is that?"

"I don't know either. "It's a business that imports expensive salmon from the North and sells it at a low price in the Imperial Capital."

"Is that business? Not charity? It would be much more practical to just scatter money on the street. "Why do you do such crazy things?"

"Well, do you understand? "That's what Prince Mores does."

Ah, yes. That Prince Mores.

Number 21 furrowed his brows slightly.

Although it has only now been overshadowed by the enormous nuisance that is Cayenne, if one were to point out the biggest problem of Seonghwang before then, Prince Mores would naturally be at the top.

I was able to painfully remind myself of the truth that, no matter how great a person's status, his or her life is ruined the moment his or her child's farm fails.

'If you think about it, that person is also quite unlucky in having children.'

This could be seen as he was always by Seonghwang's side. Compared to how much he cares, his relationship with his children is deteriorating.

Prince Owen ran away from home and did not return for several years, and although Princess Amelia and Prince Logan also showed a respectful attitude, they did not treat him very warmly.

The twins clamored every week to play chess, which he did not like, and the youngest princess also seemed to be secretly having a hard time with her father.

'I feel like I've become a little closer with Prince Mores recently... ..'

Then what should I do? Isn't Prince Mores a troublemaker like no other in history who causes trouble for the Emperor?

'Cayenne, not to mention that crazy guy.'

On the other hand, what about people who had nothing to do with him?

The image of Aslan, with a flushed face and joy at the slightest attention from Seonghwang, comes to mind.

-Yeah, really? Then I'll have to work harder so I don't disappoint you!

okay. I couldn't help but feel that way.

What would it have been like if there had been others like Aslan by that person's side, rather than his current children?

'Even though he is an enemy of my country and a great betrayer of Ortona's compatriots.'

If that weren't the case, I... ..

Number 21, who had thought that way without thinking, quickly shook his head vigorously.

Reality never changes. And he was no longer the Kike he had been as a child, comforting himself with wild imaginations.

* * *

No. 21 did his best to maintain his composure.

However, on the day I visited Cayenne's mansion again, this time I finally reached my limit when I found a black bottle lying openly in the middle of the table.

Now you're telling me to drink that out loud, without any intention of hiding it?

"Get that thing away now!"

Number 21, who ordered the guild members, glared at Kaien with burning eyes.

"Kayenne, what are we going to do now?"

"what? haha."

Then, Kaien shrugged his shoulders with a puzzled expression.

"Why are you arguing for no reason? Anyway, you know it, I know it, we all know it. "Do you have to work hard to hide that in your food?"

"... I beg your pardon?"

"No, my father says it's okay, but why are you, a subordinate, so loud? "You dared to covet what was mine and climbed on it without even knowing how to use it. Have you finally lost your mind?"

"... ... !"

There was no communication at all.

'It just can't go on like this!'

I can't keep watching this madness! If you don't make a deal with His Majesty right now!

After making that decision, No. 21 hurriedly ran towards the inner room where the homunculus was placed. At that moment, Seonghwang, who had just become a homunculus, was rustling in discomfort.

"your majesty! Finally, a situation has arisen where poison is openly served on the table! Are you satisfied now? "How long are you going to let this happen?"

Quang!

When I opened the door and shouted loudly, Seonghwang looked up at No. 21 in a bit of confusion.

"... "What else happened?"

"yes! There was! What could happen? "Your son didn't even hide it this time, and put his entire vial of poison on the table!"

"Oh, I see. "What else can I say?"

... what?

At that moment, No. 21 felt like something was snapping in his head.

"Do something! I'm telling you to stop now! "Does this ease your guilt at all?"

"Okay. Now that you understand, calm down."

Seonghwang waved his hand and casually walked towards the door. I am planning on sitting at the table where the poison is placed.

This guy is real!

"Didn't I tell you to please do something about it?"

Wow.

In his haste, No. 21 grabbed Seonghwang's arm as he was about to turn the doorknob.

"... .. ?"

And before he could even turn around, he wrapped his other arm around his shoulder, crossed his arms and walked with his wrist bent behind him. As I was trying to quickly stop the movement, the joint suddenly popped out.

Seonghwang, who was suddenly stopped from doing so, looked very puzzled.

"Something? "This clumsy technique."

As he said, the technique was a little awkward because he was in a hurry. However, No. 21 had a corner of belief.

The opponent was a homunculus. You absolutely cannot twist away from this technique with force.

"Do you remember? This is a skill you yourself taught me as a child. Once you get caught here, there is no way to escape... .."

But at that moment, something surprising happened.

Tdu-duk-duk.

An eerie bursting sound is heard, and before I can even recognize it, my arm loses its support and falls down.

The force that had been pressing down on the other person's shoulder came back, and before he knew it, No. 21 was flying in the air. The floor and ceiling change in an instant.

Quadang!

"... "Wow!"

Before I even realized what had happened, I felt a sharp pain in my back.

When I finally opened my eyes, enduring the pain, I saw Seonghwang with a calm expression, patting one of my shoulders.

"You only remember what you like, Enrique. "Didn't I tell you time and time again that you can't escape only if the other person's joints are normal?"

"... ..!"

Number 21 looked in disbelief at Seonghwang's tattered elbow, which was bent in the opposite direction.

'This is crazy! 'A whole joint?'

There is no way that an average person's joints would bend that

easily when force is applied. This feat is literally possible because the durability of a homunculus is weak!

'It's a way to use even a body that breaks down easily... ..'

Suddenly, he remembered Branch Manager Justin, who had been whining at him.

-A hundred guys like you should attack him all at once. Bart doesn't even blink!

At the time, I thought it was just nonsense from a no-nonsense branch manager, but maybe it was true. That sudden sense of self-destruction swallowed No. 21's head mercilessly.

Did he end up like this? Despite everyone's opposition, he became an assassin and worked so hard to become stronger?

And yet, is that person not even able to reach his toes when he is at his weakest?

"You're still clumsy, Enrique."

Slurp.

As Seonghwang spoke, slowly turning the joint that had quickly returned to its original position, No. 21 glared at him while rubbing his numb back.

"But, Your Majesty. "If it had been you, it wouldn't have been so easy to get out."

Then, a faint, pitiful look appeared on Seonghwang's face.

"If you were my true self, would you have even had a chance to use a technique? "That sounds absurd."

"... .."

"Anyway, it's getting worse. "What on earth should I do about these many blasphemous sins?"

Damn, do you guys understand?

While he was stubbornly keeping his mouth shut, Seonghwang quietly looked down at No. 21 and opened his mouth.

"Enrique."

"This is number 21, Your Majesty."

Even though he knew that he would never call himself that, that stubbornness had already become something like inertia. Then Seonghwang smiled faintly.

"okay. This is what happens in the end. So, didn't you warn him from the beginning to treat him in a business-like manner? "I can sense your hostility so clearly. How could Cayenne not be interested in it and be satisfied with it?"

... interest?

While he was taken aback by the unexpected words, Seonghwang let out a small sigh and patted No. 21 on the shoulder. A strong divine power flows in, and the pain in my back disappears in an instant.

"Do you understand? "That child is now trying to give back to you what he received."

"... ..!"

No. 21's face turned pale.

Could it be that all of Cayenne's actions were aimed at herself? It was the moment when the ominous premonition that I had been thinking about for so long was finally confirmed to be true.

330. Days of No. 21 (6)

"This is not your fault. It's the child's problem who arbitrarily concluded that the fact that he was only watching out for and cracking down on Cayenne's trouble was an act of hostility towards him."

Seonghwang added as if comforting him, but No. 21 could not raise his head.

He had no doubt that his presence would be needed, but instead, it became an excuse to turn Cayenne's blade towards the Holy Emperor.

"I am... So how do I... .."

"Leave the matter here to the Asean branch, and you return to the imperial capital right now."

"... ..!"

Absolutely not!

Leaving Seonghwang alone with that crazy bastard?!

Number 21 stubbornly kept his mouth shut. But he also knew deep down that there was no other way.

In the end, since we can't do anything about Cayenne, it would be right to eliminate the cause of his trouble.

Just as corporal punishment decreased and the number of troubles decreased, he hoped that the number of times he would poison his father would naturally decrease.

"Your Majesty, I... .."

Nevertheless, No. 21 hesitated. Seonghwang looked down at him for a moment, then changed his tone and gave a soft command.

"Enrique. Once again, this is not your fault and it is nothing for you to worry about. So, just go back to the imperial capital."

The success was like this every time. After No. 21 officially started working as an assassin, at first it seemed like they treated him like other guild members.

However, sometimes, when I let my guard down or something urgent happened, the same tone of voice I used when I used to scold Kike as a child suddenly popped out.

At first, I thought it was because we had been together for such a long time. But when I came to this situation, I had no choice but to realize it painfully.

To Seonghwang, No. 21 is not a proper source of information, but is still just a baby that needs to be taken care of.

Number 21 was completely resigned.

"I follow orders. I will return to the imperial capital and wait. But, Your Majesty, if things continue like this, you... .."

To No. 21, who was unable to take his feet even after getting up, Seonghwang spoke calmly, as if reassuring him.

"Don't worry too much about Cayenne. Don't you guess it too? "In the end, this end is decided."

"... ..!"

"If I end up not being able to handle Cayenne, I will at least make the best choice I can as a father for that child. "I am prepared to do so."

No. 21's eyes trembled slightly.

In fact, every time he came to this mansion, he would think about this.

-I wish you could cut down that crazy guy who is harassing you right now.

Maybe that was the true nature of the hostility that Cayenne felt.

However, when the words he had been waiting for came out of Seonghwang's mouth, he felt as if he would suffocate at any moment under the weight of the tragedy.

"your majesty. that... .."

Seonghwang slightly raised the corners of his mouth towards No. 21, who was stuttering with a distorted face.

It was an expression similar to the dangerous smile he always showed when young Kike gave the wrong answer.

"It's already something that can't be undone. Cause and effect in the world always works that way. So there is no need for you to be so sad about that child's future."

* * *

After No. 21 left like that.

Surrounded by guild members with blank stares, the father and son quietly ate their meal.

Seonghwang just stayed where he was without even touching the dishes, but Kaizen no longer urged him to eat because of the wind.

"In the end, he left like that? You didn't last as long as you thought, right? Not fun... .."

When the boy opens his mouth with a somewhat relieved expression, Seonghwang gives him a stern warning.

"Cayenne. "It is very disrespectful to speak with food in your mouth."

"Uh, um. okay."

Kaizen nodded obediently, chewed his food diligently and swallowed

it.

Mutter, gulp.

"... "Was it necessary to push him that far?"

Eventually, Seonghwang waited until the boy's mouth was completely empty before asking a question.

Then, Kaien furrowed his eyebrows and glared at Seonghwang as if he were displeased.

"of course! That kid is so cocky. "Why is it that he always looks at me and grumbles, saying he doesn't know why someone like me is his father's son!"

"... .."

There was no way Enrique would swear like that out loud. It's just that Cayenne can easily pick up the voices of other people's souls, so she may have been exposed to her true intentions that she didn't even know about.

"Where is that? Since I started torturing my father, from then on he was so anxious that he couldn't eat me! Are you crazy? "Daddy's mine, not his?!"

"That's because it's his job to protect my safety."

"What? Do not be ridiculous! "Do you really know how that child's soul views his father?"

Kaien, who shouted like that, openly pouted, as if he felt bad even thinking about it again.

"Besides, that bastard somehow resembles Aslan! "That annoying guy who always bothered me in the slash-and-burn village back in the day."

"... .."

"He's going in and out and causing a stir all over the mansion! Plus,

his skills are so useless that it's not easy to touch his soul. Of course, it's also because my father steps in and stops me every time I do that... .."

Kaien, who had been talking up to that point, narrowed his eyes as if he had realized something again.

"Oh yeah! Now that I think about it, the way my father walks around next to me seems somehow similar to Aslan... .."

"... .."

"I don't like that bastard either! "I didn't just send it back gracefully!"

Seonghwang looked at the table without much response. To be exact, the black poison bottle placed proudly in front of him.

Enrique ordered it to be cleaned up immediately, but as soon as he disappeared, it came back on the table intact. This is evidence that most of the guild members in the mansion have already followed Kaien's orders.

"That's enough. "It probably hurt a lot, so why don't you just forget about him now?"

Then, blood-

Cayenne, who was taking a sip of her drink, spilled arsenic.

"wait for a sec? What a wound. Dad shouldn't say things like that.

"Isn't it flattering that you obediently took the poison I gave you in front of him?"

"... .."

"No, no. Did you need an excuse to completely get that bastard out of here?"

Kaien muttered like that, furrowing his brows and becoming lost in thought.

"difficult. It seems like my father really knows, but it's difficult.

"Every time I do something, there is not just one purpose, so I often get confused."

"My father's soul clearly wants to atone for me. And tell me I can do anything to heal my soul. I thought it was just that, because the soul never tells lies... .."

"At the same time, you're trying to protect that arrogant bastard? He willingly participated in harassing me on purpose so that I would quickly lose interest. And as soon as I decided the time was right, I smuggled him away. how is it? "Am I wrong?"

Seonghwang did not make any effort to deny it. Because it was the same for everyone.

Cayenne also had a tendency to achieve multiple goals at once whenever she did something.

The boy wanted to torment Seongwang very much, and he quickly realized that he hated food and, above all, poison. At the same time, I wanted to treat Enrique badly and send him out far away.

There may have been things Enrique didn't like, but more than anything, it was probably because he got in the way of his guild members being able to follow his own tastes.

Although only the outward expressions were different, the ways of thinking of these rich people ultimately had some similarities.

Rattling.

Seonghwang picked up the black bottle with one hand and opened his mouth softly.

"It doesn't seem to matter much whether he's here or not. "The 'problem' that remains with us is still the same, and the 'treatment' is a temporary measure, but it is effective."

"That's right."

"Then what? "Is this all you have to eat today?"

Then, Kaien paused a little and then shook his head.

"Well, that's enough for today. Why don't you feel like it now that that bastard is gone? "It's not fun anymore because my dad doesn't seem to be as sad as before."

"... .."

"Anyway, if I ask you to eat it, you will always do it. yes?"

Cayenne, who asked that question, raised the corners of her mouth confidently without even listening to the answer. It was truly strange to see the smile of a child who did not know the affection between people seem so gentle.

"okay. Dad should do that to me. "You took my only mother, Martha, from me, right?"

"The woman's soul has rested safely. I didn't steal it. Now no one can have her soul or disturb her rest."

"... What is that?"

Kaien tilted his head.

"Rest? "What does that mean?"

"At least it means a lot to her soul."

"Nonsense! Martha is my mother, not your father's mother. She should have died and become completely mine! But why are you arbitrarily disposing of her soul? "Father, you have no right to do that!"

No one has the right to own someone's soul.

But instead of preaching like that, Seonghwang opened his mouth as if soothing a wheezing child.

"okay. That means there is no need for poison today. So now what do you want me to do for you?"

Then, Kaien quietly glared at Seonghwang with his pitch-black eyes and spat out an answer as if he could not resist.

"Let's just play chess today and then go."

"Chess. "Didn't you say it wasn't that fun the other day?"

"hmm. But... .."

Kaien trailed off, then shrugged his shoulders and smiled spitefully.

"It's quite fun to see your father's soul being disgusted. Regardless of whether you win or lose the game, isn't the fact that you're playing the game the same as if you've already won?"

"... .."

* * *

The imperial palace's office.

At noon, the chief chamberlain, who was preparing refreshments as usual, was stopped by a sudden crowd.

"Wait, Louis."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"... .."

The Emperor was silent for a moment, looking at the old man who was bowing his head respectfully.

This is someone who does his best to serve the best Melbourne food every day for someone who doesn't even eat food. I was so impressed by his sincerity that I almost didn't want to turn him away.

'As expected, I'm reluctant.'

To be honest, lately I don't even want to worry about anything that goes into my mouth, whether it's drinks or food. Just by looking at it, I could feel the bloody smell coming from my nose.

So I was going to say that.

"Lewis, for the time being, the car... .."

If only I hadn't felt a familiar figure rushing towards me from afar.

Ah, now that I think about it, that kid really liked Melbourne.

"No, forget it. "Would you please prepare another cup of tea today?"

"yes. I will do so, Your Majesty."

Not long after Lewis left the office-

Da da da da da!

Sure enough, someone approaches the office at a fast pace, almost like running. He was his immature son who was always causing incidents and accidents.

"father!"

Jump up!

The child confidently opened the door and walked towards him, holding a small box in one hand.

"Look at this! "Do you know what this is?"

When I glance down, a small, luxuriously packaged tableware catches my eye.

"It looks just like a lunch box."

"Yes, that's right. Today, a salmon specialty store finally opened in Hwangdo! "This is Bertran & Lee's historic first business!"

okay. Come to think of it, there was such a plan.

I expected that it would be difficult to proceed due to the lack of profitability. It seemed that this child, who excelled at only doing what he wanted to do, had really opened up the salmon distribution channel with his gear.

"Yes, you are great. Good job."

"Haha, nothing to say. But do you know what? Our restaurant has already become a hot topic in the capital. Customers with reservations are waiting in line! Of course, this is thanks to the large-scale advertising banners that were put up a few days ago!"

The son's subsequent explanation was roughly as follows.

-Enjoy the freshness of the state-of-the-art low-temperature carriage. Fresh salmon recognized by Ortona locals! The very taste that even His Majesty the King praised! The food is friendly and the staff is delicious!

It was absurd to listen to the advertising slogans that the child muttered. Above all, the 'His Majesty' who praised the taste hasn't even tasted it yet.

When I pointed that out, my son smiled calmly and began unwrapping the lunch box by hand.

"So, as soon as we opened, the first thing I did was pack my father's. "You haven't eaten yet, right?"

"... .."

"Now, come on and try it."

Soon, a salmon steak neatly placed in a small box appears.

But Seonghwang could not look at it in peace. He eats something. Just thinking about that made me feel nauseous, as if I was going to suffocate at any moment.

'but... ..'

His son is looking at him with a very flushed face. Isn't it possible to crush those innocent expectations so cruelly due to one's own insignificant circumstances?

Hoping that the child would not notice the slightest sense of nausea, Seonghwang slowly put a piece of salmon into his mouth.

"... ... !"

At the same time, all kinds of residual thoughts about cooking flooded into my head.

-The Empire is buying salmon for you? Without even going after the price like the Cypriots do?

-okay. What if you are an enemy of your country? After all, if you can feed your family with this, there's no reason not to sell salmon or anything else.

-Meeeee! Stop coming back! If you don't undo the combination quickly, the contents will be all messed up!

But nowhere in those frantic thoughts did he feel the intense murderous intent he had received through food.

-Give me the freshest and best parts! I'm going to take it to the imperial palace right now!

-How should I cook this, my dear?

-What menu are you most confident in? First, let's start with the basic yet delicious menu!

Surprisingly, even among the various thoughts that came to mind during the cooking process, there was nothing that reminded me of the terrible smell of blood.

-This day has finally come! There was a time when I thought about giving up.

And the only emotions my son felt as he brought it to the office were great joy and a sense of accomplishment.

When I finally get out of my thoughts, all I can feel in my mouth is the crispy grilled exterior and the soft, savory interior.

There was no feeling of nausea.

"... "It's delicious."

At his words that came out naturally, my son smiled brightly.

"Haha, I thought so too! "I thought this would suit your taste just right!"

"okay."

It fit surprisingly well in my mouth. Just like the foods he tasted while freely wandering around the continent a long time ago.

As I was savoring another dish with such strange emotion, my son personally poured some sauce and continued talking.

"You can look forward to the future. Tomorrow we will bring something even greater! "We invited an expert in cooking salmon, which is said to be the most famous in Cyprus."

Soon, all kinds of grilled, stewed, and smoked fillet dishes flowed out of my son's mouth. Even Seonghwang, who boasts that he once tried some salmon, would become dizzy from the variety of menu items.

But isn't the son who has been bragging for such a long time now pretending to be proud and making a big noise!

"Haha, anyway, now that your father has had a taste, Lord Valerie won't be able to nag you anymore, right?"

"... Sir Valerie."

"yes. That Nallari Inquisitor from the Monster Task Force. Well, they were so offended that it was 'apostasy' and 'blasphemy' to make advertisements that were not true with His Majesty the Holy Emperor, who is God's representative. "He was so loud all day long that I thought he was going to die."

"... ... !"

"I tried to stuff the guy's mouth with a piece of salmon, but it was a waste of ingredients. "I need to get paid for each serving properly."

Seonghwang was momentarily speechless. As for Sir Valery, it was almost acceptable that he was not immediately taken to the

Inquisition.

It is an arbitrary fabrication of the words of the 'representative of God.' You did such a good thing in front of the hidden powers of the Heresy Tribunal, son!

331

331. Salon (1)

It was late at night.

I couldn't sleep for some reason, so I was leafing through a book while a guild member cautiously knocked on my door.

smart-

"Cayenne, I brought you the late-night snack you mentioned."

"huh."

The guild member quietly opened the door and entered, quietly placing a tray filled with snacks next to him and looking at the boy.

"... "Then I'll leave it here, Cayenne."

"okay. "Go ahead."

Kaien nodded roughly without even looking at him.

As soon as permission was given, the guild member quickly ran away from the room. He seemed to feel an instinctive discomfort from Cayenne after some interference with his soul.

Sweet.

As the door was quickly closed, Kaien raised his head and looked in the direction where the guild member had disappeared.

'It has become so awkward. It would have been better if I could completely control the soul like Rodrigo.'

Kaien took quite a long time to take control of the entire mansion,

but even so, it was impossible to completely control the souls of the guild members. This is because the Holy Emperor has placed a kind of protective veil over the souls of everyone who enters and exits the mansion.

Even if they managed to rip out the soul by avoiding the obstruction of the veil, the moment the deficit grew noticeably, the personnel were immediately replaced and a ban on going out was issued.

Because of this, Kaien had to exhaust himself by eating small amounts of the invisible parts of his soul.

'Well, my father already knows everything, but... ... '

Still, judging from the fact that this level of interference was left alone, it seems that they judged that it would not cause much harm to the guild members.

Even if new personnel are brought in anyway, it is common for both of them to have their souls eaten by Cayenne.

So, rather than trying to control the soul in earnest, the boy who felt frustrated probably thought it would be better to maintain balance by giving him some breathing room, even if only in a clumsy way.

'Or did your father deliberately induce you to do so? Interfering with souls without harming them is much trickier than controlling them completely... ... '

In any case, the current Cayenne's limitations were clear. All it did was temporarily impede the awareness of guild members or make them forget simple commands after executing them.

It may be possible to secretly poison the Emperor's meal, but it is impossible to run far away to avoid them.

'He's pretending to free me and shackles me like this. He's such a man that he can't let down his guard.'

Currently, there is only one soul that Cayenne is completely controlling. It was Rodrigo who was controlling it from the slash-and-burn village.

He was a person with a quite complicated background. To summarize, he was a refugee from Ortona, and after the fall of his country, he committed himself to the Principality of Carthage, received special training for several years, and then secretly hid again in a slash-and-burn village, and became a sergeant for the Kingdom of Flanders. Could it be something like a 'double spy in secret'?

Of course, because he caught Cayenne's attention early on, he ended up being his limb.

Anyway, the servant from Sejak was useful in many ways. It was he who infiltrated Asin's dark city and rescued rare poisons.

So, I was planning to use it as a last resort card when I had to escape from Seonghwang, but...

'If you look at the fact that your father directly mentioned dark poetry the other day, you already know about Rodrigo.'

If so, why do you just leave him alone?

Kaien could not fully understand Seonghwang's thoughts. It's just that lately I've been getting the feeling that Cayenne wants to be thought of as 'free'.

'Are you saying that if we adhere to the minimum social norms, our behavior will not be greatly restricted?'

In Cayenne's opinion, these were truly cumbersome and useless things.

'The more I look at my father, the more complex he is. He said it was difficult to understand the principles of conduction.

In any case, since there were no particular complaints about the current situation, Cayenne was thinking that it would be okay to maintain this precarious balance for a while.

'Anyway, tomorrow is the day my father comes. So shall we call it a night? 'I also have to play with my dad and do various things.'

Percussion-

As I closed the book and lay down on the bed, a pendant around my neck rolled out.

A gem that reflects clear light even under dark lighting. It was an item that Seonghwang personally gave to Kaien not long ago.

-Please keep it safe. This is the last milestone I will ever make, and it will be the only opportunity I will ever give you.

It didn't seem like an ordinary item. If you look at the spirit of Seonghwang who made that request, he had a very serious expression on his face.

Anyway, I really liked the bright, shiny thing, so I was always wearing Cayenne around my neck, even though I usually don't have much interest in accessories.

Yum Yum.

Before closing his eyes, Kaien put the jewel in his mouth as was his habit.

As soon as I first saw it, I immediately wanted to eat it. So, as soon as I received it, I chewed the jewel in front of the Holy Emperor, and he looked very shocked.

-Why are you trying to eat that? Was it because I failed to take care of him that he spent his childhood starving like that?

My dad's reaction at that time was really funny.

'Anyway, what on earth is this gem? I don't think it's just a stone. When you bite into it, you feel something fragrant, and it is quite chewy... ..'

After mumbling like that, I was about to fall into a light sleep.

[...] You bastard, behave yourself properly from now on. I'll wait and see... ..]

Suddenly, I heard a faint voice in my ear.

'... ... !?'

Creepy.

Cayenne, startled, jumped up from her seat. I definitely thought that someone's spirit had approached me and talked to me.

But when I looked around the room, there was nothing around. Just the bright moonlight shining from the open window, breaking white onto the bed.

'... what? It was definitely the voice of a soul?'

There was absolutely no way it was a mistake. Although it was only a fleeting moment, the intimidation implied by that warning was enough to make all the hair on her body stand on end.

gulp.

Kaien, who was very nervous, put the bedding over his head and quietly swallowed dry saliva.

Fear stemming from the unknown. It was a somewhat unfamiliar feeling for a boy who could easily control a person's soul.

'what? 'Who are you?'

Thanks to this, Cayenne was unable to sleep properly that day as she was alert to her surroundings all night.

* * *

tweet. tweet.

Seongjin could barely lift his heavy eyelids while listening to the birds singing at the same time.

Since he didn't wake up right away, he lay in bed for a while and rubbed his eyes. It was something out of the ordinary for Sungjin.

'what? I feel strangely tired...'

These days, I don't play games and am sleeping soundly, but why do I

feel so tired?

[Did you have a bad dream? Yesterday, my sleep was particularly rough.]

At that time, the demon king's spirit stretched and asked.

'okay?'

[huh. Recently, I haven't slept at all for a while, perhaps because I've been visiting a different world. But you were really cruel yesterday.]

Oh, I see. Maybe you had a nightmare. Anyway, I don't remember it at all, so it doesn't really matter, right?

Seongjin, who barely managed to get up, yawned and thought.

'Anyway, will Logan come to the training ground today? When that guy comes, I'll have to tell him to use his divine power or something cool.'

[What is it? Now people are treated like automatic massagers?]

If you think about utility, there isn't much difference. But how does this damn devil use an automatic massager?

As I stood up and slowly warmed up, I could feel the demon lord moving around in my head.

'what? 'I'm crazy.'

[Hold on a moment. I'm currently going around the corners of the 24-hedron.]

'... 'Do you still play that game?'

[This is not just a game! After doing it a few times, I felt like my soul was lighter and I was getting healthier.]

'Oh, really?'

While I was preparing for morning training with a cursory reply, the Demon King added in a proud voice.

[You also practice every morning, right? So, from now on, I will also regularly exercise in the morning like you.]

'What does that mean to you?'

[The idea is to make it a lifestyle habit. They say that maintaining exercise is harder than starting it, right? So, I will make this a complete habit and continue to maintain the health of my soul in the future!]

Seongjin clicked his tongue.

The soul is not a muscle, what kind of bullshit is this?

At the end of the morning training, Logan actually came to the training center.

As if it was natural, Seongjin headed to the monster task force with him. Of course, I didn't forget to receive a share of her divine power before that.

"Oh, it's cool."

He turned his heaving shoulder and made a small groaning sound, and Logan asked with a puzzled look on his face.

"What kind of old man are you talking about, Seongjin Lee?"

"I'm telling you, I'm an old man."

There are many hardships that a lively kid like you doesn't know about.

When they arrived at the task force, Sir Sharon was waiting for them with an armful of reports.

As a result of investigating the workshop that Seongjin and Logan found the other day, they found traces of something buried in the ground. So they dug deeper into the place and found a corpse along with various work tools.

"It seemed like a long time had passed since death."

The body had already begun to decompose, but that did not mean that the scars covering the body disappeared.

Wounds that were inflicted at different times gradually accumulated over a long period of time.

"... "Are you a remnant of the Penitent Church?"

"Yes, sir. It was clearly a trace of their penance. I also confirmed that he was wearing a medal from the Penitent Church. "Based on the belongings found together, I am guessing that he is a fairly high-ranking official."

"hmm."

Seongjin looked over the report carefully.

'In that case, rather than saying that it was a Milo workshop from the beginning, would it be better to say that the manufacturing of medicinal tea was carried out at a place that was already used as a meeting place by the Penitent Church?'

So Belinda must have visited there too.

Of course, there is no way this corpse would have opened the portal directly to save Belinda. It seems she died long before she escaped her Inquisition.

'In fact, Belinda didn't seem to know that she had used the 'portal'.'

So who is it? Who is the person who boldly stole prisoners from the Heresy Tribunal using objects from the normal world?

While Seongjin was deep in thought, an unfamiliar grumble was heard from next to him.

"Will there be any significant progress now that the body has been examined? "The people who can tell us the answer are already dead."

"..."

Sir Valerie has been looking particularly sulky since Belinda died like

that.

Moreover, a few days ago, there was another conflict with Seongjin under the pretext of advertising a salmon specialty store.

"what? Sir Valery. Are you still angry?"

In response to Seongjin's question, the red-haired inquisitor firmly shook his head.

"no. "How could a lowly paladin like me dare to commit such disrespect towards you?"

"Then what is it?"

"I'm just sad! I gave you advice out of concern that you might be caught by other priests. "It was all done for my sake!"

"Oh, I see."

Seongjin gave a cursory answer and flipped through the report.

"But what did you do to me? "You stuffed salmon into a loyalist's mouth without saying a word!"

What, you're angry, right?

"So the salmon wasn't tasty?"

"... Of course it was delicious, but he said he would get money from me later! "It wasn't even a proper dish for one person!"

"Materials are expensive. "Originally, its value is equivalent to the same weight of silver."

When I responded sullenly, Sir Valerie looked blankly into space and grumbled.

"Tsk! You truly know nothing. "What a great help I am on a daily basis!"

""

"You wouldn't guess! If it weren't for me, I don't know how much you would have suffered from the Heresy Inquisition's backlash by now...
... ."

Uh, okay, okay.

I'm not getting any money, so please just shut up!

332

332. Salon (2)

Seongjin, who finished his work on the monster task force early that day, stopped by a salmon specialty restaurant at early lunch time. He wanted to personally pack the food to take to the main palace.

-Bertrand & Lee Cham Salmon Restaurant

This restaurant, which opened in the busiest part of Rue d'Este, was already gaining popularity despite its small size.

The second floor, where high-quality dishes are served to guests with reservations, is already full for lunch.

"oh my god! The Scarzzapino family is here! "Hurry up and tell the manager so he can say hello!"

"You're so busy right now! "There are two cardinals sitting at the table over there!"

Although it was a high-end section created with the intention of making a profit, it is still true that it is much cheaper than the previous price. Imperial officials had no choice but to flock in large numbers.

The condition on the first floor was even more serious.

"How long do we have to wait in line?"

Because they sell good-cost-effective dishes by collecting lower-quality cuts, the line of customers was pushed out of the restaurant, filling up one side of the street.

Where is that?

-The very taste that even His Majesty the King approved!

Despite Sir Valery's opposition, many citizens of the Imperial Capital gathered and chattered under the proudly displayed banner.

-Cham salmon? It sounds like just a fish, but is it really that expensive for one person?

-This person doesn't know anything! If it weren't for that restaurant, where do you think people like us would have been able to see salmon for a lifetime? Originally, it was a rare dish that only nobles could eat once on a good day!

-aha! That's why people are lining up like that.

-That's right! Our Prince Mores sells salmon, which is more expensive than silver, at a low price for the subjects of the imperial capital!

I thought we brought in quite a lot, but at this rate, we have to worry that we will soon run out of salmon.

'I thought I'd just make a profit, but maybe this could be a profitable business?'

Seongjin thought happily.

'I guess I'll have to give it to Branch Manager Schmidt. I'm telling you to fill the cold wagon with only salmon for a while.'

I don't know how long this heat will continue, but now that the water is coming in, it's time to paddle properly.

I need to quickly recover my investment and invest in other businesses soon.

"Do you really need to come get it yourself? If you wish, I will have a waiter deliver the food to the imperial palace every day."

The chef said as he prepared the lunch box by hand. This time it was a moist steamed salmon dish with various vegetables and spices.

"Or, I'll give you the recipe, so it would be better for the palace

people to cook it themselves. "If it cools down while it's in transit, it's bound to taste worse than when it was first served."

It made sense.

Seongjin also thought that way at first. As for the good salmon we brought in this time, we made it a priority to stock the palace refrigerator.

However, when I actually ordered them to be put on the table, I was surprised to hear that my father barely touched the dishes.

'But if I take it out and bring it to you, you eat the same dish, right?'

The salmon gravlax salad I brought for lunch yesterday was completely cleaned out again.

Maybe this wasn't a problem of picky eating. Could it be that my father doesn't like the food prepared in the main palace?

'Next time, instead of just salmon, should we try taking out other dishes as well?'

I think it's a pretty good idea. How can someone live by eating only fish all the time?

Seongjin made up his mind and spoke to the chef.

"For now, just leave it packaged like this for a while. "I think my father will like it if I carry it myself."

Then the chef from Cyprus looked very touched.

"How can we not admire the beautiful heart of the Prince who cares for His Majesty the Emperor! "Your Majesty must be well aware of this, which is why he is so happy to have your lunch box, right?"

Even though my skills are limited, I will continue to cook with passion and sincerity!

The chef shouted that and started packing lunch boxes.

'Now that I think about it, when will your mother return to the imperial capital?'

While waiting for the package to be packed, Seongjin suddenly thought of Empress Elizabeth, who had left for the Principality of Assin and had no intention of returning.

If you think about it, the day Seongjin ate salmon for the first time was at a dinner at the imperial palace, which she also attended.

'I thought you'd be back at least by the time the restaurant opens... ...
'

As the Principality of Assin is located completely inland, it was clear that salmon would be more valuable than imperial salmon. However, I can't have the lunch box delivered from here to the Principality of Assin.

'Of course, I doubt that my mother will be happy if I bring it to her.'

For some reason that Seongjin couldn't guess, his relationship with her seemed to have completely broken down.

However, even though he wants to try to improve the relationship, he has no memory of the past and is at a loss as to where to start and how to start.

-Mores! baby! Do you recognize her mom?

Nevertheless, Seongjin couldn't help but think of the tearful face the moment he first opened his eyes here.

-Your mother is so happy that you woke up so healthy.

The warmth of the Empress's hand as she held it was still vivid in my memory.

And like this, when I have something to share with the royal family, I sometimes feel regretful and think, 'It would have been nice if Empress Elizabeth had also been there.'

* * *

Da da da da da!

When I ran to the office a month later with a packed lunch, Director Katrina and Francis were there together.

"I meet Prince Mores."

Katrina showed courtesy with her extremely restrained movements.

As the leader of the Knights of Saint Aurelion, she was busy with construction work every day as she was responsible for various tasks as the right hand of the Holy Emperor.

Thanks to this, despite his nickname 'Shield of Success', it is surprisingly difficult to see him staying by his side.

"I see you."

Francis, who was standing behind him, also lowered his head awkwardly. That slightly profane appearance was truly an arrogant lieutenant.

"Ah, that is the famous salmon dish."

When Seongjin put the lunch box on Seonghwang's desk, Katrina smiled happily and asked.

"That's right, leader. "Did you hear the rumor too?"

"Yes, sir. "It's truly a shame, but most of the paladins under my command have forgotten about training and are so obsessed with talking about that new restaurant."

That's right.

Since they are priests who are tightly bound to the unity of the government, I thought they would be somewhat resistant to the unfamiliar culture of low-temperature carriages. This doesn't seem to be the case when it comes to delicious food.

"It's a shame. "If I had known you guys would be there, I would have brought a little more packed lunch."

Then Katrina hurriedly waved her hand.

"Such absurd words! How dare you put me through such trouble?"

"What trouble? Oh yeah. While we're at it, stop by the restaurant with Sir Francis. I'll tell the manager to treat you well."

"Hehe. no. "Just saying these words makes me feel very happy."

After answering that, Katrina gathered the documents on her desk, handed them over to her adjutant, and bowed her head to Seonghwang.

"If you do, I will proceed with the savings related matter as you instructed."

"Of course. "Good job, Katrina."

"yes. your majesty."

However, Katrina, who had expected him to leave, stood next to Seonghwang and looked at him with very expectant eyes.

"... .. ?"

Francis also pushed up his glasses and glanced at the crowd with sharp eyes.

Where is that? Louis, the chamberlain, brought in refreshments for Seong-jin, and as expected, he quietly took a seat behind Seonghwang!

'what? These people are somehow... .. '

Somehow I felt like I knew what they wanted.

Seongjin, who had been observing the success for a moment, quietly unwrapped the salmon lunch box and spread it out on the desk in a silence that felt strangely heated.

"... .. "

It was a very burdensome atmosphere with four people, including

Seongjin, watching.

Seonghwang paused for a moment, but fortunately, he just sighed softly and didn't seem to care much. He carefully moved the dishes alone and soon emptied the slightly cooled steamed dish cleanly.

"The chef seems to have good skills."

When the evaluation of the taste finally came out of his mouth, the people surrounding Seonghwang let out the breath they had been holding.

"Ah, Lord... .."

Director Katrina placed her hand on her chest as if she was very moved.

"As we live, days like this sometimes come. "This is by far the first time I have seen His Majesty eat something properly in the imperial palace since I secretly brought him walnuts from the warehouse when he was younger than Prince Mores."

Seongjin blinked.

"... walnut?"

"yes. At that time, His Majesty was wary of all food. "So you don't know how hard I worked to get you to eat anything."

As if recalling a long memory, there was a warm warmth in Katrina's eyes.

Now that I think about it, she said she had been by my father's side and assisted him since he was young.

"I searched for all the food available in the imperial capital. In the end, I even brought him some walnuts and told him that it would be safe if he cracked them himself and ate them, but he barely held out his hand. From that day on, it became a small pleasure of mine to occasionally bring walnuts to the imperial palace."

"uh... .."

wait for a sec. I heard that my father had a strange habit of cracking walnuts with his beloved sword when he was young, and now I see that it was a habit that this person created!

"... Katrina."

When Seonghwang shakily stopped him, the leader finally came to his senses and straightened his posture.

"this! You were so happy that you were talking nonsense. Then I'll just leave. your majesty. Prince Mores."

Quickly.

Director Katrina retreated with a very restrained step. However, from the back, Seongjin couldn't help but laugh because he seemed strangely excited, unlike usual.

"Then you two, please talk."

When Louis, who lowered his head and tried to hide the tearing corners of his mouth, retreated, Seongjin looked at Seonghwang with meaningful eyes.

No, father. I wonder why everyone reacts this way because I have had great eating habits since I was a child. yes?

"... "It's all a misunderstanding, Mores."

"yes? "I didn't say anything?"

"... .."

* * *

The abundance brought by true salmon continued at the lunch at Jinju Palace. This is thanks to the chef's skill with rare ingredients for the first time in a long time.

"I can't believe that a salmon dish can be this bland...""

"It's because there is no need for strong salting, Sisley. "This is all

thanks to the low-temperature carriage introduced by Mores."

"okay? "Cryogenic carriages are truly amazing!"

Thanks to this, the lunch meeting, which had recently shown signs of slowing down, was actively resumed.

Sister Amelia and Sisley were there, as well as Logan, who had been busy with various tasks recently. Even the twins Herna and Kadesh, who don't come to the imperial palace often!

"What about you guys? "Do you think salmon would suit your taste?"

When I asked with a proud heart, the twins looked at Seongjin with a somewhat puzzled face. He had a very dissatisfied expression.

"why? "Is the cooking bad?"

Aren't these guys who are usually so excited that it seems excessive? But today he spoke little and seemed particularly lethargic.

While Seongjin was wondering, the twins stared at him with strange eyes and then sighed deeply.

"Do you think cooking is the problem now?"

"okay. "That kind of thing is probably fine."

So what's the problem?

"I already knew that Mores had a bad temper, but... .."

"I knew well that when I got angry, I would run wild without seeing anything, but... .."

... huh?

"Please change your tendency to rush at anything without hesitation."

"Do you know how hard it is for people around you to stop you?"

"You usually consider cause and effect so thoroughly."

"When you're really angry, you're saying it's cause and effect and it's useless?"

Seongjin was very embarrassed.

"what? You rush at me without hesitation, when did I do that?"

But the twins didn't even pretend to hear the protest, just shaking their heads and mumbling amongst themselves.

"You almost ruined everything because of Mores, right?"

"When I think about all the hard work I had to do to dry it, my back still hurts."

"I will never go to that kid again. never!"

"that's right. "What if something like that happens again?"

"..."

Seongjin was speechless.

I don't understand the meaning, so it feels very unfair, but it doesn't seem like the twins are making a completely groundless complaint.

'What on earth?'

Is it because of my mood?

Somehow, the day after I drank too much, I felt like a drunkard who had forgotten everything.

333

333. Salon (3)

Fortunately, Masain quickly relieved the upset twins.

After the meal, when he returned from the handicraft class after a long time, he secretly handed two pouches with pretty patterns embroidered on them to Herna and Gades.

Did you make it whenever you had time?

"Are you really giving this to us?"

"Didn't you make this for your brother's use?"

"I have mine. "So far, there are only two people who have not had a 'pocket pocket'."

... Old man's pocket is becoming a proper noun.

Anyway, the twins seemed to really like the gift. The two swept the embroidery on their pockets with the same motion, as if they had stamped it.

"The petals are so pretty! "Did your brother Masain engrave all of this?"

"Isn't the embroidery delicate? "Brother Masain, you're good at these things, aren't you?"

It was like that. Surprisingly, Sir Martha was very dexterous.

He learned so quickly that Mirabelle, who taught him embroidery, was surprised.

What's even more surprising is that he seems to have become more at

ease since he started embroidery as a hobby.

"If you concentrate on each stitch, it seems like you will somehow gain mental discipline. "My mind naturally calmed down and I began to contemplate myself calmly."

Seongjin unconsciously nodded, looking at Masain's calm face. I knew very well how impatient he was and how hard he accelerated his training right after returning from Sigismund.

However, it is truly fortunate that I found peace of mind through embroidery.

[Have you ever thought about why that guy was so impatient? It's all because you made a big deal out of it.]

Uh huh! Don't frame me, you devil!

"These days, Lord Martha gets less angry than before when we have an accident. 'No way!'

[That's because I just gave up on you.]

'... shut up!'

Logan, the unofficial sword master who was busy embroidering leaves, also agreed with Masain's opinion.

"As I become absorbed in the elaborate movements of my hands, I gradually forget about Pia. "It doesn't seem to be much different from the training that prosecutors do to overcome walls."

"Is that also true?"

"Yes, embroidery is a good practice that requires a high degree of concentration. I'm embroidering two small leaves, and it feels like I've already finished conquering the sea. "I'm sure it will be of great help to your Auror training."

'Isn't that because, Logan, you are struggling to make up for your poor skills by maximizing your sword master's five senses?'

Logan usually had a lot of work to do, so he didn't have time to embroider, but he always attended the irregular embroidery sessions. Thanks to this, crooked leaves are already growing in his old man's pocket one by one.

Logan smiled proudly as he touched the blue tree branches that were blooming.

"Not only is it a process of mental training, but it is also very rewarding to see great results. "At this time, we should actively encourage embroidery to Lilium knights as well."

... These people are serious about their embroidery.

If things continue like this, Sir Masain may become the first high-ranking knight to overcome the Dekaron Knight wall through embroidery.

On the other hand, there were people whose skills did not improve at all compared to the effort they put in.

"oh!"

As Amelia screamed softly, Sisley, who was waiting next to her, poured divine power into her fingers as if waiting for her.

"What number is this? If this continues, your fingers will become needle holders. Sister Amelia. "Why don't we just leave it to Mirabelle?"

"No, Sisley. "I do it because it's fun."

Amelia is unable to practice her favorite swordsmanship to the fullest because she devotes time to various classes and work. Seeing how she devoted herself to embroidery, which she had no interest in doing, it seemed like she was sincere when she said that she was having fun.

The problem is that it is not very effective.

"Everyone's skills are improving day by day, so why is it always like this for me?"

Seongjin thought inadvertently, looking at Amelia who looked a little sullen.

'well. 'Isn't it a bit absurd to say that my skills are improving?'

Among the members of this handicraft class, only Lord Masain showed superior talent. Even though Logan focuses his superhuman senses, the results are not very impressive.

Seongjin is not interested at all so he just watches from the side, and the twins are making a lot of mess in the water room and doing origami with pieces of cloth.

'Among my brothers and sisters, Sisley is the only one with even average dexterity.'

So what is the difference between Lord Masain and others?

The conclusion was quick.

"I guess everyone takes after their father."

I can't even imagine a father who sews meticulously.

But Amelia tilted her head at Seongjin's answer.

"huh? That's not true, Mores. When I was young, my father, His Majesty, would often make Belle new clothes... .."

Then, Amelia, who is startled, stops talking and glances at Seongjin.

Seongjin could roughly guess her situation.

A dream that Amelia often saw through signposts during her childhood. Maybe she got confused between that dream and her real past for a moment.

"milestone... "No, have you talked to your father about that 'dream necklace'?"

Then Amelia blinked for a moment, then smiled softly as if relieved.

"Hehe, it seems like you know everything without saying anything,

Mores."

"... .."

"okay. After hearing your recommendation at that time, I immediately tried to find my father, His Majesty. But when I almost arrived in front of the office, something really strange happened to me."

"Is this something strange?"

"okay."

Amelia's gray eyes sank deeply, as if she was deep in thought.

"Mores. "You said earlier that this 'dream necklace' was definitely something your grandmother left behind, right?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then for what purpose do you think Grandmother gave me this?"

well.

Seongjin also had doubts about that. Even his father said he wasn't sure what the previous oracles were thinking.

At first glance, it seemed as if he had saved my sister's unhappy childhood by showing her a beautiful dream.

'That can't be it.'

The milestones that a single oracle can create are limited. My grandmother alone left only three things in her life.

A milestone is a kind of opportunity created to change the future. It has the potential to almost reach the power of God, to the point where it can easily implement items from the game into the real world.

You used such an amazing item just to show your sister a dream?

-Everything the Kornsim clan says to someone is an expression of

their will to predict the future and change the outcome. Therefore, everything they say has a clear intention and is completely false.

Didn't my father also warn me once?

Even if someone guesses their intentions and makes a move, the Oracle of Kornsheim predicts that judgment one more time and prepares for it.

And my father also said this.

-If those milestones remain even after death, it is because the future that the oracle who created them foresaw and sought to prepare for has not yet arrived.

What it means is that my grandmother's dream necklace is still intact. It meant that the future she had foreseen had not yet arrived.

However, Amelia's words that followed immediately pulled Seongjin's pensive mind back to reality.

"Mores. "It could be purely my imagination, but somehow I think I saw my grandmother at the imperial palace that day."

... yes?

* * *

When was it?

A day like today when we had a friendly lunch at Jinju Palace. Amelia heard this story from Mores.

-I heard that this gem is called a milestone, sister.

-milestone?

-yes. It must be a keepsake left by my grandmother. The person who knows this best is probably your father, so why not have a little chat with him when you have time?

At the time, Amelia thought her sister's words were valid. Wasn't she

the one who didn't hide even the fact of her regression from Seonghwang?

So why is it difficult to talk about small memories from childhood?

Amelia headed to the main palace with excitement.

'that's right. That beautiful dream world is only for me and my father, His Majesty. So, I definitely want to tell this story to you!'

As she climbed the stairs of the main palace, Amelia was struggling to calm her pounding heart.

But she had just reached the second floor hallway where the office was. Amelia suddenly felt a strong cold coming over her, and for a moment, she stopped in place.

"... ... !"

A black woman was standing right there. She hadn't changed one bit since she was a child when she came to see Amelia.

'who? It doesn't seem like he's a user of the main palace, so why are he doing that over there?'

Because it was an unexpected encounter, I did not realize it right away at first.

But its unique appearance. A long black dress, black hair, and even a black veil that completely covers her face. Amelia couldn't help but think of that bizarre outfit that didn't suit the mild weather of early fall.

'no way... 'The black veiled sister I met before?'

Is it because of my mood? Amelia quietly broke into a cold sweat, feeling that a mysterious gaze hidden behind a veil was somehow staring at her.

"Why are you doing this, sir?"

When the princess suddenly stopped walking and froze, a surprised

guard cautiously asked her from behind.

"excuse me... .."

Amelia slowly raised her hand and pointed at the woman.

"That woman is blocking the front of your father's majesty's office. It looks like he has some business to do, but he doesn't move from his seat at all. "What on earth is going on?"

But the knight who turned his head to follow the hand immediately asked this question as if he was puzzled.

"yes? Lowering. You mean a woman? "Except for the servant who just passed by, there is no sign of anyone in the hallway."

'... what?'

But the surprise was short-lived, and Amelia could clearly feel it as well.

An auror that every living person should feel. However, the woman in black could not sense the activity of the auror at all.

'... what?'

Just as the eerie guess about her identity was about to arise, the woman in black suddenly moved her body.

Raise one hand and point to your mouth -

'mouth?'

Slowly shake your head.

'no? what?'

But Amelia soon realized her intentions.

What was the reason you came here?

-Never say never.

A cold shiver ran down my spine.

'Father, I'm not allowed to tell your Majesty about that dream?'

A secret message delivered only to Amelia.

But amazing things happened one after another.

Amelia was standing there doubting her eyes, and as she blinked for a moment, the woman disappeared from sight as if it were a lie.

"... ..!?"

And after a while, when I headed to the office with trembling steps-

"Amelia. "How could you have been standing outside instead of coming in right away?"

"... .."

"Why are you shaking so much? "Did something happen on the way here?"

God's representative. Your Majesty, the most supreme and powerful father on the continent.

'You were completely unaware of her presence right outside the office?'

Amelia felt a grim premonition creeping up in her heart.

Who on earth was the woman in the black veil? Did she just see something in vain, or is she really the spirit of her deceased grandmother?

As a child, Amelia's words that she would have a large family in the future eventually came true.

So how on earth should Amelia accept the warning that appears before her eyes again?

that day.

Amelia, who was immersed in complicated thoughts, was ultimately unable to utter a single word about her dream to Seongwang.

* * *

"You think that woman is your grandmother?"

"okay. Even though my grandmother passed away a long time ago, I have a strong feeling that she will. "It was she who entrusted me with her dream necklace."

"hmm..."

"A black veil covering the face. The look of that old-fashioned dress. "This is definitely the woman I saw when I was young."

Seongjin rested his chin for a moment and thought about the possibility that the spirit of his grandmother, Empress Bethsheba, had indeed appeared.

My grandmother left a milestone for the future. A woman who did not feel any aura at all came to entrust it to her.

And, Sister Amelia, the daughter of a father who can see souls.

'what? 'It's not that unlikely, is it?'

After coming to a conclusion, Seongjin tilted his head.

"Then what on earth is Jomo's purpose?"

"Hehe."

Then Amelia did not answer but asked Seongjin an odd question.

"Do you really believe that your grandmother's spirit has appeared? "Don't you think I've just seen something wrong, Mores?"

"yes?"

Seongjin stared at Amelia's question blankly.

If you ask me if I believe in the soul, of course I will answer that I do.

Didn't Seongjin himself once wander around with only his soul?

Moreover, if I put my mind to it, I can summon a fanatical evil spirit shedding black tears right now.

"You clearly saw it, right? I believe it. "You have a very good memory."

"Mores..."

Then Amelia looked very moved.

Of course, it didn't last very long.

Stinging!

Seongjin, who couldn't see Amelia flinching after getting her finger pricked again, took the sewing tool from her.

"Just rest for a moment, I will finish it. sister."

"Mores you? Have you ever sewed?"

"Approximately."

Well, I've never done any embroidery, but I've done quite a bit of rank insignia. When I was in the military, there were no Velcro rank badges, right?

As Seongjin carefully began to move the needle with the yellow thread threaded through it, Amelia rested her chin on both hands and looked at him silently.

"So, you're not going to tell your father about your dream for a while?"

"okay. "I think that would be good."

Amelia nodded obediently.

"There is no other reason. Just, that's what I thought at the time. "If the woman in the black veil is really her deceased grandmother, I believe that she will probably serve her father's majesty."

"... .."

"Just like your father, your majesty, your grandmother will surely love you deeply from her heart."

Seongjin could not easily answer those words. Amelia may have a firm belief in her grandmother, but she may not be her real father.

-Remember this well, son. The Kornsheim clan are the most untrustworthy people in this world.

His stern face as he gave that request was still vivid in my memory.

"But Mores... .."

Amelia, who was looking at the butterfly that was slowly being completed, tilted her head.

"You don't seem to be very talented at embroidery either. As you said, do we all resemble our father, His Majesty?"

No, isn't this great for a first try?

But is your sister saying that to me? yes?

334. Salon (4)

Whoa whoa!

After the handicraft class, Seongjin came out to the training room a little later than usual and smiled brightly without realizing it. Because he heard a familiar crying sound greeting him.

Max, you cute guy!

Wong wooooo!

-Why are you so late? Where are you going every day, leaving me alone?

Seongjin rushed over and lightly patted the guy who was wagging his tail.

"Okay, Max. Sorry sorry."

Wong wong wong!

-play with me! play with me!

"But now I have to practice. So, just wait there for a moment."

Whoa whoa!

-Play with me!

"hmm..."

At this point, I thought it might be okay to just play with him for a little while.

Seongjin was extremely averse to disrupting his training, but who wouldn't fall for such a cute puppy's determination and cuteness?

'... yes? 'A puppy?'

Of course, in the eyes of the other resident knights, the giant wolf dog only looked like a threat to the young prince.

"Okay, okay. Let's play for a moment. "But how should I play with you?"

You say, 'Ask!' You can't even play? Even if you try to play 'bite and pull', they tear everything to pieces with their sharp teeth.

Wong wong wong wong!

-Ride me! Let's ride on the strong and gigantic me and go have fun like before!

"No, I guess that's impossible... .."

Kiing-

Max, who clearly understood Seongjin's words, stopped pestering and licked Seongjin's cheek.

[go away! You stupid mixed breed dog!]

Thanks to this, the Demon King, who hates Max, suddenly became uncomfortable.

"That's an abomination... "Just look at how calm he is in front of the prince."

"I know I'm loved too, right? "If it weren't for Prince Mores, that would be so simple!"

It wasn't just the Demon Lord who hated Max. A small grumbling sound from a distance vividly reaches Seongjin's ears. These are Sir Kalmen and Lord Haven, who are usually bullied by Max.

I feel a little sorry, but what can I do when the officers are at the

bottom of the hierarchy according to Marx's standards? So, I guess I'll do some training a long time ago.

"Isn't the imperial palace boring and uninteresting? I wonder if I might like you, Max... .."

Seongjin sat down and gently stroked Max's head.

This guy was originally a guy who freely ran around the Sigismund Territory like a wild wolf. So Seongjin still wondered whether it was a good idea to bring him to the imperial palace.

'If we stay together, won't we become more and more accustomed to the imperial palace?'

So at first, I would take him with me around the palace and let him sleep in my room all the time.

Then one day, Edith spoke with tears in her eyes. I can't handle that guy's trouble.

It turned out that he pretended to be polite when Seongjin was next to him, but the moment he left, he started chewing up all the expensive furniture and art pieces.

So one time, I showed him the tattered items and scolded him, and he looked up at Seongjin with innocent eyes and whined.

-All the other kids play with it, right? There are so many amazing toys, why do you do this to me? huh?

To Max, the palace workers busily cleaning seemed like they were playing with toys.

We had no choice but to send it out, and now we have temporarily set up a kennel in one corner of the training ground.

'But if winter comes sooner or later, wouldn't we have to bring him into the palace? If we do not provide proper education... ..'

Tsk tsk tsk.

Max, unaware of Seongjin's complex nature, immaturely licks his hair.

This guy sometimes enjoyed playing with Seongjin's hair. He seemed to secretly like shiny things, as he only picked expensive items and broke them at the Jinju Palace.

"Okay, okay. "That's fun."

It's a bit unpleasant to be wet, but if you like it, it's just my hair.

Seongjin, who left Max to play alone, quietly closed his eyes and concentrated. At this point, he was thinking of meditating in his spare time. That way, he can finish training early and play with Max more later.

"no... .."

And not long after, Masain and the resident knights encountered a very strange sight.

The young prince is immersed in meditation, with a large wolf dog on his head and the light aura wind blowing around him.

"... Are you meditating? really?"

"In this situation where the dog is covered in saliva? "Does that make sense?"

It was truly a shocking sight that shook common sense. I wonder if former Dekaron Knight leader Bruno would have been so embarrassed.

"I don't know how you maintain concentration in such a situation. "As a Dekaron Knight, I once thought I had quite a bit of enlightenment, but I feel like I can't keep up with the decline in mental power."

While everyone was shocked, only Masain smiled bitterly. He had once witnessed the prince squatting alone in a flower bed and completing the fifth floor of Auror.

It was a great joy to see my younger brother, whom I had particularly

admired since childhood, grow up so quickly.

but-

'I don't know how long I will be able to help you, as I am so inadequate.'

It was right then.

Startle!

Masain and Leader Bruno tensed at the same time and pulled out their swords from their belts.

"... ..!?"

visor! Cheaeng!

At one point, it felt as if the size of the wolfdog holding down the prince had swelled.

The dog's aura is explosively amplified, and its presence grows uncontrollably.

Whoop-

Everyone in the training hall was taken aback by the sudden situation. However, their gaze was not towards the wolfdog, but towards Masain and Leader Bruno.

"Lord Martha?"

"... "Why are you two acting like this all of a sudden?"

It was such a fleeting moment.

When the two people looked again, sweating coldly, they saw that the wolf dog looked the same as usual, just calmly applying its saliva to the prince's hair.

'what? 'Is it because of my mood?'

'no. It was only for a moment, but I definitely felt it, Lord Masaine.'

'Chief Bruno. What about that dog... ... ?'

As the atmosphere in the training hall became too chaotic, Seongjin sensed this and opened his eyes after meditating.

"what's the matter? "What happened to everyone?"

Seongjin tilted his head, looking at the two people who were somehow turning pale.

"... .."

Hehehe!

While the two embarrassed people remained silent, Maxman, who seemed to be in a good mood, just waved his tail cheerfully at Seongjin.

* * *

"... Louis."

Seonghwang, who was flipping through documents in his office, suddenly raises his head and calls the chamberlain.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Could you please call Deputy Francis right now?"

As Seonghwang said that, his gaze was not directed at the documents, but toward one side of the office that was blocked by a wall.

However, the Chamberlain, who noticed the silver sparkle of courtesy in his eyes, realized that the Emperor was not looking at his office, but somewhere in the distance.

"Yes, I will take action right away. your majesty."

Lewis answered politely and hurriedly walked out.

Seonghwang, who couldn't look away from there for a long time, eventually sighed softly and picked up the document he was reviewing.

It's not like I didn't expect this situation to happen ever since my son brought me a wolf from Ionia to raise it.

'I thought we should get ready soon, but it's earlier than I expected. Son, how on earth were you going to explain the wolf from the Demonic Sutra to the Orthodox Church and the Inquisition?'

Was it just an intention to tame it like a normal dog?

My son, who knew nothing about Ionian wolves, may have really intended to do that.

'Francis is going to complain a lot about having more work to do.'

But don't you want your child to do that?

So what should we do? All you have to do is make it a dog you can raise with peace of mind.

* * *

"Edith. "Are you sure you have collected all the letters addressed to me?"

Late evening. As always, Seongjin, who was appreciating the Melbourne team that Manager Bruno was giving away, asked.

"Yes, sir. "Even after cutting out all the miscellaneous things, it's enough to fit three large sacks, right?"

... That many?

"Can you get it now?"

"Yes, of course, sir."

Edith left the room with brisk steps.

After Director Bruno took charge of Seongjin's refreshments, she seemed to feel much more at ease recently, freed from the burden of having to drink bile-flavored tea.

These days, I feel like it's not my job, but Max's job.

"Is there a letter in particular you are looking for, Your Majesty?
"Didn't you order us to put it out of sight unless it's important?"

Manager Bruno pours more tea and asks.

Well, I did say that. This is because the number of useless letters sent to Jinju Palace, as well as flowers and gifts, has increased explosively recently.

After a series of monster incidents and the Battle of Sigismund Territory, it was natural that Prince Mores's status within the ecliptic had increased significantly.

Thanks to this, we received a huge amount of invitations for banquets and social gatherings.

I was just ignoring it because it was annoying, but it seems that the repercussions eventually extended to Amelia.

-Recently, there has been an increase in letters asking if I can attend meetings with you.

-To you? why?

-Even though I sent you an invitation, I heard you never responded?

Seongjin clicked his tongue as he knotted the embroidery.

'No, they invited me arbitrarily, and they dare expect me to respond?'

However, unlike Seongjin, who found it annoying, Amelia seemed quite pleased with the attention showered on her younger brother.

-Everyone is curious about you. Not only did you save the Sigismund Empire from a crisis, but you are already leading a department of the administration at a young age.

what. The person who was really active at that time was Logan, and I was just an advisor to the monster task force.

-In addition, there is a lot of interest in your recent businesses. If successful, Bertran & Lee will grow into the largest business in the

North, both in name and reality.

However, there was another essential reason why they were looking for Seongjin or Amelia.

Until then, the most famous social gathering in the imperial capital was by far the one led by Ricardo Scarzapino.

However, as he suddenly became mentally ill and became bedridden, other social gathering organizers who were trying to gain the status of mainstream gatherings were scrambling to invite the children of successful families.

-The wealthy Murray family of Anatolia and the Sorcha family with enemies in Cyprus are competing fiercely. But either way, once you get to know each other, there will be quite a few benefits.

-okay. But you don't have any social gatherings that you attend regularly, right? How do you get that information?

The personal informant who would take care of every little detail was not with her right now.

Not long ago, I heard that the sister who was assigned to be an informant at Monkey Watchtower sent him on a long-term business trip overseas.

Where did they say it was?

So maybe it was Rohan?

-Hehe. Lady Scarzzapino is helping me a lot. The same goes for Lady Valois. How can you be so smart even at such a young age?

Oh, I see.

'But how did it happen that all of the candidates for Mores' fiancée became close friends with your sister?'

Anyway, there must have been a hint from Amelia, so now I'm thinking of picking out some useful invitations.

There was just one thing that bothered Seongjin.

'What if it causes trouble again?'

[what?]

'I have a jinx, right?'

[Jinx?]

okay.

There is a jinx known as the 'curse of social gatherings', where you get caught up in a huge accident whenever you go to a gathering... ...

.

335. Salon (5)

The invitations Edith brought were more diverse than expected.

It seemed as if every regular meeting in the imperial capital wanted Prince Mores to attend. It was only a few months ago that Lord Masaine was pondering over just three invitations.

[Are you really going to go to a social gathering?]

As Seongjin began to rustle through the invitations, the Demon King asked back in disbelief.

[Lee Seong-jin of the world, who knows nothing but training whether he sleeps or wakes up? Are you willing to waste time like that?]

'Then, I'm watching to attend. 'Isn't it obvious?'

What can I say? Isn't the position a little different now?

In the past, I thought it was just a bonus time, practiced swordsmanship to my heart's content, and then returned the body to the owner when he returned.

'Now I have to live properly as my father's son. In that case, at least the prince of the Holy Empire should do everything he needs to do.'

I don't want anything grand like a Caesarean class.

Wouldn't it be enough to just engage in appropriate social activities, volunteer in moderation, and show a non-embarrassing appearance as a member of the royal family?

[Then isn't it already too late? Seongjin Lee, you're embarrassing no matter where you put it... ..]

'shut up!'

Anyway, not long after, Seongjin was able to easily find the invitations that Amelia had mentioned.

'You said it was the Murray family and the Sorchia family...? . If you're going to attend, it's a mainstream gathering!'

But even after picking out all the invitations, for some reason I couldn't get my hands on anything.

"hmm."

Should I ask my sister which of the two is better? If there is no difference, just go to the one that opens first.

"What shall we do with the rest, sir? "If there is anything else you would like to reply to, I will let the administrator know."

In response to Edith's question, Seongjin looked at the pile of letters.

Many imperial figures sent useless greetings, but among them, the two people received the largest share.

Lady Valois, Chloe.

Although the frequency has decreased significantly since he started meeting regularly with Amelia, the little boy still continues to send Seongjin various bouquets of flowers and cards asking how he is doing.

And another one -

'Leonard of Lohan... ... '

Seongjin's eyes darkened.

okay. I was so busy that I forgot about that kid.

- Bethelah.

The unlucky swallow child of Rohan, who gave a secret greeting. Although he must have had everything he needed as a member of the

royal family, he was a man who had a dry, bloody smell.

-It's no big deal. I'm sure you guessed it, but I have some connection with them, so I thought I'd just tell them the news. Do you know that? Our forgotten brothers of old are anxiously awaiting your command.

At that time, the guy approached Seongjin with some insidious purpose. It seemed to have some kind of connection with a very suspicious force called 'Old Brothers'.

And didn't he act like he was anxious to have Seongjin meet them?

-Then, would you like to meet my friend? I think that would definitely be of great help.

-friend?

-exactly. It is he who has direct contact with your brothers. It's difficult, but I'll try to create a place with him.

As if to prove his words, Seongjin sent a letter asking to meet every day as soon as he returned from Sigismund Territory.

'What should I do... ... '

Originally, it wasn't very polite to flirt with the prince of a country like this.

To be honest, Seongjin was not at all interested in meeting Leonard. The moment he met the 'brothers' he was talking about, he had a feeling that something very bad would happen.

'Those 'brothers' definitely have a deep connection with the past Mores, or rather, my actions.'

Now that I think about it, I can't help but wonder what that 'organization' was. And what kind of connection does it have with Seongjin?

Exciting-

Seongjin suddenly felt his heart pounding violently and quickly erased the thought of him from his mind.

"... Let's do it this way. "From now on, Leonard, please collect all letters from the author separately in one corner of the gym, Edith."

"yes? "A training ground?"

The fierce, dedicated maid tilts her head at the unexpected, unexpected instructions.

"okay. "Next to Max's dog house."

Seongjin responded with a sullen expression.

I should throw all those unlucky things to Max as toys. It will be torn to shreds without a trace!

"If you are Prince Leonard of Rohan, he is the one who has been rumored recently."

While filling Seongjin's teacup, Director Bruno glanced at the letters.

"rumor?"

"yes. It is said that the second prince of Rohan stays in the imperial capital even after the birthday party, and always attends banquets and social gatherings. There is a rumor going around in the world that he may have been pushed out of the succession competition with the first prince and is looking for a good wife to trust himself to."

Whatever the reason, thanks to his flashy appearance, he is warmly welcomed by ladies wherever he goes?

"... what?"

Wait, wait. So, no matter which meeting I go to, Leonard is sure to show up?

It was a situation that had never been imagined.

'Besides, considering that that swallow bastard flirted with Amelia at

the birthday party...'

Seongjin's face became quite serious.

'Change the plan! I was only planning to show up at one appropriate gathering, but for now, I'll have to go to all the gatherings that my sister attends!'

[...] Are you serious?]

'of course! I'll show him what an impenetrable defense is!'

But then a problem arose.

It's been several months since Seongjin stayed at Delcross. Now, he thought he had mastered the common sense of this world to some extent, but it was difficult to say that it was a level of sophistication that would not be ignored in the 'salon' of high-ranking people.

'They say it's just a one-time meeting and they say hello and move on...'

The thought of hanging out with the pretentious imperial officials and chatting about noble topics for days on end made me feel like my head was already cramping.

"I heard there are stories going around that control the continent's economy. In addition, in terms of culture and art, you have to be familiar with everything from Delcros to Ortona's classic literature and Brittany's latest performing arts, right?"

"Uh, just listening to it is already starting to bother me..."

The purpose of this was to attend considering his reputation as a prince, but if he made a mistake, his reputation, which was barely being made up for, would be eroded.

"Then how about a hunting party? As fall approaches, it seems like many small festivals are held even in the vicinity of the Imperial Capital."

"Speaking of hunting, what kind of useless thing would you go to that

place for?"

Unlike the South and North, where hunting parties were relatively free, hunting as a 'social activity' was not viewed very favorably in Delcross. This is because the Lord who gave us life, not livelihood, called it 'sin.'

So even if hunting groups are not banned altogether, it is difficult for them to grow into mainstream groups.

'I'm sure you will choose to attend one of the salons held by the Murray or Sorcha families. 'Is there no way to simply cram in 'liberal arts?'

However, the Demon King, who had been listening quietly until then, suddenly made an unexpected opinion to Seongjin.

[If nothing else, how about asking some idiot about the latest performing arts?]

'huh? 'Chief Bruno?'

Then the leader pulled his mustache and asked awkwardly.

"Lowering. Why are you immediately convinced that the 'stupid' you're talking about is me?"

"hmm? That's it..."

[Who else but you is the idiot here? You idiot.]

"You're really being too generous, Mr. Red."

The leader's stiff mustache noticeably droops down.

I've been thinking about this recently, but isn't this man still supporting his pointy beard as an auror?

'But why, Director Bruno?'

To Seongjin's question, the Demon King gave an unexpected answer.

[You didn't know at all? This guy sings pretty well.]

'... ok?'

[I sing whenever I have time, going back and forth between the female and male parts. When I see the lyrics roughly continuing, I get the feeling that it's like some kind of performance.]

'okay?'

Seongjin tilted his head.

At least in the Jinju Palace, I pride myself on having the most sensitive sense of energy, but even though I have lived with Director Bruno, I have never once heard him sing.

But doesn't the leader's face turn red at the devil lord's words?

"... "You mean you can hear it all?"

[I'm singing the song to leave like that, but of course I can hear it. What do you think of this great Demon King? You idiot.]

"... .."

And Seongjin soon found out the full story of this incident.

"Sing it in your head?"

"Yes, sir. "I swear to the Lord, I never thought anyone would hear that!"

Director Bruno stroked his face, burning with shame, with one hand.

After suffering from the Gray Plague once, he was left with an incomplete flame crystal in his mind. From then on, he became able to receive thoughts from other people, but on the other hand, he became a half-psychic person who was unable to send thoughts to others.

However, it turned out that the song he was singing in his head whenever he was bored was spreading around the neighborhood in the form of pure thoughts.

"I feel like I want to dig a grave and lie down right now. Who else besides Red would have heard those shameful things..."

"hmm."

Seongjin gave him a confirmed kill with a sad expression.

"Maybe with my father...""

Cough!

"Sir Sharon must have heard."

Gagging!

Director Bruno suffered deep internal injuries and stumbled.

[Such a cruel guy...]

'shut up! Who do you think started first? uh?'

Anyway, the leader told me the whole story with a desperate look on his face.

When you were working as a knight commander at the imperial palace, you were obsessed with opera and theater? So it is said that he went to see all the performances on the rue de Bertrand while receiving a salary.

"Even recently, I occasionally watch performances when I have time.
"I am truly sorry."

No, he says he spends his time and money on his hobbies, so he should even apologize.

'Director, you were serious about Melbourne tea, but were you also quite knowledgeable about performing arts?'

The more I look at it, the more fascinating it becomes.

I heard that he was the only knight commander in the imperial palace who was a commoner, and to be honest, he seemed to have the most noble taste among the knight commanders I've ever met.

How on earth have you lived in the slums for so long?

'Can I listen to it too? 'That opera song.'

[Should I try broadcasting in a crystal clear sky? As if relaying the spiritual eyes.]

'Ok, fine.'

So Seongjin said this to the leader with a very bright face.

"Then, leader. Would you like to sing a song here and now?"

The leader's face turned pale.

* * *

Even if only for one moment in your life

If I could drink her flower-like breath

If only I could feel her pitiful beat

Ah, I wish I could just die-

There will be no more leisure in life-

An earnest love song rang out from the living room. Of course, it is a voice that only the Demon King and Seongjin can sense, and cannot be heard by others.

"Oh oh. "Is it great?"

Seongjin honestly expressed his impressions.

Strictly speaking, this song was not sung by Director Bruno himself, but was just a song played from his memory like a tape recorder.

Still, seeing that the pitch tempo was quite accurate, I thought that the leader's musical talent was quite good.

[not there yet. The woman's answer in the next part is the real highlight. Now, idiot, go ahead and continue.]

"Yes, leader. "Do more."

"... .."

Then, Director Bruno was overcome with deep agony.

Although he decided to dedicate his difficult life to his benefactor, Prince Mores, in some way.

'Is this really a good thing?'

However, I cannot bear to look away from the young prince's eyes sparkling with anticipation.

The director worked hard and sang the highlight of the most popular opera recently.

[good. This is it!]

"This is really amazing, Captain!"

Clap clap clap!

While the Demon King and Seongjin are cheering enthusiastically -

"What do you mean, great, sir?"

Edith asked as she brought Max into the living room. This is because there were instructions from Seongjin that it would be a good idea to spend the evenings at the palace for training.

"Uh, just. "I was listening to some music."

"... yes? "A song?"

While the dedicated maid, who cannot hear any thoughts at all, tilts her head -

Wong!

Max barked vigorously and tapped the letters piled on the floor with his nose. He is looking to see if it is a toy he can play with.

"okay. are you okay."

After Seongjin gave permission, Max excitedly jumped into the correspondence.

Patter-patter-

Colorful letters are scattered here and there on the living room floor.

"Ah, cleaning..."

As Edith is sighing, Max, who has noticed her, approaches Seongjin with a letter in his hand.

Seongjin, who was looking at the sight as if it was cute, checked the contents of the letter and lightly tapped Max on the head.

"huh? Yes, Max. Do you like this?"

Wong!

"I see. Do you want to go hunting? "Do you want to come here with me?"

Wong wong!

"Okay, let's go!"

"... "Hey, you?"

You said earlier that you don't go to useless hunting parties...

Director Bruno lamented with a pitiful face.

"Then why on earth have I been..."

336. Salon (6)

Take Max with you to a proper hunting party. And I will definitely go to the salon where Amelia attends!

Seongjin made that decision, but surprisingly, the salon that Amelia chose was not the Murray or Sorchia family's salon.

"Cadogan?"

"okay. "I developed a bit of a friendship with Baron Cadogan at the birthday party."

Baron Cadogan is the leader in the publishing business in the imperial capital. He mainly publishes 'Biblical Fairy Tales' commissioned by the Holy Assembly, and imports various books from the Kingdom of Brittany and the Duchy of Assein.

Thanks to this, her salon is mainly attended by administrative workers related to the western part of the continent and children of small and medium-sized businesses.

"... .. ?"

"The salon hosted by Baron Cadogan is quite a fruitful gathering. "There is a lot of up-to-date information about the situation in the West."

However, even with that explanation, Seongjin could not hide his embarrassment. It felt like a surprising choice considering that he had been recommended to a mainstream gathering from the beginning.

Of course, Amelia thought of her younger brother as the next crown prince, so she hoped to expand her influence in the large gathering

from the beginning.

On the other hand, she herself had no intention of exerting influence even on the high-ranking members of the imperial capital. Not only is she not practical, but she could easily give them the impression that she is aiming for the throne.

Amelia had enough connections to understand the situation in western countries, including Rohan.

'Because I will become Klanos anyway.'

One day, like Sir Martha, he will escape the competition for the throne and work purely for Delcross. That was Amelia's simple dream.

Most imperial officials have no doubt that Amelia will become queen of Brittany or Rohan. But she had no intention of getting married to a foreign country in this life.

The Holy Empire, which was already heavily interfering in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, saw that the advantage it could gain from its own national marriage was not significant.

'Furthermore, if you marry a royal from a foreign country, the path of revenge against Leonard will become even more distant.'

We'll probably waste years there trying to build a new foundation.

Even if you are lucky and secure a strong position, how much influence can a queen from a foreign country have over Rohan?

On the other hand, there were many people in Delcross who could support Amelia. Not to mention Mores, who will become the crown prince, and your father, His Majesty, will also help you in both material and spiritual ways.

'So, I will become Klanos, take the selection test fairly, and gradually improve my skills at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the past, he would oversee Rohan's internal affairs alone, so that he could apply strong pressure at the right moment.'

It never occurred to me that riding on Delcross's power was a cowardly act. Is there any need to save the famous sword that was rightfully in her hands?

'Wait a moment, Leonard. For the empire, for Mores who will ascend to the throne, and for myself. I will completely take away everything you have!'

And I will give you the most miserable death imaginable.

Once all revenge was over, Amelia planned to spend the rest of her life with her family in Delcross.

'Precious family is never far away. Mores, my father, His Majesty, and everyone in the Holy Family will be by my side!'

Amelia clenched her fists and quietly strengthened her will.

Meanwhile, looking at her like that, Seongjin had a slightly strange thought.

'Sister, somehow you seem very motivated? Are you fantasizing about destroying a castle wall somewhere?'

* * *

Cadogan's salon was held in a townhouse. Since all of the imperial capital's most prominent figures had houses there, most meetings and banquets were often held in townhouses.

"Your Majesty Amelia, your Majesty Mores. "I am truly honored to have found you here."

Baron Cadogan was a woman with a sad appearance. Even though two children of the Seonghwang family were present, she led Seongjin and Amelia to their seats in a relaxed manner.

"The recent growth of Lohan's liquor industry is amazing."

"But we still can't surpass the wines of Brittany, whether in terms of quality or quantity."

"Well, what do you think? There is no country that can match Rohan in terms of distilled beverages alone. Just wait and see. "Maybe within the next 10 years, Lohan will lead the continent's alcohol industry."

The meeting had a fairly informal and comfortable atmosphere. Since most of the members are working-level members, their first-hand impressions of the industry atmosphere and the situation in the West come and go without hesitation.

Thanks to this, Seongjin, who had expected the sharp, aristocratic speaking style to be used as a shield by all kinds of cultured common sense, was at a loss. I felt a little sorry for Director Bruno, who had been enthusiastically singing the latest operas over the past few days.

"Baron Cadogan buys many rare books that are hard to find in the imperial capital. Where is that? When a new 'scriptural fairy tale' is published, it is the first to be sent to the Silver Rose Labyrinth."

"okay."

It seems like it's thanks to this person that my sister has so many children's books.

While the owner of the salon and Amelia were chatting amicably, Seongjin sipped a non-alcoholic drink and comfortably listened to their conversation.

Surprisingly, printing technology was relatively developed in this world. Although the price of books is quite high, it is still nothing compared to the era of copying.

There were even elaborate illustrations carved into engravings. It was the influence of old Ortona, where literature and ideas were actively flourishing.

"It was a true cradle of humanities like no other in history. "Nowadays, Brittany is playing part of that role."

It is said that Baron Cadogan, who was saddened by the fall of Ortona, expanded the size of his publishing company by accepting many printing technicians who had run away from there.

"Oh, Amelia! Now that I think about it, you came at a good time!"

The Baron, who had been talking for a while, suddenly glanced at the butler as if he had remembered something.

What the old butler, who had received instructions, brought to them a short while later was a children's book of a type that Seongjin was also quite familiar with.

"I brought you a new publication with me today."

"Another biblical fairy tale?"

"Yes, it is."

Unlike Ortona, which was the cradle of the humanities, or Brittany, which had many famous universities, the number of book publications in Delcross was quite limited. First, it had to go through censorship by the Holy See, and even if it was slightly unpalatable, it was summoned by the Heresy Tribunal.

Thanks to this, 'Biblical Fairy Tales', which were fun reconstructions of anecdotes from the scriptures, were the only books that the Imperial Capital could publish relatively freely.

Still, thanks to its easy composition and beautiful illustrations, it is said to be quite popular among imperial subjects.

-Saint Bastian and the Finger Devil

Amelia tilted her head as she scanned the title of a new book.

"The story of Saint Bastian? That's surprising. "I thought this publication would definitely be an anecdote about Saint Grazier."

Saint Bastian was famous for creating many dramatic scenes in the scriptures. In addition to her beautiful appearance, she is a very popular adult for published fairy tales.

Nevertheless, 'Biblical Fairy Tale' tried to cover the five saints relatively evenly.

This was a phenomenon that occurred because the saints being promoted as the main force by each ministry of the empire or the Holy Knights were all different. If you think that your saint is being treated with even the slightest bit of neglect, you will hear protests from cardinals and priests.

That was why Amelia was puzzled.

It had been a long time since St. Grazier's feast day, but the story of the 'Knight of Grace' suddenly became a hot topic, and Granius' [Exploration of the Miraculous Continent] was pushed back in publication.

"There was a special request from the Orthodox Church. 'St. Bastian's feast day is also around the corner, so it's not something we can't understand."

Even with the Baron's explanation, questions were not easily raised.

"There was also the inauguration of a new saint. I thought that this time the saint's fairy tale would be published in Grazier... .."

And after flipping through a couple of pages of the book, Amelia became even more embarrassed.

-The huge dog carried the saint and ran like the wind.

- After leaping over the finger devil's men and passing through five hills, Saint Bastian finally arrived at the highest snow mountain on the continent.

Amelia frowned slightly at the pretty Ami.

"... dog?"

"Why are you doing this, sister?"

"No, the content is a bit surprising."

"... .. ?"

For Seongjin, who still didn't understand the English language, Baron

Cadogan explained.

"The scriptures simply state that the saint rode the wind and flew to the snowy mountain. Of course, there is also an oral tradition in the folk world that it was a huge beast named 'Wind'."

What I was saying was that the story about running on an animal was not a common interpretation.

But wind is wind, and beast is beast. Why are you picking on me?

"... This book has been officially approved for publication by the Holy See. "There is no problem."

Baron Cadogan, facing the siblings' puzzled faces, responded sarcastically. However, her voice sounded very weak, as if she was not very confident in herself.

"hmm... .."

Seongjin looked at the storybook over Amelia's shoulder.

To be honest, regardless of whether the content was true or not, Seongjin really liked this story. Because the image of the dog in the elaborately drawn illustration looked a lot like Max.

"The picture is cute. "I want to show it to Max too."

"ah? It really is! "It looks a lot like the wolfdog you brought in."

Amelia, who completely casts doubt on Seongjin's words, smiles brightly as if a flower is blooming.

"Looking at it again, I think dogs are cuter and better than just the wind."

"Yes? "I think it's becoming a more dramatic story, sister."

"okay. "There was a reason for the bold adaptation."

Baron Cadogan was inwardly dumbfounded by the princess's quick change of attitude.

'Contrary to the rumors, the rumors that you two are close were true!'

However, when he came face to face with the beautiful siblings' selfless smiles, the Baron smiled along with them without realizing it.

"If you like this, I will bring another copy for you, Maures."

* * *

The conversation continued until quite late.

Thanks to this, when Seongjin and Amelia had just left the salon, it was already deep into the night and bright stars were shining in the sky.

"What do you think, Mores? "Isn't the atmosphere of a small salon like this quite nice?"

Seongjin smiled in response to Amelia's question. It's a small salon and all, and it was my first time meeting like this, so is there anything to compare it to?

Of course, I heard that he often attended Ricardo Scarzapino's meetings in the past, but I don't remember it at all.

"There were some achievements."

Seongjin replied, adjusting her coat that was slipping off her shoulders.

okay. I also got a cute children's book. Above all, it was quite encouraging that the 'curse of social gatherings' jinx had disappeared.

But they were standing at the entrance for a moment, savoring the fresh air.

"What happens now? Baron Cadogan. "Are you two going to continue to come to our meetings in the future?"

Unusual voices were heard from afar. Since the conversation took place at quite a distance, I had to enhance my hearing with Aura.

"I didn't know that you would actually accept the invitation I sent you as a courtesy. But you two will probably be good members of the group."

"under! How could that possibly be the case? The strength of our meeting was the informal exchange of opinions! It was a place for free conversation that was not restricted by religion or institutions. But now it's all over!"

"Calm down, Sir Alton. "It hasn't been long since you two left."

Seongjin thought it was a relatively easy meeting, but the long-time members of the salon seemed to think a little differently.

"Don't we all know the true face of the Holy Empire! The subjects of the imperial capital who are oppressed by the main god and the powerful representative of the god and do not have any mental freedom! But now, do we have to look at the royal family's opinions even at private gatherings like this?"

"Upper stock. "His Majesty the Holy Emperor has not done anything to restrict the freedom of his subjects."

"Is that really the case? Any merchant who travels to and from other countries knows this! The current situation in the ecliptic is absolutely not normal! Crimes that go beyond the level will never occur, and all the subjects will just be gentle sheep and chant for the Lord! Do you think this is normal?"

"That's right. Other countries are never like this. Are there only subjects? The people of Seonghwangga are also strange. "Even though there are so many heirs to the throne, is it possible that there hasn't been a single noise?"

Authors! As the level of her remarks gradually became stronger, Seongjin frowned at her and pulled Amelia's arm.

I was thinking of leaving this place right away. I wanted to prevent a situation where their voices got louder and my sister heard them.

"Mores."

But isn't Amelia smiling faintly as she comforts Seongjin's hand? She had already been listening to their conversation.

The training period was not long, so the total amount of Auras was not large, but Amelia's ability to use Auras was unrivaled. So, enhancing her hearing isn't that difficult for her either.

"Don't pay too much attention to what they say."

ha.

Amelia took a breath of cool air and looked up at the night sky.

"You don't know how strange the current situation in Delcross is. Aside from Ortona, who opened the Republic, Cyprus, Brittany, and even Rohan have already long ago surpassed the empire in terms of institutions and culture. Yet why are they helplessly under the rule of the old empire?"

"... .."

"Strong military power? No. Look at the knights who are divided into pieces and move as they please. There is no other place other than the Empire that operates such an inefficient military. Strong faith in God? That's not it either. "The royal families of other countries see the Lord as nothing more than an excuse to interfere in their internal affairs."

Seongjin quietly listened to Amelia's lonely voice.

"It is your Majesty, my father."

"... .."

"This is because the power to sustain this inefficient and incomplete empire, the power to unite and lead the hearts of its subjects, comes only from Him, Father, Your Majesty."

Seongjin, who lived on Earth, was vaguely aware of how strange it was that a thousand-year-old empire full of absurdities still existed.

Therefore, before being bound by the agreement, my father would

have tried to implement radical policies to somehow change the fundamentals of the empire.

'If the... ..'

What would happen if there was no prosperity in this world, or even now, if he completely gave up on maintaining the empire?

Conflicts will arise simultaneously here and there. The empire will collapse into nothingness in an instant. Nevertheless, it is truly a normal, human world.

"But what a fortunate thing."

Amelia's eyes, looking into the sky, burned quietly. Unlike his usual gentle and kind nature, his eyes are deep and full of restrained anger and madness.

"The fact that I can look away from all of this absurdity with peace of mind."

Leonard.

Amelia remembers the merciless battle he began that eventually engulfed the entire continent. The blood-stained sky and the earth filled with nothing but death.

No matter how deep and enormous the darkness inherent in Delcross is, it will definitely not be worse than the world at that time.

"I have never been so happy that he is, without any doubt, the worst evil in the world."

It was a sudden remark to Seongjin, but it didn't make any sense.

He recalled an incident from several months ago. He had probably his first meal with Amelia and listened to her advice seriously.

-I thought revenge that didn't reach the end was just vain. But true revenge is something that enriches life not only with the result but also with the process itself.

plural.

Ever since the conversation that day, there was only one proposition that had occupied my sister.

"So even if I prioritize 'revenge' over the safety of the empire, I have no hesitation in my heart."

Amelia had already forgotten even the harsh events of Sigismund's reign.

Who is it that makes her burn like this? What on earth did she do to her sister?

"... yes. you're right."

But Seongjin didn't bother to ask who that guy was.

The process of revenge is entirely up to you. It is a sweet fruit that she bites. If it's the Amelia I know, she will take revenge better than anyone else in the world. I can tell.

'And whoever he is, if he ends up dying like that...'

Next it's my turn.

His soul will never rest. Of all the people I know, I will become the most pitiful and pitiful soul, and I will wander in terrible pain forever.

'Because he won't be allowed even the slightest mercy shown to Countess Sigismund!'

337. Deer Hunting (1)

The dam that separates consciousness and unconsciousness is not as high as we think, so it can sometimes easily be overflowed by strong emotions or will.

"... Mores."

Amelia looked at her younger sister's face, which seemed somewhat unfamiliar from earlier.

Since when did it start? His face suddenly became expressionless, as if his expression had been washed away, and it went beyond being insensitive to the point where it looked inorganic.

There was only one thing moving on that lifeless face. There was only a faint silver-grey eye light that occasionally flickered into the air.

"Mores."

When Amelia called my name again-

Blink.

I wondered if my eyelids were moving slowly as if in response, and for a moment, a powerful emotion appeared in my eyes, which were hidden for a moment and then revealed.

It was a strange sense of desperation. An ambivalent feeling, as if trying to escape from somewhere, but at the same time, as if trying not to let go of something.

Blink.

But when he blinked a second time, the prince's eyes had already

returned to their usual gray color.

"Yes, sister."

"... .."

"Why are you doing that?"

Amelia slowly looked at him with an anxious face.

"Are you worried about something? "I was worried because his expression suddenly looked too dark."

"... ..?"

Seongjin tilted his head.

Come to think of it, what was I just thinking?

"ah! It's no big deal. I just had this thought. You said before that you wanted revenge on someone, right? "Then, is the owner of the castle wall you usually want to destroy the target of your revenge?"

Amelia was taken aback for a moment, but then nodded obediently.

"okay. "That's right."

"I knew so. So I thought: 'Wouldn't it be a little difficult if you later hit that guy with the force of destroying a castle wall?' "I do."

"so?"

Of course, Amelia also did not think that this feeling of anger would be easily understood. It must have felt quite out of the blue to her sister, as it was her revenge for things that hadn't happened yet.

But his next words were unexpected.

"sister. No matter who you are seeking revenge on, please take the situation into your own hands and hit them gently. Otherwise, you can't just hit him a few times and he dies, right?"

huh?

Amelia blinked.

"Salsa?"

"yes. You're not going to just hit one and drink it, are you? "Even if you can heal and beat the enemy, what's the use if the opponent dies in one hit?"

"... ..!"

Ah, I see.

Amelia came to a great realization.

"okay. The opponent may be weaker than expected! However, if you hit and treat it appropriately, you can take revenge for quite a long time. "You are amazing, Mores!"

Haha, what?

Maybe if you talk to Logan or Sisley, they'll be willing to help you?

"Or I can lend you Sir Valerie, Inquisitor Nallari of the Monster Task Force. "No matter who the target of revenge is, perhaps we can bring a true end to hell."

"That's a good idea. Thank you, Mores."

The sight of the brother and sister smiling side by side looking up at the night sky was as beautiful as a painting, and the baron's employee couldn't help but secretly admire them as he glanced at them.

Only Sir Martha, who was listening to the brother and sister's whispers from afar, quietly thought this while sweating coldly.

"There have been so many shortcomings in assisting Prince Mores so far! From now on, if you don't pay more attention to your emotional education... ..!"

It's a good thing that your relationship is better than before. However, it was truly a mystery why one side had such a unilaterally negative influence on the other.

* * *

'Everything has gone wrong!'

The next morning.

Alton Dan Sang-ju, who was diligently heading to the meeting place in the suburbs, couldn't hide his nervousness and chewed his lips.

'At this rate, it's impossible to predict how [Puppet Master] will turn out!'

Alton Sangju and Karen Lawson were devil contractees.

Like most merchants belonging to the Merchants' Association, she made a contract with the devil when she was young and gained her current wealth. After defeating her rivals and quickly ascending to a prominent position, she killed the Sangsan lord and her successors one by one with a curse, naturally assuming her position as the Sangdan lord.

But that was it.

Once she became the head of the Sangdan, she had to travel back and forth to the ecliptic from time to time, and in order to safely come within the scope of [Grace], she had no choice but to refrain from communicating with the devil for a long time. The opportunities to utilize her demonic powers naturally diminished.

It took a lot of effort and time to grow the top purely through one's own resourcefulness. As the operation of the upper level was sluggish, the [Puppet Master], who was well-known among demons, approached.

'We want merchants and administrative workers traveling to and from the countries of the western part of the continent, especially Rohan. 'Can you help me control them?'

The puppeteer attended Baron Cadogan's salon, where targets gathered, and was requested to carry out special instructions. She offers her a sweet reward she can never refuse.

So Karen joined hands with [Puppet Master] and attempted to take another leap forward to gain wealth.

'I did... ... !'

No way, no way.

Who would have thought that two children from the Seonghwang family would be in attendance that day!

Thanks to this, the plan to bind all members with a curse was completely foiled. Karen stamped her feet, but in the end, she had no choice but to head to the meeting place, feeling extremely frustrated.

"You didn't keep your promise."

And the person who faced Karen was a half-masked man with a cold expression.

Romain, who was drawing complex shapes on the floor, scolded her coldly without even looking at her.

"I trusted you with an important task, but I am very disappointed. "If you carelessly broke your promise, is it safe to assume that you are prepared to pay the price?"

"Now, wait! It's all happening to me too... ... !"

But when she rashly tried to approach Romain, he turned his head and shouted sharply.

"Don't touch it!"

"... ... !"

"You must never destroy this circuit. "It is a circuit that follows the laws of the normal world, but since it was drawn temporarily, it is currently in a very unstable state!"

Gyu-sang world?

Karen looked at the intricate drawings on the cabin floor with a

puzzled face.

[Laws of the normal world! Humans drew those incomprehensible things with their bare hands?]

In her head, the devil who had made a contract with her shouted in horror. When he reached her rendezvous point far outside the ecliptic, he restored his connection with her at her own discretion.

[It must have been a technology that disappeared with the fall of Ionia. What on earth is the identity of that 'Puppet Master'?]

But Karen wasn't curious about such things at all. Because the half-masked man in front of him was starting to give off a dangerous vibe, as if he was about to commit something at any moment.

"Now, Alton Sangsangju. Well, you ruined my plan. "Do you have any last words?"

omg!

Karen, who instinctively sensed danger, shouted urgently.

"wait for a sec! I didn't do that on purpose! "Your orders were absolutely impossible to carry out!"

"It's an excuse. "I can't help but think that secretly activating just one small magic item must have been that difficult."

"You don't know! Do you know who attended the meeting last night? "The 1st princess and 3rd prince of the Seonghwang family have arrived!"

"Ho... .. ?"

Only then did the man's mood noticeably soften.

"Puppet master, you definitely know! "Things that are absolutely taboo for demons who contract with humans in the Delcross dimension!"

first. Harm humans with demonic power, but do not go far beyond

the scope of human capabilities.

second. Do not confuse society with the power of the devil.

third. No matter what happens, never, ever, mess with the children of Seonghwang.

In particular, without a single exception, demons who violated the third point met a terrible end!

"Do you understand? "If I had carried out the work there as planned, how do you think it would have turned out?"

Meeting the prince and princess at such a small gathering was something she could never have imagined. She was so embarrassed that she seemed overly angry at the host, Baron Cadogan.

"understand. But a promise is only a promise."

Romain continued, taking a final look at the circuit he had completed.

"Isn't that also a promise you swore directly in front of your monarch?"

"... ..!"

Callen Lawson's face turned blue with fear. To Romain's point, she is responding to the demon she has contracted with.

Most people in the Merchant Alliance make contracts with the devil for wealth and fame. Therefore, most of the demons they contracted with were descendants of Greed, or the [Lord of Hunger].

And Greed was not a benevolent monarch who would let his descendants who disobeyed his orders be tolerated.

"An explanation! Please give the Demon King of Hunger one chance to explain! I, I... ..!"

At her desperate cries, Romain quietly nodded.

"Well, because the opponent was a prosperous Delcross. I completely understand your position. So, let me give you a special chance to make it up to me."

Finally, as if he had reviewed all the circuits, Romain smiled and raised his head. Halfway through, her lower lips curve wide as if satisfied.

"But remember, there is no next chance for you now. Do you understand?"

Due to such circumstances, Karen was barely able to escape from the [Puppet Master]. He promised to speak well to Greed, along with new instructions to [accept] whatever his next request was.

It was an order whose meaning was completely unknown.

'What on earth is that guy thinking?'

But it didn't take long for the question to be resolved. This is because, while she was in the middle of moving in her carriage, a blurry window suddenly appeared in front of her eyes.

The ☐hairs facing ☐☐☐ are opened☐. Do you want to move?☐

☐Accept/Reject☐

Karen Lawson rubbed her eyes.

'... What is this?'

Reflexively, the puppeteer's instructions to [accept] anything come to mind.

[this! Go ahead and say no, Karen! Isn't this a completely broken rule!? If you get caught up in such an incomplete code, you may end up in a [labyrinth] and never be able to escape!]

I heard the devil's cries belatedly in my ears, but it was already over. Because her conscious mind was choosing [acceptance] without her knowledge.

My vision quickly disappears into the distance.

'omg!'

Pop!

After the dizzying feeling of falling, I opened my tightly closed eyes and, to my surprise, Karen had returned to the meeting place from earlier.

When she looked up from sitting down on the dusty floor, she saw a half-masked man looking at her with a grin on his face. Holding a large crystal ball in one hand.

"What the hell is this..." ... ?"

"hmm. great. 'It's finally working properly.'"

Romain has used the 'temporary portal generator' several times so far to transport prisoners from the Inquisition. However, because about half of them were lost, they ultimately failed to determine their location.

However, it was obvious that if too many prisoners were stolen, the Emperor would notice.

So the next thing I came up with was an auxiliary circuit that distorted the movement location to one side. The chances of success were very slim, but after several days of digging, we eventually succeeded.

'Now all I have to do is steal the princess away with this.'

Although the location can be specified, choosing [acceptance] is ultimately up to the individual's will.

'In that case, all you have to do is eliminate any room for choice.'

It would be perfect if Leonard could persuade the princess. But if she fails to steal her heart-

'There is no choice but to somehow drive the princess down a dead

end and force her to choose [acceptance]... ... '

* * *

Meanwhile, at the same time, the imperial palace.

Nate, who had been staring at the teacup, was startled by something and raised his head.

"hmm? Why are you doing this all of a sudden? What's going on?"

My son, who knows nothing, asks with an innocent face.

"No, nothing...""

For some reason, a chill ran down my spine.

Why? The children are quietly protected in the imperial capital, and the movements of the strays have slowed down considerably recently. Why do I have such an ominous feeling?

"Did you do something else, Mores?"

"... yes?"

Then, the troublemaker son was confused for a moment, but then smiled brightly.

"Ah yes. So, I just told you that I was going to a hunting party. 'I'm going to go deer hunting.'"

"deer..."

"yes. I heard it's early deer hunting season these days, right? So, I want to go first and sweep up all the deer."

"..."

Nate, who was somehow feeling extremely anxious, looked at his son blankly.

But isn't this immature child, who doesn't know what his father knows, say this with a flushed face?

"Oh, don't worry. I really won't crash this time! Sir Martha and the resident knights will take care of everything. "I will never hunt myself, I will just hang out at the hunting ground with Max!"

Sounds like a good idea, right?

My son said that with a proud expression, took a swig of tea, and added, "Ah."

"If possible, I'll ask you to catch a wild boar too!"

"... .."

Is it really okay to let this child go like this?

Nate slowly raised one hand and washed his face.

338. Deer Hunting (2)

"Anyway, how about your lunch box? Does it fit your mouth?"

There was a new dish on the tea table today.

An authentic Flemish pork pie that was previously recommended by Sir Claudia. I remember eating it quite deliciously at the time, so I packed it.

'Did I say it's best served with cheese?'

Seongjin, who had prepared the side menu himself, was a little nervous and waited for Seonghwang's reaction.

Today is the first time I prepared food other than salmon. If you eat the same thing every day, even if you love salmon, wouldn't you get bored quickly?

'If I succeed in feeding him a lunch box today, from now on I'll be visiting other restaurants in the capital every now and then, other than the salmon lunch box!'

Fortunately, Seonghwang slowly emptied the pie plate. He didn't seem to like bear meat very much, but surprisingly, he liked the moist and juicy pork in the pie.

Okay, this sounds good! Let's remember this.

'But is it okay to only eat restaurant food every day? I don't think it's very good for your health. I feel like I'm encouraging this guy's picky eating habits even more... ..'

For a moment, this feeling of skepticism washed over me.

'Well, it's better than not eating anything at all. Moreover, he has great divine power, so nutrient imbalance is not a big problem.'

Then wouldn't it be best to just eat delicious food well?

First, let's change the habit of choking at the dinner table! And later, you can slowly change to a healthy diet.

Seongjin thought peacefully and sipped his warm Melbourne drink.

"... "Is there a reason you chose the Earl of Bathurst's hunting party?"

Rattling.

As I was silent for a moment and waiting for the meal to finish, Seonghwang put down his silverware and quietly asked a question.

"Um, why? well."

If you think about it, there was no particular reason. It's just that the letter Max brought me particularly caught my eye.

It was clear that Max, who especially liked shiny things, was attracted to the invitation card with the gold-leaf deer engraved on it.

"The resident engineers said that. The southwestern part of the ecliptic, where the County of Bathurst is located, has dense forests and is said to be quite rich in game. "They say there are a lot of deer and roe deer, and sometimes bears and wild boars also appear."

Wouldn't it be nice to be able to catch a variety of animals? You can also taste a variety of meats.

If you're lucky, you'll also get bear meat, which the demon lord likes. The ones brought from Sigismund's Territory have long since run out.

"If you do that, you'll have to leave the ecliptic for a few days."

"Yes, I think that will probably happen."

"okay."

Hunting gatherings take place over several days at the host's

territory. That's why they say they pitch tents and stay near hunting grounds.

Seongjin was looking forward to it. You can come to another world and feel the camping sensibility that is not even in Palja!

'When I was on Earth, I thought about wasting my time and effort on such annoying things.'

The position now is completely different from then. I'm a prince, right?

Edith or the resident knights would probably do all the miscellaneous work, like setting up the tent or cooking.

'All I have to do is hang out with Max, enjoy my free time, and meditate whenever I have free time!'

The Milo boss's investigation has been completed, so there's nothing too urgent now. At this point, let me give Max and the resident knights a change of heart.

Is the only remaining worry about my father's meals? I have to take care of the packed lunch, but if we go out to the countryside, this guy will have to starve for a few days.

'First of all, Director Katrina decided to bring us a salmon lunch box.'

In fact, she was too grandiose to ask for such a small task. But for some reason, she had a feeling that it wouldn't be possible to do anything other than the leader.

So, when I went to ask for a lunch box to be delivered, Francis' reaction was very intense.

-Our leader is the leader of Saint Aurelion, one of the most powerful knights in the Holy Empire! Even though it is for His Majesty the Holy Emperor, why should he personally do the work that his servants do? I'd rather go!

But Seongjin flatly refused. A lunch box brought by this foul-tempered lieutenant.

-What are you going to do if your father behaves? stop.

-what? Sir, what does that mean now? yes?

However, Katrina was very happy when she heard the request.

-It is my greatest honor to entrust such an important task to me, sir!

-... No, Captain?

Look. The leader definitely said he would do it, right?

Seongjin excitedly laughed at the adjutant, whose expression was crumpled, and arrived at the main palace in triumph.

"Mores."

"Yes, father."

Seonghwang's face looked somewhat dark, so Seongjin straightened his posture and listened to what he said.

"No matter what anyone says, you are the next Oracle. So, even if you think you made your decision inadvertently, keep in mind that there is always a special reason for that choice."

... Why choose?

"Do you understand? From now on, you must be careful and careful in everything you do."

"... .."

Seongjin could now easily recognize a faint feeling of worry on his cold face.

Well, considering all the accidents I've done so far, it's not unreasonable.

"Haha, don't worry. It's not far away, it's near the imperial capital. I'm going to take Lord Masaine and a lot of the resident knights."

"... .."

"I'm going to leave everything to the resident drivers and just have fun. Really!"

Seongjin tried to reassure him.

I wouldn't be able to ride a horse anyway because of Max, so would I be able to hunt properly? We had no choice but to treat it as a picnic and spend the whole day inside the camp.

"Could something happen in the camp? The jinx [the curse of social gatherings] has already disappeared."

It was right then. An unusually bright silver light flashed in Seonghwang's eyes!

However, before Seongjin could properly recognize the appearance, Seonghwang quickly lowered his head and avoided looking down.

"... ..?"

Now that I think about it, when I talk to this guy, I often find him staring blankly at his teacup with his eyes down.

'Until now, I thought it was just a habit... ..'

Didn't it look like he was dodging something in a hurry just now? It was when Seongjin tilted her head.

"Bute Mores."

"yes?"

"Have you ever eaten something you hunted yourself?"

hmm?

"no? "I think this is your first time hunting properly?"

There wasn't much of a chance. By the time I worked as a hunter on Earth, the ecosystem had already been devastated thanks to monsters.

Well, I don't know what it would have been like during the Mores era.

"I've never eaten deer or wild boar before, so I'm looking forward to it. "The chefs will make a decent meal, right?"

"... .."

Seonghwang then opened his mouth as if he wanted to say something more, but then slowly shook his head.

"No, it's nothing. "It would be good to experience something firsthand."

"... ..?"

* * *

"It's quite a hassle."

Leonard grumbles again.

He had been following Romain aimlessly since earlier, holding a bottle of alcohol in his hand.

"Didn't I tell you that it would take a long time so you don't have to follow me?"

Romain, who responded like that, sighed softly.

He was now wandering around the foot of the mountain, busily putting something on the ground from time to time. It started at noon, and now it is almost sunset.

"What does all that do?"

"As I have said many times, we are in the process of engraving the circuit of the normal world in an appropriate location."

"The normal world? "What was that?"

"I've already explained that several times, but... .."

Romaine was currently trying to figure out how to drive Princess Amelia into a dead end.

If things go well and he can sneak her into the portal, he will be able to try [Charm] on her himself.

"If I look at the things you do, there are a lot of them that are very useless. "The hard work you did to plant things for people before turned out to be useless in the end, right?"

Leonard, who was chatting comfortably, took a drink from the bottle. At this point, Romain can't help but feel the limits of her patience.

"Why am I doing these troublesome things? "If Leo had just gone ahead with the original plan, there wouldn't have been a need for such troublesome work."

Didn't he shout so loudly that he would capture the princess's heart?

-Amelia, in order to make your love with me come true, please click [Accept]. my love.

If everything had worked out as planned, everything would have ended with just one word.

But despite his obvious beatings, Leonard was not discouraged in the slightest.

"I tried, Romain. If the princess doesn't give me her heart until the end, it's definitely not because I lack charm. "It's just that her tastes are a little strange."

"... .."

It's my fault for trying to fight this man.

Romaine closed his mouth as he felt his blood pressure rising in his body.

"But what have you been looking for so much? "Can't I just draw that circuit anywhere?"

After Romain finished his work, he looked around through the bushes again, and Leonard stuck his head in next to him and asked.

"I'm looking for signs of cracks, Leo."

"crack?"

"Yes, it is."

Slurp. Sreuk.

Romain, who was wading through the tall grass with one hand, found something and pointed to a spot on the ground. The dirt floor is particularly dark red compared to other places.

"Look at this."

"Are you saying that's the trace?"

"That's right."

Romaine nodded, his eyes shining quietly beneath his half-mask.

"It is a sign that the Delcross dimension was almost torn into pieces after being caught up in the Ionian disaster many years ago. "It's the perfect place to blow up an imperfect circuit."

* * *

Let's catch a lot of game and fill the palace refrigerator!

That was what he was thinking, but it was his dedicated maid, Edith, who immediately dashed Seongjin's dreams.

"Killing and eating wild boars? Sir, that is a very unreasonable thing to say, isn't it?"

She always showed a fierce attitude, but today, for some reason, she reacted bluntly.

"Why not?"

"You have no idea how bad wild boar meat smells. Especially in this season, if you kill a female pig, it doesn't smell very good."

"... ok?"

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

I heard clearly from my senior, right? It is said that once, while standing guard, they caught a wild boar that came to eat Jjampap, and a meat party was held in the unit that day. He said it was very delicious.

But despite such rebuttal, Edith was adamant.

"If anyone has ever eaten it, it must have been in the winter."

... Was it like that?

"Maybe it was just a young sow?"

"I didn't hear if it was male or female. Come to think of it, I think they said there wasn't enough meat because it was small... .."

what. Does it taste that bad?

As I looked at him with doubt, Masain silently nodded his head next to me.

'Oh, it's ruined. I shouted to my father that I would catch a wild boar.'

Of course, I think the guy ate it without even asking.

-No, it's nothing. It would be nice to experience something firsthand.

I guess that was the story. Since Seongjin seemed so expectant, it seems he couldn't bear to tell her the truth.

I was very disappointed, but Edith shook her head.

"You can cook it with strong alcohol and spices, but that doesn't make it delicious. "If you live in a rural area where there is very little to eat, is there any reason to eat such a thing in the capital where food is plentiful?"

That's right.

Because the capital is overflowing with delicious restaurants.

"But Edith, you know your prey quite well, don't you?"

"Well, before I came to the Imperial Capital, I also hunted often. "I lived deep in the mountains."

"okay?"

"It's not a very good memory. Hunting is a lot of work. "From dismantling to disposal, it's a very cumbersome task."

"... .."

This explains why an Auror user like Edith became a dedicated maid instead of a squire. Edith, you really hate working.

Of course, this is not the correct attitude a dedicated maid should have.

"Lowering. "Deer and rabbits are quite edible if you cook them well."

When Seongjin looked very disappointed, Lord Masaine added something insinuatingly.

"Uh, okay. Thank you, Lord Martha."

Okay, we can't back down like this!

I'll have to tell all the resident knights to only target deer!

339. Deer Hunting (3)

The early autumn sky was high and clear. The air was quiet, but as the horse ran quickly, a cool breeze passed through my ears. It was perfect weather for hunting.

Nevertheless, the Earl of Bathurst's face was dark as he looked up at the blue sky. From the time he left his mansion, he began to have friction with his daughter Margaret, which made him feel uncomfortable.

-No time to waste on hunting parties!

When told to come to the hunting camp and get to know the members, Margaret came out in full bloom. Now it was time for her to meet some nice gentlemen and decide on a wife, but her daughter was still as immature as her child.

Where is that? They are preoccupied with preparing for the tea party, which has three more weeks left on the schedule.

-father! Do you know who is coming to this tea party? oh my god... The rose of the imperial palace! Princess Amelia said she was coming!

Margaret shouted with great excitement.

-And recently, wherever Princess Amelia goes, the Queen of Society, Lady Scarzzapino, follows her! This will definitely be the best tea party of my life!

The Earl of Bathurst was dumbfounded.

What did the princess say? No matter how much he monopolizes His

Majesty's favor, isn't he the type of person who will sooner or later get married and leave for a distant foreign country?

At that time, a slender middle-aged woman approached him riding a horse.

"William. Forget about Margaret. "If the organizer's expression was so dark, what would the participants think of us?"

"ma'am... .."

The Count twitched his nose.

His wife, who had married from Anatolia, was carrying on the southern family tradition of enjoying hunting. Not only did she consistently participate in hunting parties, but she also killed more deer than her husband each time.

When she was young, there were times when she looked like a goddess from mythology as she ran through the hunting grounds. However, as many years have passed, he now wishes that his wife would have more elegant tastes and hang out with the noble ladies of the imperial capital.

"Think about it, William. "If you come to a hunting party and just tell them to sit quietly at camp, is there any way Margaret will like it?"

Madam, that's just your opinion. Margaret isn't particularly interested in hunting either.

As the count was thinking, a large carriage with the god's emblem on it suddenly appeared.

'okay. Come to think of it... ..'

At most hunting parties, there is only one person sitting quietly in the camp.

Mores Klein.

The bastard third prince of the Holy Empire, who was called the disgrace of the Holy Imperial Family not long ago.

"Is it okay if it stays like this? The prince continues to stay at the camp alone... .."

The wife, noticing his gaze, asked cautiously.

"Lord Martha is not with you."

"That's not what you're saying, is it? William. Since we hosted the gathering, we have an obligation to provide at least some enjoyment to everyone in attendance."

"But what pleasure can be found in a hunting party other than hunting?"

"That's true, but... .."

How embarrassed I was when Prince Mores suddenly announced that he would participate in the invitation sent as a courtesy. Still, considering the prince's recent actions, I thought he might be slightly concerned about his reputation.

But when the prince arrived, it wasn't even a sight.

After being impressed by the striking resemblance between the Emperor and Empress Elizabeth for a moment, the Prince only exchanged greetings at the count's residence and locked himself in the carriage on the road. Then he dragged the wagon all the way to the hunting camp!

'Is he crazy...? ... '

The carriage crawling up the unpaved mountainside was amazing, but the prince stubbornly staying in his seat in the rickety carriage was even more surprising.

"Lowering. The wagon may not reach the camp. Riding a horse right now... .."

At first, the count tried to dissuade him several times, but the prince was steadfast to the end.

"It's okay, Count. You will be able to go all the way. Besides, my dog

hates it when I ride a horse."

"... yes? outline?"

Wong!

Then the prince's dog barked loudly and waggled its tail. With a dark gray back and glowing yellow eyes, it looked more like a huge wild wolf than a dog.

Ki-ing, ki-ing-

Thanks to this, the hunting dogs, who should be brave enough to drive deer, are so intimidated that they curl their tails to one side. Where else in the world can such a nuisance be found?

"Hey, our Max is the leader here. "Have you clearly established military discipline?"

Wong wong!

"Good job, Max. "Would you like some beef jerky as a reward?"

Wow~

William Bathurst vigorously rubbed his forehead where he had a headache. What on earth is that immature prince thinking?

"Oh, but the Earl of Bathurst?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are the people with the hounds over there citizens of Bathurst Territory?"

"They are half hunters and half selected citizens. The strongest people were selected from the territory. "You have to lead the dogs out of the forest and hunt down the game first."

"Yes, sturdy... .."

And the young prince gave a cool look to the people gathered in the corner for a moment. Just from the outside, they are truly full of

royal dignity and dignity.

"Aren't these slippery creatures very trustworthy when it comes to running at the same speed as the dogs? Aside from the territory residents, why are the hunters so skinny?"

"yes?"

"I heard that Bathurst Territory is overflowing with game every year, but that's really strange. "It looks like you haven't been hunting properly lately?"

However, listening to words spoken without common sense like that, I couldn't help but wonder if he was really the prince who inherited the blood of the royal family.

"Of course we don't hunt without the lord's permission. "Because they don't have the right to hunt."

"Hunting rights?"

"That's right. All the game in the territory belongs to the lord. Private hunting is strictly prohibited, especially before and during hunting season. "Isn't it obvious?"

Bathurst grew irritated by the prince's absurd question.

"... Right."

Fortunately, the prince doesn't ask any more questions and quietly settles into the carriage again.

"... .."

The Earl of Bathurst, shaken by the somewhat cold atmosphere, glanced back at the residents of the territory pointed out by the prince. This is because I was a little concerned about the evaluation that it was a bit awkward.

But he soon tilted his head.

'What's the problem? 'Isn't that stronger than usual?'

Everyone will see the prince saying such trivial things.

But the prince's eccentricities did not end there. He managed to arrive at the camp by forcefully pulling the carriage, but this time Prince Mores had quietly locked himself inside the tent.

'If you're going to do that, why did you come?'

However, it did not mean that he had no interest in hunting at all. Why not bring in a bunch of guard knights and even hold a hunting competition on the spot!

-Do you understand? Grab as many as you can. In particular, sweep away all the deer. The best performers will receive premium spirits from Rohan and a five-day vacation. You can cook and eat the game you catch however you like.

It was truly absurd. There is a limit to putting a ban on a gathering!

The members of the hunting club are mostly people of noble status, and although they enjoy hunting, they are merely ordinary people. But how can we stop the powerful Auror users who attack with determination?

"Wow, it's alcohol!"

"It's vacation!"

"It's a meat party!"

just as expected. Aren't the imperial knights running into the forest faster than horses even before the hunting dogs start chasing them?

Needless to say, the enthusiasm of the remaining members was dampened.

'Are they really the knights of the Imperial Guard? It's so frivolous.'

'I heard that the resident knights of the Pearl Palace only gather people who are a bit unique. They say they are all terrible drinkers and rough-tempered people.'

'Ah, so they are the 3rd Prince's people as expected.'

'What on earth is the Earl of Bathurst doing...? . If this is the case, I'll have to look into another meeting next year.'

The sound of the members whispering made my blood boil.

'If I don't stop him right now... ... !'

The hunting party that has been waiting for a year is in danger of being ruined. The count, very upset, approached the prince's tent to protest.

But suddenly, a sturdy knight quickly blocked his path. At one time, he was Sir Masain, the heir to the royal family.

"Stop, Earl of Bathurst. "You are meditating right now."

"... yes?"

"It will interfere with your training, so if you have any business, please tell me first. "I will tell you later."

"... ... ?!"

... training?

The Earl of Bathurst couldn't hide his bewilderment and just kept his mouth shut. He simply could not understand the prince. If that's the case, why on earth did that person come to the hunting party!

* * *

'I think it's a good thing I came.'

Seongjin, who had finished meditating satisfactorily, stretched out and thought, and the devil opened his mouth as if he was dumbfounded.

[What is good at? Nothing has changed at all since I was at Jinju Palace. Why did you come here?]

'Nothing has changed. 'Everyone likes it, right?'

As soon as Seongjin gave permission, Max got excited and ran into the mountains. Whether it's hunting or running around, whatever you do will be fine.

The resident drivers also seemed to be having fun as they came out to the countryside for the first time in a while.

[Are knights on the same level as mixed breed dogs? Are you saying we all came for a walk at once?]

The Demon King was extremely dumbfounded.

'That's the same for you too... ..'

Recently, I couldn't help but feel like I had abandoned him while accessing Pangea Chronicle. So, for the first time in a long time, he was out of the imperial capital's [grace] and tried to make him feel better.

Of course, I did not tell this story directly to the Demon King. It was obvious that he would jump up and down, asking if he was on the same level as a mixed breed dog.

'shut up. I just need to get some air too.'

[If you want to get some fresh air, wouldn't you first go outside the tent?]

'Well, I was going to do that anyway.'

Seongjin shrugged his shoulders and left the tent. That's because the smell of grilling meat wafted from outside.

"Lowering!"

Sir Claudia, who was sitting in front of the bonfire, stood up and smiled brightly.

"Are you finished with meditation?"

"Yes, Sir Claudia. "But what are you baking now?"

"Yes, this is the wild boar I caught!"

... wild boar?

What, it smells better than I thought?

Seongjin tilted his head and approached the bonfire. Then, Sir Calmen, who was about to tear into the meat, hesitated and pulled up his seat.

'Is it Lord Claudia and Lord Calmen again...? ... '

At first glance, the two of them didn't seem to get along very well, but it was amazing to see them get along so often while bickering.

"What about Sir Martha and the other knights?"

"Lord Masaine is coming after looking around for a moment. "The other resident knights are still hunting."

"But have you two already finished hunting? "Why don't you catch more?"

Then Sir Claudia wrinkled her freckled nose.

"If I roast this guy first, I'm going to go catch him again. "He wondered if there was a need to kill an animal he wasn't going to eat."

That's right, it's truly Claudia-like to only focus on eating right away without any competitive mentality.

"Then what about Lord Calmen?"

"... ... !"

Sir Calmen, who already had a lot of meat in his mouth, was embarrassed by the sudden question and muttered his lips.

Sir Claudia, who was worse off, responded sharply on his behalf.

"Lord Calmen, there is no need to take leave anyway, sir."

"huh? why?"

"Wouldn't Captain Bruno continue to guard Jinju Palace? That's why my student can't go out and have fun on his own."

Then Sir Calmen made a sullen expression with his cheeks bulging.

Director Bruno always enjoyed teaching his students, but after his recent visit to Sigismund Territory, he was even more enthusiastic about teaching Sir Carmen. Thanks to this, only Sir Calmen, who has a mediocre talent, is dying.

"Lord Calmen. It's dangerous if you cook it roughly like that. Do you know how many parasites there are in the bodies of wild animals? "It should be thoroughly cooked before eating."

"... parasitism... what?"

Sir Calmen, who had barely managed to get the meat down his throat, asked back, but Seongjin waved his hand in annoyance.

"Well, there is such a thing. Even if I explain it to you, you probably won't understand it."

I'm crying!

Blood is seen gushing out on Lord Calmen's forehead.

But fortunately, he did not carelessly swear at Seongjin like before. He had just fallen from [grace] and I was a little worried that his anger management issues might be getting worse.

It seems that the 'Pavlov's Dog' training was quite successful.

"But is this the price of meat? "What about the rest?"

When I asked about there being only a few pieces of meat left on the bonfire, Sir Claudia answered while turning over the pieces of meat.

"I handed it over to the hunters in the territory as wages. "I have never cleaned it myself, so I asked them to handle it and cut off only the tasty parts."

hmm.

I am reminded of the skinny people I saw on the street today.
Seongjin nodded.

"Well done, Sir Claudia."

"lol."

Sir Claudia smiled innocently and handed Seongjin a piece of meat.

"Ah, this is the best baked. Would you like to try it?"

"Ok, fine."

Seongjin nodded obediently. Sir Calmen didn't die after eating it, so it's probably okay.

But that was when I had just received the meat from her.

'hmm?'

Seongjin suddenly stopped and turned his head toward the mountain, feeling an eerie sensation running down his spine.

"... Lowering? "Why are you doing this?"

At the same time.

Whoa whoa!

Max's long cries, looking for Seongjin, could be heard from afar.

340. Deer Hunting (4)

About an hour ago.

It was truly by chance that Masain discovered the strange sign.

-Shall we park the carriage here?

While saying that, the place Prince Mores pointed to was an awkward location that blocked the tent and the center of the camp.

-Then the entrance to the tent is not blocked, sir?

-It's okay, Sir Masaine. It's easy to carry luggage, and I like this place just fine.

The prince, having made such a decision, soon went into the tent to meditate.

Masain, who was naturally stationed at the entrance of the tent to stand guard, began to glance sideways at the carriage that was subtly blocking his view.

Then there was a moment.

Susss-

Beyond the roof of the carriage, I could see the trees on a distant mountain peak waving faintly. At first glance, it seemed like it was shaking in the wind, but the rhythm was strangely off and the movement went against his will.

'Is it because of my mood...? ... '

For some reason, I felt a slight vibration beneath my feet.

Masain looked at the distant mountains with a stern face. A high mountain peak slightly to the west of the current location where the hunting party was being held.

"Why are you doing this, Sir Martha?"

Sir Kurt, who was giving various instructions to the coachman, looked at him in confusion.

"It's nothing, Sir Kurt. But didn't you feel that vibration just now?"

Then Sir Kurt turned his head and looked towards the western mountains.

"Vibration? "Where are you talking about?"

"... .."

Excluding Sir Masaine and Sir Maria, Sir Kurt is the most skilled among the resident knights. I can't believe he didn't notice anything wrong.

'Was it a mistake?'

Masain had just had that thought.

Susss-

The trees sway once again. It was definitely not an illusion this time!

'... what?'

This is a forest near Hwangdo. There was no way that seawater or anything could hold their feet.

The only large animals would be wild boars or bears.

'But what does that movement mean, as if the entire mountain is shaking?'

An ominous feeling comes over me.

Masain had felt this way once a long time ago. That thick, ominous

feeling of being caught in an invisible noose thrown by someone and slowly being suffocated.

"If there's anything you're concerned about, I'll go and take a look."

At Sir Kurt's words, Masaine thought for a moment.

'I must protect my Majesty's side.'

However, the potential danger that could harm the prince cannot be left alone.

Perhaps you should go see it yourself. Even his superior knight, Sir Kurt, didn't notice. There was no way he would be able to find the epicenter no matter how much he sent others.

Masain expanded his energy as much as possible and explored his son-in-law.

Fortunately, there doesn't seem to be anything special in the surroundings other than the presence of small mountain animals, and the resident knights who are out hunting are all nearby.

'and... ... '

The prince's exclusive informant was also quite nearby.

'Dasha... Did you say that?'

Masain stared for a moment at the bush where he could sense a faint presence.

After meeting Masain and Director Bruno earlier, Dasha no longer cared about their gaze and was doing her job more boldly.

'It's very shameful that I taught him the strange art of Auror concealment, but Ilsin's power is still quite trustworthy.'

After making up his mind, Masain looked back at Sir Kurt.

"Lord Kurt."

"Yes, Sir Martha."

"I'm going to take a look around for a moment. "Please protect me in the meantime."

Then Sir Kurt's expression changed strangely. 'Why would this person voluntarily leave the prince's side?' A face that clearly reveals the question.

"... .."

"Oh, excuse me. I will do so, Sir Masaine. "Don't worry!"

After confirming that Sir Claudia and Lord Calmen were seated in front of the campfire, Masain immediately turned around and quickly left the camp.

When I focused my aura and increased my speed, I was able to climb a low mountain in no time.

'It's a strange thing. Even though it is in the same Bathurst Territory, the atmosphere is quite different from the hunting ground next door.'

Is it because the forest is so dense? The western mountains strangely gave off a dark and gloomy aura. There is not even much sign of wild animals.

Masain reached a fairly high ridge, took a moment to catch his breath, and looked at the hunting camp in the distance.

'It looks like nothing much is going on over there.'

Right then.

Ugh-

Again, there is a small vibration under my feet. This time it was quite close. At the same time, the dark trees were shaking their branches and making eerie friction sounds.

sssss-

As expected, there was no sign of any wild animals nearby. The ground is shaking of its own accord.

Masain began to scan the surroundings with a stiff expression on his face.

Ugh-

How much time has passed? After a while, when a small vibration came from the ground again, Masain was able to find a stone hidden under a bush.

A red stone that is not the natural color of minerals but has a distinctly different feel no matter how you look at it.

'That... ... ?'

As I get closer, the vibration rings again.

Ugh-

"... ... !"

For a moment, Masain was shocked and froze in place. This is because, at the same time as the vibration, faintly glowing red patterns suddenly appeared and disappeared around the red stone.

It was a pattern that Masain had definitely seen at some point.

-Well, what you said... It was all true. The devil... There is a devil in the imperial palace! Wow!

A guard knight who left to protect his father, Prince Cameron, and returned alone and covered in blood. Unidentifiable blood-red patterns were clearly embedded between his eyebrows.

-I can feel the energy of the curse. Everyone should avoid this place!

Red patterns appeared one after another on the body of the priest who was shouting like that, as if it were contagious. The 1st Prince's camp became a sea of blood in such a short period of time.

The hand holding Misra was shaking.

-Please take care of me. The only legitimate successor to the throne is

Masain.

The same was true of the knight commander, who had been urging that until the end. Patterns emerged clearly from his blood-covered face. Symbols of curse.

A chill ran down my spine.

'Here... there is!'

Masain realized it right away.

'It's still here! The guy who created that evil curse back then is still circling around, eyeing the imperial capital!'

Demonic species that once tried to completely devour the continent. That evil group is still lurking in secret.

And as soon as Masain escaped the [grace] of the ecliptic, he showed his tail as if to show off.

'This fact must be known. Dear Uncle... And to the Order of St. Aurelion!'

Masain gritted his teeth and slowly moved towards the red stone.

The fear of the terrible curse he experienced as a child was still deeply engraved in his mind, as if it were a stigma.

But he was no longer the helpless child he was then. Isn't he a worthy knight of the royal guard who protects the royal family and Prince Mores?

'It is unclear whether that will remain until the Holy Knights are brought in. First, you have to take it as evidence...'

Masain took out a small gun that he was carrying in his arms. It was a precious cloth that Sisley personally blessed for use in embroidery.

As a Masain without divine power, I couldn't confirm whether I could sense demonic energy from that stone. However, even if it is activated upon contact like the previous curse, this sacred cloth will

block demonic energy for a while.

It was when, with difficulty, I picked up the stone, fighting the constant fear in my heart.

Whoa whoa!

A long howl, like a wolf's sound, was heard from afar.

"... ..!"

There are no packs of wolves living around here. Still, if it's making that sound, is it probably just a wolfdog?

"... Lowering?"

What happened to you?

As soon as the face of Prince Mores came to mind, the complicated thoughts in my mind flew away in an instant.

Masain quickly started running in the direction of the sound, holding a stone wrapped in sandpaper in his arms.

* * *

Seongjin suddenly felt an eerie premonition and looked towards the distant western mountains.

'... what?'

As I was overcome with an uneasy feeling, I naturally remembered the words that Seonghwang had given me before coming here.

-No matter what anyone says, you are the next Oracle. So, even if you think you made your decision inadvertently, keep in mind that there is always a special reason for that choice.

A special reason why I decided to come here... ..

But there was no time to think deeply anymore. Soon after, Max's long cries were heard from the hunting ground.

Whoa whoa!

The guy was urgently calling out to Seongjin.

"Lowering?"

When Seongjin put down the meat and stood up, Sir Claudia looked up at him curiously.

'Let's think about this unpleasant feeling later,'

First, we need to solve the urgent issues. Isn't my dog calling for his guardian right now?

Seongjin quickly tied the nutcracker to his waist and started running toward the hunting ground without saying a word.

"Um, my name?"

"No, instead of trying to eat, where are you suddenly going?"

Sir Claudia and Sir Calmen are startled and run after Seongjin. I also felt that two strong Auror users were following behind them.

'Lord Kurt! Dasha!'

Seongjin, who sensed their presence only through his senses, felt relieved and increased his speed. If you take this much power, Lord Masain won't nag you later, right?

"Lowering! Is there a problem? Please wait!"

Leaving behind Sir Kurt's urgent voice, Seongjin took a step forward without hesitation.

Is it because Max is one of his descendants? Without much effort, Seongjin was able to pinpoint Max's location as if he could see it.

It was when we reached a valley overflowing with moss. Seongjin was finally able to find Max, who was barking bravely at a mountain animal.

Kkkkkkkk! Kkkkkkkk!

"Max?!"

Fortunately, the dog looked fine. The problem is that the opponent Max is facing is an extremely large bear.

Whoa!

Even though it was a tense moment, Seongjin was very embarrassed the moment he saw the scene.

'what? Was the bear originally such a huge beast?'

The red-brown bear was standing upright on both feet and threatening Max, but it was so large that I wondered if it was really a bear. The height from head to head is almost 3 meters, and the sharp claws also appear to be approximately 20 centimeters.

A very unusual size considering a bear on Earth.

'Is that a bear from another world? 'It's a huge feeling of intimidation, isn't it?'

But Sir Kurt, who followed right behind, was astonished and shouted as soon as he saw the scene.

"what? "It's not even sea water, but a bear that big lives in a nearby forest?"

Oh, that's right then. I don't think it's a normal bear.

[What are you doing, that mongrel dog! Even when arguing, you have to look at the other person. Is that guy sane?]

Even the devil is freaking out -

Wong wong wong!

Max, who discovered Seongjin, increased his momentum and began to put pressure on the bear. Just by looking at it, it appears to be carrying its owner on its back in triumph.

Seongjin broke into a cold sweat.

'Max. No matter how you look at it, isn't that an opponent that is far beyond your capabilities?'

When I first let my dog out on the hunting ground, I thought he would run around happily and catch a rabbit.

Isn't this an opponent that is well over 10 times his size? Even if the angry bear let out a breath, Max felt like he would fly away.

'Max. 'You caused an unthinkable accident while I was out of sight for a moment!'

Max was circling around the bear, doing a good job of keeping him in one place. Thanks to this, the bear's spirit becomes more and more vicious.

Pow! Ujikkeun!

As the bear swung its log-like arm, the entire tree broke and fell to the ground.

Max, who had been diligently looking for gaps until then, quickly retreated to avoid the tree falling on his head.

It was a narrow miss.

'... ... !'

However, even in an urgent situation, Seongjin could not hastily jump in among them.

That's right-

Wong wong!

-That's my prey! I'll catch you!

Because Max was barking cheerfully and his eyes were shining. Should she call that brave or reckless?

Hwiik-

Sigh!

Avoiding the bear's attack as it swung again, Max quickly kissed the bear's side.

Of course, the difference in size was so great that we couldn't even reach each other properly, so we had to quickly back away as soon as the bear turned.

It was so dangerous that my hands were covered in cold sweat.

"Max! stop!"

No, why is that guy so reckless! Did I raise you like that?

However, even though he was aware that it was against Seongjin's will, Max's gaze as he glared at the bear was extremely confident.

Wong wong wong!

-Do you like that? You ate just that every day before, right?

Whoa!

-So, I'll catch you today! I'm strong and big and I'll let you eat that! Hang in there!

"No, Max... .."

Seongjin, who read the guy's thoughts, was heartbroken.

"That guy, did you remember that I ate bear meat every day in Sigismund?"

[hmm. A bit special on the topic of mixed breed dogs... no! Is now the time to think like that? Hurry and stop me, Lee Seong-jin!]

Whoa whoa!

-I catch it! So, master! Hurry and make me strong and huge!

Seongjin suddenly came to his senses at Max's energetic howling. Oh my. The devil is right. This is not the time to think like this.

The reason why Max called Seongjin was clear. He must have asked

to turn himself into a big person like Louise.

'But that's impossible, Max.'

Slurp-

Seongjin pulled out a nutcracker and measured the distance to the bear.

In the end, if things continued like this, the result of that confrontation would be as obvious as fire. Once Max's momentum subsides a little, Seongjin and the resident knights will have to rush in and catch the bear.

'I know for sure... ... '

Nevertheless, the reason why I have no choice but to hesitate is-

[Lee Seong-jin! What are you procrastinating about? If that happens, the mixed breed dog will die!]

No, devil.

But look at that guy. He's so full of confidence. But how could I just arbitrarily come in between them and crush his motivation so cruelly?

okay. Seongjin was somehow caught in a strange feeling.

This was a matter of trust with family members. If I take one wrong step now, there may be an irreparable crack in my relationship with Max.

[Lee Seong-jin!]

Of course, Seongjin also felt like his blood was drying up.

Max's every movement and the bear's every breath are transmitted to Seongjin without filtering through his extremely sensitive senses.

Wow!

Max glanced at Seongjin and lunged at the bear again.

However, Seongjin was able to foresee clearly at the moment. The bear, waiting for the attack, would slash its vicious claws right at Max's head.

'Max!'

It won't work!

Seongjin stopped measuring and ran, holding the nutcracker. However, perhaps out of desperation, his Auror moved one step ahead of his body.

Hissing-

At that moment, Seongjin could clearly feel the connection he had vaguely sensed with Max. The auror that was moving along Seongjin's body leaps through space and moves towards the wolfdog at high speed, following his intention.

Phew!

It was at that time that Max's body grew significantly.

"... ..!"

Kwawaang!

calf? No, Max, who had grown much taller than the pony, kicked the ground. As his legs stretched, Max's body jumped into the air, easily avoiding the bear's counterattack.

"... "What is that?"

"dog... a dog?"

The resident knights who followed Seongjin and tried to attack the bear looked up into the sky in shock. But that wasn't the end.

Wow-

Max, who had dodged the bear's claws, quickly twisted his body and bit off the back of the bear's neck!

Long fangs flashed, and an eerie crack sound that echoed through the air was heard.

Quad deud deuk!

341. Deer Hunting (5)

Hehehe!

The bear's scream echoes throughout the mountain. The bear's eyes were stained with pain and embarrassment as it suddenly gave up its vital spot.

Max's fangs were not able to pierce the bear's carotid artery at once, but the fangs of the wolf dog with an aura were sharp enough.

Wow! Hehe!

The bear, which was writhing in pain, twirled its body around and tried to bite Max's spine.

Accordingly, the wolf dog's body also shakes helplessly. Although the size had grown significantly, the difference was so large that it could be considered a mother and cub compared to the size of a bear.

Wow!

Nevertheless, Max steadfastly held on to the bear's neck. The thick fur is completely pierced, and the blood flowing from the bear's wound soaks the fur.

"Max?! no way?"

Sir Claudia, who arrived a little late, opened her eyes wide and shouted. She had quite a sharp eye, and even though she had grown in size, she recognized Max's unique appearance and fur color.

"what? "Is that the dog?"

Sir Calmen, who came running after him, asked in confusion, but Sir

Kurt, who had actually seen the dog grow bigger, remained silent with a stern expression on his face.

In the end, Calmen had no choice but to turn his head to Seongjin.

"Lowering? "How on earth did this happen?"

But Seongjin didn't have the presence of mind to answer. Because he was concentrating with all his might not to lose sight of his precarious connection with Max.

This is because I instinctively realized that turning my attention away from the wolf-dog would not do either.

'I don't know exactly how I did it...'

For now, I had to hold on to this connection and continue sending aurors to Max. Otherwise, the wolf-dog will become small again, and the bear will catch it and crush it helplessly.

Ugh-

The higher Seongjin's concentration, the more active the auror became. Naturally, the aura transmitted to Max increases, and the muscles surrounding the skeleton wriggle with force.

Clumsy, clumsy.

At the same time, the bear's momentum becomes even stronger. This is because the wound caused by the fang got deeper and deeper.

The guy, panicked not only by the excruciating pain but also by the unexpected threat to his life, started going crazy.

Kuong!

Trees get caught in the front paws that are wildly swung to drive away the wolf dogs, and are cruelly broken off.

Flutter! Ujikkeun!

It spins round and round, hitting rocks and trees here and there.

thud! Quang! Whoops!

Max, who was clinging to the guy, was also receiving such shocks.

But even so, the wolf-dog did not move. The dog's stubbornness was stubborn, but according to Seongjin's will, the aurors covered the wolfdog's body in layers to protect it.

Kkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk!

The wolf-dog's teeth dug deeper, and hot blood began to gush from the wound.

"iced coffee..."

The resident knights dumbly watched the tense battle without even thinking about it.

A battle between two people who, at first glance, seem like they are no match for each other. Nevertheless, as time passes, the victory is clearly tilted to one side.

By then, Seongjin was barely able to observe Max's condition with some leisure time.

'It's similar to the one I first saw at Sigismund Range. But I think he's a little bigger than then.'

Through the connection with this guy, aurors are constantly flowing. Ultimately, this means that Max's transformation is caused by Aurors.

If so, there was a way to check.

'Hey, devil!'

As soon as Seongjin called, the demon king immediately knew what to do.

[okay!]

As the Demon King was stably positioned within the flame crystal, a red light began to blink inside Seongjin's pupil. Soon, the spiritual

eyes open and the world begins to become brightly colored with five colors.

and-

'Max's auror is different from before!'

Seongjin was soon able to find out Max's current condition.

When Sigismund's Spirit checked it with his spiritual eyes, it was emitting a purple aura like other Lycanslopes. It was clearly mixed with demonic energy, but I just thought it was because he inherited the blood of a demonic wolf.

However, the auror currently surrounding Max was a dull gray color, unlike before. The same goes for the faint solid line connecting the star.

What this meant was clear. The Auror that Max had shown before simply reflected the characteristics of Louise's Auror.

and-

'Now Max is part of my family. Could it be that this guy can draw on other people's auras?'

Seongjin's aura seen through his spiritual eyes is also dark gray. And Seongjin had never seen anyone else in Delcross with this kind of aura other than himself.

'Wolf of Ionia...'

Suddenly, I remembered what the Lycan Slope Lord had said before.

Berceus Dashiano, who was controlling Vajra at the time, coveted Max and said this.

-okay. Was it the blood of the Ionian wolf? Although it is a clumsy hybrid, it is probably a bloodline rarely seen in this dimension anymore. Well, it might be useful if you make it a servant.

Also, didn't Vajra's soul appeal to Seongjin like this?

-Ah, everything is resolved! Leave my soul stone to this dog! I'm sure you can take me to where the Lord is!

Wow! Whoa!

Meanwhile, the bear continued to struggle pointlessly with Max hanging on him.

'this... .. !'

Seongjin quickly activated his auror rotation and focused all his attention on the dull gray line connected to Max.

Exciting-

Then, Max's excited state was vividly conveyed through the connection.

-I'm still fine! I can do more!

Max, you immature bastard.

However, apart from the absurd feeling, I could also feel the vitality overflowing from Max's body without any filtering.

Kuang!

The soil was dug up where the bear struggled, creating a shallow hole. Due to that ferocious struggle, it seemed as if the wolf dog was crushed to the ground for a moment, but-

-are you okay! Because I am big and strong!

Seongjin's auror prepares for impact and protects the wolfdog tightly. Then, in sync with the bear's movement to throw the dog into the air again, the aurors gathered towards Max's fangs again.

-I'm with the owner!

It was a different sense of unity than when controlling the shaved ice.

During the battle in the Demon World, it felt as if Seongjin's soul had escaped from his body and taken on the body of Bingsu himself.

But the battle with Max was different.

The wolfdog completely understands Seongjin's thoughts, and Seongjin completely reads the wolfdog's movements. A desire to trust each other's judgment and fully realize the will that has been conveyed.

'... 'This is what it means to be a member of a family!'

Is there any other relationship based on trust stronger than this?

Suddenly, Seongjin felt a strange sense of elation.

How much time has passed like that?

Hehe!

Finally, the bear, whose strength was exhausted, lay down on the ground, panting.

Then Max stood firmly on the floor and struck the final blow with a strong grip.

Push!

Finally, the bear's carotid artery was completely torn and hot blood spurted out. The fallen bear occasionally flailing its limbs, but it soon turned into intermittent convulsions.

Eventually, when the bear completely stopped breathing, Sir Calmen, who had been holding his breath until then, let out a moan-like exclamation.

"I really caught that by myself... ... !"

Max howls powerfully into the air with his blood-soaked muzzle raised.

Whoa!

-saw? Have you seen how huge and strong I am?

"Yes, yes. "You fought well, Max."

After all, our Max is amazing. You may need to be harshly scolded for randomly running at a bear.

[I will scold the mixed breed dog no matter how well you do it.]

'What are you saying? I'm a guardian who does what he does!'

But now is probably the time to praise the puppy who is intoxicated with victory.

That was when I approached Max with a proud smile. Seongjin detected a strong Auror user running quickly from afar.

'Lord Martha?'

The senior knight heading towards Dekaron Knight followed Seongjin's presence as fast as a lightning bolt.

"Lowering!"

What he found as he ran in a panic was a huge wolf proudly pushing down the bear. And there was the young prince standing defenseless next to him without any fear.

Sparks flew from Masain's eyes.

"Get away from me, you monster!"

Sling!

When the sparkling Misra was pulled out, Seongjin was shocked and blocked his path.

"Whoa, Sir Martha!"

No, that's not it! So please stop!

* * *

Seongjin asked the Demon King in bewilderment.

'Demon King, is there an Arrange nearby?'

[no? All day today, there was no soul terminal in sight?]

Then how did your father find out about this?

[why? Do you think your father sent it?]

'Isn't it obvious?'

Seongjin narrowed his eyes and looked at the paladin, who was one head taller than the others.

Otherwise, Sir Francis would never have appeared at such good timing!

"What is all this, sir? "What if an accident like this happens before people are even ready?"

Francis, who leisurely entered the hunting camp, scolded Seongjin with a calm expression on his face, as if he was not overly surprised to see the huge wolf dog.

"Francis... "Did you say sir?"

The Earl of Bathurst hesitantly approached him.

Suddenly, a huge bear that I had never seen before appeared in the hunting ground. And then another huge wolf dog appeared and bit it to death.

In this unprecedented situation, when a person wearing the uniform of the Knights of Saint Aurelion appeared, Idaji could not relax.

"Please speak clearly. Um, what exactly is that wolf? Maybe it's a sea beast or a demon beast..."

William Bathurst's face was speechless.

Since something like that has appeared within one's territory, what can one do if inquisitors come rushing in and blame the lord's vices?

But Francis' expression remained calm.

"You are asking a strange question, Count. "Of course, that is a sacred

dog, 'Shinsu.'"

"what? Si, Shinsoo?"

What on earth is that?

Everyone in the social group is embarrassed and whispering. However, this tall paladin continued speaking as if it was obvious.

"This is the [wind] that was said to have assisted Saint Bastian by his side. "Don't you all read the scriptures?"

Everyone was puzzled by the paladin's shameless attitude. Where on earth does that content exist in the scriptures?

Next, Francis seemed smug and gave an explanation.

In other words, the 'wind' of the scriptures that carried Saint Bastian up to the high snowy mountain. It wasn't the literal 'wind', but a 'divine beast' named wind?

"Oh, of course you might not know. If you have only scratched the surface of the scriptures, you may be confused. When you're busy managing your territory and running a business, you may be a bit negligent in building up your culture. "I understand everything."

"... .."

The adjutant, who immediately condemned all the members of the social club as uncultured, continued his explanation.

"You may not be able to feel it, but as a paladin, I can definitely tell. "I can feel the divine grace of the Lord in that dog."

blessing?

Everyone listened to his words with anxious expressions.

"But even if you're not a paladin, there are things you can tell by looking at them. Now, look at that proud figure standing up to protect Prince Mores from danger!"

The crowd looked back at the wolf-dog with a dumbfounded look on their faces.

"Max, stop. "Now is not the time for you to be like this."

Clap clap clap.

The dog is eagerly licking his head despite the prince's attempts to dissuade him. As the size has grown, the amount of saliva has doubled!

'... A confident look? Where?'

However, Francis continued to shout in a very angry voice.

"Even after seeing that sacred figure standing up resolutely to protect the royal family, do you really feel nothing?"

Jwajung rubbed his eyes and looked back at the dog.

"Please stay away. Now, ask me this!"

Wow! Wow!

A wooden plate thrown by the prince is pierced by sharp fangs.

However, the dog does not actually bring the plate to the owner, but rather runs around with the wooden plate in its mouth! No matter how you look at it, it looks like a poop puppy that hasn't been properly trained.

'... Divine posture? 'You must be joking, right?'

There was strong suspicion in the eyes of the social group members, but Francis waved his hands and finished his explanation in an insincere voice.

"For more information, please check [Saint Bastian and the Finger Devil]. Since ancient times, when new scriptures and fairy tales are published, isn't it the attitude of educated imperial subjects to quickly purchase them and familiarize them with them?"

Wow, Seongjin was very impressed.

In addition to propaganda and fabrication, they are also promoting it.
Francis was truly a versatile paladin.

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342. Red Curse (1)

In shock and fear, the first day of the hunting party came to an end.

"... .."

It's a time to show off each other's game, cook and eat fresh meat, and build friendships.

However, people hesitated and did not rush into the camp. It was because of the huge wolf dog sitting proudly in the middle of the camp.

Clap clap clap.

The monster dog, which was licking Prince Mores's cheek with its large tongue, looked as if it would bite off the prince's entire head if it were to be attacked.

Masain, who could not see anything, cautiously came to the side and opened his mouth.

"Lowering."

He didn't seem to let his guard down, as if he was still unfamiliar with Max's appearance.

"That dog... "Is it true that Shinsu can no longer return to his original form?"

"hmm?"

Seongjin, who had been sitting blankly in half-meditation until then, looked up at Max and scratched his cheek.

"No, that's not it... .."

The reason why Max is currently maintaining this size is because Seongjin is continuously flowing aura. After recognizing the connection between the clans more clearly, it became possible to freely send auras to the dog.

The problem is that Seongjin realized an unexpected benefit from this connection.

'If Max is big, it's great for meditation.'

Aura practice is the work of naturally pulling the aura that is constantly circulating in the body into the dantian and settling it into orbit.

The larger and healthier the body, and the higher the Auror affinity, the faster the rate at which layers are built.

However, as he suddenly shared the Auror circulation with Max, Seongjin's body seemed to have doubled in size. As the space for circulating auras increases significantly, the amount of auras accumulated in the danjeon is bound to increase.

"People would have found out anyway, so I didn't think there was any need to rush back. So, I was meditating with my dog in my spare time... .."

Masain's face turned strange after hearing Seongjin's explanation.

Are you meditating even in this situation?

"... But sir, people are scared."

"what?"

Seongjin was taken aback by the unexpected words and looked back at the camp entrance. No, you're saying that you feel scared even after seeing such a cute and gentle puppy?

"You can practice as much as you want even after returning to the Jinju Palace. So, why don't you get your dog back to normal for now

and get some rest?"

"Um, well, okay."

At Masain's recommendation, Seongjin stopped the flow of Aurors with a shocked expression.

OK-

Slurp.

Max's body suddenly becomes thin, like the air leaving a balloon. Just like what I saw one day when the connection with Louise was lost.

Of course, Max, who had returned to normal, was very disappointed.

Kiing-

-why? Why stop now? Don't you like me, strong and huge? huh?

"Max, you are strong enough even if you become small."

Wong!

-okay. If you do, fine.

Max, who was wagging his tail, licked Seongjin's hand.

Tsk tsk tsk!

"This cute guy!"

However, even though Max was brought back, the situation did not seem to improve much. This is because the members who witnessed the sight of the wolf dog shrinking before their eyes were frightened and took a step back.

"Huh!"

"The wolf has gotten really small!"

"Shh, it's not a wolf, it's a divine beast. If the Paladin hears, he might charge us with blasphemy!"

"Ah, I'm still so scared! Doesn't that mean it can grow again at any time?"

Oh my.

It seems like you're more scared somehow?

* * *

The ones who achieved the best results in today's hunt were by far the Jinju Palace resident knights. Drivers obsessed with high-end distilled spirits and vacations swept up every deer they could see. Occasionally, there were people who caught wild boars or roe deer.

On the other hand, the results brought by social group members were very poor. Except for the one deer that the Countess of Bathurst caught, all the achievements were a few small game such as rabbits or pheasants.

Seongjin clicked his tongue slightly.

"Oh my. I understand that it's ultimately a place to build friendships, but isn't it still a hunting party in name? Everyone needs to improve their hunting skills, right?"

"... .."

"Well, it's all about having fun, so I'll be considerate this time. "The game caught by the knights will be generously shared with the members, so don't worry too much, Count."

"... Truly, thank you. Lowering... .."

Count Bathurst responded to Seongjin's generous words with a trembling voice.

Anyone can see that this was because the prince held a hunting competition on his own, but it was something that could not be argued directly. The count could not help but lament. For this hunting party, we deliberately spread food in the forest to increase the number of deer, but didn't the wrong people sweep away all the game?

"If the prince will attend next year... ... !"

Needless to say, his hunting party will never be active again. Just imagining it made the Count feel like his stomach was burning.

Aside from the deep gloom on the host's face, Seongjin's group was in a completely festive mood.

"Congratulations, Lord Haven!"

"I really can't beat you! "This is the first time I've seen you move your body as enthusiastically as you did today!"

"Hmm haha! "This is no big deal!"

While the resident knights praised him, Lord Haven danced happily while holding a bottle of high-quality distilled liquor in his arms.

Seongjin looked at that figure in awe.

"I never thought Lord Haven would win..."

I thought he was a salary thief with no motivation to do anything, but when I heard about it, my eyes widened and he went around slaughtering deer? Anyway, you should know that he likes drinking.

"Anyway, what should we do with all these deer, sir?"

Sir Claudia asked, looking at the mountain of prey with puzzled eyes.

"Do as you did earlier. Wouldn't it be okay to distribute some to the members and leave the rest to the residents of Bathurst Territory?"

"If you are not a professional hunter, the leather may be damaged."

"What do you think? It's not like I'm selling leather. "It's not like it needs professional care anyway, right?"

It was as he said.

The resident knights who didn't know much about hunting cut off the deer's neck and body, so even if they tried to remove the skin, there was nothing useful about it.

"Give me all the meat and skin, and just ask me to keep some of the delicious parts."

Seongjin gave that instruction and briefly glanced at the skinny villagers gathered in the corner of the camp.

Although he is sincere in managing his hunting grounds to the point of banning hunting for all his subjects, the Earl of Bathurst is unlikely to be so tactless that he even takes back the gifts given by the prince.

"Oh, I see!"

But perhaps there was some misunderstanding, as Sir Claudia was looking at Seongjin with a very moved face.

"No way, your Majesty ordered the knights to intercept the game in advance..." ... !"

"huh?"

"I always feel this, but you are truly thoughtful. "It is a great honor to have such a person by my side."

"no..."

Seongjin was speechless and just blinked.

I've been thinking about this before, but what is this guy always misunderstanding? No matter what Seongjin does, she puts a good meaning into it and is moved by it in her own way.

"Sir, for the rest of my life..."

But that was when Sir Claudia added something. Lord Haven suddenly became very excited, pushed his head behind her and shouted.

"Hey! "I have never been so happy that I decided to dedicate the rest of my life to you!"

"what?"

"I will also dedicate the honor of winning today to you! Long live Prince Mores! Long live Rohan's premium spirits!"

Seongjin's face hardened.

"Is this the first time you've heard this? "I never agreed to it, so why are you freely offering it to me?"

Then Lord Haven's eyebrows drooped.

"yes? Wait. Isn't that too much, sir? I definitely said a long time ago that I would bury my bones at Jinju Palace from now on... ..!"

No, I don't know. There's no need.

You just live your life. Don't bother others for no reason.

Seongjin waved his hand and pushed back Sir Haven, who was in tears. Then the other resident knights giggled and patted Sir Haven on the shoulder.

"Go to sleep, cheer up. There must be one or two things you have dedicated your life to. "Don't you know that well?"

"No, I'm being serious this time too! Prince Mores is the savior of my life... ..!"

"Stop talking nonsense. Now, as a way of consoling everyone, why don't we open that bottle of liquor now? huh?"

"Whoa! What are you looking at now? "I will save this as an heirloom for the rest of my life and pass it down from generation to generation!"

Seongjin shook his head. Anyway, they seem like a bunch of drinkers that I can't stop.

"Sir, we brought the bear to camp."

Just then, Sir Kurt approached and reported to Seongjin. The bear Max caught was so large that it took several Auror users to move it?

"Good job. But didn't you hunt separately?"

This was a question asked because, surprisingly, the records of Sir Kurt, the most skilled of the resident knights, were very poor.

"Haha, Lord Masaine has firmly told me to stay by your side. So he didn't have time to show off his skills."

Sir Kurt smiles and answers awkwardly.

But Seongjin already knew that he had no interest in hunting from the beginning. Even while he was meditating, he was constantly detecting the presence of a senior knight attached to the camp.

"... .."

Sir Kurt, along with Sir Maria, is in charge of two axes of managing the resident knights. Unlike Sir Maria, who was faithful to her principles and had a strong hold on her junior knights, Sir Kurt tended to neglect his juniors except in very rare circumstances.

That's why they'll let the resident knights raid the count's hunting grounds as they please. It would have been impossible if Sir Maria had been the commander.

However, seeing as he released the knights and protected the camp until the end, it probably means that he has not forgotten his duty as a resident knight.

'Or maybe I was guessing in advance what to do with the game I caught... ..'

It was hard to know what he was thinking, but it was clear that he was a friend who thought a lot about many things.

"okay. "Thank you for your hard work tomorrow as well."

Anyway, I thought that he would continue to have a similar attitude, so I responded like that, and Sir Kurt looked at Seongjin with a strange expression.

"Sometimes I thought Sir Claudia was unusual... .."

"huh?"

"no. "It's nothing, sir."

* * *

Meanwhile, the mood among hunting club members was somber.

"At this rate, wouldn't it be safe to say that there are almost no deer left in the hunting grounds?"

"Why don't you move your hunting ground a little west, Count?"

Even for the Earl of Bathurst, it was not an impossible proposition.

The quality may be different from the hunting ground that was managed by releasing food for the hunting season, but wouldn't it be at least better than this place that was completely wiped out by the imperial knights?

I've heard rumors that Prince Mores is a crazy person, but I never thought he would do something this crazy.'

As he was looking at the prince's tent with resentful eyes, the count caught sight of a large imperial carriage.

At that moment, a bright and wonderful idea appeared in the Earl of Bathurst's mind.

He ran to the prince's tent and informed him that the hunting ground had been moved.

"West Mountain?"

"Yes, that's right, sir."

The Count answered politely and looked at Prince Mores with a kind smile.

"Your Majesty Haonde. "What are you going to do with me?"

"huh?"

"The roads in the western mountains are rough, so a carriage probably won't be able to climb them."

First of all, the plan was to separate Prince Mores and the resident knights, the source of all evil, from the gathering.

But the prince, who was thought to be embarrassed, actually smiled brightly. If you didn't know his true identity, he had a wonderful smile that you would have admired greatly.

"Ah, you take care of all that. But don't worry, Count."

"yes?"

"I just need to ride my dog. No problem."

William Bathurst blinked, wondering what he had just heard.

... yes?

343. Red Curse (2)

The Earl of Bathurst returned with a completely dumbfounded expression.

'Was riding a dog that shocking?'

Seongjin couldn't understand him at all.

I heard that famous saints also rode dogs? I heard that fairy tales from scriptures were even created? But what's the problem?

[Are you serious? You didn't intentionally harass that guy?]

Hmm, you've become sharper, demon lord.

In fact, I must have done enough hunting, and I must have exercised Max as well. There is no reason why I can't return to the ecliptic first.

But you can clearly see the plan to separate our group, right? So, I feel like I want to make fun of him for no reason.

[Anyway, he has a bad personality.]

'shut up!'

Anyway, I felt strangely empty from earlier.

Seongjin looked around for a moment, then realized the reason and tilted his head.

'But where on earth has Lord Masaine gone? 'You can't see anything since evening?'

I tried to keep my spirits high, but as expected, I couldn't sense any

sign of him near the camp.

'You're not the type of person to go somewhere without telling me, are you?'

I was puzzled and went outside the tent to find the resident knights sitting together in front of a large bonfire and drinking alcohol.

It really gives off the vibe of being outdoors.

"Lowering!"

"Sir, come here quickly!"

When Sir Claudia spots Seongjin and shouts, the resident knights wave their hands enthusiastically.

They seemed to sincerely welcome Seongjin. Compared to the scary atmosphere when I first opened my eyes in this body, it was truly a huge improvement.

'The power of the Rohan distilled spirit is amazing. Should Bertrand & Lee's next business item be distilled alcohol?'

I sat down with that foolish thought in mind, and Edith handed me a cup of black-brewed Melbourne tea. It seems that he has returned to his main job after a long time, replacing Leader Bruno, who is guarding the Pearl Palace.

"Lowering. Don't you sit down with group members? "If you come all the way here and hang out with the people at Jinju Palace, there's no point in attending a social gathering."

At her question, Seongjin glanced towards the other side of the camp.

I wonder if Seongjin's intention to stay together until the end was properly communicated, as the members looked even more gloomy than before.

"Well, just play around on your own. "I don't really want to be friends with those idiots."

"Then why are you here?"

"To eat deer meat. "I also take the dogs for a walk."

"yes? "Puppies?"

Edith asked a question, but Seongjin didn't respond and took a sip of warm tea.

... Hmm, okay. There is a constant scent of bile, like the taste of home.

"omg!"

"You really ate that!"

The resident knights were shocked. Judging by the reactions, it looks like Edith's gallbladder disease has already taken care of it once.

"Was it true that it wasn't poison?!"

"What did I say? "It doesn't mean I made something inedible."

"But Edith, why aren't you eating?"

"I don't eat anything that doesn't taste good!"

"Do you have a conscience?"

Sir Calmen, in particular, gritted his teeth with a pale face. It seems like a trauma from not long ago is vividly recalled.

Seongjin shrugged his shoulders at him.

Why are you scared? That's because I didn't really do anything to you back then.

Horok.

When I take another sip of tea, the eyes of the resident drivers, who had been looking at me like I was crazy, immediately turn into respect and admiration.

"Everyone drink in moderation. "You know that people on duty are not allowed to drink, right?"

"haha. "You have Lord Masain in charge of security, so how could you do such a big thing?"

"But what about dinner? "Are you guys drinking on an empty stomach?"

"Over there, the cook is grilling freshly prepared venison, sir."

As he said, along with the sizzling sound, the rich scent of cooking meat reached the tip of my nose. The smell isn't as bad as I thought.

'Now that I think about it, I couldn't eat the wild boar meat that Sir Claudia killed earlier.'

Seongjin, who was feeling somewhat drowsy along with mild regret, took another sip of the familiar-tasting tea.

"Ugh!"

I felt like I could hear Lord Calmen's strange screams next to me, but I guess it was just my mood.

Tsk tsk tsk.

In a vacant lot a little away from the bonfire, Max, the chief contributor to today's hunt, was tearing open a piece of raw meat. The first thing Edith gave me was deer meat.

Hustle and bustle!

Also, right in front of us, the resident knights, who were heavily drinking, were laughing their hearts out even at the nonsense jokes.

You say you like to have fun like that, but how did you manage to work at Jinju Palace because you were so frustrated?

'But everyone likes it. It's worth taking the time to come here... .. '

Crack, crack.

Despite all the commotion, a bonfire is burning quietly in the middle of the group. Occasionally, the firewood splits apart, and light sparks scatter into the sky.

'It's peaceful... ..'

Seongjin looked at the flame blankly and thought about this.

How much time has passed like that?

"Do you meditate with your eyes open now, Sir?"

Seongjin flinched and blinked when he suddenly heard Masain's voice from next to him.

"hmm? "Lord Masaine, when did you arrive?"

But what? Was I meditating?

But there was nothing to ask him. Because I felt the aura filling up in the Danjeon unlike before.

At some point, the sluggish build-up of Auras finally came to an end, and Seongjin's Auras were now spinning actively, completing the perfect 8th floor.

'... ok?'

While he was very embarrassed, Masain sat down next to Seongjin and shook his head.

"It's surprising that I am surprised every time. "While I was away for a moment, you couldn't stand it anymore and your level rose noticeably."

"... .."

Seongjin scratched his cheek shyly.

hmm. Sir Masain. This is a completely unexpected situation even for me.

"And where is Sir Francis? "He doesn't eat deer meat?"

"He had urgent business to attend to, so he went back to the imperial capital right away, Your Majesty."

"okay?"

It's urgent business.

Come to think of it, Sir Martha, I thought you were having a serious conversation with Francis earlier.

I don't know if it was resolved in any way, but I still didn't look good at all.

'This man's expression shows it all.'

But there was no time to ask anything. Before I knew it, fully cooked food had been brought to Seongjin.

The first was grilled venison sprinkled with salt and pepper. Everyone seemed to be waiting for him to lift it first, so Seongjin grabbed the utensil without delay and lifted up a piece of meat.

"hmm..."

Seongjin, who was chewing meat and sharing his taste with the Demon King, tilted his head.

Although it is quite soft, there is a slight odor remaining.

"It's not as bad as you think. But it's hard to say it's particularly delicious, right?"

"Well, I told you, right? In the first place, you shouldn't compare it to the palace's highest-quality ingredients, my Majesty."

Edith scolded him and filled the empty teacup.

"I know. "If this happens, the plan goes a bit out of whack."

Seongjin looked at the carriage with regret. To be exact, the refrigerator in the carriage luggage compartment.

It was basically Max's fault that I had to bring the wagon all the way

here, but I wanted to bring fresh, delicious meat if possible, so I brought the refrigerator with me.

"That's probably because the blood wasn't drained properly."

Sir Kurt answered, stroking his rough beard marks.

"blood?"

"yes. Lowering. Deer meat that has been cleaned and bled right away is more edible than this."

"okay?"

It was probably Seongjin's defeat. He was just busy catching his deer, so he just piled it up on one side of the camp.

'If I had known in advance, I would have left it to the people of the territory to handle it from the beginning.'

But there was still meat left. The last giant bear Max caught. Since it was prepared right away, wouldn't it taste good?

[Bear meat~ Bear meat~ Bear meat with a strong aroma and fiery taste~]

just as expected. The devil smells the smell of his favorite food and sings excitedly.

"ok? Isn't this grilled too well? "It looks like the piece of meat has somehow shrunk in half."

"Now that I think about it, the bear over there also looks a little smaller than before it was dismantled... .."

"no way! Does it make sense that a healthy piece of meat becomes half? "You're a little drunk."

Seongjin lifted the bear meat to his mouth while listening to the resident knights talking happily next to him. It is grilled faster than the previous deer meat, and the rich, flavorful meat juices flow out as soon as you chew it.

[delicious!]

The Demon King exclaimed.

This guy seems to like all bear meat.

'Still, it's not as bad as I thought.'

But it was when Seongjin swallowed the meat and put it down his throat.

Bleep-

Suddenly, I thought I heard a high-pitched ringing in my ears, but in an instant, my vision became dark and blurred.

'... ... ?!'

And when my vision became clear again, the scene in front of me had changed from a campfire to a dense grass forest.

Hiss-hiss-

A rough and noisy sound of breathing came from my ear.

'... What is this?'

At first glance, I looked down and saw that the ground was very close, as if the visibility was lower than I thought.

And you can also see thick feet with jagged claws, moving diligently back and forth and kicking the ground.

... Eh? This... it's me?

'But why am I crawling around on the floor?'

No, it would be a bit unfair to say it was long. This is because the speed at which the scenery passed by was quite fast.

Crunch, sniff.

Hiss-hiss-

In the meantime, the sound of heavy breathing did not leave my ears. I thought it was a very loud and strange breathing sound, but when I looked closely, I realized that it seemed to be coming from my own throat.

Kkkkkkkk! Kkkkkkkk!

The faint sound of dogs barking can be heard from afar.

Things that visit this forest every year showed up this time too, without fail. Seongjin was dumbfounded when she realized that she was naturally thinking that way.

- Annoying things!

Rough thoughts that have not been refined into words come to mind.

-Just avoid it! But I'm angry!

It was difficult to tell whether these were really his own thoughts or whether they were someone else's thoughts flowing in. It is not possible to resist the reckless movement of running.

Seongjin had no choice but to let his body move as it pleased and quietly observed the surrounding situation.

How long did it run like that?

Suddenly, Seongjin stopped somewhere in the forest. Perhaps it was because a red stone was shining brightly right in front of my eyes.

If you look closely, strange patterns will sometimes appear and disappear around the stone. Just looking at it, it is an unusual sight.

'What is this?'

But there was no time to wonder for long.

Because, against his will, Seongjin's body suddenly swallowed the stone past his throat.

Sniff, gulp!

'... ... !?'

Tsk tsk tsk tsk.

'Now, wait a minute! If you eat something suspicious like that... ... !'

Embarrassed, Seongjin quickly tried to spit out the stone, but just like before, nothing worked as he wanted.

Gulp!

The sensation of a small lump going down the esophagus is vivid -
Clumping.

At the same time, rapid changes began to occur in the body.

I felt as if my muscles were growing thicker, my muscles were twisting around, and my body was expanding outward.

Big wow!

Seongjin raised his body even larger and roared fiercely into the air.

There was no pain. At the same time as I was filled with groundless confidence, an uncontrollable ferocious force spread out in all directions.

A strong thought echoes in my head, and I don't know whose origin it is.

-okay. Why do you have to run away from them! Go back to your nest right now and get rid of all those annoying things... ... !

"... under!"

[...] jin!]

"Lowering! "Why are you doing this, sir?"

[Lee Seong-jin! Hurry and open your eyes! Seongjin Lee!]

The devil bastard screams so loudly that it makes my head buzz.

As strong hands continued to grab both of his shoulders and shake him vigorously, Seongjin's mind slowly regained its sense of reality.

"... Sir Masaine?"

"Yes, sir! "Are you conscious now?"

[Lee Seong-jin! Iseongjiyiin!]

'uh... ... '

Blink.

Blinking his eyes, Seongjin looked at the face of Sir Masaine who was approaching close in front of him, then slowly turned his head and looked down at the fire.

'bear... meat... ... '

Meat thrown haphazardly on the floor along with dishes comes into view.

In that moment, Seongjin instinctively realized what had just happened to him.

- Bute Mores.

-yes?

-Have you ever eaten something you hunted yourself?

At that time, my father seemed to want to explain something more. About the act of hunting and eating it yourself.

'iced coffee. I see 'I hunted that bear.'

Seongjin's mind slowly began to spin. I promised my father that I would never hunt myself and save myself.

However, that bear was captured by Seongjin's family with Seongjin's power. In the end, it wasn't much different from Seongjin's own hunting.

'This is because the karma left behind by dead things becomes the karma of the person who took that death.'

Someone's voice rang softly in my head.

'okay. This is the karma of a dead bear, the memory of a bear.'

Seongjin slowly got up, pushing Masain, who was supporting him.

Just because I suddenly glimpsed the memory of a dead bear, I didn't feel particularly tired or in pain. I just felt dizzy, like I was still in a dream.

"I ate it."

When Seongjin opened his mouth, Masain asked back in confusion.

"yes? Lowering. What is that... .."

"Lord Masaine. In that forest, I ate a rock. "It's a strange stone that glows red in the dark."

"... ..!"

When the prince, who lost consciousness for a moment, blurted out something strange, Edith and the resident knights exchanged looks with worried expressions.

But Seongjin somehow knew. His loyal bodyguard would surely have understood what he said.

And, that premonition was correct.

This is because Masain's face, looking at Seongjin, turned pale like never before.

344. Red Curse (3)

That night, Masain belatedly told me about the red stone he found in the forest.

"West Mountain?"

"Yes, sir. "I discovered it by accident, while I was guarding it."

"okay."

Seongjin was deep in thought.

Now that I think about it, even though it was only a moment, didn't he feel something ominous in the western mountain?

So, right before Max called me.

"... "I'm sorry for the late report, sir."

As Seongjin kept his mouth shut, Masain bowed his head again as if he was sorry.

"no it's okay."

What do you think of all the stones you accidentally found on the mountain?

Since nothing was certain, I guess I thought it was something I didn't need to know.

'Or maybe they just wanted me to not be involved as much as possible.'

Although he guessed his intentions to some extent, Seongjin

pretended not to know and asked another question.

"So, what did Francis say about the stone?"

"We don't know yet."

Masain continued speaking with his head down.

"But Francis said he didn't feel any magic in the stone. He said there didn't seem to be any signs of a curse. To investigate, he first returned to the Imperial Capital with the stone."

I guess that was the reason Francis went back in a hurry.

"It is not a magic trick, nor is it a curse. "So you're saying it's not that dangerous to people?"

"Seeing as there is no major problem even if you touch it with bare hands, it seems like that at first glance... .."

Nevertheless, Masain trailed off as if he was somewhat anxious.

"After a brief search with Francis, we were able to find several more similar stones in the western mountains."

"I don't know what it is, but does this mean that someone must have prepared it with a clear purpose?"

"Yes, sir. So, I think it is difficult to be easily optimistic that there will be no harm."

but. The same goes for the giant bear Max caught. Although it was only a glimpse of Seongjin's memory, the bear clearly ate a red stone.

But as soon as we dismantled it and removed its internal organs, it reverted back to the size of a normal bear. The amount of meat was reduced by a whopping 1/3. Too bad.

"But you. What you said about lifting that stone earlier... .."

"Ah, that."

I had just come out of the sense of unity with the bear, so I said that

without realizing it.

"I didn't eat it. "I was so distracted earlier that I made a mistake."

"... .."

"Really. "Sorry to confuse you, Lord Martha."

So, don't look so nervous. I feel guilty for no reason.

Of course, although Seongjin repeatedly emphasized that it was okay, Masain's anxiety did not seem to subside easily.

"It's somehow ominous. As soon as you left the imperial capital, things like this happened again... .."

"hmm."

It seems that the 'jinx of social gatherings' still remains.

'I've made the 8th floor as an Auror. From now on, I'll have to stay in the Pearl Palace and train hard. Now I guess I'll never attend a social event again!'

While I was rumbling inside, Masain opened his mouth again with a somewhat earnest expression.

"Lowering. "I may be presumptuous, but I have a favor to ask you."

"huh?"

"Why don't you go back to the imperial palace right now?"

"... .."

Seongjin was speechless. Masain's face as he made that request looked desperate, as if he was barely holding on to a weak lifeline at the edge of a cliff.

"I have already told you about the red stone, so Francis and the Knights of St. Aurelion will take care of the rest."

"Sir Martha."

"I will tell the Earl of Bathurst and order him to stop the hunting party immediately. So, if you please take refuge in a safe place... .."

"... .."

"If not the imperial palace, can't you at least return to the imperial capital, a place where Your Majesty's grace fully resides?"

This is why this loyal knight sometimes expresses concern for him to the point where it seems excessive. Seongjin also had some idea about that.

But unfortunately, Seongjin couldn't answer that desperate voice right away.

Didn't your father do the same? There must be a special reason why I chose the hunting party.

"That cannot be done, Sir Martha."

"Lowering!"

"I understand you're saying this because you're worried about me. But nothing has happened yet, right? But if you have to avoid every single one at the slightest sign like this, how can you be so anxious that you can go outside Jinju Palace for the rest of your life? "What will the members of the group think of me?"

"One down... ..!"

"Besides, this work can't just be left to the Knights of Saint Aurelion. "Even though it is wrong, it has nothing to do with demon species. If that is not the responsibility of our 'monster task force,' then what is it?"

Masain purses his lips with a stern expression. But Seongjin had no intention of backing down.

"So this is something I, as an advisor to the Monster Task Force, must investigate, Sir Martha. As the prince of the Holy Empire, I must fulfill the 'noble man's duty' given to me."

"... .."

"are you okay. "I promise you, nothing dangerous will probably happen to me."

In the end, Masain realized that he could not persuade Seongjin and stood up with a sad face.

"If you do it, everything will be as you wish. "I will just focus on supporting the situation without any setbacks."

"uh... .."

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

"Hey, Sir Martha?"

"Then rest, my lord."

Masain bowed politely and left the tent. I thought I was really angry about the cold wind blowing.

Still, the back of the person looked somewhat dejected, so it was impossible for a person to be that miserable. Looking at the atmosphere, it looks like they will foolishly devote themselves to training until late at night from now on.

'I always feel like I'm doing something wrong to that guy... ..'

Max must have sensed Seongjin's bitter mood and put his head under his hand, sniffing.

Kiing-

-are you okay? Do you want me to play?

"Hmm, do you want to, Max?"

Wong wong!

-of course! There are many strange smelling things in the forest! Let's search together!

"You got me on the same page, Max! "We were already planning to play a fun game together tomorrow."

[Fun game? what is that?]

The Demon King asked curiously, but Seongjin only raised one corner of his mouth in confusion.

And when the next morning dawned, he gathered the resident knights in front of the tent and declared:

"There will be no hunting competition today. "Shouldn't we give the members of the hunting club a chance to achieve some results?"

"yes? then... .."

"Instead, we're going to go on a treasure hunt today."

Treasure hunt? What is that?

The resident knights exchange glances and whisper.

"Now, everyone, let's take a look at this."

In front of them, Seongjin proudly lifted a stone. It was another red rock that I found by secretly digging into the bear's stomach last night.

"This is something that Adjutant Sir Francis discovered near here yesterday. In his words, he said that he had discovered that a group of rebellious people who had betrayed the Lord were actively moving around here. "This is one of those pieces of evidence."

Of course, Francis never said anything like that.

Since he is good at instigation and fabrication, he will definitely understand Seongjin. Since he is a paladin, it is easy to use him selflessly.

"Sir Francis said he suspected this was some kind of magical item."

Last night, Seongjin closely examined this stone with his spiritual

eyes.

There wasn't any particular information, so I thought it was all nonsense, but the devil bastard carefully confirmed it. It is said that the laws of the normal world can be felt, however faintly, in this stone.

The reason information did not appear before my eyes was because the rules contained in this stone were extremely poor.

'Then the more stones there are... ... '

[that's right. If enough laws come together, no one can guarantee what will happen.]

Then the solution was simple.

Collect everything in advance.

I already felt like they had brought in too many resident knights, but they all had fun going on a treasure hunt.

"It is said that it is not a very dangerous item to humans. Still, we can't just ignore the plots hatched by these seditious groups! So, as the sword of the god who protects the Holy Empire, you must take the lead and retrieve all these items!"

When the words 'disturbing group' came out, the expressions of the resident knights became serious. Although they said they came out to have fun, their duty to protect the royal family and the empire did not change.

Of course, there were some knights like Lord Haven who were as motivated as ever. Seongjin glanced at him and added an explanation.

"Of course there is compensation. "Whoever finds the most of these will receive the finest Rohan spirits, wine from Brittany, and a week's vacation!"

"... ... !"

The eyes of the resident knights suddenly light up. Only Masain realized how things were going and looked at Seongjin in horror.

Seongjin grinned an evil smile.

okay. Stones, patterns, plots, what does it all have to do with it? If you are concerned about your political enemy's intentions, wouldn't it be okay to hunt them down and destroy them before they can function properly?

* * *

"Lowering! "I found another one here!"

Sir Haven's performance this time was truly outstanding among the resident knights. He quickly found the red stone and ran up the mountainside again, shouting a strange slogan.

"Hey! Distilled liquor from Rohan! Haha! Wine from Brittany!"

Yesterday, Sir Haven was tempted by his seniors and ended up cracking open the bottle of distilled liquor. To make up for that loss, are you still searching all over the mountains with your eyes lit up?

"I'm here too, sir."

Sir Claudia, Sir Calmen, and even Sir Kurt, who were passive about hunting. As a result of everyone moving in unison, the number of red stones increased rapidly.

"There are more hidden stones than I thought?"

Especially near the halfway point of the western mountain, aren't they spread out almost at your feet?

Seongjin inwardly clicked his tongue. I don't know who did this, but it must have been a huge undertaking if everyone had done it alone.

"But where should I put all these, sir?"

"huh?"

In response to Sir Claudia's question, Seongjin blinked for a moment.

Then he pointed to a large rock nearby. The top is worn flat and looks exactly like a bench or shelf.

"That's good. Should we put it all together there first?"

"Yes, I understand, sir!"

Urururu-

Just like that, red stones began to pile up on top of the rock.

* * *

"It's a shame, it's a shame."

"What do you mean?"

At Leonard's sudden lament, Romain stopped working with his hands and turned his head.

"Baron Cadogan's salon. I heard the princess happened to be at that meeting? "If only Alton had gone as planned, he would have been able to brainwash the princess, right?"

"... .."

"It would have been better if you had just lured me into a civil marriage."

Romain felt a headache and put down the necklace he was working on.

"Do you really want to go to war with the empire?"

"hmm?"

"Don't forget, Leo. "The guardian of Delcross can blow away Rohan at any time with a single wave of his hand."

"You really want to go that far... .."

"The only reason he doesn't is because there is no sufficient cause and effect. If we had succeeded in brainwashing the princess, the Holy Emperor would also have been willing to destroy her Rohan."

Sheesh. When Leonard clicked his tongue, Romain presented him with the necklace he had finished working on.

It was an item that Leonard prepared for Princess Amelia some time ago, but it was gathering dust day by day as there was no way to meet her.

"The princess said she was attending the Lady of Bathurst's tea party."

"So you're telling me to take this to a cute tea party for noble ladies?"

"You can just go as the Earl of Bathurst's guest. Meet her princess under the pretense of coincidence, and hand her her gift in public. He probably wouldn't refuse a gift from another country's royal family in front of others."

Leonard had a clear look of dissatisfaction, but he accepted the necklace obediently without any complaints.

"When you meet the princess, give her a necklace and say this. 'This jewel is a magical item from ancient times. If an emergency occurs, the princess will be moved to a safe place.'"

"But this is just Yeonsujeong? "There is no such function, Romain."

"I know. "It simply means adding appropriate seasoning before cooking."

All of this is a work in progress to make the princess use the [portal] voluntarily.

"You should tell me that in advance, so when the selection window suddenly pops up, you'll click [Accept] without any doubts, right?"

"hmm."

Leonard nodded and put away the necklace.

"Anyway, what have you prepared? Will it work properly and on time?"

In his opinion, Romain's preparation was extremely lax. No matter how busy he was with his preparations, didn't he just lay out all those codes clumsily on the ground?

However, Romain, who heard Leonard's concerns, laughed lightly.

"Haha, it's okay. Leo. I'm sure there isn't even that level of safety device. "The codes I created are extremely incomplete, so they cannot be easily activated unless special measures are taken on our part."

"okay? "What are the chances that someone will find it?"

"The Earl of Bathurst's hunting grounds are far away. "The count strictly prohibits hunting by the people of his territory, so it is safe to say that he rarely climbs this mountain on purpose."

"But what if a wild animal touches it or the wind rolls it somewhere? "Aren't all the preparations going to be in vain?"

"Even if a few codes really disappear, it's not a problem. "Because we prepared a sufficient number."

In Romain's opinion, there was only one way for this to fail. Gathering all the laid out codes in one place, especially in a place where there were strong traces of [disaster], and completely disrupting the function of the code.

but-

"No matter how much you think about it, that is absolutely impossible. The probability of that many codes gathering in a specific place by chance is almost zero... .."

That was when I said that.

Pow!

Suddenly, there was a huge explosion and the small cabin shook violently. Romain and Leonard looked at each other at the same time

as if they had made a promise.

"... .. !?"

"... what?"

345

345. Red Curse (4)

The strange thing happened in the blink of an eye.

The rock piled with red stones seemed to be trembling slightly, so I was about to approach and take a closer look.

puck!

Without warning, a rock at the top exploded.

"... .. !?"

"Lowering!"

Masain is frightened and opens his sword to block Seongjin's path.

But that was just the beginning.

Plop! puck!

Soon, a mountain of rocks piled up and exploded one after another.

The red ground carrying the rock also begins to shake violently. It felt as if a large-scale earthquake had occurred nearby.

[What is this? what's this?]

The Demon King muttered in confusion in his head.

[That's strange, Seongjin Lee! The rules of the normal world are getting stronger! Those insignificant rules are coming together, resonating, and turning into something incredible!]

Seongjin was also overcome by strong anxiety. It felt like a

premonition that had been vague until now suddenly took on a clear form and was suddenly materialized!

Pow!

At that time, a huge explosion occurred in the distance.

If this place wasn't Delcross, it's hard to believe that hundreds of kilograms of dynamite would have exploded at once.

Shaking.

The ground beneath my feet shakes violently from the shock.

"omg? Lowering!?"

"Is there a problem?"

The resident knights scattered here and there were startled and ran towards Seongjin. But soon a tremendous scene unfolded before their eyes.

Kwakwakwakwakwa-!

The small mountain you see over there is completely collapsing. It was towards the Earl of Bathurst's hunting ground, where they had been hunting deer until just yesterday.

A huge noise and acrid dust rose up, instantly covering the hunting ground and camp.

"uh... .."

What's going on?

Why is a mountain that was fine suddenly sinking?

As Seongjin blinked and looked at the scene, Masain next to him shouted as if he had been waiting.

"I knew it would be like this!"

No, Lord Masaine? What is that?

By the way, such an incredible thing has happened, so why aren't you surprised?

"Isn't this where you are? "Nothing new anymore!"

"what? for a moment... .."

"Surely this isn't the end? "Even if I try to stop you, won't you still insist on going there?"

"... .."

"Then I will follow you! Do you understand?!"

No, Sir Masain! What on earth do you think I am?

One way or another, Seongjin felt very wronged.

Plop! Burbubbuk!

Meanwhile, the red stones are breaking apart helplessly. Eventually, the rock, unable to withstand the shock, begins to slowly sink beneath the collapsing ground.

Kurrrrrr... ..

'It's dangerous here too. I don't know if it's an earthquake or something, but I'm sure we'll be caught up in it!'

Seongjin, who realized that the vibration under his feet was getting stronger, put aura into his voice and shouted with all his might.

"Everyone listen! Stop work and come back here right away! "We're going down the mountain right now!"

The resident knights began to move quickly according to orders. Except for one Lord Haven.

"no! my stone! "I couldn't even count the exact number!"

He was waving his hands in vain, looking at the collapsing rock.

"My, my precious liquor!"

"What a crazy guy!"

Quick. Seongjin, who had blood on his forehead, kicked him hard in the stomach from behind.

Pow!

"Come to your senses, Lord Haven! "What are you doing now?"

"Oh my! But, low... .."

"The stones you found are exactly 37!"

"... yes?"

"I remember everything. No doubt it's number one! So now, come to your senses and do your duty as an imperial knight!"

Light slowly returns to Lord Haven's eyes, which were looking at Seongjin blankly for a moment.

"Sorry... "I do it, sir!"

Seongjin clicked his tongue as he saw him quickly return to his demeanor.

The guy who does it when he does it, what kind of obscenity is this!

"Fight the resident knights, Sir Kurt! "Check to see if anyone has been left behind!"

Seongjin ordered Sir Kurt, who was unusually nervous.

"And once everyone's safety is confirmed, immediately take the knights and take refuge down the mountain!"

"Yes, sir!"

"And if you see anyone escaping from the camp, help them as much as you can!"

Sir Kurt looked at Seongjin in confusion at those words. Because it sounded as if the prince would not join them.

'And what about you?'

However, his gaze soon lands on Lord Masain, who is standing behind Seongjin with his mouth shut.

Sir Kurt nodded as if he understood something.

"yes! "I will follow your orders!"

Wong wong!

As if he had been waiting, Max approaches Seongjin and barks passionately. This is probably because he already knew what his master was going to do.

Whoa whoa!

-If you go, I go too! You'll need me! Because I am strong and huge!

"Okay, Max. Come with me!"

Yesterday, it was rewarding to practice with Max by his side, and before he knew it, Seongjin had become quite accustomed to finding a connection with the dog. She quickly activated her Danjeon and sent a large amount of aura to Max -

Huuuuk-

Soon Max's size began to increase.

Kurrrrr-

Around that time, changes slowly began to occur even in the collapsed hunting grounds.

As the thick dust slowly subsided, black smoke began to billow out from underneath.

"... Demon species!"

Masain sighed softly.

Even Seongjin, who had no divine power, could tell right away.

A hole with a radius of hundreds of meters was created when the mountain collapsed. That incredibly strong magical energy is pouring out from the depths of unknown depths.

"come!"

In the midst of this evil and ominous atmosphere, a giant reptile's head covered in horns slowly began to rise.

Crrrrrrr... ..

* * *

The huge explosion could be felt even in the imperial palace office.

"... .. !?"

Amelia, who was reviewing documents in the Emperor's office, was startled by the shock and ran to the open terrace.

"That one?"

The far southwest sky is covered with thick dust. Considering that my eyesight was greatly enhanced by the aura, it was a place quite far from the ecliptic.

"It's the Earldom of Bathurst. "Now a demon species has appeared there."

Amelia's face turned pale at the calm voice.

'Mores!'

My hands began to shake with worry.

However, contrary to her desire to rush out of the office at any moment, her mind was spinning infinitely calmly.

'Calm down, Amelia! What can I do against the devil species now, without any divine power? calm down. And think. I am now by my father's Majesty's side!'

Something only you can do.

Only I can skip unnecessary procedures and send a helping hand to Mores in the shortest possible time!

"your majesty!"

"Your Majesty!"

At that moment, several knight commanders, including Balthazar, burst into the Holy Emperor's office.

"Magi! "I can feel strong magical energy!"

"It is the emergence of a demonic species! Ah, Lord!"

"I will send the Holy Knights under my command right away! "Please command me!"

Holy Knights... ..

Naturally, the face of my most trusted younger brother flashes through my mind. Amelia ordered the attendant next to her.

"Call Logan right now. And quickly move the Lilium detachment... .."

But before she could finish speaking, the elderly man bowed his head in sorrow. It was Lord Ulgen, leader of the Knights of St. Bastian.

"Sir, I may be presumptuous, but that is... .."

"What is it? "Lord Ulgen."

"His Majesty Logan has already led his horse and rushed out of the imperial palace. He probably moved as soon as he sensed the demonic species... .."

Amelia was secretly impressed.

Logan, you're so fast!

"And of course, the Lilium Detachment hurriedly followed behind them."

Logan must have been worried about Mores, too. Normally, she would have had the presence of mind to take care of the special unit, but it seems that she was clearly anxious.

'good. 'There is no force that can reach the scene faster than Logan and Lilium's special forces!'

The fire was quickly put out.

So, what she has to do now is to find and assist in areas that Mores and Logan had not thought of.

"I never believe that the Lilium Detachment's strength will be insufficient."

However, nothing has yet been determined about the exact classification, population, or power of the demon species.

'Father, His Majesty spoke calmly. It is said that a demonic 'bell' has appeared in Bathurst Territory... .. '

If so, there was a high possibility that it was a type 1, stand-alone demon. But you shouldn't just believe that and neglect your preparation.

"Considering the scale of the explosion, even if it is a single type, it is highly likely that it is a class 2 or higher species. So, immediately organize additional forces and prepare for an emergency... .. "

Amelia, who was saying that, looked back with a start.

He was just as impatient as Logan. What kind of excess of authority is this in front of your Majesty, Father?

"... .. "

But Seonghwang just stared at Amelia.

Amelia calmed herself down after seeing that the corners of his mouth were slightly curved. Seonghwang implicitly delegated full authority to her.

"Assemble the Knights of St. Grazie, Sir Agnes. The place where the explosion occurred is presumed to be near the count's hunting grounds. Although it is not a densely populated area, the empire's subjects may have become involved. "We need the help of those with extensive lifesaving experience."

"Yes, sir."

"If necessary, cooperate with the 3rd Knights of the SS. Considering the total strength of the territory reported by the Earl of Bathurst, it would not violate imperial law if the two knights moved together."

"I will."

Sir Agnes, leader of the Knights of St. Grazie, bowed her head with a kind smile.

"Cardinal Diggory. We will gather the available imperial palace council members and send them to Bathurst Territory. Take the abbreviated process. And I called Dorian from the administration and told him to prepare relief supplies that could be obtained urgently."

Although he was in front of the princess, who was barely the age of his granddaughter, Cardinal Digory felt an inexplicable sense of intimidation and bowed his head.

"All of this is being done urgently for the sake of the citizens who have fallen into despair. "I will report to the crusade afterward, so you can skip the preliminary procedures, which may take some time, for now."

* * *

Just when the explosion occurred and the sandbox began to collapse.

Fortunately, the camp was nearing the end of its evacuation process. Because I was planning to move my hunting ground starting today.

Most of the members had already moved, and the only people left in the camp were a few servants who were packing up their belongings and a few residents.

Of course, they had to move on the sidewalk, but were suddenly mesmerized by the earth-shattering vibration and rushing dust.

'There's no way for those people to escape like this!'

Edith, who had boarded the imperial carriage with the driver, looked at them with nervousness. Her mind, which was always dazed in a peaceful mood, turns quickly when faced with a sudden crisis.

'If we can get them on this carriage... ... !'

However, it is a precious carriage prepared only for members of the royal family. Is it okay to decide something like that on your own?

-Sir, why are you taking the carriage again?

Suddenly Edith remembered the light conversation she had with the prince this morning.

Even though he had a rare vehicle called a wolf dog, he was suspicious of the prince who rarely gave up his carriage.

-Once you've dragged it, wouldn't you have something to carry with you? The stones that the resident knights found had to be carried, and the game had to be carried as well. It would be too unreasonable to ask the residents of the territory to move all those deer.

But it's a luxury dinner for VIPs. Put bloody game on there? I was dumbfounded, but what he said next was even more shocking.

-Edith, if there's anything you want to bring, don't hesitate and bring it. Let's take anything, whether it's a rock or a grass. There are people who purposely go out to collect stones, right?

-... yes?

Edith bit her lip after making a decision.

Yes, you won't blame me. Aren't you the kind of person who wants to carry dirty game and even insignificant stones?

"everyone! "Get in the carriage!"

A voice heightened by aura resonates loudly throughout the camp despite the commotion.

"There is no time to wait! hurry!"

The residents of the territory thought for a moment, but the strong shaking had already reached their feet. Eventually, they started to squeeze into the carriage.

"Hurry!"

* * *

Meanwhile, members of the hunting club were also moving around.

Embarrassed by the sudden natural disaster, they abandoned the workers and ran away in a hurry, taking only their guards with them.

However, the Earl of Bathurst, who was the last to remain after sending the members away, stopped talking and turned his head in surprise. This is because the Countess, who was thought to have left first, returned to the camp and stood motionless on her horse.

"ma'am?"

"... William."

She barely turned around at his call, looking somewhat dazed.

"How did it happen? "It feels like I was dreaming."

"What is that?"

The count was about to turn his horse, but the guard quickly stopped him.

"Count! You must avoid it quickly! My wife said I... ..!"

"iced coffee!"

At that time, as if she suddenly remembered something, the Countess quickly opened her mouth.

"William! Beware of suspicious guests visiting the mansion. He's been planning something up and down the Bathurst family for a long time! And somehow I helped him."

"Welcome! Come here and talk! huh?"

The guard knight, who could not see the count, grabbed his reins and spurred him on.

Many, many, many.

The camp starts to move away.

"ma'am!"

"Listen, William! He said he was going to tear down our mansion! "I heard it clearly with my own ears!"

"We must escape now!"

"Ah, but I don't remember his face. Maybe he was wearing a mask.
"No, I don't even know now if he was a man or a woman."

"Okay! Okay, please go this way... ..!"

As the Count cried out in a desperate voice, the wife, who had been staring at him blankly, curled her mouth. As time passed, fine wrinkles appeared around her eyes, but in the eyes of the Earl of Bathurst, she still had the beauty of a goddess-like smile.

"I can't do that. "I know now that I can never escape from him."

Fantasy-like scenes were passing through her unfocused eyes.

Knife held in hand. People she loved dearly, covered in blood and no longer breathing.

It was clear now that death was approaching. If we don't make a choice now, a dark future is sure to come.

"I love you, William. Please, Margaret... .."

Those were her last words.

A pile of black dirt fell mercilessly on the head of the countess as she walked away.

346. Jurassic Island (1)

The ground was suddenly covered with black magic energy.

Above the thick smoke, the head of a huge monster slowly raises its head.

"de... Dragon?"

Those who were wandering around the camp muttered, doubting their eyes.

As the saying goes, the monster's appearance reminded me of an evil dragon from legends.

Three huge horns rise from its head the size of a house, and its neck is covered with broad bones that look like sheet metal.

As it slowly raised its body soaked in black demonic energy, it seemed as if an entire magnificent castle was rising into the air. Just that simple movement causes the Earth's axis to vibrate and the atmosphere to shake.

"... Ah, Lord!"

Everyone looking at the monster could clearly feel it. That huge body clearly contains proportional strength and power.

Even the smallest breath he exhaled caused a strong wave, like thunder.

Crrrrr... ..

But when everyone was frozen by that majestic sight.

Seongjin's feelings as he was running towards the guy were extremely simple.

"Triceratops?"

Anyone who once loved dinosaurs as a child will recognize that unique shape.

It was too large to be dismissed as just a dinosaur, and it had numerous strange horns sprouting from each of its scales, making it look even more sinister.

"yes? Lowering. "What did you just say?"

Masain asks from behind. They were riding down the mountainside at extremely fast speeds, riding on Max's now gigantic back.

"Huh, it seems somewhat similar to an animal I know!"

"An animal you know? "That one?"

"Never mind, Lord Masaine! "I guess it was my mistake!"

Masain then looks at the dinosaur monster getting closer with a stiff expression.

'Yes, it must be an illusion. At least a normal dinosaur wouldn't emit magical energy like that.'

It's not that it's not, the monster was a slimy black color, as if it was covered in tar. Perhaps it's because his entire body is covered with dark magical energy.

[Lee Seong-jin, something is strange!]

At that time, the Demon King, who was watching him closely, shouted.

[No matter how I look at it, it doesn't look like a typical demon species!]

'then?'

[It means that you were not born that way, but it is unnatural, as if you were created! I think it's closer to a demonic energy condensed into a specific shape rather than a conscious entity!]

'hmm... ..'

Seongjin was also feeling a vague sense of discomfort. Even though it was spreading such dangerous demonic energy everywhere, I could not sense any clear hostility or purpose from it.

[Besides, I can feel the laws of the normal world from him, even if only slightly! Just like the Glacher Trolls you used to control!]

okay? then.

'Demon King!'

When Seongjin called his name, the Demon King understood it clearly and made a decision to pray. Soon, a gorgeous world of spiritual eyes automatically unfolds before Seongjin's eyes.

'... ..!'

In a feast of red and blue colors, the appearance of a monster that is still as black as the abyss. There is no doubt that it is a demon species.

But surprisingly, letters that were quite familiar to Seongjin appeared above his head.

□Styracoceratops□

□Spring Valley's field boss. For every 200 Medium Triceratops caught, there is a 5% chance that they will appear. We recommend hunting in a party of 3 or more.□

□Flame resistance B. Electrical resistance B.□

□Monster grade: B+□

□*Currently unable to check Northland server.□

Seongjin blinked.

what? Was that really a dinosaur? And it's a Northland server?

-In the early days of this company...

Naturally, the voice of the dwarf engineer Dexter vividly appears in Seongjin's mind.

-We have released one free mini-game. If I remember correctly, the integrated server at that time was probably 'Northland'.

And the game title seen on Dexter's laptop. A simple illustration of a giant ape fighting a white Yeti.

-Kong: Jurassic Island

Seongjin's head began to spin.

'Game source! There is someone who has been steadily moving game sources within Impulse Soft to the Delcross dimension! All those glamor trolls, and now even that giant dinosaur! If you search the continent carefully, you can't rule out the possibility that things like that are hidden everywhere!'

The leap of logic that relied only on intuition, based on poor evidence, made Seongjin think of many possibilities.

'There is no way he would have done something like this unless he was hostile to the continent and, by extension, to the empire. Is it just one guy, or is it the work of many? It would be clear that he was at least a high-ranking devil or a member of the Dark Church. 'Since when did you start planning and preparing?'

In any case, it would be difficult to believe that the opponent accidentally found useful game sources.

'Someone who knows Ionia well, or someone who has some level of knowledge about Ionian engineering. You know that Impulse Soft's game sources are combined with Ionic technology! Maybe it's a high-ranking official directly involved in the company's operations!'

Right then.

"Lowering!"

[Lee Seong-jin! be careful!]

A tree, unable to withstand the vibrations caused by the monster, breaks violently and quickly flies in front of our eyes.

Let's react instantly and move the auror -

Sniff!

Max, with his legs gaining momentum, kicked the floor with force. The tree, which could have hit him head-on, barely passes Seongjin's ears, making the sound of a strong wind.

"Lowering! Are you okay?"

Meanwhile, Seongjin's thoughts continued.

'Numerous stones scattered in the mountains. Were they prepared to create this situation?'

But Seongjin's premonition soon denied it.

no. Probably not. Didn't Francis also say that he couldn't detect any demonic energy in the stone or the bear that swallowed it?

'But the person who brought that dinosaur to Delcross is clearly the devil or a devil worshiper!'

Nevertheless, the sudden explosion of the red stones and the appearance of the monster after the mountain collapsed could not be considered completely separate events.

Didn't the Demon King do the same? The rules of the poor normal world came together and resonated, transforming into something unfathomable and enormous.

'The guy who prepared all those rocks probably didn't think that I would gather them all in one place.'

Is it because of me in the end?

Seongjin had no choice but to come to an unpleasant conclusion. It was a treasure hunt, and putting them all together was a failure.

'shit! Please don't let your father hit you hard!'

Seongjin started to feel anxious in a slightly different sense.

Crrrrr...

Around that time, strange changes began to occur in the monster.

A huge sinkhole appeared when the hunting ground collapsed. There he was able to raise his head and raise his body, but he was not able to completely get out of the hole.

It was funny, but the overly large body seemed to be a huge burden on it.

The guy struggled to wriggle for a moment.

Puff puff!

The skin and scales on the legs spontaneously burst, and black demonic energy like blood poured out. The dinosaur's legs, unable to withstand the enormous load, began to crush themselves.

Wow!

For the first time, strong pain and hostility appeared in the eyes of this guy who had shown no purpose until now. The monster screamed and began to flail its huge head around as it pleased.

And the aftermath was enormous.

Cooooooo! Cooh!

The ground is torn apart with irregular vibrations, and huge cracks spread across the surface at high speed. The farmlands near the hunting grounds also began to crumble into shapeless pieces.

"Ugh!"

At that moment, a young man nearby runs away in a hurry and is instantly swallowed by the crack. But right before he falls into the bottomless pit.

chin!

Someone's strong hand grabbed the back of his neck. It was Masain who was riding behind Seongjin.

Seongjin and his party, who had already reached the feet of the monster, luckily found Youngjimin and quickly jumped into the crack.

Taaat, blame.

When Max, who jumped up the crack with a few light leaps, finally stood on the surface, Masaine lightly lowered him to the ground.

"Well, it's dangerous so hurry and avoid this place."

Even then, Young Jimin looked bewildered.

"Okay, thank you... ..!"

However, while he was casually saying thank you, he turned pale when he saw the large wolf dog baring its fangs in front of him.

"Ugh! "Monster, monster!"

Seongjin glared at him with fierce eyes as he ran wild.

No, you saved me at best, but now who's calling me a monster? Can't you tell the difference between a cute puppy and a monster? huh?

"Lowering... .."

At that time, Masain's trembling voice caught Seongjin's ear.

"Are you really planning on dealing with that demon species yourself?"

He was completely overwhelmed by the majesty of the monster dinosaur.

Even though I already knew its size, the sight of it right in front of me was so majestic it was even shocking.

"Even the ecliptic will soon notice something unusual. "We will probably dispatch the Holy Knights as quickly as possible, so why don't you just wait for them to arrive?"

"... .."

Seongjin looked up at the triceratops-like monster without answering for a moment.

Cooong.

The guy was now crawling out of the pit, pushing his body in place of his broken leg. With eyes overflowing with hostility and resentment whose target is unclear, it sometimes lets out painful screams.

Passsss.

Every time it struggles like that, the magical energy flowing out indiscriminately turns the ground black and the plants wither rapidly.

If things continue like this, Bathurst Territory will soon become a land of complete death where life cannot exist.

"No, Lord Masaine. "We have to stop him here."

If we couldn't kill it, we had to at least try to tie it up in one place. Because I was able to foresee so clearly, even now, where that powerful hostility was heading and what consequences it would bring.

"Lowering... .."

Masain looked at the strange gleam in the prince's eyes for a moment, then pulled out Misra with resignation.

Even someone he knew well had eyes like that sometimes. And every time, his decision was never reversed.

"are you okay. We just have to take care of it step by step, starting

with its tail. "You probably won't be able to respond properly?"

Seongjin, who said that, pulled out a nutcracker and raised the corners of his mouth.

'Importing sources at random and simply increasing the size is not a solution. If it were big enough to handle itself, the imperial capital might really be in danger by now.'

Seongjin sneered at an enemy whose face he did not know.

First of all, Triceratops is not a Jurassic dinosaur! Find a game with some proper historical research, you idiot!

* * *

"How on earth did this happen...""

Romain was unexpectedly devastated by the situation.

He was simply preparing to overthrow the Count of Bathurst at the right time. This is because we already knew that the 'trace of the crack' runs straight through the western mountain and the count's residence.

Wasn't that why the meeting place was set up on this mountain in the first place?

So, based on a few experiments I had done in the past, I was planning to just lightly shake the ground. At least I didn't intend for this mess to happen.

however...

'Where is that monster that came out of nowhere?'

There was only one variable that Romain expected. The power of the crack, amplified by the code, combined with the aura of the living beast,

'Not only can there be no animal that swallows a rock, but eating it doesn't mean the code will be activated twice.'

But what on earth is that huge monster?

"What is that? "Did I drink too much?"

Leonard ran out after Romain, threw the bottle on the floor and rubbed his eyes.

Wow!

The huge monster roars again.

Just that frenzied cry created a strong shock wave and shook the entire mountain. Trees sway and rocks split and fall.

"Wow, Romain! If we don't escape quickly... ..!"

At that moment, the cabin they were in also collapsed helplessly. A precious cabin that has been Romain's meeting place for the past several years, and has a complex code carefully crafted in the basement.

"iced coffee... .."

Romain sighed in a daze.

How can everything turn into such a mess in an instant!

"What are you procrastinating on, Romain! If this continues, everyone will die! "We need to hurry and take refuge down the mountain!"

Leonard, who was worse off, started running, dragging his arm.

The ground shaking and vibrating beneath your feet is extremely dangerous. Nevertheless, Romain could not easily turn his eyes away from the monster.

Right then-

"That... ..!"

There was a sight that clearly caught Romain's eyes.

A crazy person stands on top of a large wolf that is well beyond

normal size and charges head-on towards the monster.

"Lowering! If you suddenly rush in alone like that... ... !"

One after another, someone's faint scream follows.

That light blonde hair is definitely-

"Prince Mores... ... !"

In my once confusing mind, many thoughts come together, eventually leading to one conclusion.

A new word for success.

A reserved member of the Dark Church.

and...

'An absolute variable that no one can dare predict!'

Only then did everything make sense.

'Guardian of Delcross! How far have you foreseen, and how far have you prepared?'

Is there really no way for me to deal with him? Even if you hide yourself as if you were dead and prepare so thoroughly in so many ways?

"Hurry, Romain! "Hurry up and look ahead and run properly!"

Leonard, who was dragging him and running, shouted in frustration, but Romain's eyes would never leave Prince Mores.

347. Jurassic Island (2)

Although it was a natural disaster that occurred suddenly, there were almost no casualties. This was because there was a hunting party at the time, and the entry of local residents was strictly controlled.

It seems like those at the hunting camp managed to withdraw just in time.

"Aww, Hae-su! No, it's a monster dog!"

Seongjin, who rescued one more Young Ji-min from a pile of dirt near the farmland, approached the back of the monster dinosaur with a relieved heart.

It had now pushed half of its body out of the hole, leaving only its hind legs and tail underneath.

'I can't get any closer because of the magic. However, the distance is a bit difficult for Lord Masain's Aura blast to reach. I'd rather move closer to the side.'

If you aim from the front, there is a high chance that it will struggle to get out of the hole faster.

However, I had no intention of jumping down a pit filled with demonic energy just to catch up.

"Lowering. "That must be a type 1 demon species, especially a level 1 demon."

Masain, aiming his sword, warned with a stern face.

"To properly deal with that gigantic thing, a large number of paladins must gather together and spread a sacred barrier. So please think

carefully."

"I know, Sir Martha."

Seongjin looked at the land dying from the spreading demonic energy.

'I've seen a scene like this before.'

When the remnants of the Penitent Church summoned the Demon Beast.

According to the story told by Sir Sharon at the time, a total of more than 30 Holy Knights and Priests, including the Five Holy Emperors, deployed a defensive barrier to kill the Demon Beasts that had appeared in the past.

'We'll need a lot more people than that now.'

Isn't it a dinosaur whose size easily exceeds that of a huge building? Even excluding its long and thick tail, its length appears to be close to 100 meters.

Although it moved like a crawler, it moved faster than the magic beast. So the speed at which demonic energy spreads is also incomparable.

'It would be best to push him into a ditch... ..'

No matter how much you think about it, it is impossible with our current power.

The decision was quick. Well, wouldn't my father do something about the damage to the farmland that is increasing due to demonic energy?

"Don't go any closer than this, Sir Masaine. "Let's catch him here."

Seongjin moved a little closer to the monster and stopped Max.

Shhh-

When the Auror operation is stopped, Max suddenly returns to his original form. Naturally, Masain, who was riding behind him, also got down to the ground and gave me a suspicious look.

"Are you serious, my lord?"

"why? Sir Masain. "Did you really think I was going to rush into that demonic energy without a plan?"

When I looked at him with flawless eyes, Masain, who was startled, slightly averted his gaze.

"... No, that's not it."

"okay. I guess so. "I'm not crazy, would I do something like that?"

"... .."

What is it, Lord Masaine?

Oh, I'm not going! So stop looking at me with such suspicion!

"The only person I can trust now is Lord Martha. "The only way to hit him from this far away is to send out a surprising amount of energy."

It is the same as Seongjin or Masain who have no divine power. It was unclear how much significant damage it could inflict.

But wouldn't an aura explosion at least be enough to get the dinosaur's attention and make it turn around?

"yes. "I understand, sir."

Fortunately, it seemed that Seongjin had no intention of attacking directly, so Masain calmed down a bit and took his stance.

Ugh-

Soon Mythra emits a soft golden aura. She said it was one of the few castle relics in the empire.

As the posture became stable, Masain's sword began to show off its unrivaled power.

Awesome! Liquid!

Misra swung several times, and as a result, a sharp sword flew towards the dinosaur's side. The attack was unfailingly successful, leaving long stab wounds on the dinosaur's body.

Puff puff!

The plate-like scales split and black magical energy pours out like a fountain. It was clear that he had dealt a good blow to the bastard.

but-

'It's not enough to completely grab attention.'

The problem may be that the dinosaur's body is already weighed down by a mass that is thousands of times its normal weight.

Considering that he couldn't bear his own weight and his body exploded in various places, Masain's attack was nothing more than a scratch.

"As expected, I have no choice but to use 'Auror Explosion', which is a skill of the Lord."

Masain nodded at Seongjin's words.

"Whoa... .."

With even breathing, Misra began to emit increasingly brilliant golden light. Then, at some point, her breathing stopped with a long inhale-

Hissing-

An afterimage of a long golden moon flying quickly along a neat, vertically cutting orbit.

Puff!

The auror explosion undoubtedly caused a large explosion. Black magical energy burst out like a waterfall from the dinosaur's back,

and for the first time, the creature reacted violently.

Wow!

The dinosaur screamed loudly toward the sky.

Pow! pop! Puff!

A loud explosion followed.

After being hit by a barrage of Aura fire several more times, the dinosaur finally began to wriggle its neck and turn around with difficulty.

"good!"

While Masain, who was exhausted from using the technique in succession, took a moment to adjust his aura, Seongjin closely observed the dinosaur's condition with his spiritual eyes from the side.

'I thought it wouldn't be just a bunch of shiny polygons... .. '

The body of the dinosaur blown up by Sir Martha seemed to be made of fairly decent flesh and bones.

'It's completely different from shaved ice, which is just a block of ice. They came out of the same game, so why is there such a difference?'

If you think about it, the shaved ice has completely lost its shape in the game, which was originally designed like a Yeti.

Where is that? Didn't he show a complete disregard for the physical laws of the real world?

However, that dinosaur was clearly strongly bound by Delcross's gravity.

[Because they are fundamentally different from the glamor trolls. If those guys are simply a clumsy transfer of the laws of the normal world to the real world, then that monster is a member of a new demon created by a high-ranking demon based on those rules.]

So, it exudes magical energy that is unique to the demon species. The Demon King added that.

[It's just that he probably didn't create it himself.]

'then?'

[There is a high possibility that it is being supplied directly from the devil who created it. Rather than a living entity that naturally generates demon energy, it is closer to a mass of power that has already existed and condensed demon energy.]

Otherwise, the Demon King explained, there would be no way to explain the sudden and rapid increase in demon energy.

[So, there is a high possibility that the owner of this thing is already aware of this situation. There is no devil in the world who would not notice such a large amount of demon energy escaping.]

'So does that mean that the owner could appear here?'

[Isn't there enough possibility? Anyway, this is a place outside your father's grace.]

'hmm... ... '

Seongjin was lost in thought while stroking Max's head.

If the dinosaur owner really shows up here, things will get very tricky. Isn't he a devil who can freely share this level of magical energy with his descendants? Even if he can't do it, isn't he a great guy who is at the level of a demon lord?

'Still, it would be nice if you could come here.'

The Demon King was startled by Seongjin's words.

[what? I'm serious? why?]

'Then doesn't that mean that dinosaur is a way to turn him around? So they will do their best to stop us somehow. But if you leave it like that... ... '

The Demon King sighed at Seongjin's point.

[Well, I see. If we ignore its destruction, it means that there are plenty of descendants to replace it.]

It also meant that the devil was so strong that he could not even blink at that level of magical energy loss.

Seongjin lost his temper for a moment, but there was no sign of anyone other than Masain and Dasha approaching.

'If Logan were here, he would have been able to sense even the weakest demon energy.'

Well, I have a feeling he will come running here soon.

Puff! pop!

At that time, Masain's attack began again.

As a result, the dinosaur, unable to endure the pain, twisted its body, and part of its hind limbs, which had managed to escape, slipped back into the pit.

Coooooooo!

The body, which must have weighed hundreds of tons, lost its balance and stumbled, shaking violently in all directions as if there had been an earthquake.

"Well done, Lord Martha!"

Wong wong!

-Let's go too! Let's go and bite that thing!

Whoa whoa!

-Hurry and make me strong and huge!

Calming down Max, who was very excited, Seongjin retreated again with Masain out of the guy's field of view.

Meanwhile, Seongjin's spiritual eyes were diligently examining his condition. Somehow I had a feeling that just waiting for the paladins to come wasn't enough.

'If he still has the characteristics of the normal world, there must be a fatal vital point somewhere. Most boss mobs have weak points that are easy to attack.'

The Glatzer Troll also had such a critical point. It was the heart in the chest. Didn't Sigismund's soldiers always form groups and focus on attacking the heart?

'If it's from the same game, there's a good chance this guy has something similar!'

As expected, the effort was not in vain, as Seongjin soon discovered a light red light blinking from the horn protruding from the tip of its nose.

It was a very faint mark that could barely be seen with the naked eye, but if you think of it as a mob encountered in the game, it was a fairly plausible location.

'For some reason, it makes me want to hit him at least once!'

[What? Wait a minute, what are you thinking now?]

The Demon King was frightened, but Seongjin was increasingly possessed by a stronger impulse. Korani, who is shining red, doesn't this seem like something that needs to be hit at all costs!

'When the Holy Knights arrive later, they will start by attacking the sacred barrier.'

No matter how much you say it's a weak point, there's no crazy person who will believe that and attack the demon species from the very tip of their nose.

Then how much time and manpower will it take to subdue him? Seongjin could clearly see that the damage from the Holy Knights would be significant.

'But if I knock a little before that, the story will be different. Not only can the damage be greatly reduced, but it can also provide a basis for information to the Holy Knights that join later!'

After making his decision, Seongjin secretly looked to the side.

Lord Masaine's face looked quite tired after firing dozens of Auror attacks in a short period of time.

"Lord Masaine. Max is a divine beast who received the grace of the main god. "You know that, right?"

"yes?"

At Seongjin's sudden words, Masain, who was catching his breath, turned his head in confusion.

"So even if it comes into contact with quite a bit of magical power, it won't be affected. "Isn't it amazing?"

"Ah yes. okay."

"And so do I. "Because demonic energy and the like won't be able to hurt me."

"... yes?"

While the knight, feeling an ominous premonition, hesitated, Seongjin was fully prepared to separate him.

Whoop-

After receiving the aura, Max's size increases in an instant.

"So, don't worry, Lord Martha can't get any closer than this! okay?"

"Lowering!?"

Masain's face turned pale as he understood the true meaning of those words.

But it was already too late, and before I knew it, Seongjin was running furiously on Max's back. Look straight at the monster

dinosaur, and point straight at its red nose.

Masain was astonished. Didn't the prince himself say earlier that he wouldn't do such crazy things?

"Lowering! If you suddenly rush in alone like that... ..!"

The knight ran after him and screamed, but the prince's face looking back was bright.

"Don't even think about following me, Kyung, just come from there and blow up the bomb! Because it helps me!"

Just like that, the wolf-dog and the young prince quickly move away from each other.

"that... ..!"

Masain, who reflexively stopped at the command to take cover, could not hide his sense of futility.

But it was only a fleeting moment, and soon his face began to turn red and distorted due to the intense anger that poured in like a flood.

"this... .."

Huuuuk-

The strings of patience that had been suppressed to the limit were finally broken, and the anger welling up in my chest burst out violently along with the aura.

"Moreseuuu! "You son of a bitch!"

* * *

'Oh, Lord Martha seems to be really angry.'

Seongjin broke into a cold sweat as he heard the angry shouts ringing from behind.

I don't think this is the time to worry about getting hit by your father.

[of course! Hey, you crazy guy! Are you out of your mind now? huh?]

The Demon King was also very angry.

The guy who had been restlessly circling inside the flame crystal now sat down on the bottom of the crystal and started pounding the ground.

[No, no! I'm crazy! It's me who's crazy! You know so well that this guy will do something like this at any time, and yet you lend your spiritual eyes again without even thinking about it!]

It seemed like if he left it alone, he would completely turn off his spiritual eyes, so Seongjin carefully comforted him.

'It's okay, devil. Even though it's like this, there are at least two people who believe it.'

It wasn't an empty remark at all. After sharing Auror with Max, Auror's operation suddenly became noticeably better.

The Auror, who had previously walked around roughly as if conscious of it, was now circling along the path carefully, as if he was afraid of causing even the slightest harm to his body.

'And another thing... ... '

Ugh-

Before you know it, a distinct gray aura begins to form on the nutcracker's blade. The outer blade was so clear in shape that it could have been covered with another sharp blade.

Originally, it would have been a level that only a high-level knight could demonstrate, but now Seongjin is using Max's body to operate aurors that are close to twice the normal level.

'and... ... '

There were other Aurors that could be used.

The ripples that always flutter across my chest. A huge amount of Aurors handed over to me by my father.

'Until now, I have refrained from using it as per my father's instructions.'

Seongjin knew. Right now is the time to use this generously!

348. Jurassic Island (3)

The enormous density of magical energy emitted by the dinosaur clumped together around its body, forming a huge dome. Seongjin, who ran at full speed, soon entered the smoky demonic energy.

Panting!

Following Seongjin's will, the wolfdog kicked into the land of death covered in demonic energy without the slightest hesitation. An excited attitude as if it were a fun game even though it was a dangerous situation.

'I'm not afraid of demons after all!'

Seongjin felt relieved.

I knew that Max was immune to Louise's magical aura, but I wasn't entirely sure if he would be able to do the same against the demon species.

'I think it'll be okay. However, since the demonic energy here is so strong, there is no harm in being careful in advance.'

Seongjin added aura around the dog just in case, and looked up at the dinosaur's body, which felt like a huge wall.

It is difficult to see even an inch ahead in the pitch-black haze of demon energy. However, Seongjin still had the devil's spiritual eye.

[Oh, I was crazy, really!]

The demon lord complained tirelessly, but he did not jump out of the flame crystal like before.

Water already spilled. In that case, you must have learned from experience that you should cooperate with Seongjin as much as possible and finish the job as quickly as possible.

Puff!

A familiar explosion was heard again, and the dinosaur struggled violently. Perhaps Masain came back from afar and fired a barrage of fire again to prevent Seongjin from noticing him approaching.

It must have felt like he wanted to follow me right away. However, if you follow Seongjin and jump into the demonic energy, you may not be of any help and may die on the spot.

Masain himself is well aware of this fact, so he is probably desperately exercising self-control.

'I knew that would happen so I separated it.'

I'm so sorry, Sir Martha.

As the situation was different, I couldn't ask for your understanding, but I will still take your advice to heart from now on.

[You're funny! Don't say things you don't mean!]

Sheesh. You know too much for nothing, devil.

Meanwhile, Seongjin, who had reached the feet of the dinosaur, attempted to conceal the Aurors on his and Max's bodies at the same time. Didn't Luise and Max's body easily perform the Schneeshuhe before?

'There are plenty of possibilities!'

Whoop-

But what's so refreshing is that with just one attempt, the wolf-dog's presence disappears.

'... 'It's simpler than I thought, isn't it?'

Is it because of the connection with the family? It was a feat that was possible because the wolf dog's body could freely move its aura as if it were another version of itself.

'If you do this well... .. !'

Seongjin swallowed dry saliva.

I thought it would be a pretty intense battle to properly target Red Nose.

'If things continue like this, I might be able to get up to the bridge of my nose and strike a sharp punch without even a mouse or a bird knowing.'

Seongjin, relieved, climbed up the dinosaur's leg without hesitation. Already being mercilessly pressed down by their own mass, there was no worry that the dinosaurs would be able to detect their secret movements.

Jeok-

Push!

Occasionally, the dinosaur's skin bursts before your eyes without warning, and a huge amount of magical energy surges from the wound.

However, Seongjin, who had fully activated his spiritual eyes, could clearly see a path to avoid all the obstacles.

A long, solid silver line.

Following the clear path they had seen before, Seongjin and the wolfdog lightly stepped on the scales of the dinosaur and jumped up, as if they were taking a walk.

Thump, thud!

Eventually, Max took a leap forward and jumped up to the dinosaur's shoulder, and the demonic energy in front of his eyes finally cleared up, and the dinosaur's head became visible to the naked eye.

At the same time, the figures of Seongjin and Max were also clearly visible outside the black haze.

"... ..!"

Masain, who was about to fire an Aura blast again, stopped his movement when he discovered that they had also used Aura concealment. It looks like the monster is shaking and is afraid that it might fall down.

Wong!

On the other hand, the wolf-dog was excited for the first time in a while.

He doesn't care whether his vision is dark or obstacles are blocking his way, he just follows Seongjin's lead and enjoys a sense of unity with his master.

I was so excited that I even let out a small howl.

Whoa!

-Here I come, strong and gigantic! Bite hard!

Shh! Max.

We're currently in Auror cloaking.

Kiing-

-Still biting. Shows strong teeth.

no. Stop it, Max.

You shouldn't carelessly bite evil spirits that exude evil energy.

'Well, what should we do now?'

Climbing up the uneven scales with ease, Seongjin thought for a moment.

The external energy of the sword created by the increased aura had

stretched to almost twice the length of the nutcracker blade.

Instead of going all the way to the bridge of the nose, should we just delve into a vital area like the carotid artery?

'No, how can I pierce this big guy's vitals at once?'

Seongjin immediately shook his head.

Considering the power they have now, they probably need a powerful strike that defies even the laws of physics in the real world.

'Plus, I have a strong feeling! That red nose must be a real vital spot!'

After making up his mind, Seongjin drove Max without hesitation and ran down the dinosaur's forehead.

Then, the area around its eyes, which had relatively sensitive senses, twitched, and the dinosaur slowly rolled its eyes forward.

Crrrrr... ... ?

"... "Oh my!"

You might get discovered!

Masain, who was anxiously watching the scene from afar, fired an Aura blast once again.

Pow!

Another explosion occurs somewhere along the creature's spine, and the dinosaur turns its head with difficulty.

It was at that moment that the wolf-dog soared upward.

Huh-

Caught by a small gust of wind from its body, the wolf-dog fell straight towards the bridge of the dinosaur's nose.

And above him, there was Seongjin holding a nutcracker.

A long dark auror blade extended to the side and cut through the base of the red horn.

Whoops!

The nutcracker's blade, the grip that held it, the shoulder that wielded the sword, and finally the tip of the head.

A thunderous impact sound shook Seongjin.

I could tell the results without even looking.

'It was eaten!'

* * *

"Ugh!"

At the sudden scream of sowing, the guild member standing next to him asked with a puzzled expression.

"What is it? Lady Bugil."

"No, what on earth is this..." ... !"

Pajong frowned and looked into space.

He had recently joined a small or medium-sized guild and was crazy about the game. He was still busy preparing for a large-scale raid with his guild members.

But suddenly, a shock of unknown origin struck my head.

'What is happening? Why is my demon energy suddenly decreasing so much?'

From what I could guess, it was clear that one of the countless seeds he had sown in the Delcross dimension had bloomed.

But it is truly strange. There's no way there's a seed that can consume this much demonic energy?

Pa-jong, who had been concentrating for a moment to understand the

situation, flinched and wrinkled his eyebrows in surprise.

'what? 'Why did it get so big?'

For some reason, the status of one of the seeds seemed to have increased significantly. To eat this much demonic energy, it is equivalent to the amount of most high-level demons.

'What on earth is going on? Did the guardian of Delcross do something? But why all of a sudden after being quiet all this time?'

Since I was absent from the normal world playing games for a while, I had no idea what was going on.

'Let's go to the Delcross dimension first! I'll go and find out what's going on!'

It was the moment when Pajong was in a hurry to terminate the connection. A small window quickly appears before my eyes. It was the quest window that had been giving him trouble recently.

[Essential Quest – Recover the Lost Heart of Ice!]

[Quest Grade: EX+]

[You have lost all of Pangea Chronicle's valuable advancement items. Thanks to that careless atrocity, the fate of one dimension is in danger at every moment. Take the lead in leading players by example, and fulfill the necessary causes and effects to restore items. And restore all the ice hearts you lost to save the world.]

[Progress :

1. Restore 1 ice heart. (23%)
2. Restore 1 ice heart. (0%)
3. Restore 1 ice heart. (0%)
4. Restore 1 ice heart. (0%)]

[Reward: Total 20P Cash – A reward of 5P Cash is given for each ice

heart recovered.]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window. Is the reward too small? Feel deeply grateful for the fact that you will receive a small amount of cash for the quest to atone for the atrocities you have committed!]

Ah, the sorrow. This little guy. Do we really have to do this?

While Pajong was pondering, a small paladin came to his side.

"Mr. Pajong!"

"Ah, guild leader."

"Have you finished preparing for the raid? It still feels like a dream to have a high-ranker like you come to our guild. "You are the hope of our glamping guild!"

What the guild leader said was true.

A glamping guild that was once blinded by former items, attacked a demon-possessed mountain goat, and came close to being destroyed.

Now that the merger with the PEP guild had collapsed, the only person I could trust was the newly arrived ranker.

"hmm. Guild leader. Speaking of that raid, actually, I'm in a hurry right now... .."

It was time for Pajong to hesitate and make an excuse. Suddenly, as if threatening him, a new text window appeared again.

[warning! - Quest failure penalty]

[Do your best and complete the quest in the shortest time! Otherwise, you will have to pay a heavy price for completely destroying the potential of a world.]

[Result: Avatar initialization. Wipe all cache. Registered on user blacklist.]

[*It is questionable whether proper recovery is possible. If this situation is repeated, the ID itself may be erased, and eventually even the opportunity to easily repay the debt may disappear. That doesn't mean your debt itself goes away. I am really looking forward to seeing how it will be repaid.]

I came to my senses.

Even among the high-ranking Demon Lords, there is no one who can follow [Passion] in terms of having a long tail.

If this warning was ignored, there was no telling what else this crazy demon king would plan.

"Ugh... . okay. "You can do it."

"... Mr. Pajong?"

"It's nothing, guild leader."

Pa Jong shook his head and walked towards where the guild members were gathered.

But before he could even take two steps-

"Huh!?"

There was another huge shock, and a bunch of magical energy came out of the body.

'what? Holy crazy! 'What's happening now?'

Pajong was greatly embarrassed.

Considering only the amount lost so far, the amount is almost comparable to that of the demon lord of the flame level.

In any case, further loss of magical energy was dangerous. Because the loss of magic energy suffered by the Delcross Guardian in the gap had not yet been completely recovered.

'Being loosely between the world and its laws has actually become

poisonous!

The lineage that borrowed the laws of the normal world had the advantage of being able to roll stably with relatively little magic power. Right now, he's just a bastard who eats demonic energy.

'Holy shit! 'I can't help it!'

In the end, Pajong had no choice but to cry and eat mustard, completely severing his connection with his family.

* * *

Wow!

With the second blow, a large crack appears in the red horn again.

However, the dinosaur's horn was not completely broken. A huge amount of magical energy surged out, and it was restored to normal in an instant.

[It's no use, Seongjin Lee! This guy keeps playing?]

The Demon King was frightened and shouted, but Seongjin was not embarrassed.

'It's okay, devil. 'It's not useless!'

I was confident that I had hit the guy properly. Because he clearly felt the taste of the sword.

However, this was when Seongjin gathered his energy and was about to strike the third blow.

'... ... !?'

Seongjin was startled by a somewhat ominous premonition and put down the nutcracker.

'Has the red mark disappeared?'

It was like that. The red mark that had been blinking faintly just a moment ago had now completely disappeared and was no longer

visible. This meant that the horn at the tip of the nose was no longer a vital point.

Where is that? The momentum conveyed by the dinosaur was completely different from before.

Crrrrr...

Seongjin quickly pushed Max back and looked at the dinosaur.

But something strange happened.

□Stila□Kera□su□

□&P□%d's field boss. □For every 200 □Trackeras# ^sd, there is a □ % probability# of appearing. Party hunting is recommended for groups of □ or more. □

□*r!m Resistance □. \$g resistance □.□

□Mon@ter Grade: □□

□*Currently unable to check Northland server.□

The text that came to mind once again was badly broken, unlike before.

'... what?'

Seongjin broke into a cold sweat as he watched the text window shatter in real time before his eyes.

But that wasn't the only change.

Tdu-duk, tdu-duk.

The dinosaur's body begins to twist and shrink little by little.

For some unknown reason, the clumsy demon species that had been bound by the laws of the normal world was being reborn as a complete monster of the normal world.

349. Jurassic Island (4)

Tdu-duk, tdu-duk.

An eerie sound of destruction is heard as loose tissues break apart and come together again.

[Lee Seong-jin, something is strange! The energy of the normal world flowing from him suddenly disappeared!]

Before the demon lord could even startle, Seongjin, who had a premonition of something, was already moving Max.

'The devil has decided to abandon his family!'

Somehow I had that feeling.

Hwiik-

While Schneeshuhe was quickly sliding down the dinosaur's body, a strong whirlpool occurred behind him. Friction between worlds that occurs when the essence of an entity is completely reversed.

Kwa-kwa-kwa-kwa-kwa-

Just like that, the dinosaur's entire body began to reorganize before my eyes.

The body, which was needlessly huge, gradually shrinks, and the body tissues that were extremely flimsy compared to the mass become denser.

Her belly, which was thick like a hippopotamus's, has become slim, and her legs, which had been floppy, reveal the clear curves of her muscles.

There was also a slight change in the demonic veil that was spreading in all directions. The black smoke, which had lost its central point, seemed to quickly disperse into the air.

However, most of the demon energy did not disappear, and soon began to gather and condense together in a vortex centered around the dinosaur.

Shuuuk-

For some reason, a very small portion of the scattered demon energy is gathering towards Seongjin at a rapid pace! Seongjin, who was escaping at full speed to avoid being caught in the whirlpool, was scared.

'huh? 'Why is it coming this way?'

Seongjin was disgusted and shook away the black smoke that was gathering, but the demonic energy disappeared into Seongjin's body as if it were being sucked into an exhaust fan.

'100 million!?'

I panicked and tried to shake off my body, but once the demon energy was absorbed, it did not come out again.

'What the hell is going on?'

Seongjin was nervous for a moment, but fortunately, there didn't seem to be any immediate danger to his life. Because my physical condition was not much different from usual.

'It's a bit uncomfortable, though.'

Seongjin breathed a sigh of relief.

At that time, the Demon King, who was quietly examining the dinosaur, muttered in confusion.

[Is that strange? It seems like the high-ranking demon who created that family has completely given up not only the family, but also ownership of the demonic energy.]

'Give up ownership?'

[huh. If I had wanted to, I could have retrieved just the magic energy, but I threw away so many demon energy without any regrets. Why on earth did he do that?]

[Pajong], the owner of the dinosaur, had some unavoidable circumstances, but there was no way for Seongjin and his party to know that fact.

[How much demon energy does this guy have left?]

'I guess my stomach was upset?'

[Tch! That's right.]

In any case, the Demon King added that demons that have lost their masters will either completely disappear or succumb to and be absorbed by nearby demons.

[So it flew towards this direction. In your head, there is this body of the great Fire Demon, right?]

'... 'Yes, I see.'

Seongjin ran after Max and looked back at the dinosaur wrapped in a black vortex.

'Then what happens to that abandoned family member in the future?'

Now, no matter how much I looked with my spiritual eyes, I couldn't see the text. This probably means that he has completely escaped the laws of the normal world.

[That will be the new devil!]

There was a faint excitement mixed in the Demon King's voice.

[Devils are originally born where demonic energy gathers. However, it is not common in the demon world for such a large amount of demonic energy to gather naturally. Not to mention the human world!]

'then... ... '

[Yes, Seongjin Lee! This is truly a monumental moment when a new high-ranking devil is born in the human world!]

Hey, that's no big deal. There is something else in the world to celebrate.

"Then what is the possibility that he will completely change and show a favorable attitude toward us?"

[Hmm, maybe it's close to zero? Even though the essence has changed, it doesn't change the fact that you broke that guy's nose twice earlier, right?]

this.

Then, at best, a high-ranking devil born in the human world will die before he can live long. That seems like something worth commemorating.

In the meantime, Seongjin and Max had completely escaped the land contaminated with demonic energy.

"Lowering!"

Masain, who had been anxiously waiting for them to approach, came running towards them with joy. Of course, Seongjin yelled at her so loudly that she had to stop in her tracks.

"Oh, don't come any closer, Lord Masaine! Dangerous!"

"... yes?!"

"A long time ago, quite a lot of demonic energy entered my body. "I think I'm okay, but I don't know what will happen to other people."

"M-Magi, listen..." ... !"

At those shocking words, the poor knight staggered with a pale face.

"I am... I am! Because I was unable to properly compensate for the

decline... ..!"

no. That's not it, so come to your senses, Lord Masaine!

Hwii-

By that time, the vortex of demonic energy surrounding the dinosaur had completely subsided. What slowly appeared through the black smoke was a demon species that was much smaller than before.

Crrrrr... ..

The overall impression was not much different from the first, but its sleeker appearance now resembled a three-horned lizard rather than a triceratops.

The guy, who at first glance looked like a scarf lizard due to the slats around his neck, slowly got up and took a heavy step.

Coo!

Although the earth was still shaken by a strong impact, it was a huge improvement compared to the first time when it could not bear its own weight at all.

"... Dragon?"

Masain, who was staring blankly at the guy, muttered without realizing it.

okay. If we had to give a name to this demon, which is not even a dinosaur, it would probably be closest to the legendary creature from the founding myth.

"But it's not a dragon, Lord Masaine. "It's just a species of demon in reptilian form."

Seongjin replied, holding the nutcracker.

"You don't even have wings, do you? Of course, it will be easier for us to deal with him that way."

"yes? Dealing with it, wait a minute..."

Masain's face began to look sinister.

"Sir, are you still planning on continuing?"

"hmm? But Sir Masain. If you just leave that alone..."

"The Holy Knights will soon come and deal with us! You have already done enough. "Isn't the size of the monster much smaller than before?"

"No, that's..."

I didn't shorten it.

But before Seongjin could say anything more, Masain got angry.

"Now do your work! Do you think I will just sit back and watch this situation happen? "If you do such a dangerous thing again, this time I will definitely follow you, whether it's in the demonic energy or somewhere else!"

"ok?"

"If you want to see me die right here, then go ahead and do it!"

"hmm..."

Then Seongjin made a very embarrassed expression.

"But I don't think it will work out the way I want it to, Lord Martha."

"yes?"

"Anyway, even if we don't go, I think he'll come after us on his own."

"... ... !?"

As he said, the giant lizard, which was moving its body around, slowly rolled its eyes and glared at Seongjin and the others. What was in those eyes was undoubtedly strong hostility!

Grrrr...

Black magic energy flowed from the corner of his mouth along with a threatening low-frequency breathing sound.

It was clear that he clearly remembered who was the one who had fired a lot of Aura fire at him and bit the bridge of his nose when he couldn't even control himself properly.

Masain's face turns pale as he understands the situation.

"So, let's disperse far away this time. "There's nothing we can do to distract him, Lord Martha!"

"no... ... !?"

"Well then, good luck. "Be careful not to touch the demon energy!"

Before Masain could say anything more, Seongjin drove Max and started running again.

Even if the appearance of the demon race changed slightly, the principles of dealing with it did not change at all. Tie them down so they don't leave this spot as much as possible!

"Wait a minute, my dear!"

Masain's screaming figure quickly moves away.

When Seongjin suddenly began to move noticeably, the dinosaur's irises tightened and the target was identified.

Shhh-

The guy let out a strong, demonic snort and immediately moved his heavy body to chase after them.

thud! thud! thud!

Fortunately, its movements were quite slow.

The cause was unknown, whether it was because the nerve transmission took a long time due to the size of the body, or whether

gravity was still too much to handle.

'I don't think I'll be able to catch up with Max easily.'

A large amount of aura was wrapped stably around the wolf dog's legs. This is thanks to the generous effort to attract not only Seongjin's own auras, but also the auras of the Seonghwang people filling the passageway.

'There's still room for Aurors. Then, let's spin around and lure him in for as long as possible!'

Seongjin changed Max's direction slightly, measuring the distance between him and the guy.

[Are you just going to run away like this?]

'uh.'

No other sharp number came to mind. Even though it has shrunk a bit in size, it is still a dinosaur the size of a decent building.

There was no way to kill a guy like that right away. I no longer see any weaknesses like a red nose.

'You never know if a meteorite suddenly falls in this place.'

[Why is it a meteorite all of a sudden?]

Well, there is such a thing, demon lord.

They are the eternal natural enemies of dinosaurs.

* * *

Meanwhile, Masain gathered the Aurors who could see the floor and followed Seongjin's running figure with his eyes. To be exact, the clear gray auror blade on his sword.

'... Outdoor air! That's even higher than that of a senior knight!'

As far as he knew, that Auror Blade was absolutely not an external energy that could come from the prince's realm.

Where is that? As the prince appears to be escaping more stably than expected, things that he had missed out of confusion until now come into view.

'The auror wrapped around that dog's body is clearly operated by you!'

Masain couldn't even imagine what tricks the prince was doing.

What the prince was using now was not the normal Banahas practice. No matter how much of a genius Banajas was, he probably couldn't have prepared for a situation where he had to ride a wolf dog and use a sword.

Now, the prince is unconsciously moving the aurors in his own way.

It may be true that the Banahas exercises have become the basis to some extent, but what the prince is showing now is not any specific exercises, but a completely new method of operation.

no way.

'A state where form and expression disappear... ... ?'

Masain shook his head at a thought that suddenly crossed his mind.

It doesn't make sense. For a prince who had become an Auror only a few months ago, was this even possible?

At that time, the Aurors gathered again, and a brilliant golden aura appeared in Mythra. Masain raised his shaking arm and aimed it at the monster's tail.

'I can't make you chase after me forever. So now look this way, you deviant demon servant!'

Hissing-

A golden moon quickly shoots through the air. The attack with all its might hit near the devil's tail, causing a huge explosion.

Quang!

Wow!

In response to the unexpected attack, the devil stopped walking and roared. The skin of the tail bursts, and instead of blood, black magic energy pours out like a waterfall.

Coo! thud!

The dinosaur looks back with bloodshot eyes. As the huge body turned 180 degrees, its long tail swept the floor and swung like a whip.

"huh?"

The problem was that its tail rushed towards Seongjin, who was teasingly running right in front of the dinosaur, at an incredible speed.

Words were like a whip, but to Seongjin, it was like an entire high hill had been pushed down upon him.

"... ..!"

Even in that urgent situation, Seongjin became suspicious.

His senses, his spiritual eyes, and his premonitions did not warn him of this situation at all!

[Lee Seong-jin! Dangerous!]

Seongjin's eyes widened at the demon king's shout.

Suddenly, in my rapidly accelerating consciousness, I see the tail of a huge reptile approaching, as if in slow motion. Even if I went as fast as I could, there was already nowhere to escape.

'... late!'

Seongjin reflexively gathered all the aura in his body and covered the wolfdog as much as possible.

At least Marx... ..!

Whi profit!

The strong wind is blowing like that -

Quaaaang!

Then, a huge impact sound hit my eardrums.

"... ... ?"

But no matter how long I waited, there was no shock as expected.

When Seongjin opened his eyes in confusion, what was unfolding in front of him was a large Auror curtain shining silver-blue.

"Lee Seong-jin!"

And at the center of it all was Logan.

Conquest of the White Knights without any disruption. The former sword master, who looked neat as usual, was looking at Seongjin with a bewildered expression.

"You man! "A guy who doesn't have any divine power, what can he trust right now to deal with a level 1 demon species on his own?!"

350

350. Holy Wind (1)

Coooooooo!

The dinosaur, which has lost its balance, falls forward and a thunderous sound resounds.

This is because the tail, which was swinging quickly, hit the strong sword curtain and was cut in half.

Shootaaa-

Black magical energy poured out like a waterfall from the torn wound.

"It has been almost 10 years since a first-class giant demon species appeared near the ecliptic. "You're not the kind of person who can do things on your own."

However, the Sword Master, who had achieved such an incredible feat using only his sword, was so nagging that he did not even look at the threatening waterfall of demonic energy.

"Do you understand, Seongjin Lee? This means that even if the Holy Knights had been here, they would have developed a proper strategy and approached cautiously. "What on earth were you thinking?"

"no. That's wrong, Logan! I was just trying to keep him tied up here! I never planned on doing it on my own... .."

But Seongjin could not finish speaking.

"Hey, my dear!"

This is because the cries of a distraught Lord Masain were heard from

afar.

The knight, who was almost exhausted from the series of Aura explosions, was almost on the verge of losing his mind due to the dizzying accident caused by his own attack.

Logan glanced at him and clicked his tongue.

"Look at that. Because you do such a reckless thing, Masaine is the only one suffering for no reason. "No matter how much you are born with the blood of a prosperous family, it is dangerous to be exposed to demonic energy for such a long time."

Since he had nothing to say to that point, Seongjin kept his mouth shut.

"But that dog...""

Logan looked at Max, who had become huge, puzzled for a moment.

The wolfdog, which, like its owner, had no sense of danger, was panting and happily beating its tail as if it knew that it had just almost died.

"Oh, this is our Max. "He's definitely not a suspicious guy!"

"Max... ... ?"

"Uh, um. You may have been a bit surprised by his sudden growth, but they say he is a divine beast who received the grace of the main god..."

"Shinsu."

lie.

The Sword Master, who can immediately grasp a person's true feelings, would not have known how absurd an excuse that answer was.

At Logan's somewhat cold-looking gaze, Seongjin, who was stabbed by the grass, gave a series of explanations.

"Well, Sir Francis said that! It's called the wind, and there have been instances in the past when a divine beast like this appeared! I heard that it is also mentioned in the fairy tales of the scriptures... .."

"... okay."

Sincerity.

Logan's expression becomes a little mysterious.

Why not? The auror that is currently surrounding the wolfdog is completely Lee Seong-jin's. It even gives off a faint, evil energy, so how can it be a creature that belongs to the grace of the Lord?

However, Logan soon nodded without saying anything.

"It looks like that person has already worked on something. "If it were Ortona, he would have done something that could never have happened."

"... .."

"Still, for now, I feel fortunate that Delcross is a country with absolute imperial authority. Otherwise, there would have been no way to control stubborn high-ranking clergy."

Still, just in case, try to refrain from appearing like this in front of high-ranking priests as much as possible.

As Logan said that, he lifted the sword he had spread out. As the dinosaur's wounds were slowly healing, the magic energy pouring out was also showing signs of decreasing.

Instead, Logan spread a small sacred barrier around them.

"Are you going to catch that guy?"

Seongjin asked, looking at the dinosaur that was staggering around. This is a question without any doubt that Logan would definitely be able to do it.

But surprisingly, Logan shook his head.

"no. "I will wait here for the Holy Knights to arrive."

"why?"

"You can easily suffocate him. But purifying the demonic energy it contains is another matter."

In short, the current state of the dinosaur is no different from a weak pouch containing a huge amount of demon energy.

If the central point is completely destroyed without any thought, an unprecedented disaster will occur in which a huge tidal wave of magic will engulf Bathurst Territory.

"He is probably the only one who can dispose of that level of demonic power in one go. So first, the Holy Knights must come here and establish a tight sacred barrier. "It will be after that that the guy's breathing will be completely cut off."

"Sacred barrier... .."

"The first thing is to prevent the outflow of demonic energy. Normally, a large number of priests spend several days purifying demonic energy while maintaining the sacred barrier."

okay?

Seongjin blinked.

"Then there was no reason for you to come first, right? "Why didn't you bring all the Holy Knights?"

Logan made a bewildered expression at that question.

"Is that what you're going to say? "Why on earth do you think this is?"

"uh... .."

"Lee Seong-jin, you almost died just now, but you have no sense of crisis?"

That look that looks down on you as if you were pitiful, seems like you are dealing with an immature child. Seongjin started to cry and rebel without even realizing it.

"Hey, who wants to die! "I was sure he blocked it with aura just before that!"

"Of course, that dog you desperately wrapped survived."

Logan sighed slightly and swung his sword without even looking back.

Hwiik-

Wow!

An extremely simple blow.

With that alone, the dinosaur, which had barely been able to get up, falls back to the floor. This is because the sharp external energy emitted from Arjuna blew away the entire tip of his tail, which maintains his body's balance.

Coooooooo!

The ground shakes, and a huge amount of demonic energy pours down like running water from the cut section.

Leaving behind that unrealistic scene, the Sword Master reprimanded Seongjin in a calm voice.

"Let me ask. Why did you act so foolishly in such a tense situation? "Have you never even thought about taking care of yourself?"

It was as if they were in the eye of a typhoon. No matter how strong and threatening the incoming demonic energy flow was, it could not infiltrate the sacred barrier surrounding Seongjin and Logan in the slightest.

In that strange calmness, Logan's pounding continued.

"I thought it might have been like that from the time you turned the

auror around randomly inside your body, but even if you wash your eyes and look for it, you really don't have an instinctive self-defense mechanism?"

"Wow, that's a big leap! "If the situation is too urgent, people can make mistakes!"

"Do you think we can gloss it over by saying it was just a mistake? People tend to show their true feelings unconsciously when unexpected situations arise. "What on earth do you think of yourself that allows you to send all the Aurors to the wrong place even in such a desperate crisis?"

Seongjin briefly closed his mouth in response to Logan's harsh criticism.

There was nothing I could say in response. Only clumsy thoughts that could not be expressed in words echoed dizzily in her head.

'No, but death to me anyway... ..'

"Lowering! "Hey!"

The thoughts no longer continued. This is because Masain screamed as if he was almost out of breath as they came running toward them covered in demonic energy.

"this."

Fortunately, Logan's nagging ended quickly. After catching a glimpse of Masain as if he was worried, he turned around and quickly spoke to Seongjin.

"Then I'll come and check on Brother Masain's condition. "It's been quite a while since I was exposed to demonic energy, so without the sacred barrier, you too will be in danger."

"Am I going with you?"

"It's just inside the barrier. "You probably won't be able to follow my movements yet."

Logan, who had said something very hurtful to his pride, slightly raised the corners of his mouth and added.

"I will take appropriate measures as I go so that there is no danger."

"action?"

"okay. Well, unless it's a fairly unexpected situation, you wouldn't be easily defeated by a guy like that."

With those words, Logan showed off an amazing move.

I thought I was going to easily jump out of the barrier, but soon I started sliding up the dinosaur as high as a small mountain.

"... ..!"

Logan's slightly blurred appearance seemed natural, as if he were melting into the air.

It is unlikely that he was carrying out an Auror cover-up.

Just perfect auror balance.

The appearance of a knight who defined the relationship between himself and the world by his own laws, and succeeded in making the Auror's movements completely conform to these laws.

In this way, Dekaron Knight, the youngest person on the continent, became a ray of silver-blue wind and easily passed over the ridge of the dinosaur's back.

Kwasik!

Of course, before completely riding over the dinosaur at the top, I didn't forget to plunge another deep sword strike into its spine.

Cooooooo!

The dinosaur, which was struggling to get up, was hit hard on the road by the deadly Auror Blade, as if it were a skewered specimen.

Wow!

Its nervous roar echoes through the air.

"and... .."

Seongjin engraved the series of movements in his mind, one by one, with shining eyes. Without forgetting to quickly guess the principle in your head.

A red light blinks inside the pupil.

With his senses becoming more sensitive than before, plus the Demon King's spiritual eyes, Seongjin seemed to be able to see the laws hidden behind phenomena that seemed mysterious at first glance.

'What is the principle? 'How is it possible to move like that?'

Is this an application of Schneeschhe? Or is it a unique step belonging to the Henesys practice?

'... No, it's a little different from that.'

As I looked at it, I felt like I could see at a glance what the crucial difference was.

'This isn't something that can be solved just by wrapping the aura around the body. That's changing the outside of the body, that is, the air flow itself, as desired!'

Look at Logan's strange movements. Even though I'm not specifically focusing my aura on my feet, doesn't it look like I'm sliding on a transparent rail?

Once I figured out the basics, this thought naturally occurred to me.

'If I do well, I think I can do it too...' ... '

[What? Hey, man! What are you going to do again?]

The Demon King, who was holding his breath in the flame crystal, was startled and shouted.

[Are you still unable to come to your senses even after things have

gotten to this point? Just stay inside the barrier! It's dangerous!]

But as I watched Logan moving as freely as the wind, my hands began to itch.

Think about it, devil. How can you remain still after seeing something like that?

'Even the Aurors are richer than ever before.'

Hwii-

Seongjin was not conscious of it, but at some point, a weak wind was rising beneath Max's feet, created when the Auror materialized.

* * *

"Brother, stop! "Are you feeling okay?"

Meanwhile, Logan, who quickly arrived on the other side riding a dinosaur, stopped Masain and asked. This stubborn knight was so desperate that he had unknowingly stepped deep into the land of death.

Logan, who noticed signs of erosion all over his body, quickly struck a sacred barrier and unleashed strong divine power.

"Lowering! Prince Mores... ..!"

"Mores is safe, brother. So, please rest assured and get yourself together."

"... ..!"

Masain finally seemed to come to his senses after hearing his trustworthy younger brother's words.

The knight, who realized that he had shown an unbelievably indecent appearance despite his age, fell to his knees on the floor and let out a sigh of mixed relief and self-destruction.

"Phew, I'm sorry. Because I was unable to properly assist Prince

Mores... .."

"older brother."

"I failed to fulfill my duty. "You truly have no shame, sir!"

Logan looked down at him with an embarrassed face and thought.

Who in this world can 'properly' take care of Mores, who deliberately causes trouble?

"We need to crack down on Mores. "Brother, you have done enough."

"That's not true... omg!"

But Masain's face turned pale again as he looked up at what he saw.

Logan unconsciously turned his head to follow his gaze, unable to hide his bewildered feelings at the sight that caught his eye.

"... Seongjin Lee?"

It was like that.

Isn't Lee Seong-jin, who is now on top of the dinosaur's body with Max, smiling as he looks down into the distance with a confident face?

It was clear that they had followed Logan's exact path.

"Ahaha! "It's simpler than you think, right?"

But Seongjin's atrocities were only just beginning.

Seongjin, who was assessing something on top of the wildly writhing demon species, got on his uneasy feet and began to carefully move the wolf dog.

"Well, I... ..!"

Masain, who was worse off, jumped up from his seat.

lightly.

Seongjin, who dangerously turned his wolf-dog body toward Masain and Logan, raised the corner of his mouth playfully for the last time.

"I'm going to show you something really fun, Logan! "Maybe you'll be surprised too?"

With that said, finally.

Shuuuk-

Seongjin ran away with Max without any regrets.

"... ..!"

"Hey!"

Seongjin literally fell in an instant.

Using the dinosaur's high back as support, it slides as if going down a slide in the air.

Although it's a little clumsy, it's not fundamentally different from the movements Logan showed.

"ha ha ha! Look at this, Logan! Who says they can't keep up? "I'm much faster, right?"

Shooooooooo-

The prince is riding the dog as if it were a sled, and the prince is accelerating tremendously! The speed was so scary that if it hit the floor like this, it would absolutely be crushed flat!

Masain, who was worse off, stood up and ran out of the barrier.

"Lowering! It's dangerous! Please stop!"

"Ahahaha!"

"Hey!"

Running after him, Logan laughed a little helplessly.

"Haha, that's really amazing."

"yes?"

"I didn't expect you to imitate that anomalous movement right away.

"Mores really seems to be a genius in Auror training, brother."

"... .."

At that carefree admiration, Masain unconsciously frowned and looked back.

No, I wouldn't know if it were someone else. When you say that, isn't it just deception?

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351. Holy Wind (2)

Fortunately, the situation Masain feared did not occur.

As the bottom rapidly approached, Seongjin's speed decreased noticeably.

The air slide is, after all, an application of Schunishuhe. The essence of the technology is to increase friction with aura to prevent slipping even on ice.

Talk.

Seongjin landed on the floor easily, got off the wolf dog's back, and raised his head with a proud face.

"... uh?"

And when I saw Masain's pale face, I became very puzzled.

'Sir Martha, why do you look worse than before? 'You seemed so worried that I rushed over to join you?'

Didn't I do a good job? You did a good job of imitating Logan, and you did a good job of following me so that you didn't go back and forth for no reason, right?

He thought so, but it was purely Seongjin's illusion.

"Lowering..."

The knight's trembling hand slowly came up and placed his chin on both of Seongjin's shoulders.

'I just felt like I was trying to grab him by the collar and changed

direction... ... ?'

Seongjin tilted his head.

Oh, no way, Lord Martha can't do that.

"Lord Martha, be careful. As I said before, demonic energy entered my body..."

"That kind of thing is okay now."

Masain cut off Seongjin's words, which was rare, and strengthened his grip.

I felt like the grip that was pushing down was somehow filled with emotion.

"Lord Martha?"

"How far are you willing to go?"

"what?"

"How long do I have to just watch you run into danger at will?"

The growling voice was unusual.

"I am proud that I have done my best to ensure your safety. But what should I do if you don't mind taking risks and run to me? "Now I don't even know what I should be working for or in what direction!"

Oh my.

Seongjin quietly averted his gaze and watched his gaze.

Lord Martha, you must be really angry.

Hwiik-

Coo!

At that time, Logan unleashed a strong sword attack, causing the dinosaur to collapse again.

The guy who subdued a huge demon species with a single wave of his hand came up to Seongjin's side and told him this with an innocent look on his face.

'You'd better hurry up and say you were wrong, Seongjin Lee.'

'no... ..'

Seongjin felt very wronged.

'Wait a minute, what on earth did I do so wrong?'

'Because I didn't wait for reinforcements and attacked the level 1 demon species alone without fear.'

But I felt like I had to! Somehow, I feel like I've overcome several close junctures and achieved the best results!

This was all for the Seonghwang family and Delcross. But why are you angry at me?

'That's not all. You almost died earlier, but you couldn't take it anymore and jumped over the demon species again, right?'

'That's it... ..!'

I just felt like it was no longer dangerous now that Logan had come. So he thought it would be beneficial in many ways to join quickly.

Plus the slide, it was so much fun!

"Weren't you happy too, Max?"

But when I patted the wolfdog's head and asked, didn't the dog look at Seongjin with pitiful eyes and sniffle?

Kiing, whining!

-What was that? Can't we do it now? I was a little scared... ..

Oh, really?

Seongjin immediately changed his stance and reflected.

"I see. I guess it was a dangerous thing after all. 'I'm so sorry for worrying you, Lord Martha.'"

At that soulless apology, Masain's mood suddenly turned ugly.

"how... .."

Crash.

The sound of the knight grinding his teeth was eerie.

"How long will it be just words..." .."

Where is that?

Ugh-

Mythra responded to his harsh aura and even rang out a threatening sword sound!

Seongjin broke into a cold sweat.

'Wow. Calm down, Sir Masaine. You're putting too much pressure on your hands right now. 'My shoulder is starting to hurt!'

Aren't you really going to get caught like this?

It was when Seongjin was worried about that.

"Lowering!"

"Hey Logan!"

From afar, cries for Logan began to be heard.

It was a special unit of Liliium, led by Otto, Ellie, and Sir Duchamp.

"Lowering! Are you okay?!"

The sight of horses running around in a hurry, not knowing what to do, is not a sight to see. They were paladins who didn't seem to be distracted to a large extent, but they seemed to be very anxious.

They were even bringing Logan's Rottweiler, Roxana.

"Again, you abandoned your horse midway and left. How big of a mess did you get into?"

"No matter how low you are, you should not deal with a level 1 demon species alone!"

"We're leaving now, just wait a moment..." Ugh! omg!"

The cries were so desperate that they put Sir Masaine's heartache to shame.

The embarrassed knight lowered his expression and gently lowered his hand from Seongjin's shoulder.

"Ah, we've finally arrived. "It must have been a lot of trouble to rush."

In fact, only Logan, the person responsible, is saying such things with a nonchalant expression.

This is truly absurd.

"I threw away my words and ran alone, so who is criticizing whom now? uh?"

"hmm."

Logan, who received Seongjin's stinging glare, looked away.

* * *

The chief chamberlain, who was about to announce the presence of a visitor, stopped before entering the office.

This is because I sensed an unusual atmosphere in the back of the emperor sitting in the Odokani seat looking at the terrace.

"... .."

Lewis already knew from long experience that he should not be touched at times like this.

As he guessed, Seonghwang's eyes were now directed towards the southwestern sky, but in fact, the scene he was seeing was something slightly different.

A large-scale earthquake that occurs out of nowhere.

Numerous casualties buried in piles of dirt.

Amelia's disappearance.

The tragic fall of the Bathurst Territory.

And it started in Rohan and spread throughout the continent.

These were disasters that might really have happened in the relatively near future.

"... .."

How long had I been looking at them like that?

After a while, all these scenes disappeared from sight as if they were lies. Perhaps the troublemaker son has done something.

Seonghwang was relieved, even if only for a moment.

But as if to ridicule him, images of another dark future begin to unfold before his eyes.

The advent of a high-ranking demon king who enjoys making arrangements.

Seeds of numerous demon species blooming throughout the continent.

A racial barrier that is being destroyed one after another.

Eventually, a unit of miscreants marches toward the imperial capital, destroying everything they come across.

These were also disasters that my son's small steps narrowly avoided.

Futures that will never come back now, and that it is finally possible

for the Holy Emperor to gaze squarely in the face.

'But it doesn't end like this.'

His young son is alone and struggling towards the future.

In fact, the person who has to protect such a child is so helpless that it makes one lament.

"... your majesty."

"... .."

Seonghwang turned his head without answering. Lewis, who noticed the silver sparkle in his eyes, bowed his head with great guilt.

"We apologize for the inconvenience, but the visitor has been waiting for a long time."

"visit."

"Yes, Saint Iseo now requests to see Your Majesty."

Seonghwang furrowed his brows slightly. The eyes of the saintess who came in guided by the chamberlain were shining bright gold.

Cadmus.

I wasn't always happy with him, but in his current mood, he was someone I couldn't welcome.

[It's really unusual to keep your position even in this situation.]

Cadmus flopped down across from the Holy Emperor without asking permission.

[I thought that if that missing thing was in danger, it would be the first to run away.]

Seonghwang glared at him without answering.

I didn't think it would be unaware of the appearance of a level 1 demon species, but why did it bother to come and expose it even

though it knew it would go against its wishes?

[I can't understand you, descendant. Why are you just watching that devil?]

"We have already sent the Holy Knights. "They will do what is necessary."

[That's funny. What can those ugly things do right?]

The arrogant demigod, who believed that only his own power was meaningful in the world, stared at the Holy Emperor as if he was genuinely curious.

[Isn't this a demonic species that appeared near the ecliptic after a long time? It's just a stone's throw away from here. It wouldn't require so much cause and effect that you would put so much effort into it.]

The author, who knows nothing, is citing [cause and effect] as he pleases.

'but... ... '

Cause and effect.

It could be called that in a simple way, but the cause and effect that the Holy Emperor saw was not that simple.

He personally kills the demon species in front of everyone. Even in that simple action, countless causes and effects were involved.

It did not just stop at erasing the existence of the demon species itself.

The world's perception that defines God's representative. A faith that can easily lead to fanaticism toward the Lord. Countless subjects, present and future, will be influenced by this.

The significance of the existence of the Holy Knights and, by extension, all organizations involved in the affairs of the empire. And order and procedures become unstable, and the chaos in Delcross

accelerates.

The situation on the continent will probably change quickly, and most likely it will not go in a good direction. It is obvious that the pranks of wrongdoers taking advantage of this will also increase.

In this way, an action that sometimes seems like nothing can cause an irreversible upheaval in the future of the continent.

In order to correct all of that again, it is bound to take a lot of cause and effect.

'But I have no intention of explaining everything to that dead thing.'

As Seonghwang kept his mouth shut, Cadmus nodded and continued speaking as if he was not expecting an answer.

[But in the meantime, do you know what's fun? The truth is that all of this is a prison of cause and effect created by yourself. Descendants.]

"... .."

[You cannot deceive your eyes. Although it appears to be holding on somehow on the outside, Delcross is already slowly collapsing. You in the past would not have known that this would happen.]

So Cadmus was always curious.

The descendant in front of him now is a human being, but one who has crossed the realm of gods. He was the only one in Delcross who could be compared to the demigod himself.

But how can you let go of all that power and obediently stay in the imperial capital and live a helpless life in prison?

[Why did you do that? Do you regret what happened back then? Didn't you ever have the slightest desire to undo that mistake?]

How about starting to prophesy properly now? If you do that, perhaps the world will allow you, as a prophet, to have some causality.

Cadmus's irises, which had repeatedly made invitations disguised as questions, suddenly glowed with a magical golden light.

[Or how about removing the obstacle now and getting your rights back?]

Seonghwang laughed inwardly at that absurd trick.

Do you really not know whose mercy is saving your life right now?

[If you get back all the causalities you need, this collapsing world can have another chance at revival... ..]

"Because I was so ignorant about my situation, the 700 years I spent lying in the coffin were useless."

[...] What?]

When a sensitive topic came up, Cadmus raised his eyebrows, showing his discomfort.

"okay. It seems you have finally realized that your situation is intertwined with my son's cause and effect. So, in your eyes, did that child seem like a prison guard imprisoning you?"

Cadmus, who had hit the nail on the head, kept his mouth shut. However, Seonghwang's cynicism toward him continued.

"As the current situation seems difficult, I guess I finally have a chance to get rid of that child from before my eyes. "How can you be so inadequate even if you call yourself a demigod?"

[You, this guy... .. !]

Cadmus got angry for a moment, but that was all. This was because the silver-grey eyes of the Holy Emperor staring at him had an unprecedentedly cruel look.

"okay. If you want to hear my prophecy, I'm happy to give it to you. So keep that hat clearly engraved in your mind. "The reason you are able to survive today by clinging to the humans of the normal world is because that child's cause and effect allowed you to do so."

[...] ... !]

"Otherwise, is there no reason to preserve your life when you dare to target Sisley?"

A demigod who created the foundation of the empire.

It was a remark that treated that great being as if it were embers, but Cadmus could vividly feel that Seonghwang's words were sincere.

"Do you understand? "In any future I can see, there is no other world in which you could have survived until now."

Cadmus was taken aback by that abstract prophecy and his eyes trembled slightly.

[...] Well, that's really it... ... !]

But there was no more answer. Instead, Cadmus saw the Holy Emperor's hand slowly moving towards the silver thorn.

An indirect expression of the intention that there will be no further conversation.

[...] It was my heart that cherished the Delcross I had built. But I think I said something pointless!]

Cadmus, very sulky, left the office without even saying hello.

Seonghwang, who was finally alone, slowly turned his head and looked outside the terrace.

"yet..."

His eyes darkened as he looked at the southwest sky again.

"It's not over yet, son."

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352. Holy Wind (3)

The Liliun detachment that arrived at the scene could not keep their mouths shut for a while.

"That is a first-class large demon species... .."

Even for those who were well-versed in eradicating all kinds of sea creatures and demon species, the size of the dinosaur demon was beyond imagination.

Not only was it large enough to easily surpass a small mountain, but the land contaminated with demonic energy had already reached a radius of several hundred meters.

Fortunately, the dinosaur was only writhing here and there and was no longer moving from its spot. This is thanks to the Auror Blade that Logan plunged deep into the guy.

"How is that still there?"

Seongjin asked, his eyes fixed on the long, skewer-like silver and blue blade.

Usually, the external air that leaves the Auror user's body quickly dissipates into the air. However, it is truly amazing that the external air blown earlier still remains in a clear form.

"What if you ask me that?"

But Logan asked back, rather puzzled.

"huh?"

"You are still sending aurors to the wolfdog who is away."

To Logan, the two seemed to have similar talents. It's probably because I don't know much about the connection between Seongjin and Max.

"Do you think I should be taught by you instead? "I don't have the talent to send external energy directly to a moving creature and to sustain that."

"Even if you say that, I don't really know how to do it. So, quickly teach me the trick."

When Seongjin insisted, Logan looked dumbfounded for a moment.

However, isn't Lee Seong-jin unconsciously abusing Aura materialization even while meditating? Logan, who thought it would happen soon, answered obediently.

"Wherever the gaze goes, human perception always follows, right?"

"huh."

"So, it's just a theory that a thought naturally arises there and the aura is drawn to it."

"... .. ?"

"The important thing is to never let go of oneness with the outside world. And be careful not to lose sight of them even for a moment. If I do that, it's like the external energy is out of my hands but not out of my hands."

... Did I ask for no reason?

Dad and Logan both say Zen questions the same way. Well, I guess this guy is a sword master.

"Sir, what about that beast?"

At that time, Otto, Eli, and Sir Duchamp approached Logan and asked. At first glance, the appearance of a huge wolf dog was unusual.

"... .."

Logan, who caught a glimpse of Seongjin, responded kindly to them.

"That is a divine beast."

"god... number? "What is that?"

"They say it is a sacred beast that has received the grace of the Lord."

"The grace of the Lord?"

"okay. It is said that this was clearly confirmed by Sir Francis, the adjutant of the Knights of St. Aurelion. So this beast, um... .."

But the truth is, he only just found out.

When Logan, who was at a loss for explanation, trailed off, Seongjin quickly added from next to him.

"Sir Francis said it was like a divine beast called [Wind]. "It's a cute dog from St. Bastian's fairy tale."

"Oh yeah. It is also found in the fairy tales of the scriptures. So, as members of the Order of Knights who follow the virtues of St. Bastian, we need to clearly recognize the value of this sacred beast and treat it appropriately. "So that I can become an example for everyone."

"... .. ?"

The knights of the separate unit were dumbfounded for a moment. However, the expression on the face of their spiritual leader, Prince Logan, was impeccable.

"... okay. "Our scripture study was still insufficient."

If His Majesty Logan says so, then so be it. The knights of the separate unit, who understood without much doubt, looked back at Max with eyes filled with admiration.

"The Lord's sacred beast... .."

Hehehe!

A poopy puppy wagging its tail in an unreasonable manner and aiming for Seongjin's hair.

"That lively look! "Look at the eyes full of guns!"

"You are truly majestic and trustworthy!"

Seongjin quietly broke out in a cold sweat as he witnessed the real-time scolding of the Lilium knights.

'Logan, you scary guy. How did he usually roast and boil the knights, so he could believe in your words like a religion?

In any case, as the special forces began to move in an organized manner, the plan to subdue the demon species also gained momentum.

After accurately assessing the extent of the damage, Lilium's knights began to spread out widely, focusing on the agricultural fields.

"We are preparing to create a Granus-style barrier."

As Seongjin looked at him blankly, Logan gave a brief explanation.

First, create a semicircular formation that surrounds the devil with only a small number of people. It was a Granus type 1 defense line that defended the front.

If you keep the shape in such a hurry, when other Holy Knights arrive, you can quickly build a completely spherical Type 0 barrier.

Meanwhile, it was decided to immediately transfer Masain, which had been exposed to erosion for a long time, to the Imperial Capital.

"I must protect His Excellency Mores!"

The stubborn knight stubbornly refused at first.

"But that is too much to say, Lord Martha."

"It is now oppressed by the divine power of Degraded Logan, but the

extent of the erosion is greater than expected. To completely cure this, you must return to the ecliptic immediately."

"it's okay. "I can endure!"

But Sir Ely, who blocked his path, was merciless.

"Be as stubborn as you can! How many paladins do you think it takes to stop the erosion of the world? "The current number of people is not even enough to set up a barrier to block the demon species!"

"no... .."

"You're so preoccupied with your own mission that you're not planning on causing such a huge inconvenience to everyone, are you?"

In this way, Masain was taken to the imperial capital without even being able to say a word.

"Hey... .."

Seongjin waved his hand with a sad expression as he heard Masain's scream as he walked away.

Don't worry about me, just take care of yourself, Sir Martha.

And when I was completely relieved of my anger, I slowly returned to Jinju Palace. Because you tend to cool down quickly.

Meanwhile, there was an unexpected encounter for everyone. It was Roxana and Max who met face to face for the first time since they met at Sigismund Range.

Sniff.

When Max stops wagging his tail and raises his head, the beautiful white horse also looks down at the wolf-dog with a noble attitude. At one point, there was a strange tension between the two birds.

However, contrary to the expectation that they would keep each other in check with sharp nerves like before, Roxana and Max

maintained a fairly calm attitude.

After such a moment passed-

Max was the first to raise his voice softly.

Crrrrr.

-You understand now, right? My hugeness and strength.

Then Roxana also snored lightly.

Purung.

-joy. It's worth shouting. Although he is still too boring to be my opponent.

Grrrr...

-Are you going to attack me? I won't lose!

Purr...

-Don't be rash, kid. There will come a day when I have to settle the matter with you.

It felt like the conversation between the two birds was vividly echoing in my head.

The demon lord who was watching laughed in his head.

[...] What on earth are they doing?]

That's right.

Anyway, while the separate team was diligently preparing the barrier, Seongjin grabbed Logan, who was relatively free, and asked him various questions. Since I had enough auras, I wanted to learn what I needed to learn and test what I needed to test.

For some reason, I felt a sense of impatience, like I had to hurry, and I couldn't figure out why.

"How to blow away air? "Right here?"

"huh. I wanted to try that too. "Not only do you often use Lord Martha, but also Lord Maria and Sir Kurt?"

"That's because they are high-ranking knights."

Logan responded like that, looked at Seongjin's condition for a moment, and then nodded.

"Well, I don't know if it would be possible for you if you were an Auror at this level. "I don't know how there were so many Aurors all of a sudden."

"I got it all from my father. "I just saved it until now."

"... Are you transferring your Auror status to someone else?"

Logan tilted his head for a moment, but it seemed like he expected it to happen soon.

"Well, since that's what he does, I guess something like that is possible. Then let's give it a try. "You already know Banahas Type 4 and Type 5's 'Unfolding the Small Sword', right?"

"huh. The training itself has been completely mastered. But, as Sir Masain explained, the sword curtain didn't unfold like it was supposed to, right?"

"That was purely because the total number of four Aurors was insufficient."

Logan demonstrated himself.

Ugh-

Soon, Arjuna made a small sound, and a thin silver-blue film was created around the undulating blade.

Logan, who casually performed the Bananas method, which is not his main practice, continued his explanation.

"Do you see the thin membrane surrounding the sword here? Preparing to blow away air is similar to this. It's the most efficient way to create an auror barrier. how is it? Would you like to open Form 4 and Form 5 now?"

"uh. okay."

As Seongjin picked up the nutcracker and took a stance, Logan added from next to him.

"If you want to focus the Auror on the sword, first take that dog away... .."

But I quickly shook my head as I thought about something.

"No, no. It would be best to leave it alone. "I think it's all thanks to that dog that your aura flows more smoothly than usual."

"huh?"

"If you move alone, don't you think you'll use the aura inside your body recklessly again? "Wouldn't it be great if you always cared for yourself that much?"

"... .. ?"

I'm just moving the aura, so what's the difference from before?

Seongjin tilted his head for a moment, but anyway, it wasn't that important right now. Seongjin quickly concentrated on unfolding the small screen, and after several attempts, he finally succeeded in creating a faint gray screen.

"... "You're really good at anything you do as an Auror."

Logan seemed very impressed.

"Then, shall we separate the sword screen and fly it far away? "The trick is similar to Banajas 3 and 7, 'Water-Jebi-knit'."

"Type 3, type 7... Type 3, Type 7... .."

"If that's a little difficult, you can just think of tying a stone with a string, hanging it on the blade, and swinging it."

The Sword Master's advice was quite intuitive and simple. But perhaps that unexpectedly stuck in Seongjin's head?

"Throw stones. Attach a string to the blade and throw a stone... .."

Grrrr... ..

As the nutcracker began to tremble slightly, the paladins who were preparing the barrier glanced at Seongjin. However, Seongjin, who was concentrating on shaking the Aura, was so immersed that he didn't even feel it.

How much time has passed like that?

Peeing-

Pick!

Soon, a small piece of Aura fell from Seongjin's sword and flew away. Although it was a very small external energy compared to what I had seen so far, it definitely hit the dinosaur's body and created a small fountain of magical energy.

"done!"

When Seongjin shouted excitedly, Logan also seemed excited.

"Haha, are you good at it? "Then, while you're at it, do you want to learn this too?"

Then, doesn't it look like Logan is stepping lightly in the empty air? He even looked as if he was floating in the air.

"The movements and tricks you showed me earlier are similar. "You'll probably be able to follow along quickly."

When Seongjin looked closely, he could see the wind of the Aurors materializing from time to time beneath Logan's feet.

"... "The Sword Master does a lot of amazing tricks, doesn't he?"

"It's nothing special. "I also accidentally learned it from someone else."

As Logan answered like that, the image of a mercenary boy leaping into the air and jumping into the enemy camp stood out in his mind.

At the time, I couldn't even imagine that it would be possible to operate Aurors in that way.

"hmm..."

When Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows in concentration, Logan added something as if trying to ease the burden.

"It's about gathering the Aurors into one point without the central point of the sword. It may be difficult right now because it will be an unfamiliar method. "You don't have to think so quickly."

However, Seongjin, who seemed to be struggling for a while without finding his way, ends up creating a small vortex of aura in the air after a while!

Logan made a rare expression of admiration.

"Lee Seong-jin."

"huh?"

"You also have a natural talent for sword and Auror training. "Would you like to learn the Henesys practice formally?"

"..."

Seongjin was speechless from the absurdity.

A man so crazy about his love for his country, couldn't he give up learning Ortona's practice even under these circumstances?

But Logan's attitude was serious.

"listen. Even when I was living as Gael Bertran, there was only one

person in my life who I felt I truly wanted to teach. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances, it was canceled. "You are the first person to make such a suggestion since then."

"okay?"

Only then did Seongjin, who felt a little tempted, ask cautiously.

"But why was the training of disciples canceled when I was Gael?"

"Who was that one talented person?"

"This is a mercenary boy I met at the front line before."

Logan, who answered like that, hesitated for a moment and then added.

"... So, this is Abama Massage right now."

At that absurd answer, Seongjin opened his mouth without realizing it.

'You were trying to teach your father? What a crazy genius! 'Aren't you too high-minded in choosing your disciples?'

Around this time, Seongjin was busy learning new skills.

Wiggle!

It was at that time that the demon species that had been lying still began to make strange movements.

Druuuuuuuuuuuuuuu...

353. Holy Wind (4)

Styracoceratops.

Originally a field boss that appeared in an RPG game called [Kong: Jurassic Island].

Like most beings assembled from the codes of the normal world, the devil was already fully aware of his status and duties from the moment he opened his eyes.

-however...

Strangely enough, there was a huge gap between the pre-assigned code and the reality in which it manifested itself.

The devil, confused by the enormous gravity that restrained his body, quickly looked at the previous records to understand what had happened.

-For some reason, layers of incomplete 'amplification' code were piled on top of [my] [controller].

It seems like that was the reason why I woke up to a size different from the designated code.

But the devil wasn't too worried at first. Rather, thanks to that, he was able to generously steal the magical energy of the high-ranking demon king who was under his control.

Perhaps because he was worried about the leakage of demonic energy, the high-ranking demon king soon completely cut off the connection with himself. He gained unexpected freedom.

-[I] am now a high-ranking devil with power comparable to that of a

low-ranking devil!

The devil, freed from the countless codes that had bound him, felt a great sense of liberation as he willingly changed his essence to fit reality.

So what do we do now? The answer was simple.

-Although the code specifying the 'action target' has disappeared, the purpose of my existence is to destroy everything in the field!

The devil didn't feel any need to change it.

-So break it! All I have to do is to spread [my] power generously!

But things started to go differently than expected. It was only for a moment that we roared in joy at the new birth. He was beaten here and there by the hands of several people, and eventually ended up being pinned to the floor, helpless.

-... ... ?

If the difference in power and status between them and those people was so clear, I couldn't understand how this result could happen.

How much did he struggle to escape that bondage? Suddenly the devil realized.

-[I] was definitely born again.

Codes that specified one's appearance, consciousness, and even the meaning of existence. Freed from those elaborate rules, it finally reorganized itself into what it thought was the most appropriate form.

But that wasn't enough. So these hardships continue.

-I thought I was completely liberated, but I was mistaken. [I] still look the same as before. There was no need to be tied down to anything in the first place!

A demon that has just awakened and has even lost the laws of the

normal world that formed its foundation.

His ego, which had undergone drastic changes, was overly blurred and ambiguous. Moreover, I didn't have time to become attached to such a clumsy ego.

So the devil thought.

-Why can't I give up on these things, [me]?

* * *

"Manpower deployment is complete, Sir Otto."

Sir Ellie, who was leading the preparations for the barrier, returned to the center of the camp and sent a signal.

"Hurry as much as possible. Fortunately, the demon species is not moving yet, but the demonic energy is spreading little by little and killing the land. "Before waiting for reinforcements, it might be better to deploy a type 1 barrier first."

Sir Otto, who was standing in the center, nodded.

If one were to pick the person with the strongest divine power in the original Lilium Detachment, it would undoubtedly be Prince Logan. However, because he was also the strongest force in the Detached Force, it was rare for him to focus entirely on the sacred barrier.

Therefore, whenever Lilium struck a barrier, the focal point was Sir Otto, who had the second-strongest divine power after the prince.

"I'm ready too. Then let me know and let's get started right away... .."

Sir Otto raised his head and followed their idol with his eyes.

Unlike them, who were quite far away from the polluted area, Prince Logan was close to the border of the Land of the Dead. He probably maintains an Auror blade with a demonic species attached to it, to keep it in check.

What was surprising was that Prince Mores was next to him.

'It may be because you have such strong divine power.'

For some reason, Prince Mores also seems not to be afraid of demons at all. Sir Otto looked at them with curiosity.

From a distance, the brothers seemed to be chatting comfortably. Occasionally, when I see Prince Mores swinging a sword, it seems like Prince Logan is teaching swordsmanship using an interlude.

"You already have that kind of external skills at that age!"

A paladin exclaims in admiration as he sees the sword energy clearly condensed on a nutcracker. There was a time when it was rumored that the 3rd prince was a bastard with no swordsmanship skills, but looking at him like that, it looks like he is indeed a member of the royal family.

But what caught Sir Otto's attention was something else.

'His Majesty Logan, with Prince Mores... ... '

Considering what their relationship was like not long ago, it is a truly amazing sight.

Originally, it was a relationship where one party seemed to unilaterally prey on the other.

The fact that Prince Logan was so absorbed in subjugating the seawater all day long was probably not without the influence of that serious discord. Sometimes, even by chance, when a story about the damn brothers came up, Prince Logan would always smile bitterly and change the topic.

'But what about now?'

The way they laugh and bicker is so natural. Don't they just seem like ordinary brothers who literally have good friendship?

"You seem really happy to come to see you."

Sir Otto, who was fixating his gaze on the demon species, widened his eyes in astonishment.

Several large cracks appeared on its body, and then, for no apparent reason, the demon's body began to break into small pieces.

"... ..!"

It is not cut or burst.

It was close to rapidly losing its original shape, like a sand castle collapsing in the wind or a water droplet breaking between landing poles.

Murmur.

As the Paladins' agitation spread, the demon species finally suddenly lost its shape and completely collapsed. All they can see now is a huge amount of black flesh writhing and mixing with demonic energy.

"... Gu, maggot?"

Sir Duchamp muttered something stupid next to him.

But the real problem started now. Because the demon species that was completely dismantled was no longer attached to Prince Logan's Auror Blade.

The completely liberated black flesh forms several bundles and rapidly rises into the air.

Sigh!

At first glance, it seemed like it was erupting randomly, but the movement had a clear purpose. Most of them were shot in the direction where the princes were, and one of them started crawling towards the paladins as quickly as a snake writhing on the ground.

Undoubted hostility towards humans!

Sir Otto, who instinctively felt a sense of crisis, unleashed his divine

power to the fullest and shouted.

"Type 1 deployment!"

"... Hey, deploy!"

In this way, starting with Sir Otto, the Holy Knights of Lilium began to emit divine power one after another.

A white, shining film of divine power quickly covers the entire surface along the formation.

Paaaa-

However, the defensive line was overly wide with insufficient personnel. It was obvious that the light-density sacred barrier would not be enough to completely block the fierce influx of flesh.

'... It's pierced!'

Sir Otto realized this instinctively. But still, he could never step down.

'If I move now, all barriers will collapse! The evil energy will invade the farmland and eventually attack the subjects of the Lord!'

In that case, even if I lose my life here, I can at least be a proud member of Lilium... ... !

"Lord, be angry with the enemies who stand in our way. So let your anger save us from the wrath of the enemy!"

He was reciting a prayer to strengthen the barrier even a little, but when a huge demonic snake came closer, he closed his eyes tightly, having a premonition of the end.

Quaaaang!

The strong magical energy and divine power collided, causing a loud explosion.

However, contrary to the expectation that it would be immediately

swept away by demonic energy, surprisingly, the sacred barrier was firmly holding up the black flesh.

"... ..?"

When Sir Otto, surprised, slowly opened his eyes, he saw a familiar new model standing in front of him.

"... Lowering!?"

Prince Logan.

Their idol, undisturbed as always, had suddenly approached the sacred barrier and was adding its divine power.

A divine power strong enough to single-handedly support a type 1 barrier that was barely framed.

"Lord, please protect your children."

The prince recites in a calm voice.

Just a small part of a prayer. However, just by reciting that simple phrase, the divine power exuded by Prince Logan became even stronger.

The gigantic half-circle, which was extremely flimsy, was finally completed into a complete Type 1 barrier and began to emit dazzling white light.

* * *

Since Seongjin and Logan were close to the demon species, they were able to notice the abnormality faster than anyone else.

Whick!

Logan, who sensed an unusual change, immediately swung Arjuna and unleashed a sword energy mixed with divine power.

but-

Cheesy!

Only a small portion of the flesh that touched the outside air was purified and burned, and the black flesh that was scattered in all directions in an instant came back together again and writhed ominously.

"... .."

Seongjin and Logan exchanged glances without saying a word.

The two people, both of whom had sensitive instincts, immediately realized that they would not be able to deal with this rapidly changing demon species using normal methods.

'That thing is no longer worthy of being called an entity. Even if you hit them randomly, it's no use!'

'okay. There is only one way to neutralize something like that. All we have to do is surround it with a strong sacred barrier and purify it!'

Once the situation was assessed, the response was quick.

"Max!"

The two people quickly ran towards the sacred barrier in their own way, managing to avoid the huge pillars that were fired at them at random.

But it was almost before we arrived at Banwonjin. I don't know what I was thinking, but Seongjin suddenly suddenly turned in Max's direction!

Logan, startled, cast a desperate gaze.

"Wait a minute, what are you doing now, Seongjin Lee!"

"You know it can't go on like this, right? Even if we unfold the sacred barrier now, it will only be in an incomplete form. So, in order to completely surround him, we must first gather all the demon energy scattered in all directions into one place and narrow the area!"

"It's dangerous for you alone! Then me too... ..!"

"But without you, I don't think the barrier can be maintained at all?"

It was the perfect answer.

Logan, who was speechless, glanced at the Knights of Lilium and Seongjin alternately with an anxious expression.

"You know it well, right?"

As if to reassure Logan, Seongjin raised the corners of his mouth with a grin.

"To me, demonic energy poses no threat."

"... ..!"

"And that I would never put my dog in danger."

Logan bites his lip with a frustrated look on his face.

Of course, he understood Seongjin's skills better than anyone else in the room. To be honest, Lee Seong-jin is more trustworthy than the Lilium Special Forces. As a guy, he probably won't be easily defeated by the devil.

'but... ..!'

Know. I know.

Still, understanding it with reason and allowing the heart to do it are two completely different things!

Leaving behind Logan, who was in deep conflict, Seongjin ran vigorously with Max. Well, he's a smart guy, so he probably doesn't know what's best.

"Let's go, Max!"

Wong!

The wolfdog responded vigorously and kicked the ground according to the will of its owner without the slightest fear.

[Ah, Seongjin Lee, you crazy bastard. You, this bastard again... ... !]

In my head, I could hear the despairing sigh of the demon lord.

But even though he was grumbling like that, the Demon King clearly understood what he had to do now.

sparkle.

Red light begins to blink in Seongjin's pupils as always -

Wow!

Soon, a familiar five-colored world with many solid lines of possibilities unfolded before his eyes.

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354. Holy Wind (5)

Huge pillars made of black flesh bursting out violently in all directions.

It looked like a mythical monster with many heads, or a scene of a terrible natural disaster with lava erupting violently.

The air filled with demonic energy vibrates, and the black earth of death shakes mercilessly.

"As it is... ..!"

Sir Ellie, who had been pouring out his divine power on one side of the semi-circle, swallowed his sleep as he foresaw a disastrous outcome.

At first glance, the Granius type 1 barrier, which was deployed in time, seemed to have successfully blocked the demon species.

However, she was the only one who could clearly see the structure and location of the barrier for the first time. Due to the nature of the large barrier, which is difficult to readjust once deployed, it is far from possible to completely confine the demon species without reinforcements from the Holy Knights.

And the demon species blocked by the sacred barrier will eventually cross the opposite forest and mercilessly sweep away other territories.

'furthermore... ..'

Prince Mores.

The young boy was still in that demonic storm.

When the bastard prince, who didn't know where he would fall, suddenly jumped into a whirlpool of black flesh, Sir Ellie almost forgot to keep the barrier and ran towards him.

Protecting members of the royal family with their lives is also an important mission for a Holy Knight.

'however... .. '

Surprisingly, Prince Logan, who was thought to be the first to run, seemed calmer than expected even in such an unexpected situation.

While pouring out enormous divine power to capture the center of the barrier, he was keeping an eye on the situation while holding Arjuna, who was clad in silver and blue, with one hand.

Sir Elie, who was examining those cool-looking blue eyes, became momentarily curious.

'... Believe... there is?'

That troublemaker prince?

why?

There is no way he could have miscalculated the feelings of an idol he has followed for a long time. Sir Ely looked back at Prince Mores, who was running far away in her half-confident mood.

Nettle -

An extremely confusing situation in which black flesh moving like a snake suddenly scatters or comes together in unexpected places.

In it, the young prince was skillfully driving a wolf dog while avoiding attacks from demon species.

Hwiik-

Push!

Occasionally, as he swung the nutcracker, black flesh would scatter

helplessly, scattering demonic energy.

However, rather than confronting the demon species head on, Prince Mores was dodging the demon species here and there, making dizzy movements as if he was disturbing them.

'why?'

Then, at the moment of realization, Sir Elie felt as if he had been stabbed in the back of the head.

It was clearly visible to her now. The black flesh that seemed to be spreading out in all directions without any hesitation, at some point was drawn to Prince Mores and was either stagnating in place or coming back to this place little by little!

'Surely, to keep him here?'

Quang!

At that time, another black pillar flies and hits the sacred barrier.

Grumbling-

The flesh that was purified by divine power and began to burn white could not withstand the impact and began to sway back and forth.

Quang! bang! bang!

A tremendous shock striking the barrier one after another.

'... ... !'

However, even though it was such a huge shock that it felt like the barrier would break at any moment, Prince Logan did not swing the sword in his hand. He just stands firm in his position and pours out his divine power even more fiercely towards the barrier.

'Did you already know!'

Only then did Sir Ely become certain.

His Majesty Logan knew Prince Mores's goal from the beginning, and

he had no doubts that he would achieve it in the end.

So, you won't make any attacks that might provoke the demon species, and you'll just hold out until they gather here!

'perhaps... ... !'

On the one hand, a seemingly bleak outlook gave rise to hope that perhaps the empire could be protected without major damage.

"Lord, be angry with the enemies who stand in our way! So let your anger save us from the wrath of the enemy!"

Reciting a passage from the scriptures most often recited by the Lilium Detachment during battle, Lord Ellie soon began pouring all of her strength into the sacred barrier.

* * *

Thousands or tens of thousands, perhaps more, of dinosaur flesh broken into small pieces.

The sight of them spewing out demonic energy all at once and running wild was a sight so dizzying that it was impossible for a human eye to follow it.

However, Seongjin, who was now buried inside, was seeing a scene so complex that it could not be compared to the movements of the demon species.

'Those lines... ... !'

He was once again facing the solid lines he had seen before.

In the cloud of incredible probability where the flesh of the demon race scatters and gathers, silver lines that clearly predict their movements tangle here and there and extend in all directions.

Among them, one line shines particularly brightly. The only path Seongjin had to take was also vividly emerging as if he could grasp it at any moment.

Hwiik-

As Max lightly moved along the path, a black pillar came down like a whip on the spot where they had just been.

Kuaang!

The black flesh that was broken into small pieces by the impact of hitting the empty ground came together again on both sides of Seongjin and swung from side to side. Awesome!

However, Seongjin, who had predicted this, had already kicked the ground and was flying through the air with Max.

The flight time became defenseless for an instant.

Aiming for that moment, other black pillars swirl around Seongjin like a whirlpool.

Paang!

At that moment, Seongjin kicked into the empty air and jumped out of the whirlpool like a lie.

A technique that materializes Auras and uses them as a stepping stone.

It was just a trick I had just learned from Logan, but once I got the hang of it, I quickly became skilled enough to use it in emergency situations.

Sigh!

Then he got down to the floor and swung the nutcracker straight ahead.

Due to that fierce attack, the base of the writhing flesh was scattered and a black pillar suddenly stopped moving. It is one of the stems that extends recklessly toward the west.

'Hey, come this way! 'Don't go far alone!'

Seongjin, who was driving the demon species with such vigor, frowned for a moment.

Strongly-

Maybe it's because I'm moving so flashily, but my overused eyes are already starting to sting.

Unlike before, it was a spiritual sight that was receiving proper relay from the Demon King, but the solid line stretching out before my eyes was almost like a spirit.

The vision that gazes at so many possibilities at the same time is eventually unable to overcome the overload and is damaged.

Seongjin hurriedly pulled up the flowing aura from the passage to his chest and placed it around his eyes.

Is this a characteristic of my father's Auror? Seongjin moved her body again, feeling the pain go away along with a cool feeling.

'Is it okay to do it?'

[Hey, Seongjin Lee... ... !]

The Demon King swallows his sleep.

One there.

Although I knew Seongjin's current condition better than anyone else, I couldn't bear to interrupt his immersion.

Moments that feel as if you are running on a knife edge. If the path is deviated even slightly, Lee Seong-jin will be covered in those black flesh and be torn to pieces in an instant.

Seongjin, which had been luring the flesh in the southern direction for a while, suddenly turned around and started running towards the east.

"... "Ahh!"

a bunch of thorns chasing him.

"How on earth... .."

In the eyes of the Holy Knights, the young prince's movements were already close to divine.

Crank!

Meanwhile, the flesh writhing near the barrier also began to show the same changes.

Wedge!

The thorns rise up all at once, as if scales are rising, and shoot out with all their might towards Seongjin, who is running towards us.

However, Seongjin maintained the same path and lightly raised the nutcracker. The vivid auror blade that firmly surrounds the blade lightly swats away the rushing thorns.

Taeon! Tang!

The auror blade that Seongjin was creating now had reached a level that far exceeded his level as an auror.

This is because, rather than condensing the aurors in a general way, he was materializing them purely in his own way.

-Never forget this, Mores. In every world, there is a fundamental power, such as an auror.

My father explained it that way the other day.

-If you see a mysterious phenomenon that appears to have extraordinary power, always think carefully about what lies beneath it.

Pangea Chronicle.

In the spherical world where flame images were made to be easily formalized and materialized, Seongjin was able to easily draw Demon

King No. 2 using his own flame images.

And here, in the Delcross dimension, the material that forms the basis is-

'Auror!'

A power that all life forms naturally, and a power that can be clearly realized through will.

A power that is materialized by practicing the sword over a long period of time and, strictly speaking, can be called a flame image created by gathering thoughts.

'And I learned how to draw flames in detail from my father!'

Sigh!

A sturdy outer blade that is a span longer than the blade of an actual nutcracker. The gray Auror blade tore the black snake's body apart again.

Although he was not an Auror with a mixture of divine power like Logan, the power of the nutcracker, a holy relic, was absolute.

Wow!

The snakes made of black thorns suddenly lose their strength, each turning into writhing flesh and scattering in all directions.

Challeng-

At the same time, a stream of cool water spreads from my chest throughout my body, as if to replenish my depleted aura.

With the abundance of auras like never before, Seongjin was highly exalted and swung his sword as he pleased.

Wow! Okay!

Black flesh scattered helplessly.

Max, who received the same excitement from Seongjin, could not

contain his excitement and barked cheerfully.

Wong wong!

-I like this! I used to be strong and huge, but now I am even stronger and bigger than before! And it's faster!

"Ahahaha!"

Perhaps it was due to the excessive secretion of adrenaline, but cheerful laughter burst out.

Holding the sword that materialized his thoughts, and with the wind that materialized his thoughts wrapped around his entire body, Seongjin, along with Max, continued to hunt down the devil species, moving through the demonic energy as he pleased.

Grrrrrr!

The flesh of the demon species that had been scattered in all directions gradually gathered towards the sacred barrier. The Lilium Detachment could only stare in fascination at the amazing sight.

"... That is the divine beast, [Wind]..."

A soft exclamation came from Sir Duchamp's mouth.

Did you say it was found in a fairy tale in the scriptures? It was indeed as Prince Logan explained.

Isn't that sight of him running with his entire body covered in a thick gray wind the second coming of Saint Bastian, who is said to have performed great miracles by riding the wind?

'Divine wind!'

'The very wind that led the saint to the high snowy mountain a long time ago and finally defeated the finger demon!'

'His Majesty Mores is now with the wind!'

The admiration soon began to spread to all the Paladins of Lilium,

along with a strange fever.

"... "Lee Seong-jin, why are you so excited when I tell you to be careful?"

Among them, only Logan watched the scene, trying hard to hide his inner nervousness.

355. Holy Wind (6)

"Lord Kurt. "It seems like there's no one left nearby now."

Kurt nodded in response to a report from a resident engineer.

'I guess I'll have to finish it soon.'

As instructed by Prince Mores, he led the resident knights down the mountain and immediately helped the residents of the territory and members of the hunting club evacuate.

The main text of the resident knights is the protection of the prince. However, Prince Mores' will is so strong, and he has Sir Martha, the former head of the Royal Guard, by his side.

'Still, the casualties are extremely low compared to disasters.'

He breathed a sigh of relief when he confirmed that the evacuation to the last farmhouse was complete.

The demon species appeared in a hunting ground on the outskirts of the territory. Except for some farmland, it was a sparsely populated area with mostly forests.

Except for one woodcutter whose life or death was unknown after being swept away by the collapsing mountain, the damage to Yeongjimin that has been identified so far has been almost non-existent.

The only variable was that there was a hunting camp for imperial officials nearby.

However, considering that the camp was swept away by a landslide, their evacuation was also timely. Perhaps it was because they had

prepared in advance to withdraw to move their hunting grounds.

Where is that?

Thanks to the fact that the prince's maid rushed to the scene of the accident, filling the carriage with the remaining residents, there were virtually no casualties. Considering the scale of the disaster that had struck, it was almost a miracle.

'I was just getting ready to withdraw, and there was an empty carriage at the camp...'

At that moment, the image of Prince Mores, who was insisting on taking the carriage up to the mountain retreat, flashed in Sir Kurt's mind.

'no way?'

Did you anticipate that things would turn out like this?

No, but could it be? How on earth does he know about the demon species that showed up without warning?

'hmm? Now that I think about it, the reason I wanted to move my hunting ground in the first place...'

If you think about it, wasn't it because of Prince Mores, who unleashed his resident knights to disrupt the hunting party and wipe out all the game?

... No, wait a minute. Really?

Is this really... ... ?

"Lord Kurt!"

What cut off Kurt's thoughts was the voice of Sir Claudia urgently calling him.

"hurry up, please! "We delayed the rescue too long!"

"... Sir Claudia."

"We have to find him quickly!"

You mean 'we'? Kurt was dumbfounded by that blind attitude.

In his view, Sir Claudia's loyalty seemed increasingly strange. It's been a while since he woke up and he started following the 3rd prince as if he was possessed by something, but now he gets anxious whenever he leaves even for a moment, just like a dog that lost its owner!

"By now, your Majesty may be rushing to fight the demon species alone again!"

No way, no matter how reckless the prince is, there is no way he would do something like that.

But didn't Lord Calmen, who had been standing quietly next to him, suddenly say something like this?

"Oh, I guess so. "It would be best to find him and stop him before he causes more trouble, Sir Kurt."

Is this guy joking? Kurt looked at his face suspiciously, but surprisingly, Lord Calmen seemed more serious.

Rather, it was Sir Claudia who angrily protested those words.

"Lord Calmen! Don't say such blasphemous things! "We don't cause accidents!"

"what? "Isn't it an accident to run into a demon species alone?"

"no! "We are just brave!"

"okay. "Let's be brave and go quickly before something happens."

"profit!"

However, even though there was a slight difference in temperature, the two people walking long distance were stamping their feet in the same way with nervousness. If they delay here just a little bit, they will rush off to find Hae-ho among themselves.

In the end, Sir Kurt quickly began to gather the resident knights.

"Let go of this! "I have to go back to camp!"

"Count! You can't do this! It's dangerous! The rescue team will be there soon... ..!"

It was time for Sir Kurt to rush off on horseback with his resident knights. From a distance, I could see the Earl of Bathurst screaming, surrounded by his bodyguards.

"I told you to let me go! "Then it's too late!"

Oh, by the way, the only casualty in the camp was the Countess of Bathurst. She was told she was swept away when a landslide occurred.

"You have to go and save your wife! ma'am! Buoy-in!"

They looked like an ordinary married couple, but it seems Geumseul was better than I thought.

As I clicked my tongue as I caught a glimpse of the Count's pitiful appearance, I saw Sir Claudia spurring her words even further next to me.

"It's dangerous after all! I wasn't sending you off alone... . I should have been by your side until the end... .."

Hee hee hee!

The horse that had been kicked hard gave a loud neigh and began to overtake Sir Kurt.

But this time too, there was an unexpected sight. With an expression full of dissatisfaction, Lord Calmen began to follow closely behind her.

"I go first, Sir Kurt. If you leave that kid alone, what kind of crazy things will he do?"

"... ..?"

Kurt blinked.

No, putting aside his profane self-talk, is he really worried about Prince Mores right now? really?

'It's Sir Claudia, but. Lord Calmen, weren't you anxious not long ago because you couldn't catch the 3rd prince?'

Meanwhile, the two people started to jump forward and widen the gap between them. The figure looked the same as if it had been taken out of a frame, so Kurt involuntarily tilted his head.

"Since when did they get along so well together?"

It was when I was following the two people who were so cluelessly ahead of me with my eyes. Sir Kurt suddenly felt a strange sense of *déjà vu*.

"... .. ?"

someday.

A long time ago, someday.

Didn't he run after those two people with such urgency even back then?

Weeeeeeee... ..

Along with a strange tinnitus, I felt like my vision was blurring for a moment. No, rather than blurred vision, it is confusion and vertigo caused by the sight in front of your eyes overlapping with another image in your memory.

The two people ahead of him at that time seemed to be wearing formal armor rather than a Royal Guard uniform.

A cloak with the symbol of the Holy Empire clearly engraved on it, fluttering in the wind. And the place where they were heading towards the horse's head was not that whirlpool of black magic energy, but a rain of countless arrows... ..

"Lord Kurt!"

Kurt suddenly came to his senses when he heard someone shouting from behind him. While he was dazed, the other resident knights were ahead of him one by one.

"Why are you doing this all of a sudden? Are you okay?"

"No, it's nothing."

Sir Kurt shook his head to dispel the dizzying thoughts. A sense of reality quickly set in, and the strange sense of déjà vu completely disappeared from his mind.

"This is not the time. The Magi's movements are unusual. "Let's hurry!"

"Hey!"

Hehe! Hee hee hee!

As he spoke, the sound of spurs could be heard here and there, and the speed of the resident knights began to increase even more.

When they hurriedly arrived at Prince Mores, they witnessed an unbelievable sight.

"... Lowering?"

A demonic species that is divided into countless pieces of flesh and moves like a storm.

In response to this, the Lilium Detachment is deploying a massive sacred barrier with only a small number of people.

Everything was beyond imagination, but where could it be compared to Prince Mores?

"... Auror Blade?"

Now, their young prince was already wielding the Auror Blade at a level that was far beyond that of a high-ranking knight!

"Auror materialization... ..!"

Where is that? Running through the battlefield, freely driving a huge wolf dog, with a wind so strong that it was clearly visible to the eye!

The legend of the first emperor, who fought against monsters and ended the era of the three ancient dragons, could not be this grand. It was literally as if a scene from an old myth had been vividly recreated before my eyes.

"Stay back! "The demon energy is strong, so stay outside the barrier!"

After being stopped by the Lilium Paladins, they could only stare blankly at the prince outside the sacred barrier.

"... look. Someone causes an accident... "As expected, we are great!"

How long has it been like that? Kurt came to his senses when he heard Sir Claudia's overwhelming voice.

Now is not the time.

Although it was difficult for them to directly deal with the demonic species due to their lack of divine power, they still had to assist the Paladins of Lilium and form a battle line.

"Come on, everyone, come to your senses!"

Sir Kurt shouted and urged the resident knights.

It's embarrassing to look at other articles, so please don't make faces that look like you're clearly in love!

Especially Lord Calmen! Even though Sir Claudia is like that, seeing you like that, Calmen, somehow gives me goosebumps!

* * *

'Is the end in sight?'

Reinforcements will come soon. Feeling such a strong premonition, Seongjin looked around.

Fortunately, the flesh of the demon species that was spreading out randomly did not go far beyond the open barrier. This is thanks to Seongjin diligently looking everywhere and driving them away.

Because the range was so wide, there were some pieces of flesh that were occasionally missed, but each time, Logan fired his sword energy from afar and hit them appropriately. Even at such a great distance, the power of the Aura explosion did not kill him at all, so there was no such thing as a monster.

'Anyway, even if you ask the secret, Aurors will naturally be drawn to where the gaze goes, so they'll just say something nonsense like getting out of hand but not getting out of it.'

By that time, the movements of the demon species that had been running wild were gradually changing. It seemed like they were becoming more and more confused as they were stopped by Seongjin.

-[I] am a high-ranking devil. He had power comparable to that of a low-ranking demon lord!

-What's the use of it all? [I] failed anyway.

-It's too early to talk about failure. [I] am still free.

-Ah, but I feel a stronger force than [me] around here! If only I could be with him... ... !

-It goes against [my] will! This is impossible!

-Why not? [I] already gave up on [me]... ... !

That was the way the demon lord roughly conveyed their thoughts.

For some reason, as time passes, it seems like the flesh moving as one body is gradually losing its unity.

Strongly-

Conscious of the pain in his eyes getting worse, Seongjin raised the aura to his chest again. Still, would it be a good thing if their movements gradually slowed down and the number of rising lines

decreased significantly?

[Lee Seong-jin.]

At that time, the Demon King seemed anxious and called Seongjin.

[The atmosphere they have is somehow strange.]

'huh?'

[I guess the time we were divided was too long. I don't think it would be difficult to see them as one entity anymore, right?]

At the same time-

Stand tall.

The flesh of the demon species that was stuck together like a snake suddenly stopped moving.

"... .. ?"

Paaaaa-!

Then they suddenly lost their focus and began to scatter helplessly in the air. A dizzying sight, as if there were dust.

[Have we finally given up resistance completely?]

The Demon King was pleased, but Seongjin was shocked and held the nutcracker. Because his premonition began to sound a dangerous alarm like never before.

Hwii-

Scattered pieces of flesh flutter helplessly in the wind.

The problem started from then. Each and every piece of flesh that fell off flew toward Seongjin as if it had its own individual will.

"... .. !"

My vision, which had been tracking thousands or tens of thousands of

movements one by one, was suddenly covered with silver lines and turned completely white. At that moment, a terrible pain arose in my eyes.

Seongjin urgently disconnected from the devil. However, it was too late, and the already severely damaged optic nerve did not recover immediately.

It was a disaster.

-okay. [I] have already changed. Isn't it [me] as originally specified in the code?

-Since you are reborn, you can be reborn as a different being again and again!

-In that case, it would be better to do it with a stronger 'strength'... ...
!

-Let's become a new and stronger [me]!

Since my senses with the Demon Lord were completely blocked, I couldn't understand their thoughts one by one.

However, just from the mere sight of the flesh coming, Seongjin could vividly feel their strong will.

'this... ... !'

Things that have no power and are just dust or air. There is no way to stop such things from coming in from all directions.

Seongjin hurriedly raised the aura to his chest again and covered Max with the trick of 'opening a small sword curtain'.

"... ... !?"

Right then.

Seongjin trembled at the strange sensation he had never felt before.

'... 'Isn't it strange?'

These are all your father's auras, right?

He's a good auror who is improving my eye condition and protecting my body.

But why is my chest, where the aura is filled, getting so hot as if it were burning?

356. Holy Wind (7)

My chest feels warm and stinging, and my blood feels dry.

This strange sensation is definitely not an illusion.

'It's hot...' ... ?'

Sensing a sense of crisis, Seongjin quickly examined his entire body.

However, there is no noticeable change in the aurors being used. If so, it means that there is something wrong with the passage itself.

[Lee Seong-jin!]

The Demon King must have felt something as well and called out to him in a voice full of anxiety.

'Let's put out the urgent fire first!'

Seongjin hurriedly stopped using the aurors in the passage. Then, even though I couldn't see it with my eyes, I could feel Max's size shrinking.

Kiing!

Seongjin reached out and hugged the wolf dog, which was snoring anxiously, and gathered up all the aura he needed to wrap it around the dog.

Meanwhile, his mind was racing to find the cause of the problem.

-Mores.

Quite a long time ago, the day when King Seonghwang destroyed the

backyard of the main palace and blocked the passage with his own hands.

Seongjin had heard the warning he conveyed with strong thoughts.

-Keep in mind that when you pull the water in a channel, the things on the other side are pulled in with it.

Yeah, I didn't forget.

From that day on, I always kept my father's warning in my heart.

but...

'Compared to the enormous amount of auras that were put in to block the passage, the auras I used were only a handful!'

If that's the amount, when I return to the palace, my father can easily replenish it with a single blow. But why does this change happen?

[Hey, Lee Seong-jin! I guess this is... ... !]

The Demon King called Seongjin again, as if he wanted to say something. However, I don't know what I was thinking, but I paused for a moment and fell into silence.

Black flesh gradually began to cover around Seongjin. With countless thoughts echoing in my mind.

-Be [me]!

-Or, accept [me] into [you]!

-The moment you become one with [you], [you] will definitely become a new [me]!

Seongjin, who was nervously swatting them away, soon stopped his meaningless movements and crouched down.

The broken pieces of flesh seemed to be easily pushed away by even a small physical force, but they soon pushed back into the empty space and tried to fill the son-in-law. It felt like I was struggling in

dark water.

-Please don't refuse. The feeling of strangeness is nothing more than a fleeting moment!

The lack of aurors is limited to protecting Max. Soon, I felt the concentrated magical energy being absorbed into my body as if I was being sucked in. I melted in so easily that it was pointless that I was even momentarily nervous.

Then, the devil's flesh also clung to him as if it was digging into his body, and Seongjin quickly buried his nose in Max's fur.

Whine whine!

The sound of Max crying next to me somehow felt distant, and the thoughts rushing into my ears became even stronger.

-Now, I will become an even stronger, invincible [me]!

-That would be the most wonderful thing!

-hurry! hurry! hurry!

Trying not to be swept away by the chaotic clamor, Seongjin put more strength into the arms he held Max.

Only then did a small amount of regret arise.

'Did I go too crazy...?'

No, but I had calculated that it would definitely be okay. I felt like it was the best!

'Plus, I also thought that this was the only opportunity to test the abundant Aurors to my heart's content.'

Maybe I trusted my premonition too blindly. Because of his own foolish judgment, didn't even the innocent Max get caught up in this situation?

The damaged eyes can no longer see anything, and the situation is

increasingly suffocating as they are covered by demonic species.

But it was truly strange. Seongjin did not feel a great sense of crisis even when the situation reached this point.

Noisy-

Somehow, Seongjin calmed down his pounding heart and slowly closed his eyes.

Well, there is one thing I can trust right now.

When help comes, Logan, who was bound by the barrier, will also be free. Then he will definitely come up with something good.

'Until then, let's focus on protecting Max!'

Feeling the flesh filled with demonic energy sticking to his skin as if digging into his skin, Seongjin gathered up the last of his remaining aura and wrapped it around Max once more.

* * *

When black flesh suddenly began to gather towards Lee Seong-jin, Logan intuitively realized that something unusual was happening.

"Sir Otto."

Holding Arjuna in his hand, Logan quickly gave instructions to the knight next to him.

"Yes, sir."

"Even if I leave, you will keep your seat."

"... yes?"

"If the demon species doesn't move any further, I think it will be okay even if the barrier disappears for a while. 'Let's reorganize the sacred barrier at this time.'"

"Lowering. What is that... .. ?"

But before Sir Otto could ask-

Phew!

In an instant, an enormous amount of sacred power was withdrawn, and the sacred barrier shook as if it would break at any moment.

"Lowering?!"

Sir Otto was perplexed for a moment. However, while he had been accompanying Prince Logan until now, he had been surprised by the prince's unexpected behavior once or twice.

He quickly regained his composure and shouted, unleashing divine power with all his might.

"Li, Lilium everyone! Stay in your place! Maintain the barrier!"

Sir Ellie, who was at the edge of the barrier, also calmly looked back and cautioned.

"The Royal Guard, please do not act hastily!"

Sure enough, there was a small commotion behind her. Sir Kurt was barely holding on to Sir Claudia, who was about to rush at her with her sword drawn.

"Calm down, Sir Claudia!"

"Lord Kurt! Now is not the time for this! Our Majesty Mores... ..!"

"But if you jump in without taking any precautions, the water will erode in an instant and you will die!"

"It's our job to protect our country even at the cost of our lives!"

"For now, we must follow Lilium's instructions! His Majesty Logan has moved. So let's just wait and see what happens!"

Meanwhile, Logan was already rushing towards the demon species. He had already fired a couple of Auror explosions.

"Lee Seong-jin! Come to your senses and get out of there!"

However, being pushed away by the explosion was only temporary.

The flesh gathered around Lee Seong-jin buries him in an instant and gradually increases in size.

In this way, the demon species suddenly became a huge sphere and was left alone in the land of death.

"Lee Seong-jin!"

Arjuna emitted a bright blue aura. Logan's true auror was revealed when his divine power was almost depleted.

Liquid! Awesome!

The Sword Master's fierce sword strike cut into pieces the edge of the huge sphere. Since Lee Seong-jin is somewhere in the center, they cannot dare to blindly penetrate the center.

'are you okay. If we keep chipping away from the edges like this... ...
!'

Pass...

However, as if to laugh at him, the pieces of flesh seemed to be cut and scattered for a moment, but then gathered together and returned to their original form.

Pow! Whoa!

I tried firing the aura blast again, but the result was the same. The small pieces of flesh that were broken and floating around like liquid quickly returned to their normal state even after being cut again and again by Arjuna.

'Is there no other way than to purify everything with divine power?'

Logan looked up at the huge black sphere with a perplexed feeling.

It is impossible to purify that gigantic demon species alone. So why didn't they just tie him up here and wait for the other Holy Knights to come?

Another problem was that his condition was not very good right now. Because he had been handling the huge barrier that should have been supported by dozens of people for a long time alone, his sacred power was already close to being depleted.

As evidence, signs of erosion were gradually appearing on the body that had been in contact with demonic energy several times.

'... But, it must be done.'

The hand holding Arjuna gains strength.

'It is overly optimistic to expect Lee Seong-jin to be safe out there while waiting for reinforcements that may come at any time.'

Logan forcibly squeezed out the remaining sacred power and made the silver and blue flame bloom again on the blade.

'So now, I have to save Lee Seong-jin!'

Whoa!

As if responding to his will, the fading divine power began to glow white again.

Logan, wearing the silver and blue torch, slowly began swinging his sword towards the center of the demon species.

Cheesy!

When the divine power reaches out, the black flesh begins to burn white and gradually move outward.

Logan dug in without missing the opportunity and swung his sword toward the center again.

Kurrrrrr... ..

The black sphere sways violently, as if the presence of an intruder is unpleasant.

'... 'Can we break through?'

Repeated sword strikes.

Logan thought, suddenly feeling dizzy as if his soul was being twisted.

'Can I last until the end?'

I can not know. But still, he had to get results.

Carrying a heavy burden alone. And to endure until death, pouring out everything you have.

Ironically, wasn't such foolish behavior what General Gael, who was called an unrivaled genius, did best?

"Lord, please protect your children."

As he swung his sword and chanted softly, the silver flame began to burn with increasing light as if responding.

* * *

Just as aura reflects a person's nature to some extent, demonic energy also comes to resemble the original owner's nature.

In that sense, it can be said that the demonic energy that covers Seongjin has a very annoying nature.

-Let's spread it all over the world...

-Let's sow seeds and cultivate them. And then we have to harvest... ...
.

-To go further, you have to divide into smaller and smaller seeds... ...
.

The demon species no longer mentions [me]. It just divides and divides into small pieces, and can no longer emit thoughts that can be called consciousness.

It has completely lost its individual characteristics and is turning into a demonic energy itself.

-My seeds even in the distant universe...

Of course, there is no change in the fact that it is noisy.

Seongjin felt a headache coming from the strong will conveyed by the demon energy.

'... It is the devil of an annoying person who wants to spread his seeds without any gaps, not only in all dimensions but also in the entire universe.'

Someone's voice says so.

Oh, it looks like that. How on earth can one have such an absurd desire to spread one's seeds throughout the universe?

Wouldn't it be better for both of us if we stopped doing such useless things and just slept like we were dead?

'...'

How long can I last here? Seongjin thought so and tried not to miss the feel of Max in his hand.

No, holding on is not the problem. More precisely, the problem was that the will to hold on was gradually disappearing.

Ah, yes. Until now, I've tried not to think about it. But I can no longer deny that these 'Magi' feel somehow familiar.

If so, wouldn't there be no problem in the end? Is this really meaningful resistance?

Exciting-

Little by little, my consciousness expanded, and my vision began to open brightly again.

No, the word vision was not appropriate. His distant eyes were still tightly closed, just touching Max's soft fur.

Nevertheless, Seongjin's spirit was clearly recognized. A small passage

opened in his chest, and the movement of dark red flames slowly encroaching on it.

Seongjin realized what it was and took a deep breath.

'... 'The fire of Gehenna!'

The burning of hell, which burns everything in the world as well as the soul, and is extremely feared by even the goddesses of other dimensions.

'How did it get here?'

But strangely enough, as soon as I asked the question, the answer automatically popped out of my head.

'It's because I broke the boundary my father created!'

The reason why the Holy Emperor's aura fluttered like water was because its intangible energy was wrapped in a strange barrier-like membrane.

However, because Seongjin continues to pull it, the boundary is completely broken.

Thanks to this, Gehenna's terrorizer has crossed the curtain, and from then on, he will burn all the aurors and quickly encroach on the passage!

Seongjin suddenly realized.

'Anyway, all of this was going to happen someday. It was impossible to completely stop Gehenna's fire in the first place.'

No matter how strong my father's barrier is, what good is it? Perhaps in the near future, Seongjin, who was cornered, would definitely have to forcefully use the aura of this passage at least once.

'If things continue like this, soon this body will burn away.'

Seongjin watched without much emotion as the fierce flames spread through the passage.

[Lee Seong-jin...]

At that time, the Demon King called to him in a creeping voice. It was a voice that conveyed deep agony, as if there was a fierce conflict about something.

[Maybe it's not too late. Now, we can stop the fire of Gehenna with the remaining auras.]

'Um, well...'

When Seongjin responded lukewarmly, the Demon King coaxed him again.

[hurry. At this point, you'll probably be able to hold out until your father takes action again.]

... father.

As his thoughts came to him, Seongjin felt his heart, which had been cooling down for some reason, quickly begin to flutter.

[Don't regret it later. You really like this place, right?]

Maybe that's why the Demon King's proposal sounded quite tempting.

Yes, even if it is an ending that will be reached someday anyway.

'Maybe there's no need to end it now. I know nothing will change anything, but if I could just delay it a little longer...'

After making up his mind, Seongjin immediately rallied his will. He enthusiastically moved the remaining Holy Auras and began to push Gehenna's fire out from the passage little by little.

Grumble!

Then, suddenly interrupted, Gyeophwa struggles violently as if he were protesting.

[...]]

However, he could not overcome Seongjin's strong will, and in the

end, he had no choice but to be slowly pushed to the other side, helpless.

'done!'

However, Seongjin's momentum did not last long.

Since when did it start? This is because, a little distance away, he suddenly discovered a soul that began to glow brightly.

'... 'Logan?'

A whitish shape wrapped in light. But somehow Seongjin was able to immediately recognize the owner of the soul.

'But what is he doing now?'

Logan's soul must have been shining brightly with divine power from the beginning. But now, somehow, the aspect of the light seemed a little different.

The flame burning brightly around him is lighting up his surroundings and at the same time slowly eating into his soul.

'... ... !?'

The image of squeezing out one's soul while releasing divine power, and ultimately burning one's own soul along with the sacred fire.

Now, Seongjin could clearly see how reckless Logan's actions were. As if cold water was suddenly poured onto his dazed head, his mind returned to reality in an instant.

'That crazy guy!'

Seongjin, who was frightened, used all his strength to pull the Aura of the passage back to this side.

There was no more measuring back and forth.

We have to stop Logan's foolish actions!

Grumble!

As the Aurors left the passage, the speed at which Gehenna's flames rushed towards them accelerated even more.

But Seongjin didn't care one bit.

How about following Gehenna down here? Just like this, I will go beyond my body and burn this damned demon species to the ground!

[...] Ah, this is how you do it. In the end, it ends up like this.]

The demon lord watched in silence for a moment and sighed in a somewhat sad voice.

357. Holy Wind (8)

"We'll be there soon, Balthazar."

Balthazar nodded at Adjutant Dimros' report.

As the head of the Imperial Palace Knights and the greatest knight on the continent, he was currently leading a large army made up of several Holy Knights.

'You've managed to create this many people in such a short period of time.'

The symbol of the main god shining brightly in gold.

Below, hundreds of paladins wearing subtle silver armor.

Looking back at a minister he rarely saw, Balthazar thought of Princess Amelia, who had appointed him as commander-in-chief.

-First, we have to wait for the Inquisitor's report. Whether or not the Holy Knights will be dispatched and the appropriate scale of dispatch are matters that only the Holy Assembly will decide!

Despite the threat of a large demon species that had appeared for the first time in several years, the brazen Cardinal Benitus went on a rampage in front of the princess.

-The Holy Knights are, in name and reality, the best force in Delcross. This is not a group that can move independently without the approval of the Holy Assembly!

-But, Your Excellency! While we waste time like this, the damage caused by the demon species will continue to increase!

-The more you do that, the more confusing things become. It doesn't take long to wait for the results of the reconnaissance. Rather, why don't you know that the more you get involved, the more complicated the situation becomes?

-... .. !

-Even if you are a prosperous emperor, you cannot be this reckless! Do you understand? That is the procedure and the law, Amelia!

Then, the princess's eyes, glaring at Benitus, flashed coldly for an instant. I had no idea how her eyes, which usually shined warmly and kindly, could change so suddenly in an instant.

-... great. Well then, let us follow the due process that your Excellency prefers.

The result was this.

Princess Amelia ordered the emergency mobilization of imperial troops in accordance with imperial law on responding to wartime and incidents, instead of the provisions of the sacred law on responding to demon species.

And after all the ordinary knights were taken away to the imperial emergency alert, the remaining five Holy Knights were grouped together as reserve troops.

Where is that? In order to avoid confusion in the jumbled command system of the Paladins, Balthazar, the best military officer in Delcross, whom no one could argue with, was put in charge!

-What kind of pun is this? Are you calling me a pick-up!?

-The five knight commanders must wait for the approval of the Holy Council according to legal procedures. In the meantime, our Lord Balthazar will recruit 'some' troops from the Holy Knights to confront the threat of the Empire.

-That's part of it, there's a limit to jokes! Doesn't this mean taking out most of the troops through expedient means? What are the Royal Guards and SS doing in the meantime?

-We must protect His Majesty and the subjects of the Imperial Capital. Isn't it so obvious?

-No, that's ridiculous... ... !

Thanks to this, ironically, we ended up in a situation where Balthazar, who had no divine power at all, was in charge of leading the demonic subjugation unit made up entirely of Holy Knights.

'Princess Amelia...'

Balthazar's eyes deepened.

A princess whose maternal family is the great noble family of Count Sigismund, but because she is an illegitimate daughter, she does not receive any support from her family.

The princess did not even think that she had the right to succeed to the throne as she had no significant influence or influence.

'But maybe...'

The appearance of the princess he saw today closely resembled the prosperity of her youth when she used to push herself without restraint.

If this continues, she may soon emerge as a new standard-bearer who will immediately change the imperial succession structure, which is currently tilted towards Prince Logan.

"Lord Balthazar."

Just then, a calm woman's voice was heard urging Balthazar. He was the only exorcist included in these subjugation units.

"The energy of the demon species is a bit unusual. "I think we need to hurry up the march."

The Knights of St. Terbachia are known to be vulnerable to large-scale battles, and most of them are out on duty far away. Therefore, the current troop recruitment was mainly done from the other four knights.

But what caught Balthazar's eye was something else.

That woman, didn't her impression seem a little different from before?

-Exorcist? Were the Knights of St. Terbachia also eligible for recruitment?

-Hehehe. No, Lord Balthazar. I am participating as a member of the monster task force.

When she first joined, that woman was smiling vaguely and in an unpleasant way. She sometimes muttered softly into the air, and no matter how much she washed her eyes, she was clearly a psychopath.

But now her impression was completely different.

The hair that had covered his face in a gloomy manner was neatly pulled back and flowing, and his tired face with dark circles looked quite neat, although a little pale.

okay. When I think about it that way, it seems like my presence has changed a little... ..

"Lord Balthazar."

When the exorcist called him again, Balthazar, who had been lost in his thoughts, was startled and froze.

"... Oh, it's nothing. okay. "We must hurry."

But Balthazar had just ordered his adjutant to speed up.

"... ..!"

Hwaak-

A silver gleam flashed in the exorcist's eyes, and she suddenly broke away from the battle line and began shooting forward quickly.

"... ..!?"

"hey! "Don't suddenly break out of line!"

The startled deputy shouted at her. The person who stopped him was Francis, the lieutenant of the Knights of St. Aurelion.

"You can leave it alone, Lord Dimroth. Sir Sharon is a knight who moves freely without any structure. He is under the command of His Majesty the Holy Emperor."

"Moving without a system, what on earth is that..." ... ?"

This is something that an imperial knight could not even dare to imagine. While Dimroth was mumbling dumbly, Balthazar was looking at the exorcist's back with eyes full of astonishment.

But what surprised Balthazar was something completely different from his adjutant.

'That kind of mysterious auror operation? 'Where did someone so genius suddenly appear?'

Why did I miss that inspection until now?

I need to take the author as my disciple right now... No, should I first get permission from Lord Leandros? But will they really hand over such a great talent to me?

But Balthazar's worries did not last long.

Not long after the exorcist disappeared, an aura like a storm burst out from the direction the troops were heading.

* * *

Fuuuuuuu!

A huge explosion erupted from within.

That enormous power not only tore apart the devil's sphere, but also created a black vortex that encompassed all of its flesh.

The force was so strong that the pieces of flesh were unable to gather back together in the center and were just fluttering around in the wind.

Whoa!

Then a cool wind blew. A wind made up of the materialization of a silver aura containing divine energy.

"... ... !"

Everyone froze and looked at that figure.

The Lilium Detached Blade was struggling to maintain the barrier. The resident knights were also stamping their feet and looking at the princes' situation.

"That sacred energy!"

"The grace of the Lord is with us here!"

The one who appeared before their eyes was Prince Mores, wrapped in a silver wind.

He was holding the large wolfdog, which was slowly falling to the floor as if it were a flower seed blowing in the wind.

An extremely sacred and majestic sight, as if it were a scene of a miracle shown by ancient saints.

"ah... ... !"

For a moment, I was surprised to recognize that the wind was actually a prosperous aura.

Logan was pleased to see Seongjin, who looked quite fine, and lowered Arjuna down.

"Sane... ... !"

"Hey, man!"

Then, my eyes widen at the unexpectedly strong yelling.

"You crazy bastard! What are you doing? "Were you planning on committing suicide right here?"

"... what?"

"Reinforcements are coming, so why are you so urgent that you are squeezing out divine power by yourself? "There are degrees of being impatient!"

Tuk.

Seongjin, who stepped on the floor, frowned and sensed signs around him.

Logan's torch burns the flesh of demon species and is still not extinguished. And then there was the sign of a guy who was much weaker than usual.

The more I thought about it, the more ridiculous it became.

"you... .."

On the other hand, Logan was embarrassed in a different way. Because he realized that Lee Seong-jin's eyes that were criticizing him were not properly focused.

'Snow... .. !'

Logan bit his lip as he suddenly remembered what happened at Sigismund Territory.

"Lee Seong-jin, what on earth are you doing? "Why are your eyes like that?"

"Hmm, whatever."

Seongjin answered roughly and lowered Max to the floor.

However, was it because the huge amount of aura remaining in the passage was released all at once? The moment the weight of the wolf dog disappeared, Seongjin felt severe dizziness and stumbled on the spot.

"Uh... .. !"

Logan, startled, suddenly reaches out his arm to support him.

however-

"Uh... ..!"

"what?"

Unable to bear Seongjin's weight, he stumbled. If you think about it, Logan wasn't in the right condition either.

Quadang! thud!

In the end, the two ended up collapsing on the floor without anyone else.

"... .."

What kind of shape is this?

"... I don't know what kind of talent you have, but it seems like now is your only chance. "We need to get out of here quickly."

Logan, who was silent for a moment, looked up and said.

In fact, the rapidly swirling flesh of the demon species was showing signs of coming back together as the wind of the Auror slowly died down.

"That's right. That's how it should be... .."

Seongjin frowned as he pushed away Max, who was licking his face.

Perhaps it was because all the auras that were blocking Gehenna's fire were released, or because I felt a pain in my chest that felt like fire.

'... I think it's already too late to avoid it.'

The fire of Gehenna is almost at the end of the passage. Seongjin knew very well that if things continued like this, his entire body would soon be helplessly engulfed in flames.

'In that case, it would be better to stay like this, with the demon species...'

Just as I was about to make a truly solemn resolve.

Seongjin and Logan simultaneously flinched and turned their heads in surprise. This is because they felt a familiar figure running quickly towards them from afar.

"... ... !"

The owner of the figure soon appeared within sight.

Hair as black as a crow and a pale face. And the familiar silver-gray eyes that emit a silvery sheen.

An exorcist dressed in the gray uniform of Tervakia was rapidly shooting into the land of the dead, spurring his aurons.

'Abama!'

Logan, somehow relieved, stood up shakily, supporting Seongjin. His body had no strength as he was squeezing out all his divine power, but at least he was better off than this guy who was blind.

"Now, wake up, Seongjin Lee. "Others have their eyes on me too, so I have to stand up and greet them properly."

There your father is coming.

Logan didn't say anything, but Seongjin could immediately sense what he wanted to say. Because his nervousness suddenly calmed down.

Seongjin also felt a strong sense of relief and secretly smiled.

"ha ha ha."

"What are you smiling about right now? "For such a huge accident."

Logan supported his shaking leg with Arjuna and beat Seongjin as if nothing had happened.

"Even from here, I can feel Abamama's momentum. "Aren't you afraid of the aftermath?"

"Uh, okay. "It's not scary at all."

Seongjin thought as he raised the corners of his mouth.

At least for today, I feel like I have a comrade to share the night with.

358. Join (1)

After the Holy Aura that was blocking the passage completely disappeared.

The embers of Gehenna quickly encroached on the passage as if they had been waiting and rushed toward Seongjin.

He belatedly tried to gather his Aura, but his Aura, which was almost depleted, was powerless in the face of the fierce fire.

Woe!

Instead, the aura caught fire, and a tremendous burning sensation arose throughout my body.

"... ..!"

Logan also seemed to feel an unusual heat. He, who had taken a step ahead to greet the crowd, looked back in surprise.

"Lee Seongjin, are you okay? "Why do you suddenly feel like you have a fever?"

"Uh, well... .."

There is such a thing.

But it's okay now. Because my father came.

"Would you like me to help you?"

"It's okay. "Something that's out of shape."

Seongjin waved his hand at Logan and then grabbed his head, which

was starting to spin due to high fever.

'My father will heal me just fine this time too. First of all, you have to be prepared to get hit hard.'

Even when I think about it today, I feel like it was a bit close.

Although there was no other way, my father was probably very angry. If he were that guy, he would already know everything.

'But you're my father, right? 'Maybe you'll get over your anger soon?'

However, Seongjin had just finished mentally preparing himself, and the sign of Seonghwang was just around the corner.

thud!

I felt a little dizzy, and then suddenly I felt a strong shock to the back of my head.

Seongjin thought in confusion. As expected, his father must have been angry. No, but why not the forehead...

"Lee Seong-jin!"

Logan's voice calling him soon became distant.

* * *

A large demon species appears near the ecliptic for the first time in many years, and is successfully subdued.

The incredible rumor quickly spread throughout the imperial capital.

"Surprisingly, there were almost no casualties! "This is truly wonderful care from the Lord!"

"I heard Balthazar, the greatest knight on the continent, led the punitive force, right?"

"Ah, then there's nothing to worry about. "By now, he has probably given the evil demon race a good taste of bitterness."

Disasters whose damage cannot be felt are nothing more than a fresh and interesting story for people. Soon, everyone in the imperial capital started talking about this incident whenever they made eye contact.

"I guess you just built a house?"

"No, what are all the houses! "I heard he was a mountain bastard?"

And among them, the activities of a completely unexpected person were also included.

"But do you know what? It turns out that it was actually Prince Mores who subdued him! "He happened to be in Bathurst Territory, and he stood alone against the bastard to protect his subjects."

"what? Wow, this guy is talking nonsense! "Does that make sense?"

"No, really! There are more than one person who saw it clearly with their own two eyes. "I heard that Prince Mores used the sacred energy of the Holy Family to tear the demon species to pieces in one fell swoop?"

Rumors that were thought to be absurd gradually began to have a credible basis. This was because Balthazar's troops, who had left for the subjugation, easily completed the purification and quickly returned to the imperial capital.

A demonic species that disintegrates and disintegrates again, almost returning to its original form as a demon.

Purifying such a bastard was not that difficult. All you have to do is set up a huge barrier, push through with the number of people, and pour out divine power.

Thanks to this, there was no damage to the punitive forces. Only the two princes of the Holy Family suffered major and minor injuries and were transported to the main palace for treatment.

Around that time, the vague rumors began to gain weight little by little.

"Oh my god, Prince Mores rode the [wind] and bravely rushed towards the demon species."

"wind? what is that?"

"They say you are a divine beast who received the grace of the Lord?"

"What is Shinsu again?"

"Oh, this person! "Have you seen Saint Bastian's new fairy tale yet?"

Soon, rumors about Prince Mores and the divine beast [Wind] began to sweep the ecliptic like a storm. This is thanks to the just-published scripture fairy tales, which have been expanded and reproduced at an incredible speed.

So, by the evening of that day, the rumor that Prince Mores was an apostle of St. Bastian was widely spread throughout the imperial capital.

"An apostle of St. Bastian!"

The tremendous rumor naturally spread to the members of the Holy Assembly.

In order to go through the proper 'procedures', they were summoned to the imperial palace only after all work had been completed.

All of the Holy Knights under his command had been dispatched, and the five Holy Knight Commanders, who were nominally awaiting approval from the Holy Council, were also present.

"What kind of nonsense is that? Inquisitor! Is the Inquisitor still out to investigate!?"

Cardinal Benitus was scolding Sir Paris, the new leader of the Knights of St. Marsyas. Because he was more sensitive than anyone else to heresy that distorted the will of the Lord.

"Shouldn't we know how such absurd talk came about? Could it be that the Third Prince himself said such disturbing words?"

"It doesn't seem like it, but... .."

"I don't think so? Hey! "If you still don't understand one thing, what on earth are you doing as the leader?"

"Calm down, Your Excellency Cardinal. It hasn't been long since we sent the second Inquisitor. Besides, aren't the two princes, as well as most of the knights at the scene, currently receiving treatment?"

When the reinforcements arrived on the scene, most of the situation was already over.

Before Balthazar struck the Granius-style barrier, he quickly transported everyone on site, including the two princes, to the imperial palace.

The Lilium Detachment, which had been squeezing out divine power, was completely exhausted, and the resident knights of the Pearl Palace also showed signs of weakening, albeit weakly.

"There was a strict order from His Majesty the Holy Emperor not to dare disturb their rest."

"Egh! "These useless things!"

Meanwhile, Cardinal Meyer, who had been silent, looked a little worried as he rubbed his forehead.

"It's not good. not good... .."

"A large level 1 demon species was defeated without any damage. Isn't this something that can elevate the names of the Seonghwang family and Delcross on the continent? "What is the problem?"

In response to Archbishop Wester's question, Cardinal Meyer had a mixed expression.

"Don't you know? The Holy Family itself, not the empire of the main god, is considered sacred. The Holy Hwangga receives the respect of the subjects on behalf of the main lord. "Isn't that what His Majesty is most wary of now?"

"But it's already too late. dismissal."

Wesker frowned and raised the corners of his mouth.

"The princes' activities are so clear. So, I guess Cardinal Benitus can't belittle His Majesty Mores as recklessly as he usually does. "Those young princes accomplished a task that would have been difficult even if all five Holy Knights were there."

"one... .."

"For the subjects, the Holy Family is already the same as the power of the main lord itself. Therefore, praise for the Holy Family can never exceed reverence for the Lord, the subject of power."

Still, an apostle of St. Bastian, isn't that a bit too far?

Archbishop Wesker added with a sour expression to Cardinal Mayer, who still looked worried.

"You don't need to think about it too complicated. "Isn't Sisley already recognized as an apostle?"

"The case is very different from Sisley. Wasn't she already a saint who received the support of her subjects through long years of volunteer work?"

But what about Prince Mores?

"You have only recently come into prominence, and you are not even born with any divine power. But now there are rumors going around that he brought about divine grace and defeated the demon race! What else is that if not excessive deification of the royal family?"

Moreover, Prince Mores is a little [different] from the other princes and princesses of the Holy Imperial Family.

Most of the high-ranking clergy had already noticed it. An undeniable evil energy that sometimes emanates from that strange prince.

If he had not been the emperor's favorite prince, Cardinal Benitus would have taken him to the Heresy Tribunal and interrogated him

long ago.

"Unholy! There is a rumor going around that a person without any divine power dared to exercise the grace of the god! This is heresy! "It is a heresy that no one can deny!"

Sure enough, Cardinal Benitus, who overheard their conversation, was furious.

"In this world, only His Majesty, the Supreme Holy Emperor, and the priests and paladins who serve the Lord! Prince Mores absolutely does not deserve this! Do you understand!?"

Everyone who attended the crusade was expecting his reaction.

'It's really noisy. He's going to cause this ruckus until he runs out of energy again.'

Since he has strong divine power, he will go on a rampage for quite some time.

Everyone was thinking like that and mindlessly shuffling through documents for follow-up measures.

But none of them could have guessed that today's crusade would end with this conclusion.

"Prince Mores is truly the God's tool in name and reality. He will soon become a paladin."

Everyone in the Holy Assembly opened their eyes and turned their heads to the husky voice that seemed to be scraping rough metal.

There stood a man who looked like a dry old tree.

Leander, leader of the Knights of St. Terbachia.

The gloomy man leading all the exorcists opened his heavy mouth again.

"Because Leandros will put his honor on the line and nominate Prince Mores as a member of the Knights of St. Terbachia."

"... ... ?"

"Maybe he won't turn down that offer."

For a moment, silence fell throughout the entire crusade.

"... "Prince Mores?"

"Well, does that make sense? Doesn't he have divine power?"

"A paladin without divine power? What is that..."

However, despite the spreading turmoil, Sir Leandros did not even blink.

"Everyone seems to have forgotten, but there are only two things that the Knights of St. Terbachia consider important. "It is a strong hostility toward the demon species and a correspondingly strong power of destruction."

Those with divine powers usually possess the powers of healing, blessing, and destruction of evil, although there are differences in degree.

Among them, most members of the Knights of Saint Terbachia, whose main task was exorcism, specialized in the ability to destroy evil.

However, since this power of [Destruction] is only a characteristic of divine power, it is mainly those who have divine power that join. In principle, anyone could meet the qualifications as long as they could defeat the devil well.

There was also a precedent here. Terbachia, the saint of wisdom whom the exorcists seek to continue. It is said that he, too, originally had no divine power.

However, Saint Terbachia held powerful relics in both hands and defeated more demons than anyone else at the time. That is why, in later generations, he rose to the rank of saint.

And the same goes for Sir Leandros.

Although he had a power to destroy evil so strong that he was called the nightmare of demons, he was also the only one among the leaders of the Five Holy Knights to have no divine power.

"B-but... .."

Cardinal Benitus, who had been standing dumbfounded in shock, finally came to his senses and opened his mouth.

"He, no, the third prince doesn't deserve it... .."

"I heard that Prince Mores's military power has already surpassed that of an ordinary knight in the imperial palace. Where is that? Considering his accomplishments so far, there is no doubt about his ability to [annihilate] against the demon race."

"... ..!"

No one would dare refute those words.

Prince Mores is the one who solved the demon crisis in the imperial capital. Moreover, not long ago, he led the Wolf Knights and successfully defeated the Demon Beast that had appeared for the first time in hundreds of years.

Plus, there was some action today. Aren't all of these achievements difficult for even a decent leader of the Holy Knights to achieve in their lifetime?

"Also, the beloved sword you use is a nutcracker that has the status of a holy relic."

"... .."

"Now, everyone, please answer. "Is there anything missing in his qualifications?"

Looking back at the members of the Holy Assembly who were engulfed in silence, Lord Reindras made a sharp expression on his face.

"So, as soon as everything is settled, I, Leandros, will personally speak

to His Majesty the Holy Emperor."

* * *

While everyone was going crazy over the third prince, Seongjin's mind was wandering in the wrong place, not reality.

[hmm. I think my father healed me...]

Seongjin tilted his head in confusion.

It doesn't look like he's dead, does it?

Still, for some reason, he was now in a state where he had left his body halfway and was observing himself through the eyes of his soul.

To be exact, a long passage connected to one's body.

'That's my father's auror!'

Soon, a white glowing aura unique to the Holy Emperor was seen slowly pushing the fire of Gehenna out of the passage.

'I thought it would be possible with my father!'

Seongjin, who was internally relieved, looked at the scene blankly.

And next to him, there was another being watching it along with Seongjin.

[Lee Seong-jin. There is the fire of Gehenna over there.]

A small and insignificant red soul as always.

Seongjin looked at the bastard and nodded.

[...] uh.]

[That long road must be a shortcut to crossing dimensions, right?]

Only then did Seongjin realize what the Demon King had seemed so worried about earlier.

A long passage covered in dark red flames was the road back to Gehenna.

Sigurd: A demon world that has completely merged with Earth 34. To the dimension that Seongjin and the Demon King left.

[By the way, Seongjin Lee.]

Seongjin kept his mouth shut, but the Demon King asked again as if he was anxious.

[If I go back to Gehenna, will you treat me like you do now?]

359. Join (2)

Seongjin stared silently at the demon king's soul blinking red.

'... The devil returns? To Gehenna?'

To be honest, I was quite embarrassed. Because it was something I had never even thought of as a possibility until now.

If you think about it, it was a strange thing. Seongjin already knew that there was a passage in his body connected to Gehenna.

Where is that? There was a time when I was thrown straight there through a passage.

I should have known a long time ago that the devil's soul was capable of such a thing.

'For some reason, I had a baseless belief that he would continue to be here in the future.'

It may be natural that the Demon King wants to return. Because he's been losing himself steadily, little by little, ever since.

Not only has he lost all of his senses needed to live, but he has also lost all his strength and status, and now even his name has become a blur.

The shock has caused the Demon King to whimper helplessly once or twice so far.

'but... ... '

Nevertheless, Seongjin could not be easily convinced.

Returning to Gehenna. And to regain its former form and strength. Is it okay to think that this is truly the way to regain the Demon Lord himself?

[If I return to Gehenna, I may become a stronger demon king than before.]

[okay?]

[huh. Sigurd Earth 34 and Gehenna have completely merged. Now, if I regain my status as a demon king, perhaps those two dimensions will be able to leap into one dimension that is newer and more solid than before.]

[hmm.]

As Seongjin responded without much emotion, the demon king's soul stirred irregularly, as if he was impatient.

[Now we won't invade other dimensions for a while. Because I also need to solidify my level first. Of course, as time passes, the day will come when we need to take another leap forward... . ah! Of course, I will never invade Delcross where you are!]

[...]]

[This is a high level where I can't do anything right now, right? And just imagining having to face your monstrous father head-on... [It's to the point where every part of my body that isn't even in my soul is going numb.]

okay. He knows my father well, so he wouldn't dare do something like that and expect to get away with it.

'but...'

Seongjin had been feeling strange since a while ago.

Is it because I've been hanging out with that guy for a long time? Although he didn't have the ability to see through the truth like Logan, Seongjin felt that for some reason, the devil seemed to be trying hard to avoid topics he really wanted to talk about.

So I asked directly.

[What are you so scared of, devil?]

Wouldn't it be over if I just go back down the passage and become the Demon King again?

Is there anything in the process that makes you feel afraid?

[...] ... !]

But it seems that the point was correct. Because the Demon King was so shocked that he kept his mouth shut.

There was a break in conversation for a moment. Seongjin and the Demon King were lost in their own thoughts and quietly watched the black and red flower being helplessly pushed down the passage.

And around that time, Seongjin realized that the power of Seonghwang's aura to push out the flames was gradually weakening.

'... ... ?'

what? What happened to your father?

Seongjin was puzzled, but then the demon king let out a small sigh as if he had decided on something.

[Lee Seong-jin, do you know that?]

[hmm?]

[When I first met you, you were a crazy person who couldn't communicate properly. Compromise and appeasement were impossible in the first place, and you fearlessly burned your hostility towards an opponent who was much stronger than you. I wondered if there were such crazy people in the world.]

Shut up, you devil!

In the end, you ended up being completely ruined by my fist. Do you want to go to this point and slander a person's character?

[But after coming to this world and spending time together, I learned more about you than I thought.]

The red soul gave off a faint light as if recalling old memories.

[You're not as angry as I thought. Even though this situation is repeated over and over again. I thought he was a psychopath who just pushes whatever he wants, but wouldn't he be like a brat who would get away with it in most cases except in special cases?]

... what? Hogu?

Seongjin was so dumbfounded that he lost the will to respond.

Who says this is bullshit now? Is there anyone who considers profit and loss and practical benefit as well as me?

[In particular, you showed infinite generosity to the weak things that could not threaten you. Because you allowed your maid to drink bile and that vulgar knight to commit lese majeste. Where is that? Even towards the arrogant resident knights who sometimes look at you for misfortune, you never once frowned.]

[...] That's it.]

There was no intention to respect their basic rights, such as freedom of expression.

It's just because their actions meant nothing to Seongjin.

It's not really worth worrying about, right? It's as if you don't feel the need to clean up the rocks that your feet hit while walking because they are a little annoying.

[So I realized. Your hostility basically only works against things that threaten your people and things that are strong enough to threaten your survival.]

The Demon King, who had spoken up to that point, paused for a moment and continued speaking with some difficulty.

[Then, what about me?]

Pyooooong.

A red soul floated up and blinked vaguely as it faced Seongjin.

[Lee Seong-jin. You said you became a hunter to kill me. And in the end, that goal was achieved.]

okay. It was like that.

By completely burning not only his colleagues but also his own body, he finally put an end to the demon lord.

[The reason you left my soul helpless was because you didn't know how to kill me, right? But if I regain my strength and return to my original form...]

The little soul trailed off for a moment, emitting an irregular light as if reflecting anxiety.

[I have harmed your people, and I am no longer weak enough to be generous to you... What kind of person am I to you?]

[...]]

[Would you treat me like you do now then? No, can you just leave me alone? If you say that you will sacrifice everything to kill me again, then I will...]

Seongjin could not hastily answer that question. Because he himself didn't know how to deal with the demon lord who had regained his power.

Still, I had this question.

'Why does the devil bastard ask this? Are you really asking my permission to regain your strength?'

why? If I'm scared, shouldn't I just run away?

Seongjin, who has now decided to live as Mores in Delcross, will not be able to chase after him, throwing everything away like before.

Then, Seongjin suddenly remembered the desperate moment of being consumed by the flames of Gehenna.

-Lee Seong-jin. Maybe it's not too late. Now, we can stop the fire of Gehenna with the remaining aurors.

At that time, I now understand why the devil was in such fierce conflict.

There would have been only one way for the Demon King to return to Gehenna.

Seongjin is engulfed in the fire of Gehenna and dies, so the passage is completely dominated by the fire of Gehenna.

Otherwise, even if the existence of the passage had been known, the Demon Lord would have had a long way to go back.

No matter how much I was surrounded by my father's barrier, I would not have been able to pass through the aura filled with divine power and cross that long passage.

'but... ... '

In the end, rather than returning to Gehenna and regaining his power, the demon king decided to save Seongjin first.

Then the story wasn't that difficult.

'I can never forget that he is my parents' enemy.'

But it also doesn't change the fact that he worked hard for her until now. It was not that difficult for Seongjin to return the favor he had received.

'And if you really wanted to go back, you wouldn't have started this conversation with me in the first place.'

There were enough clues to guess the devil's true intentions.

Didn't he say this himself?

-Don't regret it later. You really like this place, right?

He probably thinks he was just representing Seongjin's thoughts at the time.

But deep down, the demon lord also really likes this place.

A place with bear meat steaks and other delicious dishes. There is a manager, Bruno, who will criticize you for being a jerk, and a place full of noisy human relationships.

Seongjin is probably not alone in not wanting to leave this place easily.

So Seongjin was able to make the suggestion with a slightly more relaxed mind.

[Just don't go, devil.]

[...] uh?]

Perhaps because it was an unexpected answer, the Demon King's soul blinked in confusion.

However, Seongjin's next words were Cheongsanyusu.

[As long as I live, the passage will remain anyway, and it will open again someday. It means you can return to Gehenna at any time.]

okay. The road will reopen soon.

For some reason, Seongjin had such a strong feeling.

[So is there a need to hurry up? There would already be nothing left out there anyway. The fire of Gehenna would have burned the Earth and everything in Gehenna.]

[...] But...]

[Then wouldn't it be pointless to go back anyway? What are you going to do there alone?]

[No, but Seongjin Lee. As I said before, the enormous potential of the

two worlds fused...]

[Then what do you do? There isn't even a bear meat steak there.]

[...] ... !]

Seongjin raised the corner of his mouth with a grin and spoke at the Demon King, who was blinking strongly as if indicating an internal conflict.

[And without you, I also feel quite uncomfortable.]

[huh?]

Perhaps the words were unexpected, but the Demon King asked Seongjin with an urgent light.

[I... Do you need me?]

[okay. of course. You have spiritual eyes, can detect lies, and can scout quite far outside the ecliptic, right?]

Plus, I hate to admit it, but he's also pretty smart. As a demon lord, he knows a lot.

[Besides, think about it, devil. I need you to stick by my side, so if something happens to me, won't you be my companion?]

[uh... ... ?]

[If I die, you will die too. Do you really think I will just leave you alive and go along?]

[...] ... !]

The Demon King seemed to be dazed for a moment and stopped blinking.

Meanwhile, changes gradually occurred in the space where they were staying.

The ominous light emitted by Gehenna's apocalypse is completely pushed away, and the son-in-law is covered in dazzling white light.

The thriving aurors had already restored about half of the passage.

'It's slower than I thought. Father, what are you doing? 'Aren't you going to push me away at once this time?'

Seongjin is thinking about this as he looks around -

[Ugh...]

The Demon Lord, who was unable to speak for a moment, immediately circled around Seongjin with a bewildered grin.

[What is it? what is that? Why is this guy who is so good at negotiating with other people making an offer to me like that?]

what? why? what?

Is there room for negotiation here? What more do you need than a bear steak?

Seongjin held out his hand with a shameless expression. I had a strong feeling that sooner or later I would get out of here and open my eyes.

[...] okay. Anyway, you have no intention of ending me right away.]

The Demon King, who hesitated for a moment, soon sighed and fell into Seongjin's hands.

[And they won't kick you out. Still, can't you tone down his words, you heartless bastard?]

However, there was a faint hint of relief in the voice of the man who lamented like that.

What is it that makes this guy so relieved? He always thought that he understood most things while working together, but there are still many things he doesn't know.

[Sniff. Still, when I go, you'll be my companion too, right? Right, Seongjin Lee?]

[Noisy. Stop whining now.]

[Sniff. Sniff. Seongjin Lee, you idiot.]

Seongjin did not reply any further and held the demon king's soul.

at that time-

-Mores.

He heard someone calling him.

Seongjin welcomed the call with joy and slowly closed his eyes.

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360. Join (3)

Blink.

When Seongjin first opened his eyes, what caught his eye was an unfamiliar, gracefully hanging canopy.

'Where am I?'

As I looked up at the ceiling in a daze, I heard a calm voice next to me as if answering my question.

"This is a temporary treatment room located next to the office."

"... father?"

"This measure was taken because I felt like I would have to frequently combine treatment and government work, so please stay here for the time being."

Seongjin, who discovered the success, felt both joy and embarrassment.

As expected, my father helped me! Somehow, my eyes seemed fine.

'But if the treatment is over, it's over. What more treatment are you doing here?'

That wasn't the only strange thing.

'He was right next to me, why didn't I notice this man's presence right away?'

But when Seongjin wriggled to get up, Seonghwang pressed his forehead and encouraged him.

"Lie still, Mores."

"yes? but... .."

"Your condition has not fully recovered. "Do you still have a high fever?"

After hearing those words, I definitely felt a strange sense of helplessness that was different from usual.

It was truly strange. Normally, when exposed to the powerful divine power of the Holy Emperor, my physical condition would instantly clear up, but why does this feeling still remain?

'No, that's not the problem now.'

Wow-

Seongjin, who was enjoying the divine power pouring down again, suddenly came to his senses. This is because the messy situation from before slowly came to mind.

I rushed at a large demon species without any plan and was helplessly surrounded by its flesh.

In order to stop Logan, who rushed to save him, he drew so much fire from Gehenna that he almost burned his body... ..

100 million!

'We're in big trouble! Today I really made a mistake and hit it right!'

Cold sweat broke out on my forehead.

I'm not sure if this is sweating due to my feet being numb or nervous, or if it's a physiological phenomenon that occurs due to high fever.

In any case, Seonghwang seemed to have decided that it was the latter. He took his hand away from Seongjin's forehead and said, pulling up the crooked bedding.

"Lay down. "Let's go see the other kids for a while."

... Other kids?

Only then did Seongjin realize that they were not the only ones in the room.

Beautiful rosy waves covering the chest. It was clearly Amelia's hair, sleeping face down next to the bed.

"... ... ?"

Why are you sleeping here?

While Seongjin was panicking, Seonghwang carefully picked up Amelia so as not to wake her up. Then, he laid her down comfortably right next to her.

'Why are you here?'

Because the bed was so big, I didn't feel particularly uncomfortable.

But is it okay to stay like this? They are not children who hold hands and try to sleep because they are afraid of monsters under their beds.

"Amelia will definitely look for you as soon as she wakes up."

This time, I didn't ask, but Seonghwang gave me the answer first.

"..."

Seongjin, who became a little solemn, turned his head and looked at Amelia lying next to him. Once again, I can see her frowning eyebrows and the clear tear marks on her cheeks.

'sister. 'You cried because of me.'

Seongjin was staring blankly at her silent face with guilt pressing down on his chest. This time, Seonghwang returned to the other side of the bed and picked up the little saint.

"Sisley..."

Yeah, it wasn't just Amelia. Opposite her, little Sisley was lying face down in the same position.

He must have been pouring out his divine power right before he fell asleep, and he was holding Seongjin's sleeve tightly with his small hand.

This time, Seonghwang placed Sisley next to Seongjin. Because of this, Seongjin suddenly found herself caught between her two princesses and unable to move.

"uh..."

But that wasn't the end.

This time, Logan and Sir Martha are sitting on the long sofa a little far away from the bed, dozing off!

At this point, a sense of guilt and an ominous premonition arose.

what? Why didn't I get a feel for them sooner?

"father."

I called out to him in a slightly cracked voice, but he didn't answer right away and walked slowly towards the sofa this time. Maybe it was because of my mood, but the steps seemed very heavy.

Only after Logan and Sir Martha had laid down on the sofa one by one, did he finally turn his head towards Seongjin.

"Since everyone is stubborn about protecting you, I told you to just do it."

"uh..."

"I thought it was actually good. "Wouldn't that allow me to look after all of you at the same time?"

It sounds as if he can't leave Seongjin's side for a long time.

Seongjin couldn't help but recall what he had heard in passing earlier.

-This measure was taken because I felt like I would have to frequently

combine treatment and government work, so please stay here for the time being.

no way?

Does this mean that Seongjin has some serious problem that requires constant treatment by his side?

"Father, I feel..." "I feel like my senses are a little strange."

When he confessed his abnormality in a trembling voice, Seonghwang looked at Seongjin for a moment and nodded slightly.

"... "Maybe so."

"What on earth is going on? "Can you tell me exactly what's wrong with me?"

"okay."

Seonghwang, who answered obediently, explained with a somewhat bitter expression.

"Because my auras are binding your auras and your senses."

"Come on, sense?"

What does that mean?

While I was confused, Seonghwang paused for a moment and continued speaking.

"Rather than a lengthy explanation, it would be better to experience it yourself. "I'll let you go for a while, so are you willing to try moving your auras?"

Whoop-

With those words, the small pressure pressing down on my body disappears.

"... ..!"

Only then was Seongjin able to properly understand Seonghwang's words.

This was a space filled with aura of prosperity as if it were air.

The materialized aura filled the room, encroaching on the path through which Seongjin's aura flowed, and eventually even taking away his breathing and senses.

There was no gap in the flow so far, so he didn't feel anything wrong, as if it were Seongjin's own aura.

'Why on earth would you do such a thing?'

However, Seongjin was soon able to painfully feel the reason.

The auror layer, which started rotating on its own from the start, soon began to become hot as if burning.

"... .. ?!"

It was quite different from the aura Seongjin had felt before.

The aura, which used to flow smoothly like water, is burning everything it touches as if it has turned into lava. Heat surged from my body along with a burning sensation.

'This... Could it be that the fire of Gehenna?'

Embarrassed, Seongjin first tried to control the flow of Aurors.

But strangely, the more I tried to control the aurors, the more the fire rising inside me began to rage. As her aura spreads throughout her body, her searing pain becomes increasingly severe.

I'm so confused and don't know what to do...

Whoop-

A cool wind rushed in, instantly trapping the flames inside my body.

It was a successful auror.

At the same time, bright divine power pours down from above the head again.

"... .."

Feeling the pain disappear in an instant, Seongjin looked up at Seonghwang with a frustrated face.

'Of course. The temperature dropped quite a bit, but it was definitely a disaster from Gehenna.'

Didn't your father push all the fire down the aisle earlier? Why is it still in my body?

But at least one thing is certain. Whatever happened to his body now, it was clearly Sungjin's own fault.

Seongjin noticed Seonghwang's behavior and quickly criticized him.

"I'm so sorry, Dad. "You clearly warned me to be careful before, but I only trusted my intuition and acted too hastily."

"... .."

"I guess I was using my aura too much, so the fire my father talked about came here. I never meant to do this... .."

While he was making gibberish excuses, Seonghwang's hand slowly approached Seongjin.

However, contrary to expectations that this time, Takbam will fly-
Scrunch.

Seonghwang only lightly stroked Seongjin's head once, as if to comfort him.

"You just tried to save Delcross with everything you had."

"No, I just..." .."

"And there was a price to pay for it. "You are probably the one who is heartbroken because you cannot use your Aurors as you wish. Instead

of taking care of yourself, why do you try to comfort others first?"

"... ..!"

Seongjin felt his heart sink at Seonghwang's point.

Are you heartbroken? I?

'no. But my father will definitely have a solution. 'You're my father, right?'

Seongjin believed in Seonghwang, and he also believed in his own premonition.

'My Auror is back. I can see that. I won't have to wait too long, I'm sure I'll be able to use Aurors again like before.'

But it was a really strange thing.

Despite such a strong premonition, what slowly came over me was a greater sense of loss than I expected.

It feels like I'm running hard and the goal suddenly disappears before my eyes. I feel like the toy I was playing with was helplessly taken away.

Seongjin once again realized how much he enjoyed training as an Auror.

"I am... .."

I was mumbling in an unfamiliar mood, but Seonghwang looked at Seongjin for a moment and then continued speaking.

"I'm sure you didn't know deep down that it would lead to this result. So, I guess I tried to learn as many things as possible during the little time left."

okay.

When I think about it now, it seemed a bit strangely reckless. He was calmly learning how to use Aurors by urging Logan next to the

demon species.

But at that time, Seongjin clearly knew. If it's not now, there won't be a chance for a while.

"And there must be a reason why you brought out that fire. So what can I do? In the end, if you decide to do it, I can only help you make it happen."

"... .."

"Don't be too disappointed. Although the hellfire has completely merged with your aura, there is nothing that cannot be eradicated with a long period of time. "That's why, instead of blocking all the passageways, I left some space."

Scrub.

Seonghwang added, shaking Seongjin's hair as he kept his mouth shut.

"Remember, son. There is nothing wrong with you. If there's anyone to blame, it's just that they put you in this situation... .."

He didn't continue talking, but Seongjin suddenly came to his senses after hearing what he was saying.

Oh no, now is not the time for me to feel this down.

It's a new feeling, but this guy really has a lot in common with Logan. Especially when you dig so deeply into the ground for something that is not your fault.

"father! Absolutely not! This incident is my... ..!"

But Seongjin could not finish speaking. This is because Seonghwang covered his eyes and lightly scolded him.

"Shh, when you wake up and try to move, the aurors will continue to move, following your intentions. "Then your fever will rise again, so it's better to sleep some more now."

Tuk.

With Takbam losing a lot of strength, Seongjin's consciousness sank helplessly again.

-Have a nice dream for a little while.

It was as if I heard a faint voice in my ear.

* * *

[Wow! I really can't do this!]

Seongjin internally became suspicious.

'Wait a minute, didn't you say it was a good dream?'

However, the first thing Seongjin heard in that 'good' dream was Lord Martha's angry lament.

[What do you think, Your Majesty Logan? It happens like this every time, every time. Isn't it really too much for His Majesty Mores to do?]

... Lord Masaine?

Yes, Lord Masain was standing before his eyes now.

It was strange that he looked a little younger than usual, but even so, Seongjin could immediately recognize him as his loyal bodyguard.

[I understand everything, brother Masain. Brother, you did your best.]

And next to him, Logan, who also looked strangely small, was patting his shoulder.

[Was it because I lacked resolve? I promised myself that if I had to, this time I would use this sword without asking for help... ..]

[No, it is absolutely not your fault.]

Pat pat.

'... What is this?'

Seongjin blinked blankly at the unimaginable sight.

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361. Join (4)

Seongjin was standing on a picturesque field.

Clouds like cotton candy float in the deep blue sky. Colorful blooming flowers sway dizzily on the evenly spread green carpet.

This childishly gorgeous feast of natural colors.

'... Gather together, friends?'

Naturally, I couldn't help but think of the evil infant skin from Pangea Chronicles.

'Is this the 'good' dream, father?'

This appears to be a temporary flame level created by Seonghwang. Although he didn't hear any particular explanation, Seongjin could somehow intuitively feel that fact.

'Should I call this fatherly, sending my soul to another dimension just to get some rest...?'

Well, whether it's blowing away souls or creating a temporary resting place, it's all good.

however...

'How on earth did you decide on the target age?'

Seongjin couldn't help but be taken aback.

No, father. How long will I be a child to you? yes?

[Wow! I really can't do this!]

At that time, a familiar lament was heard from somewhere in front of me. When I turned my head, the blond-haired knight that Seongjin saw every day was in tears.

[It happens like this every time. Isn't it really too much for His Majesty Mores to do?]

'... Lord Masaine?'

Seeing that he is wearing a neat royal guard uniform, he is indeed Lord Masaine.

Nevertheless, the reason Seongjin was not immediately sure of his identity was because Lord Masain looked much younger than usual.

Instead of his face getting more and more stained day by day due to Seongjin's troubles, Lord Masain somehow looks like a youthful youth. Now, he was pouring out the anger he had been holding in towards Logan.

[I understand everything, brother Masain. Brother, you did your best.]

And the sight of Logan patting him next to him was even more spectacular.

Although he was dressed neatly in his usual Holy Knights uniform, he had the appearance of a small child who could have been in kindergarten.

If it weren't for his unique aura and drooping blue eyes, Seongjin probably would never have recognized Logan.

'... What is this?'

Seongjin was embarrassed.

It certainly feels like Sir Martha and Logan are the two people. Why are you acting like that?

[Isn't it because that's the image that I'm most familiar with when they're together?]

[Baion, which is closest to the physical body, sometimes changes depending on memory and unconsciousness.]

The answer came from an unexpected place.

When I looked up, I saw two small bead-like things circling around Seongjin's head at different speeds.

[Oh, don't you know? Bion is one of the three elements that make up the soul.]

[The theory of the three elements of the soul is only Granius's claim.]

The theory of three elements of the soul?

While he was puzzled by the sudden sound, two beads came closer to Seongjin and conveyed his thoughts again.

[In our view, it is more appropriate to define the soul in terms of the two elements Aeon and Bion.]

The blue bead moved as if it was jumping and swirled around Seongjin's face.

[The reason Dacion was included there was purely due to Granius' political circumstances.]

On the other hand, the pink beads fall at a leisurely pace and settle gently on Seongjin's shoulder.

And the two beads burst into laughter at the same time.

[This is a temporary barrier made by Seonghwang's father!]

[It's a small play area where you'll forget everything when you wake up.]

[Are you surprised, Mores?]

[Are you surprised, Mores?]

The feeling conveyed in the voice is clearly the two people he knows, right?

Seongjin spoke the names that came to mind in an uncertain voice.

[...] Herna? Kadesh?]

[...] ... !?]

However, the two beads' reaction to Seongjin's name was very enthusiastic. At first, the two shook their head as if they were surprised, but then suddenly they started pouring out a lot of noisy thoughts.

[Wow! Are you finally recognizing us?]

[know? We were always by your side.]

[We were a little worried about you too.]

[Of course, I wasn't overly worried.]

No matter how I looked at that unique way of speaking, it was clear that they were twins.

[But why did this change happen today?]

[I guess it's because Dad, His Majesty, sent me in an awakened state.]

[So now, can Mores recognize us even if we go out at night?]

[You said the name, right? Probably enough cause and effect has been created to remember.]

Seongjin asked, trying to ignore his wild thoughts.

[Baion... Even so. Why are these two not even human?]

Then, as if they had been waiting, cheerful answers came back.

[That's right, we came here not by Bion, but by using a properly separated soul terminal.]

[Thanks to this, other people think it's just a dream and forget about it, but we can remain conscious.]

[Even if you are not a successful father, we can always come here by ourselves.]

[Of course, since it was created by my father, His Majesty, permission is required.]

Through the thoughts of the twins' soul terminals, Seongjin learned that Sir Martha and Logan were also flown here by Seonghwang's hand.

[My brother, Masain, was in quite critical condition due to severe erosion.]

[Nevertheless, he insisted until the end not to take a break.]

It is said that in the end, the lesser Seonghwang had no choice but to put Lord Masain to sleep. By creating a dream dimension and forcibly blowing away souls.

[Where is that? Amelia was like that too.]

[It was the same with Brother Logan and Sisley.]

Seongjin was convinced.

Ah, somehow. Even after talking with Seonghwang for a long time, the two cheerful people did not wake up at all.

[Seonghwang's father has created this level several times in the past.]

[It was mainly like that when Brother Owen was around. He used to have severe nightmares.]

Of course, if the repeated process of forcibly separating one's soul is repeated, it will take a huge toll on the body and mind. So, it is a method that is not used very often.

[But the playground looks quite different from before?]

[It looks like something has changed in the image in your father's imagination.]

[It's so colorful that it feels strange.]

[Have you read any new children's books?]

... Well, somehow I think I know what my father was referencing.

Anyway, after adjusting to some extent, Seongjin was able to leisurely look around with the twin soul terminals attached.

Appropriately called a playground, this place had everything prepared for children.

On one side, a fairly generous table of refreshments is set out, and in the shallow pond, small boats float that a child can sail alone.

There was also a large tent with cute toys such as wooden horses and dolls scattered around.

Then, Seongjin came across a strange sight. The sight of large mushrooms huddled together on one side of the field, all spewing strong wind into the sky.

'... 'What is that again?'

Mushroom stalks as large as human torsos were wriggling and spewing air upward as if they were pumping from the ground.

Hwiing- Hooong-

Small white spores flew with the strong wind.

[It's booming.]

[huh. It's booming.]

... Boom? what is that?

But soon, Seongjin learned what the mushrooms really were. Logan, who had been soothing Sir Martha for a while, led him straight to that place.

[How determined have I been until now to never again hand over Misra into the small hands of Mores... ..!]

[Brother Masain. Please calm down.]

[But it's bad. I feel like I'm dying and coming back to life several times a day these days! I'm an Auror user and all, and if I keep going like this, I really don't think I'll get kicked out!]

[I know how you feel, brother. Now, come this way. If you cheer together, you will feel much better.]

The two people climbed up the mushroom, and soon began to soar into the sky, riding the wind. Isn't this how it alternates between rising and falling several times?

'... ... '

Seongjin looked at them with a puzzled expression.

No, let alone Logan. Sir Martha, what is that man doing now, not even worthy of his age?

[hmm. Because this is just a dream.]

[Because it's just what the soul subconsciously wants.]

[If you ask the cause, it is because of Mores.]

[okay. As it turns out, it's all Mores' fault.]

[Be careful, Mores!]

[Be careful, Mores!]

The excuse for the two ended up being a criticism towards Seongjin.

[Uh, okay, okay. I am reflecting.]

Seongjin roughly separated the twins who were running wild and turned his attention to another part of the playground.

'Anyway, this means that your sister and Sisley are here too, right?'

Seongjin slowly walked through the sunny field with the intention of looking for them as well.

A landscape that feels unrealistic, as if it were a dream.

Is it because of my mood? As I am doing this, the feeling of loss from losing my Auror seems to be relieving a little... ..

Then, Seongjin encountered an unexpected person.

[Hahahaha!]

'... 'Owen?'

okay. That's definitely Owen.

She looked much younger than when we met her in the Pangea Chronicle, but her long, bronze-colored hair still flowed untidy.

He was running around the field energetically, wondering where he got that energy from. Even carrying a much smaller Sisley on his shoulders!

[Hahaha! I really missed you, Sisley! Our baby, our youngest!]

[Brother, I am not a baby anymore!]

[ha ha ha! What are you talking about? Is it still this small?]

[That's just because my brother is big... ah! There's a cute rabbit over there!]

[okay? Shall I chase after you?]

Doo doo doo doo!

Seongjin, who was watching the two people speeding away, slowly touched his forehead.

'Oh, I'm confused. This is really just a dream.'

It was right then.

[Why are you so lethargic, Mores?]

A clear voice that resonates like a song.

I looked back with a strange feeling of déjà vu, and there was a cute girl standing there wearing a flowing dress.

Rich rosy hair blowing in the wind.

[sister... ... ?]

She had the appearance of a small girl who seemed to be ten years old, but with that neat and glamorous aura, it could not have been anyone else.

Seongjin let out a laugh.

[...] I never thought I would see a sister who looks younger than me.]

Then little Amelia tilted her head.

[What do you mean, Mores? He's younger than you?]

[yes?]

[I am your older sister. So it's natural that I'm more mature than you, right?]

[...] ... ?]

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

uh? Now that I think about it, since when did my standards become this low?

When I looked at my body in confusion, I realized that he really had the body of a small child.

Small sleeves with luxurious buttons, and small hands sticking out from underneath them.

[...] ... ?!]

What is this again?

As Seongjin was groping in confusion, the twins next to him did not miss the opportunity and started chirping.

[This is the appropriate age that the unconscious feels.]

[In other words, it can be said to be your true mental age.]

[Everyone knows, so there's nothing to be embarrassed about, Mores.]

[Because it is a clearly visible and undeniable truth, Mores.]

Shut up, you demons!

If you think about it, this is the world of my father's imagination. So this can't really be my mental age!

This is all my father's perception, that is, his fault!

Seongjin, who was very upset, waved his hands wildly to catch the annoying terminals.

[Come here, you guys! Can't you come here?]

Why are you so rude to me in the first place? Wow, it just worked out! Today, my brother will fix your messy hair in one go!

Then the twins burst out laughing at the same time, flying around to avoid him, as if they were playing hide and seek.

[Kyahahaha! Mores idiot!]

These immature kids are just having fun.

These guys! Do you think I'm having fun right now? uh?

[Haha, what are you doing now, Mores?]

Amelia, who was looking at that scene with round eyes, eventually came over with a faint smile on her face.

[sister... ..]

[Don't lose your strength and come here, Mores.]

A small, delicate hand clasping an absurdly young hand.

What was conveyed there was a warmth that little by little filled my heart that was empty due to loss.

[There is an interesting looking pond over there. Would you like to go boating with me?]

* * *

"your majesty... .."

Katrina, who entered the office for a post-mortem report, stopped in shock at the sight of a somewhat unfamiliar figure.

Eyes with a strange silver glow.

On a face that appears expressionless at first glance, there is something that could definitely be called a smile, although it is faint.

Katrina intuitively realized this.

'You are looking at your children now.'

The loyal knight commander felt his heart ache.

'Your Majesty's rest will always be by your children's side, but now you can't even take care of them as you wish!'

Although he is now the father of many children, he was still a young prince in Katrina's eyes.

The boy she cherished the most in the world, whom she had looked after since childhood.

"Good job, Katrina. "Report."

That was why he hesitated for a moment even though Seonghwang's words urged him to do so.

"your majesty."

Katrina soon came to her senses, and instead of reporting, she turned to him with a determined face.

"We will do our best to confiscate the remaining homunculus right now. "I don't know where Justin hid it, but he certainly couldn't have gone far beyond the ecliptic."

"... Katrina."

"So, please keep the homunculus always by your side, Maures, and forget your worries. If that is not possible, first of all, let's consider bringing in Sir Sharon as a resident knight... .."

"You can't do that, Katrina."

Katrina raised her head at the calm voice that cut her off. Then she immediately felt a shock that made her heart sink.

Seonghwang was smiling at Katrina.

In the past, when he was young, he made the same expression he always showed every time he left Empress Bethsheba's room.

"You can't watch Mores like that."

"... .."

"I know the consequences, but I still can't do it."

It was the face of someone who had long ago recognized the things he had to give up and calmly accepted them.

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362. Join (5)

"Before Balthazar's troops arrived on the scene, some of the demonic energy flowing from the demon species was observed spreading throughout the countryside."

Leandros' hoarse voice echoes through the quiet office.

Katrina stood next to Seonghwang and quietly listened to his voice.

"Magi is attracted to stronger demon energy. Therefore, I instructed the exorcists not to hastily attempt to purify it, but rather to track the whereabouts of the demonic energy."

Thanks to the activities of Prince Mores and Prince Logan, the demon species was trapped in one place and tied to the scene for a long time. Thanks to this, even though such a huge amount of magical energy was generated, there was almost no additional damage caused by it.

However, the sacred barrier spread out in a semicircle was never perfect, and some demonic energy was scattered without being able to contain it.

"This is all I have to report. "Please do so."

Then, as if he had been waiting, Seonghwang immediately gave instructions to Leandros.

"Send an investigation team to the last place where demonic energy was confirmed. Since Katrina is here at the moment, it would be better to cooperate with the Knights of Saint Aurelion."

Katrina could sense that strange attitude.

'Your Majesty already knew. 'It was already in your sights and in Maurice's plans!'

Prince Mores did not lose his magic energy due to lack of strength. Perhaps even this was all intentionally planned by the prince?

Katrina, who had been supporting the success for a long time, naturally had no choice but to reach that conclusion.

And what supported that guess was the voice of a young man suddenly heard from the entrance.

"Coincidentally, there were seeds of another demon species hidden there. "Our Arenja has already accurately tracked the location, so Your Majesty, please do not worry any further."

A short young man with a black hood covering his face enters the office. Then Seonghwang, whose expression had not changed until then, visibly frowned.

"... "Rebekah."

Katrina and Leandros also naturally turned their gaze towards him.

Rebekah.

The head of Arenja, a secret organization directly subordinate to Seonghwang.

Thanks to their unique method of creating and communicating with soul terminals, Katrina and Leandros also rarely witnessed Arrangja's true nature in person.

This may be because their caution has grown to the point of paranoia after experiencing a crisis that almost led to the annihilation of their clan by the Inquisitors several years ago.

In any case, they are currently hiding deep in the basement of the imperial palace and rarely show up. Sometimes, only their leader, Rebekah, uses external agents on her behalf to maintain necessary communication.

"Rebekah? "Seeing as their presence has completely changed, it looks like they brought in a new external agent."

In response to Leander's point, the young man simply smiled and lowered his head.

Judging from the appearance of the subordinate who had not yet lost his fur, it appears that the spokesperson appointed this time was younger than expected.

"It's been a while since I've seen the two leaders 'in person' like this."

"Forget the boring jokes. "You always hesitate, saying that cause and effect are not enough, and then suddenly, what are you doing here again?"

An unusually blunt question came out of Katrina's mouth. She is sensitive to Seonghwang's mood and often reflects his mood without even realizing it.

However, Rebekah did not pay attention to her fierce attitude and maintained a relaxed attitude throughout.

"There is nothing to worry about, Director Katrina. The cause and effect for the search has already been filled. "Then, even if Rebekah reveals the secret a little early, the outcome will not be much different."

After responding like that, Rebekah slowly approached the Holy Emperor and bowed her head deeply.

"Thanks to Prince Mores' hard work, we have been able to uncover all of the Sower's long-standing arrangements, Your Majesty. "Isn't this clearly because the Lord takes pity on Delcross?"

"... .."

"So, if you give us permission, we [Arenja] will lead the paladins to that location without a hitch on behalf of Your Majesty."

Rebekah's attitude was extremely polite. However, Seonghwang's eyes were so dark as he looked down at him that he felt a chill.

"... "Since that child doesn't do what you want, now you're trying to attack others yourself."

The young man, who had hit the nail on the head, trembles slightly.

No matter how sly the leader of Arranger was, he would not have dared to maintain a shameless attitude in front of the Holy Emperor who saw everything.

Seonghwang, who was looking down at him coldly, raised the corners of his mouth and added,

"I allow it."

"... Duke Hwang... "I do."

"One Rebekah."

Rebekah naturally raised her head at the calm name. And in that moment, I was completely overwhelmed.

Right there, the essence of the clan he had longed for his entire life, the oracle's wondrous gaze.

"The imperial palace is a fence that protects you Kornsi, but at the same time it is a prison you cannot escape. "We must not forget that fact even for a moment."

"... .."

"Do you understand?"

When Rebekah, who was pale, hurriedly bowed her head -

"Once the report is over, you can leave now. "The child's fever is rising again."

A cold spirit of congratulations fell on my head.

* * *

[Wow, I missed this taste! I don't know how long it's been since I've had such sweet snacks.]

In response to Owen's exclamation, Seongjin did not miss the opportunity and attacked him.

[Then you will come home quickly, what are you procrastinating about now?]

Then Owen looked at Seongjin with a strange expression.

[Well, I have some things to organize, newbie. What would happen if the prince, who is holding the center of the battle line, leaves his seat on his own accord?]

[...]]

Perhaps unconsciously feeling familiar, Owen sometimes called Seongjin a newbie. Of course, it seems like he doesn't feel much discomfort.

[But why are you berating me, telling me to come back, not even Sisley? I hate you.]

[okay. Sorry, idiot.]

[What an idiot! Newbie, you always tend to look at me too funny! look. Even now, I'm much, much more mature than you!]

Oh, that's why I'm an idiot.

Seongjin snorted and turned his attention to the tea table.

They had been running around the playground a while ago, and now they were sitting at the tea table in groups of twos and threes chatting.

This is a new dimension where the sense of time is dull. A cool breeze always blew comfortably, and the sun shining down from the sky was still warm.

[By the way, Mores.]

While I was sipping Melbourne at just the right temperature, Amelia turned to Seongjin and asked.

[There was something I was curious about earlier. What on earth is that cloth that you keep so precious to?]

Only then did Seongjin take a closer look at his outfit.

'I didn't pay much attention to it because I thought it was just a dream... .. '

As she said, Seongjin was now wearing a strange cloth around his neck. A shabby, worn-out piece of fabric that doesn't go well with luxurious clothes.

Feeling a strange sense of déjà vu, Seongjin unravels the red cloth, and the children's eyes all focus on it.

'This?'

There was a picture of a man holding a sword and a huge dinosaur engraved on it.

[...] Rex?]

Seongjin blinked.

Wait a minute, what is this? Why is there a Tyrannosaurus engraved on Delcross' items?

[Rex? What is that, Mores?]

Amelia asks Seongjin with sparkling curiosity.

[Uh, that's... ..]

Seongjin hesitated for a moment, but then obediently answered her.

Well, how about it? This is all a dream.

You probably won't even remember this conversation.

[This is Tyrannosaurus Rex. It's a dinosaur.]

[dinosaur?]

[It is an ancient creature that once lived on a place called Earth, but is now extinct.]

[okay?]

Amelia tilted her head.

[To me, it just looks like a picture of a king and a fierce dragon.]

[yes?]

Surprised, Seongjin took a closer look at the cloth again.

"This is a dragon?"

No, that can't be possible, sister.

Look at its large head, ungainly paws, and vicious-looking teeth. No matter how you look at it, this is a Tyrannosaurus rex!

[Ah, Rex. It's been a really long time.]

But suddenly, Logan suddenly joins in and says this.

[Looking at it again, it still leaves a harsh impression. Couldn't it have been made a little nicer to engrave?]

[Uh, wait a minute!]

Seongjin was shocked.

[Logan, how do you know about the Cretaceous dinosaurs that lived on Earth?]

Then Logan looked at Seongjin again, as if he was puzzled.

[How do you know? You gave that dragon a fancy name, right? I always called him Rex, Rex.]

[I?]

[then.]

[...]]

Seongjin was staring at the cloth blankly, lost for words, while Logan quietly whispered as if he were telling a big secret.

[Do you know that, sister? Mores always said this when he was young. He said that when he grows up, he will become a giant Rex.]

[...] I? Did you really say that?]

Seongjin was very embarrassed.

Of course, at one point in my childhood, I had a grand dream of becoming a Tyrannosaurus.

But wasn't that the time when he lived on Earth?

[okay? Our Mores has had a special dream since he was young.]

For some reason, Amelia looked at Seongjin with a proud face. I can't quite figure out what part she's so proud of.

[But don't you usually dream of becoming a dragon-slaying warrior like His Majesty the First Emperor? Why did Brother Mores want to become an evil dragon?]

Sisley also looked intently at the decorative cloth and stroked the dragon wrigglingly with his small hand.

Uh, do you understand? I don't remember anything at all?

[...] He said it was because he was the strongest.]

It was Sir Martha who answered those words.

[When I was young, my Majesty always said that being strong is on the side of justice. So he said he was willing to become an evil dragon and crush all enemies in front of him.]

Wow, Mores as a child... No, I was a pretty extreme person.

[From then on, I had to take good care of him. My emotional education is so lacking...]

Lord Masain, who had finally calmed down, bursts into tears again. Then little Logan looked back at Seongjin with a reproachful expression.

what? why? what?

No, why is everyone talking about dark history that people don't even remember?

Of course, there were people who took the meaning completely differently.

[...] cool.]

Little Amelia held both hands and looked deeply moved.

[The strongest thing is justice... . How wonderful is this sentence?]

... yes?

[I can feel the spirit of a warrior who purely pursues strength. Or, it could be a symbol of the resolute will to push through any stigma for the sake of the goal.]

[...] ... !?]

[You can think about it this way too.]

A bright blue light suddenly passed through the girl's clear gray eyes.

[Strong revenge. It is no different from the word justice. How can there be such a beautiful sentence? Mores, you are amazing as expected!]

Seongjin was the flagship.

No, sister! Please don't develop your tastes in middle school to that level!

[It's okay, Mores.]

[Don't worry, Mores.]

The twins circled around Seongjin and offered words of comfort.

[Not everyone will remember what happened here.]

[Because everyone will think they just had a pleasant dream.]

[Of course, it will leave a deep impression on Amelia's subconscious.]

[Even though you completely destroyed Amelia's subconscious.]

Seongjin, who could no longer bear it, had no choice but to lose his temper.

Ah, you guys!

Comfort or tease, just do one thing, okay?

363. Join (6)

A playground in a dream that seemed to stay the same forever.

Time passed there without exception, and eventually dark night arrived.

[Look over there, Mores. This is Belluna and her children in the night sky.]

Amelia looked somewhat emotional as she pointed at the numerous stars that seemed to be shining brightly.

[When I was young, I used to sleep in the field alone with my father, His Majesty, looking at the night sky. It's a very nostalgic memory.]

It probably didn't really happen. Because when my sister was young, her real father was not by her side.

'It's probably the story of the dream I had while hugging Lee Seong-gi in the attic.'

But instead of reminding Amelia of the truth, Seongjin just responded like this.

[What do you miss? Even now, if I put my mind to it, I can look at the night sky with my father whenever I want.]

How about visiting the main palace late at night sometime? I know because I've done it a few times.

Perhaps your father will welcome you as happily as usual even if you visit in the middle of the night?

As she added that, Amelia smiled brightly at Seongjin. Her cheeks,

flushed with joy, glowed white in the bright moonlight.

[Hehe. okay. You are right, Mores.]

Meanwhile, a large bonfire was burning in the middle of the playground. Although no one had ever lit it, it was a bonfire that appeared naturally sometime ago.

And around the fire, the soft bedding began to fall into place one by one.

[I guess Dad Seonghwang has finally decided to wake us up.]

[It's worth it. Because it is now morning in Delcross.]

The twin soul terminals circled the bonfire at different speeds and explained.

[If you fall asleep here now, everyone will wake up in reality.]

[There will be no memories of playing here, only happy memories.]

[Get rid of all your hard work, Mores.]

[So that only stability and peace remain in your mind.]

... I see

Seongjin looked at the children crawling into their bedding as if they had made a promise.

Is this the end of the dream? It's a bit of a shame that I don't remember this warm time.

However, when all the children fell asleep, Seongjin was the last to lie down.

Aren't the soul terminals of Herna and Kadesh slowly coming to either side of Seongjin, one after another? Then he whispered a huge secret into his ear.

[You know what, Mores? The puppeteer is now in Cyprus.]

[If this continues, Brother Logan and Sisley will meet him soon.]

[That's why we've been worried so much, Mores.]

[Of course, you probably decided it would be okay.]

[...] what?]

It's a sobering sound.

Seongjin jumped up from his seat and shouted.

[for a moment! Did you guys know the whereabouts of the puppeteer? Why are you telling me that now?!]

[That's it... ..]

The soul terminals that appeared before Pororong Seongjin's eyes were shaking as if they were a little embarrassed.

[Mores already knew anyway?]

[How do I keep forgetting myself every time?]

[I can't guarantee this time either.]

[huh. I might forget again.]

You know, but forget it? What is that?

[Besides, Seonghwang's father is not the only one who worries about cause and effect.]

[okay. The more you know, the more limitations there are.]

[Rebekah will definitely be annoying too.]

[Rebekah interferes unnecessarily.]

Rebekah, it was a name I hadn't heard in quite some time.

Thanks to this, it took Seongjin some time to remember him.

[...] So what now? Why are you telling me that now?]

[Because you might remember us from now on.]

[okay. Because you called our name correctly earlier.]

Blue and pink soul beads blinked with irregular light as if disturbed.

[Strictly speaking, this is not the Delcross dimension, so there is a bit of freedom.]

[huh. This is a world that will disappear as soon as you open your eyes, so some causal imbalance will disappear.]

[So, I decided to take this opportunity to have an adventure at least once.]

[How far can you go against cause and effect and protect your memories?]

[Oh, isn't it? Exactly, it is not a matter of how much memory you protect, but rather a question of how much you will allow.]

[Right. We have no way of guessing by what standard you are judging all of this.]

Cause and effect, and memory...

Seongjin looked down at his ridiculously small hands for a moment and answered without realizing it.

[There are no special standards. I just roughly know the consequences.]

Then the twins flinched as if they were surprised, and then burst into laughter at the same time.

[look! It's always like this! Mores is really sneaky!]

Make a lot of noise, you devils!

Who is sneaky? Do you think you can have any idea of the hardships I carry around the world?

Seongjin lay down on the road with a sullen face. Then the twins settle down on either side of the pillow and chirp.

[You mean the result is the problem? Then isn't there something to look forward to this time?]

[huh. Even if he remembered everything anyway, Mores wouldn't be able to do anything.]

[what? Why is that?]

To Seongjin's question, a cheerful answer immediately came back.

[That's right, because Mores is not allowed to go out!]

[Yes, because you are absolutely not allowed to go out for a while.]

[Thanks to this, cause and effect are not disrupted!]

[Yes, no accidents will occur for the time being.]

Uh, that might be a little tricky.

After thinking that for the last time, Seongjin looked at the children breathing evenly for a moment and then slowly closed his eyes.

Immediately with a snapping sound, I felt like something was being washed clean from my mind.

Okay, it's like this again.

I didn't expect much.

[...] Sniff, sniff.]

And the first thing Seongjin heard when he came to his senses was a small whimper that echoed in his head.

'... 'Demon King?'

[...] Seongjin Lee? Lee Seong-jin!]

The Demon King, who was startled, immediately started whispering

quietly.

[Are you okay, Seongjin Lee? The fire of Gehenna came over the passage, and I thought you would surely die like this!]

'Uh, okay. It's okay now.'

I can't help it.

You were there too, so you know it well, right? My father has already seen everything.

[Why don't you just nod! Is this a problem that can be overlooked? The inferno of hell has completely assimilated into your Auror! Now there's no way to get rid of it forever! Now maybe it's a good thing!]

hmm.

Seongjin, who had nothing to say in response, kept his mouth shut. Then the devil started whimpering again.

[Sniff! I guess I thought of something wrong. I wasn't meant to stay here. If I had left for Gehenna at that time, would the outcome have been any different?]

well. Even if things had changed, it wouldn't be the devil's fault. Wasn't it Seongjin who encouraged him to stay here?

Moreover, according to what my father said, it seems that no matter what the outcome is, I am the one who decided it.

But for some reason, the demon lord was wrapped in an unusually deep sense of guilt.

[It shouldn't have happened like this... Sniff!]

'... ..'

But since when has this guy been crying alone? The day was already brightly bright.

[Sniff, slurp.]

'Oh, I'm fine! So, stop dropping Cheongseung now!'

Seongjin, who couldn't see the guy looking so discouraged, scolded him for no reason. If you leave her alone, she will cry all day.

I've thought about it before, but isn't this guy who was said to be a demon lord of one dimension crying too often?

'Come on, stop! If you don't feel any better, just exercise like before.'

[Sniff. Okay. That would be good.]

Boom, boom, boom.

Soon, a figure was felt frantically wandering around the edge of the flame crystal, and its cries gradually began to subside.

Only then did Seongjin feel a little relieved and blankly looked around the brightened room.

Blink.

At that time, Amelia, who was lying next to him, must have felt Seongjin tossing and turning, and slowly opened her eyes.

Between the fluttering eyelashes, the gentle gray eyes, as always, gently curve.

"Hello, Mores."

* * *

The touching reunion of the brothers and sisters was short-lived.

In an instant, Seongjin was surrounded by everyone who became energetic and heard a lot of nagging.

"Mores! I already told you to respect your body! "You even promised me that you would never jump into a dangerous place again!"

"That's right, Amelia. "Please say something harsh to His Majesty Mores!"

"It's no use, brother Masain. Even if I give advice, it is rarely listened to."

"Brother Mores. Do you know how worried everyone was? "Brother, you need to reflect more deeply."

"uh..."

Seongjin suddenly felt very wronged.

No, am I the only one brought here with an injury? Logan was also very dangerous, right? What about Sir Martha?

"It was all to protect you!"

Seongjin, who was struck by Amelia, quickly erased his defiance and calmly lowered his gaze.

"Think of your father, your Majesty, and the people of the Seonghwang family who will be very worried if you get hurt. Do you understand, Mores? Your body is no longer yours alone. Always keep in mind that not only the Seonghwang family, but all the subjects of Delcross look up to you and cherish you!"

Amelia's scolding was harsher than ever.

Why not? Because she had already heard clearly about Seongjin's atrocities from Lord Masain.

-In a critical situation where life is at stake, wouldn't it be better to pull out all the aurors and protect the wolfdog? How can you do this?

-... Brother Masain.

-Anyone with Aurors reflexively protects themselves in the face of danger. But when you look at Mores, it's as if he doesn't care about his own well-being!

In fact, Amelia had already experienced such behavior from Mores.

In a rain of arrows, hadn't there been a time when he had neglected his own safety and put all his strength into her just for her sake?

At the time, I didn't really know what Mores had done. But now that she had some understanding of Auror training, she could be sure.

The person who caught Amelia falling from a distance was probably the materialized Auror of Mores.

At that time, Mores poured all of his Auras at Amelia without leaving even a handful of them, and performed a feat that would have been impossible at his level at the time.

And the result was a miserable death, pierced by numerous arrows.

Strongly-

Amelia sighed softly, soothing her aching heart again.

"okay. But because you were that kind of kid... .."

"... yes?"

Scrunch.

While I was confused by the hand gently stroking my hair, Amelia stood up with a somewhat determined look on her face.

"So, in order to prevent something like this from happening again in the future, we, the Seonghwang family, need to increase our strength even more."

"... ..?"

"Everyone, please keep an eye on Mores. I still have work to do. "I have to report to the Crusade and attend the funeral of the Countess of Bathurst."

Since this was an accident near the imperial capital, it would be better for others to see a member of the royal family show up.

Then Logan stood up from his hesitation and said.

"Ah, sister. If that's the case, I... .."

However, he was immediately stopped by Amelia.

"Logan. "Please rest here quietly today."

"yes? sister. but... .."

"It is also the duty of both of us to get proper rest. "You still don't know what a great thing you did yesterday."

Hearing her majestic voice, Logan sat back down without saying anything.

"So, show off that you worked a little harder. We need to show this to everyone in Delcross, not to mention the crusade. "Because they both deserve it."

Then Sisley stood up along with Amelia.

"I'll come back for a bit too. Because I promised my brother that I would never neglect my knighthood training. "I will quickly become stronger and never again allow my brothers to do dangerous things."

The little boy then added that he would accompany the Knights of St. Grazier to relief work in the afternoon.

"Relief work?"

"huh. Although you have become a knight of Saint Marsyas, your status as a saint is still stronger, right? So, as a saint, she must properly take care of the people of Bathurst Territory."

They were people who experienced a huge disaster such as the sudden appearance of a large demon species.

Although it is said that there were almost no actual casualties, it was little Sisley who knew better than anyone else the effectiveness of such show-like slogans.

With a long history of volunteer work and a track record of comforting the public, she is probably the most successful person.

"It's not just Brother Mores. It is still too early for the two to make a move. So, stay here forever and receive His Majesty's treatment for a while longer."

From what I heard, when they were brought to the imperial palace, Logan and Lord Martha were in terrible condition.

Sir Martha was in a life-threatening situation due to erosion all over his body, and Logan also lost consciousness for a while due to excessive exertion of his divine power.

After receiving the divine power of the Holy Emperor, the two of them had a good night's sleep as soon as they woke up.

"... "Just at night?"

"huh. "It's my first time seeing His Majesty look so scared."

Sisley nodded and continued.

"This is probably the first time Brother Logan has been hit. "Is this the first time you've been in trouble?"

"and..."

When Seongjin looks back at Logan with disbelieving eyes, he touches his forehead shyly.

"Was it really true?"

"... huh."

"You are a sword master. "Even you couldn't avoid the night?"

"Well, Abama drank it. Not only was there no life at all, but it was so fast that there was no time to reflexively move..."

Logan, who had spoken up to that point, quietly trailed off.

"Plus, for some reason, I felt like I shouldn't avoid it. "Abamamama's momentum at that time was so great that I can't explain it in words."

Oh, indeed.

In the face of your father's anger, whether you are a Sword Master or not, you are nothing.

364. Join (7)

When the cloth blocking the entrance was opened, a bright beam of light poured into the dark center of the tent.

"Lowering."

Owen slowly opened his eyes at the sound of a soft voice calling him.

"... Alicia?"

"Yes, it is me."

"Is it morning already?"

"Yes, sir. You have to hurry. "Isn't today the day when the Great Tribal Council of Barça is held?"

Thanksgiving Day!

Owen suddenly came to his senses and jumped up from the bed.

"Alicia. "When did I fall asleep?"

"When I brought you dinner last night, you were already sleeping in bed."

"... okay?"

Owen frowned.

Isn't this really strange? I wasn't that tired yesterday, but I couldn't remember anything before going to bed.

I remember laying out a map of the South and thinking about various

things about the Great Tribal Council until late at night.

Even on the map, there are black rabbit eye patches that have been removed.

'Sleeping without an eye patch, I'm out of my mind. Should I consider myself lucky that I didn't have a nightmare?'

Fortunately, the condition is not that bad. I don't remember, but I think I had a pretty happy dream.

Owen ran his fingers through his messy hair and opened the quest window out of habit. Recently, it was a valuable quest that not only motivated him but also energized his life.

[Special Quest? Let's go back to the ecliptic!]

[Quest Grade: E]

[The goddess who rules one dimension received a special request from someone and collected the essence of all things in one place. Thanks to that invisible effort, you were able to obtain the 'Ultimate Elixir' easier than you thought. It goes without saying that precious things always have a valuable use. Now you must return to the ecliptic and find someone to gift this item to.]

[Reward: 30 P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

The ultimate elixir.

An ultra-rare item that not only heals all status abnormalities and permanently increases abilities, but also restores players who have received a death penalty.

That item was the reason Owen logged on to Pangea Chronicle every day.

At first, Sang Tae-chang was unfriendly and only gave me a quest to get this and didn't teach me any specific methods.

Thanks to this, Owen was overcome with frustration, wondering if he would never be able to return to the imperial capital if things continued like this.

Fortunately, I received an ice heart from a cute newbie I recently dated, so I was able to obtain the quest item easier than I thought.

'But I have to go to the imperial capital and give this elixir to someone... ..'

Owen's eyes deepened as he looked at the quest window.

Finally returning to the ecliptic, the joy is short-lived. The more I think about the contents of the quest, the more I worry and question it.

'Why do you need this item?'

If there are people in the imperial capital who are worthy of giving and receiving gifts, they are all people from the imperial capital, including the Holy Emperor.

However, most of them either already possess strong divine power, or are people who can immediately receive help from that divine power.

'Furthermore, like all the quests so far, this quest is also likely to be related to the main stream.'

Thanks to the enthusiastic quest to return to the imperial capital in a hurry, the main stream, which had recently made steady progress, was already approaching the final quest.

[Main Stream 2? Progress rate 87%]

Perhaps, if we can successfully bring about stability on the front line at today's Great Tribal Council, we can expect Main Stream 2 to be completed as is.

And the next main stream to be done is... ..

[Main Stream 3? Save Castle ☐!]

Of course, this means that the 'Ultimate Elixir' is used here, right?

But who am I supposed to save? Is this really a quest to save a saint? Please make sure nothing dangerous happens to little Sisley.

"Lowering. "I'll be late."

"Ah, yes."

Owen, who had been lost in his thoughts, suddenly came to his senses.

"Let's go right now. But how are Bartoza's preparations?"

Then a faint sneer passed across Alicia's face.

"Do you think it would be cool? For the past few days, I have been restless like a dog with its tail on fire. "I don't know, but I probably didn't sleep a wink last night."

Purma's Bartoja.

He is a treacherous traitor who was sent by Karazhan's chieftain, Wakana Tusai, to assassinate Owen.

-You go. Go and tell Wakana Tusai. If you want to embroil all Barsha tribes in war, then do whatever you want.

Immediately after foiling his plot, Owen sent him back to warn Karazhan.

However, Bartoza, who had thought he would just get away with it, showed a very unexpected appearance. He instantly fell flat and expressed his intention of complete submission to his enemy, Owen.

-I, Bartoza of Purma, deeply admire the warrior Owen's bravery and generosity!

-... what?

-So, I will entrust the future of our clan to you, a great warrior. As we just saw their wicked plan, there are now more and more shameless

cowards in Barça who have forgotten their pride as warriors. Barça is becoming increasingly corrupt!

Is this something the guy who was the key figure in that 'evil plan' would say? Besides, who are you to leave the future of Barça to Delcross?

Owen, dumbfounded, exchanged glances with Alicia.

'what? this guy?'

'well. 'I think you're crazy because you're scared, sir.'

Owen didn't know it, but in fact, Bartoja was saying exactly the same thing he had shouted in front of Wakana Tusai not long ago.

-This Bartoja, together with Owen of Delcross, who is called the warrior of [Invincibility], will try to reform the corrupting tribes of Barsha! So please accept me as your confidant! Give me another chance to take up arms by your side!

The bastard groveled towards Owen in such a servile manner that it would be appropriate to say he was beating his tail.

They must have calculated that if they ran away to any part of Barça's land, they would die without a move. So, it would be better to stick with Owen, Barça's old enemy.

'What can they use a guy like this for? The guy who betrayed Purma and Karazhan, there's nothing he can't betray, right?'

Of course, at first Owen had no intention of accepting him.

That is, until I heard Bartoja's next words.

-The upcoming Great Tribal Meeting! Please allow me to be there with you! Then, I will be there willingly to testify to the whole world about the atrocities of Wakana Tusai!

-... ... !

Owen felt himself come to his senses.

What is the biggest obstacle to stabilizing the front line right now? Isn't this the warlike tribal leader Wakana Tusai?

Even so, I was thinking of putting pressure on Wakana Tusai at this Great Tribal Council by presenting the poisonous sting as evidence.

However, if only he could secure witnesses to support this and ultimately give control of the meeting to the friendly Volanta tribe!

'Stabilizing the front line even for a moment is not a dream. If that happens, I can head to the imperial capital with a slightly more relaxed mind!'

That's how Owen and Bartosa waited for Thanksgiving with different hearts.

"Oh, Bartóza! "You're already ready."

Owen, who had finished arming himself and was walking towards the wooden fence, ran into Bartosa, who was looking slavishly at the entrance.

As the time came to face the fearsome Wakana Tusai, his complexion was becoming haggard by the day.

"I have high expectations for you, Bartoza. "Please testify at the Great Tribal Council with the proud attitude of a warrior."

When Owen greeted him warmly, Bartoza hurriedly averted his gaze and rolled his eyes.

Despite his sturdy size and rugged appearance, he was a truly amazing guy, perhaps because the more you look at him like that, the more subtle he seems.

"I hope things will work out well."

"The Lord will look down upon you, sir."

"Anyway, I have to hand over a big burden to you, Alicia."

When I got on my horse and hinted at my apology, the escort knight

replied with a light bow.

"No, sir. "It's what I should do."

Owen decided to leave behind the escort knight who was always by his side at the front during this trip to the Imperial Capital.

It was something that could not be helped. On the southern front, Alicia's reputation had long since gone beyond that of a simple prince's bodyguard.

Perhaps she would be enough of a deterrent to hold up the front line while Owen was away.

Alicia was also clearly aware of that, so she probably obediently accepted Owen's order to stay.

"Instead, when I get back to the front, I'll give you a long vacation right away, Alicia."

"That's it, sir. "Please just buy me some sweet food from the imperial capital."

Alicia's eyes, which had been replying lightly, suddenly sparkled seriously.

"You must not let down your guard even for a moment, sir. Wakana Tusai, you never know how the old fox will shake up his chieftains."

We have already secured evidence and witnesses for the assassination plot.

However, Wakana Tusai was not an easy opponent. Although he has the reputation of being the strongest warrior in Barça, he never lets down his guard and is quick-witted, which makes him worthy of the nickname "Old Fox."

Haven't Owen also been victimized by her several times so far?

"hmm."

But there was silence for a moment.

Owen clenched and unclenched his fist and grinned, showing his teeth.

"Well, is it because I haven't slept well in a while? How do I feel reassured? "No matter what happens today, I don't think I'll ever lose to her, Alicia."

"... .."

"do not worry. "I'll come back after achieving the right results."

Alicia looked up at Owen in a new mood.

It seems like only yesterday when he was a young boy, but now he is by all accounts the trustworthy first prince of the empire.

Balthazar was once renowned as an undefeated general on the southern front. The name of [Invincible] is often used as a modifier for Owen, who has not yet reached his contract.

Alicia put her hand on her chest and bowed her head politely towards her prince.

"Yes, sir. "Who would dare doubt that?"

* * *

It was only for a moment that I woke up from a peaceful dream and seemed to be in a stable state.

Soon, Seongjin could hardly leave the temporary treatment room due to the high fever that rose all the time.

A fever not caused by an illness, but purely due to a change in the nature of the Auror. Therefore, not only the doctor's medicine but also the priests' treatment was of no use.

Only when the Holy Emperor leaves everything aside and rushes in and pours out enormous divine power is the fever finally brought down and the condition stabilized.

Thanks to this, whenever Seonghwang had to leave the office even

for a moment to do work, Masain would get very anxious and wander around the direction of the office.

"Sir, isn't your fever rising again? "I will bring your Majesty here right now!"

"Calm down, Sir Martha. "If it's your father, you went there just a moment ago."

Success is a man with a lot of success in construction. He couldn't continue to sit by Seongjin's side and suppress his auras and senses forever.

Seongjin also did not want that kind of care. Having all of your auras and senses suppressed by others was the same as having not only your small movements but even your breathing being controlled.

I just ignored it when I didn't know about it, but when I realized it, it was so frustrating that it wasn't something a person could endure.

So, as a self-rescue measure, Seongjin attempted to tie up the Aurors.

"Try to hold on as long as you can without moving the auror!"

But that strategy was of little use.

Aura is a power that occurs naturally in living creatures and is closer to the source of life.

Therefore, no matter how much you try to completely exclude it, it has no choice but to constantly linger within your body, even if only slightly, and the hellish fire naturally assimilated there will run rampant from time to time to burn down Seongjin.

[...] Sniff, sniff.]

And every time that happened, I would hear the demon lord whimpering again and again in my head.

365

365. Join (8)

"Keuung, it's Sakshin...""

Seongjin, who was tossing and turning, let out a moan like an old man without realizing it.

I didn't know about it because I haven't had any diseases since I became a hunter, but fever is not something to be taken lightly. There is no part of her body that does not hurt.

[Sniff! Seongjin Lee. I am...]

Then, I heard the demon lord's whimpers in my head.

'It's getting more and more embarrassing...'

Not only is he a problem, but the demon lord's condition has been very strange lately.

Are you intimidated because it is the main palace filled with divine power? For some reason, he's talking less and less, and he seems to be getting more and more depressed.

As he was anxiously assessing the Demon Lord's condition, Masain was surprised again by how he perceived his troubled expression.

"Lowering. Are you sick again? "Hurry and lie down!"

"Uh, it's okay. By the way, Lord Martha, isn't it past time for lunch now?"

"... yes?"

"Could you give some to the chef? I really want to eat bear meat

today..."

Then the color gradually drained from Masain's face.

"just now... "You vomited all the watery soup you had for lunch, what are you talking about?!"

"huh? Did you throw up? When did I... ... ?"

"omg! You are talking nonsense again with a high fever! lawmaker! lawmaker!"

"... "Huh?"

Now that I think about it, it feels like things are spinning in front of my eyes?

"Mores!"

Fortunately, each time, Seonghwang recognized Seongjin as if he were a ghost and came to visit Seongjin. Sometimes, people would come running to me with documents in their hands that they were processing in a hurry.

Wow-

After bathing in the waterfall of divine power, your body will feel refreshed and your mind will become clear.

Every time that happened, I felt sorry for Seonghwang again.

'Why should I be a nuisance to an already busy man?'

When Seongjin was being treated like that, Logan and Sir Martha, who were by his side, were also often baptized with divine power. The king treated them as critically ill patients and ordered them to stay in a temporary treatment room.

Logan and Masaine looked very sorry each time.

"Abama. I'm fine now, so let's get back to work..."

Unable to bear it any longer, Logan attempted a small deviation -

"Logan."

"Yes, Abama."

"Which member of the imperial palace dared to tell you nonsense about your condition being fine?"

"yes? that... .."

"... .."

"that... .."

In the end, Logan couldn't bear it for long as Seonghwang's gaze was staring at him, and he immediately gave up.

"... "I was wrong."

"okay. "If only I knew."

Wow-

While Logan faced the pouring divine power with a resigned face, Seongjin was feeling fortunate inwardly.

It was good to have colleagues fighting the disease together. There was no need to spend time alone boringly, and sometimes it was fun to make fun of them.

"I want to train... .."

Nevertheless, as he continued to be confined to the temporary treatment room, Seongjin's feeling of frustration gradually increased. In particular, her biggest stress was that she could not practice as she wanted.

Masain, unable to see Seongjin who was so discouraged, spoke as if to comfort him.

"Don't be impatient, sir. "Can't you think of continuing to practice Auror binding for a while?"

"It was too easy to bind Aurors in the first place. "The training is not

working."

When Seongjin responds sullenly, Logan, who was meditating next to him, secretly notices.

"But living with an Auror tied up can be a great help in at least increasing your basic strength."

"muscular strength?"

"Yes, it is."

People who become Aurors early will naturally have Auras in their muscles from an early age. As a result, there are not many opportunities to train strength itself.

'Now that I think about it, that's true.'

Just looking at my father and Logan, they don't have particularly prominent muscles.

On the other hand, what about Lord Martha, who became an Auror late in life? Even for a knight, he's quite sturdy.

'Maybe it's worth a try... . The reason Sir Masaine's sword strikes are much fiercer than those of other imperial knights is not just because he is skilled in using Aurors.'

Obviously strength will help in some way.

good night. Now that this has happened, let's increase our strength!

"But even if you work hard to build muscle, won't it go back to square one when the Aurors come back?"

At least that was according to Seongjin's common sense. Unless adequate protein is supplied and the load is consistently maintained, muscle volume will not be maintained intact.

However, there was a fact that he overlooked: this was Delcross, not Earth.

"Once an Auror user develops muscles, of course they remain intact. "I have an Auror who keeps my body in top condition at all times, so what are you worried about?"

"... ..!"

Seongjin opened his mouth wide.

and! This place in Delcross must be a paradise for hell spears!

* * *

In the end, my strength training ended in a miserable failure.

As Seongjin tied up the Auror and began to move his body, the frequency of his fever also significantly increased.

If you think about it, it was a natural result. The more you move your body, the more active your auror will be.

[Sniff, slurp. What should I do... ..]

This guy is doing it again.

I had to hurry and appease him, but it was really difficult because I couldn't give him everything he liked.

"Lowering. Are you awake? "If you're thirsty, can I bring you a drink?"

Edith's worried voice came from nearby.

"no it's okay."

"Then I'll put a wet towel on you."

Soon I feel a hand wiping my forehead with a damp towel. I felt that it was somehow unfamiliar and yet nostalgic.

Come to think of it, when I first came here, Empress Lizabeth would often clean my face like this.

"Mother... .."

How is Empress Elizabeth doing now?

Should I ask Dasha when she comes? Now it's time for her to show the results of the research she asked her to do.

Seongjin blinked hard to overcome the pouring sleep. But, slowly, someone's small voices began to sound in his ears.

[There is no sign of it fading away, right? I think there is a limit to how low the temperature can be lowered even with the power of a prosperous father.]

[This is a fire that never goes away. That's its unique property. It is the power that dominates the dimension.]

[Is it related to red?]

[Yes, red is also a problem.]

[Mores, what should we do now?]

[Mores, I feel so sorry.]

Uh, they're twins. These guys are still here.

As Seongjin struggled to pretend to understand, their voices suddenly became lively.

[Wow, Mores! Will you remember us now?]

[Is that true, Mores? really? Really?]

Of course it is.

There won't be another guy in the world with such an annoying way of talking.

[Good. Listen, Mores! In our opinion, it's probably red... .. !]

Seongjin dismissed the voices of the guys talking at the same time with just one word.

That guy is done. Because it has nothing to do with this matter.

[but...]

It ended up going better than that. listen. There's already a place I want to go with you guys right now...

When Seongjin thought that far, a cool thought suddenly sounded from above his head.

[Stop doing nonsense and stay calm in the palace, son.]

Oh my. I guess I heard it.

Wow-

Feeling the familiar divine power pouring over his head again, Seongjin fell into a deep sleep.

* * *

Even while I was sleeping, my fever rose and fell frequently.

Seongjin, who would occasionally toss and turn in discomfort, would only regain stability after a burst of divine power poured over his head.

While going through light and deep sleep repeatedly, Seongjin had so many dreams that it was difficult to remember them all.

Most of them disappeared into oblivion as soon as we recognized them, but there were some dreams that left a vivid impression as if we were experiencing them in reality.

One of them was the memory of a familiar woman screaming towards him. An old memory, probably belonging to young Mores.

-You shouldn't have been born like this!

In the messy room, a very disheveled woman glared at Seongjin and cried.

-You ruined all my dreams! How on earth am I supposed to live from now on?

Strongly-

The red gaze glaring at him pierces deep into my heart like a dagger slicing through my lungs.

-I should have looked more like my father than I do now! How can it be that I resemble the person I hate the most in the world? How could you do that!?

Feeling his eyes getting hot, Seongjin let out a frustrated breath.

But, oh my.

The person you are talking about... ..

"... Sarani, is that possible?"

"Of course it is. "I don't dare say empty words."

"But as you know, Sir... .."

"What is the use of what we are talking about right now? So, first of all, when you wake up, couldn't you ask me about your intentions?"

Seongjin slowly came to his senses at the annoying voice that sounded like scraping metal.

When I turned my head, Masain was standing at the entrance to the treatment room, talking with someone with a serious look on his face.

"... Sir Masain. "Who came?"

At Seongjin's question, Masain flinched and turned around. At the same time, the visitor who had been hidden by his body appeared and politely bowed to Seongjin.

"Meeting with His Majesty Mores."

Lord Leandros. The leader of the exorcists who exudes a gloomy aura like a dry old tree.

Seongjin slowly got up from the bed, looking at his dark, strangely

red eyes.

'What's going on here all of a sudden?'

Even now that his senses were duller than usual, Seongjin still felt something foreign about him, just like the last time they met.

"We apologize for disturbing your rest. "I came here because I had to ask your permission."

"allow?"

"Yes, I will soon be leaving for the western region under Your Majesty's orders. So, if I don't hurry up now, I don't think I will have time to handle the matter anymore, so I had no choice but to be rude to you."

The story Sir Leander told next was surprising.

He had asked Seongjin to officially join the Knights of St. Terbachia.

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

"Paladin? I?"

I don't even have an ounce of divine power, so what on earth can I do?

However, Sir Leandros, who actually made such an incredible statement, had a calm expression.

"You have already proven your ability to destroy evil. In addition, at a young age, he possessed a force that surpasses that of the imperial knights, and isn't he still improving rapidly every day? So how could I not seek your help?"

"hmm..."

"Therefore, the Knights of Saint Terbachia requests that you act as a member of the Holy Knights, not just as an advisor to the Monster Task Force."

Seongjin soon grasped the situation and secretly winked at Lord Masain.

'Don't the others know yet?'

Then Sir Masain nods his head as if he is embarrassed.

'Yes, I don't know.'

'Right.'

Seongjin rested his chin and was deep in thought.

Maybe it's natural. There is no way the prince could openly announce that he has lost his Auror user abilities.

It is clear that the position of the 3rd prince, who has only just begun to gain a reputation, will collapse at once, and it may even lead to doubts about the omnipotence of God's representative.

However, Leandros, who felt the subtle air current flowing between Seongjin and Masain, added as if he was a little nervous.

"Please reconsider positively. "If you wish, I can promise you an adjutant-level position in our knights, just like Sisley, who recently joined the Knights of St. Marsyas."

'Oh, that's right?'

As soon as the judgment was over, the answer came out right away.

"I will!"

"Also, the exorcists' active cooperation in your work afterwards... yes?"

"I do. Isn't this an excellent way for me and the Knights of St. Terbachia to coexist? "That was really well thought out, Sir Leander."

"... .."

Then Sir Leander's expression became shocked.

As the prince is known to value personal training time, it was thought that it would take quite a bit of persuasion to burden him with tasks other than the monster task force.

However, Sir Leander soon regained his composure and bowed his head in silence.

"Thank you for your decision. "Then, since you have given permission, I will prepare for Leandros's honor to join your team without any problems."

Startle-

Then Logan, who had been quietly listening next to him, looked back at Seongjin in great confusion.

The leader of one of the five Holy Knights of the Empire put his own honor on the line. That weight will never be light.

However, if it were revealed to the world that the prince he helped join could no longer use Aurors... ... !

'Uh-huh!'

But before Logan could open his mouth, Seongjin opened his eyes wide.

Don't disturb me, Logan.

Since ancient times, health insurance is only valid if you get it before you are diagnosed with cancer!

They say they have come on their own and are giving me enormous public power, so what fool in the world would refuse that? huh?

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366. The Return of the Prodigal Son (1)

Asein Grand Duke's family has several outbuildings.

As the richest and most powerful person on the continent, most of them boasted large scale and splendid architectural styles, but there were some outbuildings that were incongruously simple and small.

This was due to the taste of some guests who wanted a unique atmosphere, but since not many people visited, there were some outbuildings that were completely forgotten and neglected.

Now, an elderly woman wearing a stealth suit was walking in the courtyard of the abandoned outbuilding.

Her small, grey-white hair contrasted with the black stealth suit might have looked quite peculiar, but strangely enough, none of the employees noticed her presence.

A maid walking carrying laundry, a servant trimming the garden trees, and even a guard guarding the entrance to the outbuilding.

While no one was aware of her presence and was busy with her work, the woman leisurely passed through the entrance of the mansion and headed to the stairs to the second floor where the bedrooms were located.

She had just reached the empress's room.

Wow!

Following the sound of a harsh slap, a fierce woman's scream rang out.

"What are you doing! "Didn't I tell you time and time again not to

mess with my things?"

"So, I'm sorry, Mama Hwangbi! I'm just trying to clean up the trash on the floor... ..!"

"How dare you do something I didn't ask you to do?!"

Thump thump!

The nervous sound of kicking the floor over and over again, unable to overcome my temper.

"dare! "How dare you call my things trash?"

"No, that's not it... .."

"Other than that, what is it? "If you have a mouth, say something!"

"main... "I have committed a mortal sin, Queen Mother!"

As the woman entered the room, she saw Empress Lizabeth in her nightgown, furiously losing her temper towards one of the maids.

The sudden lightning strike caused the maid to crawl on the floor, not knowing what to do.

"You've lost your mind! Is that all you ask for? "If my things get damaged because of you, then how can you compensate me?"

"Well, I just touched it! Nothing was broken, so please forgive me... ..",

"profit! I don't even want to look at you! "Can't you turn it off right now?!"

In front of Lizabeth, who was fuming, the maid crawled on all fours and quickly ran out of the room.

'Hmm... ..'

As the woman looked around the room, a letter crumpled on one side of the floor caught her eye.

The handwriting written on it is round and childlike.

-mother. I returned safely from my work at Sigismund Range. There were many interesting things that happened there, and I will tell you more about them when we return to the Imperial Capital.

Oh, and since I don't know when he will come, I'm sending a souvenir of the trip along with the letter.

It was a letter from Prince Mores. This is something she knows well because she personally delivered it to her empress.

And next to it, small trinkets that the prince said were enclosed were thrown side by side.

'The maid must have thought it was trash because she threw it on the floor.'

That wasn't the only thing rolling around on the floor.

Rolling around by the bedside was a half-burnt wooden sculpture. That too was sent by Prince Mores as a souvenir.

The burn marks from setting fire to that thing were still faintly visible on the empress's hand.

'If you ruined it so badly, why did you bother to bring it all the way here...? ... '

Moreover, after bringing it with him, he just threw it on the floor again. Although she assisted her for a long time, the Empress's arbitrary judgment was something she was unaware of.

"... .."

Empress Elizabeth stood alone for a moment to let off steam, but soon slumped down in an armchair with a sullen expression on her face.

Roughly combed messy platinum-blond hair and a loose-fitting nightgown. When we think of the always perfect and gorgeous empress seen in the imperial palace, it may be difficult to imagine what she would normally look like.

However, to the woman, the current empress seemed extremely comfortable, like a mouse hiding in the shade she was most familiar with.

"Lisabeth."

When he called her softly, the empress flinched and looked back at her informant.

Because he had been killing all traces until just now, he had not noticed the woman's presence at all.

"... "No. 4?"

"yes. That's me. "I brought it because a letter has just arrived from the imperial palace."

Then Empress Lizabeth asked with a slightly softened face.

"Correspondence? "From His Majesty?"

"This is a letter from Princess Amelia."

"okay?"

The Empress nodded and accepted the letter from No. 4.

Empress Lizabeth is naturally aloof from her parents, the Archduke Asean, and does not have a very close relationship with any of the royal family members.

Nevertheless, strangely enough, letters were sent to the empress every day asking about her personal well-being.

About half of them were sent by the Emperor, and in addition, the kind Empress Melody and the affectionate Princess Amelia regularly sent letters to her.

Empress Lizabeth, as if she deep down hated it, kept them piled up in her mailbox without replying. And when she is bored, she makes it a pastime to look through her letters.

-Lizabeth Oh my.

The imperial palace garden, which was green and green until yesterday, was colored with a pale sunset color in just one day, just like it originally was.

It's a day when I realize how long Momma has been away from the imperial palace...

As always, a friendly greeting that begins with beautiful handwriting.

Although there was no lengthy rhetoric like other social letters, the princess's letters always showed her own meticulous attention to detail.

Princess Amelia then calmly described various news about the royal family. Among them, the biggest part was definitely the news from Prince Mores.

-... Recently, there was a huge event in the ecliptic. Now, the subjects are loudly praising Mores, calling him the second coming of Saint Bastian...

A demon species that appeared near the ecliptic.

What a great performance Prince Mores did against that bastard, and how much the subjects of the imperial capital praise him for it.

In the sentences that described all these situations in detail, the pride that Princess Amelia felt was clearly conveyed.

-... Orthodox priests are no exception to this atmosphere. Perhaps, like Sisley, there are some who argue that Mores should also be canonized as a saint's apostle.

Considering that the Orthodox Church has often shown a blasphemous and suspicious attitude toward the Mores, recent changes cannot help but be very encouraging...

Lizabeth, who had read up to that point, burst into laughter without realizing it.

Apostle of saints? Who?

This may be something that this innocent princess can only say because she cannot even guess what it is.

Amelia's bragging about her younger brother, under the guise of delivering the news, ended like this.

-... LIZABETH Oh my. There is something I really want to tell you.

Do you know what? Recently, Mores occasionally calls me Mama Mama in his sleep. That proud child has bravely endured all suffering and never says a weak word in front of us.

However, while going back and forth between high fever and high fever, that fleeting moment when the boundary of strong will is broken down. The child would call out to his mother as if he were barely allowed to breathe.

When I see Mores like that, it breaks my heart. So, Elizabeth. For the sake of that child, couldn't she return to the ecliptic a little earlier than scheduled?

After reading up to that point, Elizabeth closed the letter and put it into the mailbox.

"... "The princess is talking nonsense."

"Since you are such a kind person, you must be worrying too much about the prince."

"joy."

The Empress snorted at Number 4's words, but did not particularly refute them.

Princess Amelia was clearly the child of the Holy Emperor, but Number 4 was always amazed by the strangely lenient attitude of the empress and empresses towards her.

"What are you going to do? Your Majesty has been asking about Elizabeth every day lately. So, returning to the imperial capital at this

point... .."

But the Empress leaned her head on the armchair and spoke firmly.

"hate."

"... .."

"I still don't like it. "Everything is just annoying now."

Lizabeth turned her head and looked at the mailbox on the table.

Since she came here, a steady stream of letters has been pouring in, and before she knows it, the large mailbox is almost overflowing.

But why? Even though she was surrounded by warm letters asking how she was doing, Lizabeth felt extremely lonely.

A dark and soggy feeling of anxiety that only you feel in the world.

-I understand very well that you feel anxious about everything that is not immediately visible to you.

Seonghwang always said this to Lizabeth.

-But Lizabeth. Sometimes miracles come to us so boldly. So, can't you think that those unexpected events may sometimes be a gift from God, given with care?

That calm voice sounded so kind that there was a time when I wanted to truly believe those words.

but-

'I already knew for a long time. Preparation is never God's responsibility. What happened to us was just someone's prank, not a miracle from God or anything... ..'

As Lizabeth's face darkened, No. 4 paused for a moment and then opened his mouth.

"Here is the letter, Lizabeth. "I will sort it out now."

"... .."

After confirming that the Empress was not reacting in any way, No. 4 carefully picked up the crumpled letter on the floor and slipped it under the mailbox.

* * *

"This ended so abruptly."

Seongjin clicked his tongue as he received the Holy Knight ordination letter and lieutenant appointment letter that were delivered to him within a few days.

There were no special conditions required for him to join the Knights of St. Terbachia.

The only thing that matters is permission from Seonghwang.

The question that Seonghwang, who was silent for a moment after hearing Leandros' report, was only pure Seongjin's doctor.

"... "Did you want to do it?"

Yes, of course. It's public power!

When Seongjin nodded vigorously, Seonghwang immediately called the other Holy Knight leaders and cardinals to the temporary treatment room.

Then, he said a simple word to those people who entered the room with a puzzled expression.

"Everyone is here, so that's it. "Go ahead, Lord Leandros."

"yes? "Your Majesty, what is this now?"

Those who were called had to go back on the spot with puzzled faces.

"Father, why are they?"

"They have just entered the Holy Knight Ordination Ceremony."

"... yes?"

It turned out that there was a rule that three or more high-ranking priests and two or more leaders of the Holy Knights were present at the Holy Knight ordination ceremony.

After a hasty investiture ceremony, the joining process proceeded smoothly. Thanks to this, that evening, there was no one in the imperial capital who did not know that the 3rd prince had joined the Holy Knights.

"Congratulations on your appointment."

If anything, even Dasha, who stopped by that evening, would have greeted me like this.

"Oh! Dasha. "When did you come?"

Seongjin greeted the informant who suddenly appeared in the middle of the treatment room with a curious face. She hadn't noticed her presence for the first time.

"This is a really clever stealth technique, Dasha. Is this how everyone greets informants?"

Then, instead of being happy, Dasha looked somewhat confused.

"Your condition is still not fully recovered. "Are you feeling well, sir?"

"yes I'm fine."

"I'm glad you said that. At that time, I couldn't be of any help to you... .."

Dasha, uncharacteristically, trailed off and made a dark expression.

If you think about it, when he was confronting the demon species, Seongjin kept feeling her presence nearby.

It was probably frustrating for her too. She said the prince was in danger and the situation was becoming increasingly urgent, but she couldn't have done anything because she couldn't show herself right

away.

"Now I have these doubts. I wonder if my existence is really of any use to you... .."

Dasha used to laugh cheerfully at No. 19, who used to say such things, but recently, she also often gets caught up in such gloomy thoughts.

Seongjin was very embarrassed.

Wow, Dasha. Don't do that. Didn't you say that the most important factor in concealing Aurors is [faith]?

"are you okay. Believe in yourself, Dasha!"

"yes... .."

"Or believe in me who believes in Dasha! "I always think Dasha is the best source of information in Delcross!"

"Thank you very much. "But I am weaker than you, and even my Auror concealment skills are far behind, aren't I?"

"huh? "Isn't that obvious?"

"... .."

And that day.

The results of the investigation that Seongjin heard from Dasha were incredible.

"... "Infertility treatment?"

"Yes, sir."

Dasha nodded and added with a slightly heavy expression.

"Empress Lizabeth has continuously received infertility treatment from the Archduchess Asean's doctor since she was young."

367. The Return of the Prodigal Son (2)

There were more difficulties than expected in investigating Empress Lizabeth.

Surrounding her were great informants whom the Emperor had attached for her safety, and Grand Duke Asin was also monitoring the Empress with numerous secret agents.

It is almost impossible to conduct an investigation without the eyes of such people. So it is said that Dasha had no choice but to ask for cooperation from one of the empress's informants.

"There is one legendary senior who is still active. "When I told them that there was a request from you, they willingly cooperated."

The Empress's childhood was nothing special.

Lizabeth Assin was born as the youngest of the four sons and four daughters of Grand Duke Assin. Although she was not particularly outstanding among the archduke's children, she grew up in her mansion, receiving a proper education like any other noble girl.

Unlike now, when he was young, he was not a very sociable person, so he rarely went out of the mansion. Also, he was known to have a weak body, so he lived with his doctor and took medicine from a young age?

As a result, I decided to investigate Galen, the old doctor who had been in charge of the Empress since she was a baby.

"Although Galen was already dead, we were able to obtain the medical records remaining in the mansion and find out what treatment the Empress received at the time."

Surprisingly, the doctor at the time was treating young Lizabeth for infertility.

It is said that along with numerous medicinal herbs known to be good for pregnancy, they made a decoction of dried pig uterus and took it regularly.

'... sterility? Empress Lizabeth?'

Shocked for a moment.

This question immediately appeared in Seongjin's mind.

'Infertility treatment from a young age? How on earth did you diagnose something like that?'

To be honest, Seongjin did not believe in the medical science of this world. Isn't this a crazy world where perfume is sprayed on plague patients and bloodletting is applied to trauma patients?

Moreover, isn't the diagnosis of female infertility quite difficult even in modern times?

If you think about it from a common sense point of view, it is true. First of all, if you don't have children for several years after getting married, you can go to the hospital and start getting various tests.

But how is it possible to diagnose infertility from a young age when there are no secondary sexual characteristics?

'Besides, the empress is me... You gave birth to Mores, right? If so, isn't it ultimately infertility?'

Even if Empress Lizabeth was truly infertile, there was no way that the level of medicine in this world could treat such a thing.

Seongjin asked after coming to a tentative conclusion.

"who is this? That bastard named Galen. "Where on earth did he learn medicine to make such an idiotic diagnosis?"

In this way, Seongjin received Galen's entire medical notes from

Dasha.

It flutters.

As I flipped through the notes, I saw notes that roughly scribbled the symptoms the Empress had and the corresponding prescriptions. It was the worst handwriting of all, but for some reason, Seongjin had no difficulty deciphering the imperial languages.

-The other princesses were all born healthy and began practicing building Auror layers on their danjeon from a young age. However, Miss Elizabeth is said to have been unable to learn the exercises because her height was unusually short and her frame was thin, perhaps because the Grand Duchess gave birth prematurely.

Therefore, Grand Duke Asin, who was concerned about his daughter's health, visited me, the most skilled of the members of the Plague Society at the time, and asked him to take charge of the treatment of Lady Elizabeth.

And Dasha, who was standing next to Seongjin, suddenly saw something like a faint light passing through his eyes.

'... 'Is it an illusion?'

She was puzzled for a moment, but when she confirmed that there was no abnormality in the prince's condition, she immediately shifted her gaze to the note he was holding in his hand.

According to records, Galen was a member of the Plague Society of Kshantra. At the time, it appeared to be a fairly radical plague group whose activities centered around Asin.

"Is Danchen still active today?"

Naturally, that question arose.

Regarding the plague society he was sponsoring, Seongjin once ordered an investigation into all the famous plague societies active on the continent. But I had never heard of a place called the Kshantra Plague Society.

"I'm not active right now, sir. There was a controversy over them as heretics, and they were all tried and burned at the stake several years ago. "At that time, all records related to them were burned, so it is almost a miracle that these medical notes still survive."

"hmm."

In Seongjin's opinion, any plague society was barbaric, but it is said that the Kshantra Plague Society was a talented school that practiced quite unconventional treatments at the time.

Thanks to this, a man named Galen also displayed an excellent ability to detect the Aura activity of the human body and use it for diagnosis.

-Compared to other princesses, Lady Elizabeth's auror, especially on her abdomen, was noticeably weaker. Her stomach is full of cold energy, which prevents her from digesting food well and prevents her from waking up early in the morning. This is a common symptom seen in infertile women.

Seongjin furrowed his brows slightly.

No, since I didn't practice Aura, of course my Dantian's Aura would be weak. You just detected the auror activity level, and now you're saying some bullshit?

-This is probably because the uterine energy is weak and liver function is stagnant, resulting in congestion. This is undoubtedly a symptom of infertility.

Ah, Bethelah. Dear Lord. Unfortunately, the precious young lady of the Asein family suffers from infertility.

The diagnosis made through a process of absurd reasoning was, as expected, extremely disastrous.

for a moment. But, Bethelah?

"This... "Isn't this a holy name mainly used by the Dark Church?"

Seongjin still remembered. Belinda, the now-dead Bishop of the

Penitent Parish, once recited this name while talking to Seongjin.

Also, what was Leonard like?

- Bethelah.

Didn't Rohan's unlucky swallow son also greet Seongjin like this at first?

-Do you know that? Forgotten brothers of old await your command.

At some point, Seongjin had an intuition that Leonard had some kind of relationship with the Dark Church. That's why, even though he keeps sending me letters asking me to meet him, I've been completely ignoring him.

"Yes, it is. "It is now completely gone, but until a few years ago, an active underground sect used to use this name widely."

Dasha nodded and answered Seongjin's question.

"But even so, it is not clear whether Galen was really a heretic."

"Why is that so?"

"At the time he was active, the underground religious sects were not yet labeled as heretics. It was not that long ago that His Majesty the Current Emperor named the underground cult the [Dark Church] and completely expelled it. So, at that time, the subjects often used this name simply as praise to the Lord, regardless of whether they were Orthodox or underground denominations."

Hmm.

Although something felt unclear, Seongjin didn't question it and quickly turned through the notes.

- The patient was fed boiled ramus fruit to help relieve the cold in the abdomen naturally. However, the more she had diarrhea, the more Lisabeth did not get better and only became thinner. Perhaps it was because the young lady's body was too weak to withstand the treatment.

Hey, by inducing diarrhea, the person must have become increasingly dehydrated and weak. What did this bastard do to an innocent child?

-So I soon decided to change my treatment policy. It was prescribed to take angelica root, cinnamon bark, and dried pig's uterus. Also, do not use regular perfume, but always be close to the scent of bulbous plants that contain geothermal energy...

Fluttering.

While flipping through those ridiculous records, a thought suddenly occurred to Seongjin.

'Ever since I was young, oh... Empress Elizabeth has been receiving such nonsense treatment. Then, whether or not she was infertile, it is likely that she at least firmly believed that she was infertile, right?

Then, almost to the last page, there was a phrase that suddenly caught Seongjin's eye.

-Why is treatment so slow even though all methods have been tried? Perhaps this is because God arranged it to be this way in advance.

The fact that a flame breaks out in the bitter cold and grass grows in the desert is a miracle made possible because death himself breathed his breath into it. For this to happen, the ground must first be extremely cold and extremely dry.

Seongjin blinked.

"uh... ... ?"

wait for a sec.

what? Haven't I heard this somewhere?

'So, I think it was probably meant to be something like this.'

Grief kindles a flame in the bitter cold, sowing cultivates crops in the desert, and rest takes its own breath...

Beep-

Suddenly, I heard tinnitus in my ears and lost consciousness.

"... Lowering? "Why are you doing this?"

When Seongjin put down the note and stumbled, Dasha, who was startled, hurriedly helped him up and asked.

However, in Seongjin's ears, her voice had already gone far enough to be beyond the range of recognition.

Instead, what fills the auditory nerve is the sound of someone's heart growing louder along with the intense heat.

thud! thud! thud!

And it was the cheers of a crowd full of joy, vividly revived from oblivion.

- Rejoice! And worship!

-The baby is [prepared] for the glory of the church!

It was a long-standing nightmare that I had forgotten about for some time.

'Oh, that's right. Something like that happened once...'

That day, Seongjin was sitting on a high altar, wrapped in a black robe.

And a group of people wearing the same black robes were shedding tears at Seongjin and at the same time bursting into laughter.

-You who are prepared! Apostle of the Lord!

-Ah, now the time has come!

-Free from long-term oppression, the underground cult will flourish once again!

Those who know that there is no end to the suffering of the soul, and that the salvation they await is still far away, but they are relieved that others can never reach salvation, and they only shout out

prayers that have no answer.

What else can describe the complex and intense emotions on their faces other than the word 'madness'?

Seongjin looked at those fanatics and felt both infinite pity and deep fear.

-okay. The long-awaited time has finally arrived!

And [him] was there too. The damned Archbishop of Rest who planned and executed this entire mess.

The archbishop, who was standing upright next to the altar and watching all this, looked directly into Seongjin's eyes and curled the corners of his mouth with confidence.

-Look! His preparations are not over yet!

No, not yet.

Tap, tap, tap.

Seongjin thought as he hastily turned his gaze away from the archbishop who was slowly approaching him.

'It's not time yet! 'You shouldn't look at the author now!'

The Archbishop of Rest will surely remain somewhere in one's memory.

Trying not to recognize his face, Seongjin urgently closed his eyes and thought to himself.

'hurry! somehow! If I don't escape this nightmare right now... .. !'

[Mores!]

At that very moment, he heard an urgent thought calling out to him from somewhere.

It was the same as that day, but it was the voice of salvation that Seongjin had always subconsciously been eagerly waiting for, which

he could not bear to respond to at the time.

'... father?'

It was the moment when Seongjin reflexively responded to that voice.

Shoot ah-

With the powerful divine power pouring down like a waterfall, I soon felt the nightmare getting farther away.

A black altar stained with blood and the eerie sight of fanatics worshipping it. And even the appearance of the archbishop who stubbornly did not take his eyes off Seongjin.

All those memories soon disappeared beyond recognition, but Seongjin did not feel regretful about them at all this time.

"Mores, are you okay?"

Sensing the heat slowly subsiding, Seongjin blinked and opened his eyes.

As expected, there was a magnificent sight before his eyes.

When I met his calm gray eyes as usual, for some reason I felt an absolute sense of relief.

Phew.

Seongjin let out a breath he had been holding for some time and looked around.

Then, his eyes caught the image of Dasha, looking pale and clinging to one side of the room.

"Stand, stand, Your Majesty!"

Dasha, who could not escape from the sudden appearance of the crowd, was frozen, not knowing what to do.

"Huh, how? Where suddenly? "I definitely didn't feel any sign of anyone around here?"

ah.

Seongjin looked at her with a slightly pitiful gaze.

There's nothing strange, Dasha. My father wouldn't have moved from his office next to him even for a moment.

Maybe it was because you were hovering nearby, looking for an opportunity, that he completely erased your presence so that you could come in comfortably?

But Dasha's suffering did not end there.

"Hey!"

Quang!

Lord Martha rushed into the treatment room, almost breaking the door open. He was taken away by Logan for a while, but after hearing Seongjin's abnormality, he came running to him a month later.

"I heard from His Majesty Logan! It seems like your fever is rising again... ! Are you okay now?"

"Uh, yes. are you okay."

Logan walked in behind Masain with a shy expression on his face. Then he went straight towards Dasha, who was curled up in the corner of the room, and apologized with a sad expression.

"I'm sorry I don't think I'm done with my business yet. Because Mores's condition is a state. But rest assured. "Lord Masaine will leave the room in a moment, so you can talk to Mores again slowly."

"... ..!"

Dasha froze without saying a word.

Uh, okay. I thought it was strange ever since I suddenly dragged Sir Martha out for a night walk.

"Logan. After all, you knew that Dasha was here and you deliberately avoided her place?"

Dasha came to visit not long after he left, so it must be true.

Then Logan responded as if he was embarrassed.

"hmm. Well, it looks like your informant has been waiting outside for too long... .."

In the end, it means that he knew Dasha's movements from beginning to end.

"omg!"

Dasha suffered deep internal injuries and stumbled.

It was the moment when the [belief] of Monkey Watchtower's elite informant was shattered in real time.

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368. The Return of the Prodigal Son (3)

Even though her identity was clearly revealed, Dasha was unable to leave the temporary treatment room for a while. This is because Prince Mores' condition seemed to be more serious than expected.

'I've already heard that His Majesty's condition is bad enough to keep him in the main palace... ... '

I never thought I would see someone who was talking normally suddenly collapse from a high fever.

However, unlike her, who was embarrassed and didn't know what to do, everyone in the treatment room moved their bodies in an orderly fashion as if this was not the first time something like this had happened.

"You were sweating a lot as your fever went down. "I'll bring you a change of clothes, so please rest for a moment."

Edith, who had rushed to the summons of Sir Martha, immediately laid Prince Mores down and quickly cleaned up the disheveled bedding. Although she did not have the qualifications to be a dedicated maid, she was at least exceptional in her physical strength.

"It's almost time for the evening wind to get colder. "It would be best to close all the curtains first."

When Prince Logan lightly gestures from one side, the thick curtain slides away on its own.

Although it was widely rumored that the continent's youngest sword master had been born, I had no idea that the legendary state of Auror materialization would be confirmed in this way.

"Lowering! Are you okay? "I'll put a wet towel on you right away!"

The most outrageous of them all was by far Sir Masain. The former leader of the imperial palace knights, who has now been reduced to being the prince's nanny, is stamping his feet in a hurry, wringing out a wet towel with his gloved hands.

Wow-

Meanwhile, a huge amount of divine power continued to pour down from above the prince's head.

"Father, do you think you can stop? "It really doesn't matter anymore."

Even though Prince Mores, who seemed to be quite fine now, tried to dissuade him, the Emperor pretended not to hear and showered miracles on his head. There was no such waste.

"Why do you keep wasting your divine power... Kuwet?!"

While speaking, the prince, who pushed his forehead, made a strange sound while chewing his tongue.

Then Seonghwang nodded as if he understood.

"Seeing as how you haven't come to your senses even after this level of shock, I guess you don't have much energy yet. So don't talk nonsense and just lie down quietly."

"No, are you really saying this without knowing the power of your father? Besides, if you hit someone like that without warning... ..!"

"Then I'll give you a notice this time. "Get ready."

"... yes?"

Talk.

"Kkuek!?"

"Look at this. "It has nothing to do with the notice."

"No, this guy is really..." ... !"

When the highly intoxicated prince protested by flailing his arms, the Holy Emperor gently pressed his forehead and poured out his divine power once again without any hesitation.

'... your majesty. Was he like this?'

His attitude is so sly that you wouldn't expect him to be the kind of person Dasha usually knows.

'hmm?'

Meanwhile, Dasha felt a strange sense of emptiness and carefully looked around. Now that she thought about it, she realized that she couldn't see what should be right in front of her.

Her eyes suddenly found Galen's medical notes in Seonghwang's hand. Dasha was startled and opened her mouth.

"Hey, Your Majesty. that..."

But Dasha could no longer speak. Seonghwang, who noticed her gaze, turned her head and began to look at her face.

"..."

Silver-grey eyes so shaped that one might think they are emitting light of their own.

Dasha, who felt the silent pressure of that extremely inorganic gaze, had no choice but to hesitantly say hello to Prince Mores.

"If you do it, you will be degraded. Now doesn't seem like a good time, so I'll just leave. Galen's matter will be reported again later..."

"huh?"

But when Prince Mores heard those words, he tilted his head as if it were a lie!

"What are you reporting? "What is Galen?"

"... ..!"

Dasha, who was embarrassed, unconsciously turned her head towards Seonghwang.

However, Seonghwang, who received a skeptical look, simply patted his son's head in a casual manner and said:

"It won't be too late to report it later. "It seems quite uncomfortable in a crowded place, so I think it would be best to let the author go."

'... 'You know!'

Your Majesty knows everything about what just happened to Prince Mores and the reason. That's why I personally retrieved Galen's notes so that I wouldn't be noticed!

Suddenly, Dasha remembered the advice Breman had given her on the day she was first assigned to Prince Mores.

-Did you understand? To the extent possible, carry out only the missions you wish. That's where your role ends. There is no need to think or worry about anything more than that.

Those words were passed over without any notice at the time. But now, somehow, the meaning felt a little different.

A gentle and beautiful sight with friendly family members gathered in one place.

However, Prince Mores, who decorated the center of the perfect workmanship like a center stone, was giving off a faint presence, like a jewel that was subtly off-axis.

"What's there to be uncomfortable about? Everyone knows anyway, so just relax, Dasha. "It's been a while since I've seen you again. Why don't you stay a little longer?"

Innocent-looking gray eyes contrast with sharp eyes.

As Dasha, who knew Prince Mores's extreme temperament, she couldn't help but feel a strong sense of alienation from him.

Struggling to swallow the doubts welling up in her throat, Dasha slowly bowed her head to the prince.

"No, sir. "I will leave now, so please be considerate."

* * *

The Countess's funeral was announced later than expected.

There were many people who witnessed her being crushed under a pile of dirt, but the Earl of Bathurst did not give up hope of survival and led a search party.

However, when he discovered her miserably mangled body under a collapsed pile of dirt, he eventually had no choice but to acknowledge the death of his beloved wife.

The countess's funeral was held quietly in a chaotic atmosphere at the estate, which was still in disarray due to the accident being resolved.

It was Princess Amelia who visited the funeral as a representative of the Seonghwang family.

Now that both princes were receiving treatment at the main palace for serious injuries, it was the most appropriate expression of condolence that the Holy Imperial Family could send to the Bathurst Territory.

"Thank you very much for coming here during your busy schedule, Amelia. May the blessings of the Lord always be with the Seonghwang family."

A girl who looked exactly like the Countess in her youth greeted Amelia with a sad expression.

Margaret, Lady of the Earl of Bathurst.

At the time of the birthday party, she was a girl who smiled innocently while announcing the news of the tea party, but now she

was giving off a more mature vibe due to experiencing the disaster in her territory and her mother's death one after another.

"What should I say to comfort you? Lady Bathurst. The Countess was truly beautiful and elegant, the epitome of a noble noblewoman. "The empire has lost someone so precious."

"I am truly honored that you remember my mother so well."

Margaret answered like that and looked back at her mother's coffin with sad eyes.

There lies the countess, tightly wrapped in a thick veil. This was done because her miserable body, crushed under a pile of dirt, was not worth seeing to others no matter how much it was cleaned.

"First of all, I have something to apologize for. It looks like the tea party you decided to attend after a long time may not be held as planned... I'm so sorry... .."

Amelia hugged the poor girl, who couldn't speak and burst into tears, and comforted her for a long time.

Also sitting there was William Bathurst, who had become a completely different person in just a few days. Originally, instead of young Margaret, the owner of the estate, Count Bassert, would have personally welcomed the princess.

But now no one could blame him for his irreverence. The Count, who lost his wife, had not been able to eat or drink for several days, and he looked like a man who had lost his mind as he stared blankly into space.

Perhaps, if the priests had not continued to look after him with their divine power, the count and the count would have been able to hold the funeral side by side.

"It looks like the earl is very heartbroken."

"Human relationships are truly different from what they seem. "It seemed like they were always bickering, but it seems like the couple got along better than I thought."

Everyone who attended the funeral thought he was heartbroken over the loss of his wife.

But only Amelia was clearly recognizable. The light that occasionally burns in the Count's eyes is extreme anger that has not yet identified a target.

Amelia understood better than anyone else present what it felt like to lose someone you loved right before your eyes.

Therefore, she knew well where to direct that endless sadness and anger.

"The Countess was a truly capable person. As the count, you have carefully managed the inside and outside of the estate, looking into details that even you are unaware of. "Sometimes I wondered if she was a better person for her countess title."

That's why Amelia gave the Count a somewhat provocative greeting, which was not typical of her.

"... .."

When the Count showed no reaction, Amelia added in a slightly cold voice:

"And he was also a courageous person who sacrificed himself for the future of the territory."

Flash!

For a moment, a spark flew out of the quiet earl's eyes.

-You know what? In fact, they say the Countess may have committed suicide. She walked into a pile of dirt on her own, I guess?

-What? Lord of the world! No, what on earth is the cause?

The rumors that had spread among the people who witnessed his wife's death had quickly come to the conclusion that her death was a 'suicide' and even reproduced unfounded speculations about the cause.

No matter how much he blocked his eyes and ears, there was no way the Count would not know that fact. He just didn't want to believe it and had been in denial until now.

"That can't be possible! The princess must have misunderstood something... ..!"

The Count jumped up, ready to grab Amelia by the collar.

My beloved wife would never do that. How could one easily make such a choice about Margaret and me!

But before he commits lese majeste-

Coo!

Suddenly, a tremendous force poured down from the princess, causing the count to freeze in place.

"... ..!"

I couldn't believe the current situation.

Since when did the princess, who was always thought to be as fragile as a rose, become someone who could radiate this kind of energy and pressure people?

"The Earl of Bathurst."

The princess, with cold eyes that had never been seen before, quietly warned the frozen count.

"Now come to your senses and look at reality. Please do not let the Countess' deep intentions go to waste any longer."

"... ..!"

"A first-class large demon species has appeared in Bathurst Territory. Not anywhere else, but right at the count's hunting ground. If it weren't for the Countess's sacrifice, who do you think would have first aroused the Inquisition's suspicions?"

Princess Amelia's point was accurate.

Because almost the only casualties were from the Count family, and because the Seonghwang family willingly expressed condolences for the death. The Count of Bathurst was barely able to maintain its position as a victim.

"Besides, there is one more problem. The red trace of the curse discovered on the west side of the hunting ground stretched straight across the center of the territory and all the way to the count's residence. "For the sake of the subjects of the Bathurst Territory who suffered a great disaster and the honor of the Countess who chose to make a noble sacrifice, this fact was not made public."

Looking into the wildly shaking eyes of the Earl of Bathurst, Amelia recalled an event from the long past.

A memory that has not yet happened and is also a distant future.

At that time, Amelia remembered a cold-faced woman who often frequented the royal palace of Rohan. She is the familiar face of a woman who used to stand by Romain's side like a confidant, and who is now in her coffin.

-Who on earth is that imperialist that frequents the royal family of Rohan as if it were his own home?

-He's the Earl of Bathurst from Delcross, right? She is a tarantula-like woman.

-that's right. What could it be but a tarantula? It is said that she killed not only her husband but also her daughter, the rightful heir to the count, with her own hands.

Rumor has it that the woman's husband and daughter were suspected of having contact with a devil worshiper.

So, after killing her beloved family with her own hands, she was recognized by the Heresy Tribunal for her actions and was able to keep the title of House of Bathurst.

-oh my god! With my own hands?

-No matter how much it may be, it is not an easy choice. What a poisonous woman she is.

That was why Amelia put aside other things and expressed her intention to attend the Lady of Bathurst's tea party.

Because he knows the future of the Countess of Bathurst, who eventually becomes Romaine's subordinate, that is, the current Countess.

'So I slowly got closer to them and tried to find out why the Countess made such a callous choice.'

I never expected that my wife would choose to kill herself.

'but... ... '

Amelia seemed to somehow understand her choice.

Since she was a woman who was known to be capable in the future, she would have fully anticipated what kind of crisis the territory would face in the future due to the emergence of demonic species.

And maybe.

'It is highly likely that she was already under Romain's control. It's probably no coincidence that the red curse symbol extends to the mansion. So she may have chosen the only way to escape his influence.'

This is Romaine, who often bewitched people with strange tricks.

Amelia was fully mindful of the possibility that the Countess, who would become his confidant in the future, also went through such a process.

'A curse, that kind of thing... . Your wife has nothing to do with that... ... '

The Count, who had been muttering as if he found it difficult to believe, slowly trailed off as if he had an inkling of something.

Suddenly, the voice of his wife shouting at him came to his mind vividly.

-William! Beware of suspicious guests visiting the mansion. He's been planning something up and down the Bathurst family for a long time!

Someone.

There is someone who is the culprit of this situation!

Amelia, who saw that the Count's eyes were slowly returning to focus, continued speaking in a slightly calmer voice.

"Rest assured. I have no unreasonable suspicions about the deceased.
"I have faith in the Countess's honor."

There was not the slightest doubt on Amelia's face as she said that.

okay. I will be able to trust you a hundred times over. Is there anyone in the world as harmless as someone who is already dead?

"But Earl of Bathurst. All of these things should not be thought of as disasters that just happened by chance. "It means that the person who used the Red Curse to summon a demonic species to Bathurst Territory and drove the Countess to her death is still watching over this territory from somewhere."

"... .."

"The imperial palace plans to pursue this matter until the end. The Knights of Saint Aurelion have already begun an investigation based on the Red Curse, and little by little, they are gaining clues to their identity. "Uncovering their conspiracy and stopping it completely in advance will be the task of my life."

And Amelia withdrew the momentum she had been exerting toward the Count and made a gentle suggestion.

"So, Earl of Bathurst, will you please cooperate with me? "To stop the insidious forces that are trying to shake the empire, and to comfort the soul of the countess who died unjustly."

William Bathurst was silent for a while.

The Count's appearance, which had been desiccated for several days, was not much different from that of a half-dead corpse.

Only his eyes.

The only living part of the Count's body was his eyes, which shimmered in a complex light with a mixture of sadness, doubt, and anger.

"... Lowering!"

The Earl of Bathurst finally made up his mind and slowly knelt in front of the princess.

Towards the unquestionable representative of prosperity, who offered his hand saying that he would be willing to turn a blind eye to the suspicions surrounding his beloved wife.

"Please allow me and this Bathurst to join in the task."

"count."

"I will offer my loyalty and, if necessary, everything in my territory to you! I will spare no effort to ensure the safety of the empire! I don't expect much in return. The day when my humble task ends... .."

William Bathurst, who had said so much, looked up at the princess with passionate eyes.

What flashed in those intense eyes was a vision not much different from what Amelia once saw to the Holy Emperor.

"Just hand over to me the one who caused your wife's death!"

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369. The Return of the Prodigal Son (4)

Romain, who was sitting in the cave, felt a sudden chill and frowned.

'... what?'

It may not just be because the night air is cold. Because his current dull body was not his original body, it was difficult to even sense the cold unless the temperature difference was quite extreme.

"What's going on, Romain?"

The girl with the forked hair who was squatting across from me asked Greed as if she was puzzled.

Romain closed one eye for a moment, looked around carefully, and then shook his head.

"It is nothing, Lord of Greed. "I guess it was just my mood."

Romain, who lost the cabin that had been a comfortable hideout for a long time, had to hastily look for a new meeting place due to the two demon lords' harassment.

It was this small cave located south of Delcross.

It is a place that is some distance from the ecliptic, and is also quite far from Bathurst Territory, where everyone's attention is currently focused.

It was a cold and shabby place without any decent furniture as it was being prepared in a hurry.

Perhaps it is fortunate that the two demon kings, who are insensitive to human senses, do not feel much discomfort. Of course, the sight of

them squatting together in a narrow cave was extremely pitiful.

"Oh, by the way, I'm really going crazy!"

Pajong, who had the appearance of an old priest, was furious.

"How could things get so screwed up? "I was just there to repay a debt, but how could things get so bad in such a short period of time?"

While he was forced to connect to the Pangea Chronicle, unable to resist the urging of his sorrow, Pa-jong lost a huge amount of magical energy.

If it had gone a little further, it would have been so serious that the demon lords under them would have risen up to change generations.

"Why did this happen? "Why did the seeds that were barely planted around the ecliptic wake up on their own and cause such chaos!"

"There are quite a few 'marks of cracks' around here. They are traces of a [disaster] that goes against cause and effect and destroys laws and boundaries. Sowing, is it possible that you may have been careless in hiding the seeds near the trail?"

At the little girl's point, the old man suddenly got angry.

"Hey, Greed. "Do you think I'm that thoughtless?"

"Your family clearly seemed to have gone berserk under the influence of the rift."

"Oh, of course I planted some seeds near the crack! I thought that in order to properly shake up Delcross in the future, I would have to use the power of the crack at some point! But I made all my own preparations!"

The seeds planted near the ecliptic were the products of the normal world that had been saved from sorrow at a high price.

The body of the normal world, which was never activated unless under certain conditions, was perfect for secretly hiding the deep demonic energy of a high-ranking demon king's family.

Thanks to this, none of the countless priests who have traveled to the imperial capital have noticed the existence of the seed.

"Of course, I expected that there was a good possibility that the 'trace of the crack' would destabilize the clan. So, just in case something happened, I went to the trouble of making a separate controller and hiding it nearby!"

"controller?"

"okay. It is also an expensive item purchased out of love. If it is suitable, it is an absolute object that can control subordinates regardless of conditions. "After burying it well near the seed, they even covered it with a large rock to prevent anyone from touching it!"

Perhaps that rock was the place where Seongjin ordered his knights to pile up the red stones.

Of course, now that everything had collapsed without a trace, there was no way for Pajong to know that fact.

"profit! "The more I think about it, the more I feel like I'm dying because I miss them so much!"

Romaine, who could not bear to see the growing fever, comforted him.

"Calm down, seedling. What has already happened has happened. Fortunately, what was lost this time was only one of the seeds you arranged, wasn't it?"

"... what?"

"There is no time to dwell on what is lost anymore. "With this incident as an opportunity, it is time to predict how Seonghwang's attitude will change and quickly think of measures to respond to it."

Sowing was not the only one who lost what he had arranged in vain. Romaine also lost most of the foundation he had prepared over the past few years.

The carefully constructed circuit to steal away Princess Amelia was shattered along with the cabin.

Lord Alton, who had been recruited to take control of Baron Cadogan's salon, was surprised by the appearance of a powerful demon species and ended up running away.

What about the Countess of Bathurst, who was thought to be one day converted? While Romaine lost control of her for a moment due to her confusion and shock, she was caught in a landslide and lost her life.

Even the 'marks of cracks' are likely to be discovered. Aren't the holy knights from the imperial palace already occupying and scouring all the roads leading from the demonic haunts to Count Bathurst's residence?

'How did things get to this point?'

Romaine seemed to know somehow. Even now, when I close my eyes, the image of a young boy riding a huge wolf charging towards the demon race comes vividly to mind.

'Prince Mores... ... !'

There was already a rumor on the continent that the 3rd prince rode the divine beast [Wind] mentioned in the scriptures and unleashed the divine grace of the main god to finally sink the demon race. Even now, whenever two people gather in the imperial capital, they talk about him.

There are absurd claims that Prince Mores is the reincarnation of Saint Bastian, or that a new saint was born from the Holy Imperial family.

'There must be a guardian of Delcross behind all of this.'

A new word for success.

A person that the Dark Church has been preparing for a long time.

And, an absolute variable that no one can dare predict.

Even so, Romain could not stand to see such an unknown entity swaying a situation in which complex interests were intertwined.

"Now, can't you see it with your own eyes? Great monarchs. The 3rd Prince has already escaped the influence of the Dark Church and is nothing more than a puppet that moves at the direction of the Holy Emperor. "Didn't I tell you this many times before?"

That's why Romain took risks every time and secretly encouraged the high-ranking demon kings to exclude him from the situation.

"As you can see, the existence of [the reserved one] is not at all beneficial to the monarchs... "Wow!"

But before he could finish speaking, a strong hand grabbed his robe. It was sowing that the medicine was about to rise.

"It's ridiculous. Isn't this the time to be leisurely talking about [The Prepared One]?"

The old man, who was squeezing Romain's breathing with one hand, thrust a stone in his other hand in front of his eyes. It was a red stone that sometimes had incomplete codes flashing around it and then disappearing.

"Look at this. You insignificant doll. "Do you know what I found in that mess?"

"Off..."

"Why are these things scattered in the place where my family is rushing? "Why can I sense your shabby presence here!"

Romain broke into a cold sweat and quickly made an excuse.

"This is just a coincidence, Mr. Sowing! I was just trying to set a trap for the guardian of Delcross..."

"Shut up! Isn't this a suspicious item at first glance? "Are you confident in telling me clearly that this situation is absolutely not your fault?"

On the outside, he pretended to ask a question, but it seemed like he had already decided that everything was Romaine's fault. Because the strong murderous intent pouring over the half-mask was real.

"Now, go ahead and say it. "Is there any reason for me to tolerate your arrogance any longer?"

"Tsk!"

Romain gritted his chattering teeth.

Although he denied it for a long time, his essence was still a mere human being. Compared to the high-ranking demon kings who control the existence of even one dimension, they are nothing more than small insects.

It is a fate that one can be crushed to death at any time just by their strong gaze.

'but... It can't end like this! You must never let go of ties with these high-ranking demon lords!'

In the hands of an absolute being who could kill him at any moment, Romain tried to maintain his composure and opened his mouth trembling.

"How can I tell a lie in front of a great monarch who can see right through human lies? "What I can tell you for sure is that this situation was not intentional on my part!"

"So you admit it was your fault?"

"I do not deny the possibility that my preparations may have unexpectedly had some influence on the plans of the great monarch."

Flash-

Romain, who saw the evil green glow clearly shining in the old priest's eyes, quickly continued speaking.

"Even so, I have the right to ask for your mercy, Lord of all diseases! "Because you owe me a lot!"

"... what?"

"If it weren't for me, wouldn't all your arrangements have been useless anyway? "He would have been reverse-summoned from the Delcross dimension, and would have had to hover outside the dimension for a long time, just looking for an opportunity to descend."

"... ... !"

Pajong slowly opened his mouth.

That definitely happened. Just as he was about to be reverse-summoned, engulfed in strange flames, didn't that cheeky doll provide him with his current body?

"No, no matter what, what debt do I owe for such a poor body..." ... !"

Pajong frowned, but before he knew it, his grip on Romaine was slowly losing strength.

Even though he was all old and worn out, this old priest's body was the only thing that kept Pajong, who was almost thrown out of the dimension, stuck in this world.

The guardian of Delcross has his eyes wide open, so when will he again hold a large-scale offering ceremony and wait for the opportunity to descend to this dimension?

"Okay..."

In the end, when Plantation retreated with a disapproving expression, Romaine, who had stumbled for a moment, carefully adjusted his clothes.

"Thank you for your mercy."

"joy! Don't be cocky. "This is all I can do to look after you."

Pa-jong, who had not completely let go of his anger, glared at Romaine with harsh eyes.

"It's a doll, and it manages to imitate its owner, so I'm just leaving it alone because I think it might be of some use. It's annoying to everyone, so they treat you as a [Puppet Master] for convenience, but isn't the original Puppeteer still alive and well? If you fail, we may abandon you and join hands with you."

"well."

The corners of Romain's mouth, still trembling, curled into a crooked smile.

"Haven't I already proven that I am far superior to the original [Puppet Master], Lord of Disease?"

"what? When did you?"

"You are holding the evidence yourself now."

Pazong was dumbfounded and looked alternately at the stone in his hand and at Romaine's half-mask.

"The ability, unique in all dimensions, to add code to objects in the original world."

"Eh?"

"At first glance, the stone may look like an object from the normal world and function like an object from the normal world, but that is not really the case. "I just drew the code directly on the stone of the original world."

"... ..!"

Pajong, who was dazed for a moment, finally grasped the meaning of those words and opened his eyes wide.

"... Can you draw the laws of the normal world with your bare hands? How? "By what means can you?"

"well. Even so, before I became a doll, I was a fairly talented programmer."

As Romaine shrugged his shoulders slyly, Pazong looked back at the little girl with a puzzled expression.

"Oh my... .."

The old man's eyes narrowed, and deep wrinkles appeared in his round eyes.

"That's right. Greed, I was wondering why you chose the abandoned doll over Sigurd Sigurdson. He had this secret... .."

* * *

Seongjin suffered from high fever and high fever repeatedly and was unable to recover.

While he could not feel it, time passed quickly and before he knew it, 15 days had passed.

By then, the Holy Emperor had finally allowed Logan to leave the temporary treatment room.

"I think I have sincerely reflected on this. "I guess Abamama also figured that out."

Logan seems to think that Seonghwang ordered him to stay in the treatment room purely as a sign of self-respect. But Seongjin knew the truth behind Seonghwang's decision.

'Logan, it seemed like he suffered quite a bit of damage to his soul at that time.'

It doesn't seem like a living person could easily burn his or her soul, but the Sword Master's superhuman will probably made such an incredible feat possible.

Of course, the Emperor must have noticed this. Every time he comes to treat Seongjin, he doesn't forget to pour out his divine power on Logan.

And, it was finally determined that the guy's soul had fully recovered.

'It would be nice if I could check it with my spiritual eyes... ..'

But it was difficult to get the devil's cooperation.

The Demon King, who had recently been stuck in a flame crystal, only whimpered occasionally and rarely responded to Seongjin's calls.

'How long is this guy going to be depressed? I'm getting tired of eating bear meat soup every day.'

While staying in the temporary treatment room at Eoyeongbuyeong, the day finally arrived for Logan and Sisley to leave for Cyprus.

"In the end, I regret not being able to see Brother Owen. "It would be better if you stayed at the palace until we return."

Not long after the demon species appearance incident, good news came from the southern front.

It is said that 1st Prince Owen participated in the Great Tribal Council of Varsha and brought about a fairly long-term and stable truce.

Thanks to this, Owen returned to the imperial capital after a few years, and the imperial palace was now preparing for his triumphal ceremony.

"Sisley, do you still have no intention of staying in the imperial capital? Brother Owen especially liked you. "It's been a long time coming to the imperial capital, but if you're not here, my brother will be very disappointed."

Sisley shook his head firmly in response to Logan's question.

"I sent you a letter a long time ago saying I was leaving for Cyprus. "It looks like the truce will be quite long, so maybe Brother Owen will wait for us to return."

Seongjin already knew what Sisley was worried about. Because she had this conversation with the kid before.

-Ever since I heard that a punitive force was being formed, I've been

feeling uneasy. I have a feeling that there, on the black coast of Cyprus, something evil is lurking around to devour Brother Logan.

Seongjin stroked Sisley's hair, which was growing better day by day.

"Okay, be careful, kid."

"what? Brother. "Since when have you been subtly calling me kid?"

"Then do you call a little boy a kid? What do you call him?"

However, on the day when the large-scale punitive force left the imperial capital, Seongjin's high fever rose again and he was unable to see them off and had to whine in the treatment room.

Then one day it happened.

Quick and easy!

Suddenly, I heard the sound of cheerful footsteps, and then I jumped!
And the door to the treatment room opened violently.

"Mores, you goby!"

What appeared there was a familiar brat with a bunch of ugly cormorant feathers on his head.

"You man! No matter how sick I was, my brother came and didn't even say hello... ..!"

Owen, who was shouting vigorously, opened his mouth in an instant when his eyes met Seongjin, who was lying on the bed.

"... Mores?"

"okay. "It's noisy, you idiot."

"... ..!?"

When Seongjin responded sullenly, Owen's eyes shook violently as if there had been an earthquake.

"you... You, man... Are you okay? "How bad did it hurt to become

half a person?"

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370. The return of the Prodigal Son (5)

The news that 1st Prince Owen was returning was enough to revamp the atmosphere of the imperial capital, which had been chaotic due to the appearance of a large demon species.

That's how great his contribution was.

In addition to successfully stabilizing the southern front over the past few years, the first official truce was concluded with the heretics since the founding of Delcross.

Of course, all of this did not just happen suddenly.

As the front lines became more solidified over the years, armed conflicts became noticeably less frequent, and even trade was taking place with some moderate tribes.

In such an atmosphere, the fact that Owen, who attended the Great Tribal Council, effectively put pressure on the warlike Wakana Tusai may have played a major role.

Of course, Mr. Sang Chang-chang's detailed instructions were of great help.

[Surprising quest? Oh my, my hand slipped!]

[Quest Grade: F]

[Drop the poison needle in your possession as if it were a mistake in front of everyone, and quickly retrieve it. Of course, I believe that you will not make the mistake of hastily mentioning the source of this. Some tribal leaders may be dissatisfied with you for bringing a trivial toy to an important event. But what does it matter? It will

definitely be able to grab the attention of just one person who needs to see it.]

[Reward: 1P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

It was inevitable that the quest rewards were unprecedentedly salty. Sang Tae-chang always seems annoying, but this time he was kindly giving instructions purely to help Owen.

In this way, the small quest to control the atmosphere of the Great Tribal Council continued.

[Surprise quest? Praise makes even Majuri dance!]

[Please mention that the archery skills of the Majuli tribe warriors you met during the battle were impressive, and honor those who died. The heart of the tribal leader, who is still confused, will greatly lean towards you.]

[Surprising quest? Introduce the new friend you made!]

[Your friendship with the Volanta tribe is already famous. However, the tribal chieftains are suspicious that your favor is not limited to just the Volanta tribe. Emphasize that you have recently made a new friend from the Purma tribe. You will be able to gain favor with other tribal leaders and convince the old fox.]

Originally, Owen had planned to hold out the poisonous needle in front of Wakana Tusai and question him about the unfair assassination attempt. If necessary, she would use Purma's Bartoza as her witness to force the case against her.

but-

'No matter how much I think about it, Sang Chang-chang's method is right. If we're not careful, the entire Barça tribe might think we're insulting them and rebel.'

Although the tribes fought each other fiercely at the slightest invasion of territory, there was a high possibility that they would

unite strongly in the face of external enemies.

So Owen faithfully followed Sang Tae-chang's quest, and eventually achieved a truce in a moderate way.

"Hoo... .."

Fortunately, Wakana Tusai did not commit the atrocity of violating the ceasefire agreement that was already in place.

It was not thought that the old fox of Karazhan was afraid of the sting or of Bartoza's accusation. While she was trying hard to persuade her tribe leaders, she was watching Owen with great amusement.

Now, Owen's guess was that Wakana Tusai had decided to avoid wasting his strength for the time being and strengthen his stamina.

Volanta, which had recently formed a friendship with Owen and was gaining various trade advantages, was quickly emerging as a power comparable to Karazhan by successfully eliminating the nearby sea creatures.

Anyway, after completing all the necessary clean-up after the successful armistice agreement, Owen was only able to leave the Southern Front exactly one week after Thanksgiving.

* * *

Hee hee hee!

"Whoa, let's rest here for a while."

When Owen suddenly stopped his horse and gave instructions, the soldier following him asked curiously.

"yes? But it's low. Didn't you already take a break during lunch earlier? "There is still a long way to go to the ecliptic."

"You can't just think about the circumstances of powerful ignorant people like us. "Isn't the sick priest Bart also with us?"

At Owen's point, the soldier looks back and nods.

"Oh, that's right. "I'm sure the long journey will be very difficult for you, priest."

Owen was currently returning to the Imperial Capital with fifteen soldiers and part of the missionary group.

It was very shabby for a procession of the first prince of the Holy Empire, but it was something that could not be taken carelessly from the front lines.

In addition, since Owen himself was one of the strongest forces on the front line, there was no need to hire a large number of separate escorts.

A small carriage was following behind them. It was the carriage of Priest Bart, known as the living saint of the Southern Front.

At some point, even though I sang, "Go back, go back," I sat firmly on the front line, but this time, I guess what the wind was blowing, and I decided to go back to the imperial capital with Owen.

"Father Bart always seems anxious every time I see him. Wouldn't it have been better for you to just remain at the front?"

"I don't know. Isn't the southern environment very harmful to the priest's health? "It will be much better for your health if you follow us up here."

Owen got off his horse and responded leisurely.

"So don't be in a hurry. "The armistice agreement has already been concluded, so there is plenty of time."

Owen had already received a letter from Sisley informing him that he was leaving for Cyprus with Logan. No matter how quickly he tried, he would end up crossing paths with them, so there was no need to rush the route.

'I want to see my youngest's face as soon as possible... ... '

After all the hardships I endured over the past few years, it wasn't that difficult to appease my longing a little more.

Anyway, if I wait for you at the imperial palace, I will meet you. Because the two of them plan to stay for a long time until they return from Cyprus.

'When we arrive at the imperial capital, should we stop by the monkey watchtower and inquire about the newbie's whereabouts?'

A small baby goat's sullen expression flashes through Owen's mind.

This newbie guy didn't really tell us, but it seemed like he was living a rough life. If Owen finds him, he'll definitely have some way to help.

'Ah, but I have to see my family's faces first!'

Let's meet Father, Amelia, and the twins and let's get rid of all the worries! If I get a chance, I'll also take a look at that bastard Mores.

'hmm. When I think about it this way, I think I miss Mores a little too.'

Even if he's such an obnoxious guy, I'm really looking forward to seeing him face to face. The way back home was so exciting and enjoyable.

It was a time when I was alone, smiling and thinking about various things. As an attendant in charge of Priest Bart happened to be passing by, Owen quickly called him over.

"hey. Are you okay, Priest? Why do you rarely come out of the carriage even when you are resting?"

"omg! Lowering?"

Then the attendant seemed overly surprised and rolled his eyes.

"You're sure the meals are being served on time, right?"

"Woah, don't worry. "I am taking good care of it."

"okay? "Then, since we're resting now, would you mind telling me to get some fresh air?"

"That, that lung... The priest is now... Lord, you are sleeping!"

"what?"

Owen's eyebrows rose.

"The only answer is that you have been sleeping for three days now. Does that make sense? "How can a person just sleep every hour?"

"But what should I do when you are really sleeping?"

"Look at this person. He already has a weak body, so you should think it's strange if people can't wake up! Are you okay now? Let me go take a look..."

As Owen took a long stride toward the carriage, a distraught attendant blocked his path.

"Ahh, no! "I am very tired from the sudden trip, so the priest told me not to disturb my rest!"

"hmm?"

"I apologize for daring to stand in your way! One, Priest Bart! never! never! Since you told me not to wake you up... ... !"

The attendant was desperate.

What would happen if the first prince opened the carriage door now? You will encounter a homunculus whose pulse has completely stopped due to the absence of the Holy Emperor's soul.

It was the worst situation.

"... okay?"

But the 1st prince, who seemed to be stubbornly heading towards the carriage, stopped and nodded!

"Well, okay. If the priest said so much. "No matter what, your own opinion is the most important thing."

"that... yes?"

"When I think about it, in the past, even when the situation on the front line was at its peak, the priest would always sleep like he was dead for more than half a day. "It's not that strange."

Tuk-tuk.

Owen added softly, patting the embarrassed attendant on the shoulder.

"By the way, you. Aren't you gaining weight these past few days? Just like a person who eats two people's worth in one meal."

"... ... !"

"Don't just take care of yourself, take care of the priest's meals as well. Do you understand?"

The frozen attendant could only nod frantically.

The first prince thought he couldn't figure out whether people were sharp or dull.

* * *

So, about 15 days after leaving the front, Owen proudly entered the imperial capital.

What greeted Owen was a splendidly prepared triumphal ceremony and huge cheers from the subjects of the imperial capital.

"Waaah!"

"The undefeated hero protecting the southern front!"

"Long live Owen!"

Owen was completely overwhelmed for a moment.

At first glance, I heard there was going to be an improvement ceremony. However, Owen, who had never expected such rich hospitality, looked at the scene before him with a little bewilderment.

Buildings decorated with colorful flowers and ribbons. The solemn

imperial guard stands in a long line along the main road, showing courtesy.

And a wave of subjects waving handkerchiefs and shouting loudly.

"This... .."

Unknown emotions well up.

Until now, Owen has affectionately called Seonghwang "father." He used to get along with other princes and princesses as if they were real brothers.

Where is that? The soldiers on the southern front, who have been fighting for a long time, are now wholeheartedly following him.

Nevertheless, Owen never once expected that he would be treated honorably as the prince of the Holy Imperial Family.

But at this moment, everyone in the imperial capital is saying that he is the proud first prince of the Holy Imperial Family!

'... As for me, where am I... You have truly become a member of the Holy Family!'

Just then, a new quest window popped up in front of Owen.

[Surprise quest? Show yourself without shame as the first prince of the Holy Empire!]

[Your subjects are very curious about you. Although he had been famous abroad for a long time, he was a mysterious prince who rarely showed himself in front of his subjects. Well, now is the time! Straighten your shoulders and proudly show off your status and reputation here. Even though your sloppy outfit is far from that of a prince, no matter how you look at it, the strong confidence you confidently exude will be more than enough to cover up all these flaws.]

[Reward: 2P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

A burst of laughter flowed out.

Ah, such a disingenuous Sang Sang-chang. You could just give them a simple encouragement to be confident.

Quickly.

As Owen straightened his shoulders and drove his horse as instructed by Sang Tae-chang, the imperial guards who were waiting all followed behind him, hiding the shabby procession.

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371. The Return of the Prodigal Son (6)

The imperial capital was excited about the successive victory ceremonies.

The triumphal ceremony of Prince Logan and Prince Mores, who had made their major in the Sigismund Territory, took place not long ago.

Isn't the fact that such great auspicious events occur one after another as proof that the Lord is looking after Delcross?

"Here he comes!"

"Waaah!"

"The undefeated hero protecting the southern front!"

Soon, the subjects of the imperial capital felt a slight shock when they saw Prince Owen appear with cheers.

Unlike the people from the Seonghwang family I had seen so far, he was giving off a very unfamiliar and exotic atmosphere.

"He... "His Majesty Owen?"

He had the appearance of a mature warrior, befitting his age of 17.

Wearing shabby, comfortable light armor, long hair flowing freely.

There were even feather decorations like those worn by barbarians stuck here and there on her unkempt hair!

To the subjects of Delcross, who considered it a virtue to keep their hair short like priests, that outfit was clearly very unfamiliar.

This was due to the absence of escort driver Alicia. If she had followed Owen, he would have scolded her incessantly so that he could throw away all her cormorant feathers and dress more comfortably.

"Awesome... "You did it!"

However, perhaps because of Owen's confident attitude and confident expression, the subjects of the imperial capital soon began to pour out various admiring remarks about him.

"Look at your magnificent and wonderful prayer!"

"It was said that the heretics trembled at the mere sight of Prince Owen on the battlefield. It seems that those words were not just empty words!"

"You look so strong! "He is truly a knight of the god who protects the Holy Empire!"

When I think about it that way, it seems like a brilliant halo is coming out from behind the first prince.

"lung... Priest?! Are you awake? But why are you suddenly generating divine power in the air?"

There was no way they would have known about a small disturbance in the carriage following.

The subjects, who were convinced that Prince Owen was in the glory of the Lord, soon began to chant his name loudly.

"Long live Owen!"

"Long live Owen!"

As he passed through the cheers and arrived in front of the imperial palace, he was greeted by a girl who had become much more mature than the image in Owen's memories.

Owen, who noticed Ye's soft rosy hair blowing in the wind, called out to her without realizing it.

"Amelia!"

A name that has been called out loud for the first time in a long time.

Owen, who felt his voice cracking a little, realized once again how much he missed his brothers from the Holy Family.

Then the girl, with her eyes wide open, smiled just as sweetly as before.

"You're finally here! "Welcome back, Brother Owen."

"How have you been? You have really changed a lot. So, something...
... ."

Owen, who spoke happily, trailed off as he didn't know how to express what he felt.

"... "I've really become more mature."

The kind girl who always smiled at Owen had changed more than he had imagined.

Not only has she grown taller, but her face, which is praised as the most beautiful woman in the capital, has become even more beautiful. She must have recently started practicing as an Auror, and her energy has clearly changed.

But is it because of my mood? Her Owen was sensing a more fundamental change in her.

A past that only Amelia knows now. The pain and sorrow she had to endure alone for such a long time left a faint mark on her as a child.

"You know, something really happened, right?"

In response to Owen's worried question, Amelia burst out laughing.

"Something happened. Brother, you've really changed a lot, haven't you? "It was so big that I almost didn't recognize you."

Amelia was also feeling a similar shock to Owen.

In the past, she had already followed Leonard to Rohan before Owen returned from the front. So, the last time she actually saw him face to face was already in the distant past.

The shabby country boy who remained in her memories had suddenly become a strong warrior supporting the front lines of the empire.

"Let's go quickly, brother."

Feeling her heart sink from overjoyment, Amelia pulled Owen's sleeve affectionately.

"Father, His Majesty is waiting for you."

* * *

"How on earth did you convince that belligerent Karazhan tribal leader? "Since the news of the ceasefire spread, all major and small officials have been unanimously praising my brother's political acumen."

In particular, in the case of Cardinal Cesare of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he is raising his enthusiasm by saying that all southern diplomacy should be left entirely to the First Prince?

Owen nodded hesitantly at Amelia's explanation.

"okay? "Isn't that an unexpected reaction?"

Cardinals and high priests.

Those old-timers had long been unwilling to acknowledge Owen as a member of the royal family.

Didn't she always glare at him with her white eyes, trying to catch even the slightest flaw in him?

"It's worth it. You really did a great job! A truce with the infidels. "Your brother has accomplished what no one has been able to achieve during the millennium of the empire."

Listening to Amelia's voice chirping like a small bird, Owen took a deep breath of the air he had been missing.

The grounds of the imperial palace, where I had been for the first time in a long time, were truly cozy.

In the past, I thought it was a fancy and spacious place that didn't suit me at all.

But now, as if it were a lie, Owen was feeling the comfort of home here.

and-

'... father!'

Owen, who finally stood at the conference hall, was filled with a strange feeling when he saw that the event had not changed one bit since he left.

"Come closer, Owen."

Everyone's eyes are focused on the 1st prince, who follows orders and walks with great strides.

His unkempt and free-spirited attire could not even be described as befitting a prince of the Holy Empire.

Nevertheless, no one could easily gossip about him. Just like when facing Balthazar, the greatest knight on the continent, everyone was overwhelmed by the strong force emanating from the prince.

"I'm back, father."

When Owen arrived in front of the throne and showed his courtesy, the Holy Emperor, who looked down at him for a moment, opened his mouth.

"Do you remember the critical situation on the southern front several years ago? "Who stopped the heretics from rapidly advancing north?"

Seonghwang's calm voice resonates throughout the conference hall.

A voice I missed so much. Strangely, it felt like he had heard it often recently, but perhaps he was mistaken because he was so happy to hear it.

"They will also remember the incident in which the 3rd Missionary Corps, isolated in the south, was on the verge of annihilation. Who was it that rescued them safely from the hands of the cruel pagans at that time? "Isn't that the first prince, Owen?"

Owen quietly listened to his voice, trying hard to hide his troubled feelings.

'Once I was an orphan with nothing, my father willingly called me his son.'

I wanted to become a person who lived up to that title. So when Owen's status window appeared before him one day, he was able to abandon all his comforts and head to the southern front without hesitation.

In addition, he has continued to make ceaseless efforts by completing quests until now.

Now, what about now? Did he become a son who lived up to Seonghwang's expectations?

"Because my brave son was there at that time, I was able to protect the empire and its subjects from all these threats. Not only did he succeed in quelling the vicious nature of the pagans, but he returned with a feat that would remain in the history of the Holy Empire. "How could I not be proud of this?"

Owen slowly raised his head to the calm, congratulatory voice.

Looking down at him was the same cold face as always, but what was faintly there was something that could definitely be called a smile.

"You did a great job, son."

* * *

A banquet at the imperial palace was scheduled to commemorate the

triumph, so Owen decided to temporarily stay at the main palace instead of the Blue Rose Labyrinth for that day only.

And the person who greeted him warmly at the main palace was Lord Masain, who seemed more mature for some reason.

"Brother Masain!"

As I approached him and called out to him warmly, the driver smiled and placed his hand on his chest.

"Meeting Prince Owen."

"Haha, please stop giving such stiff greetings."

For Owen, there was another person in the Holy Family who was equally as irritating as Mores, and that was Sir Martha, a knight of the Royal Guard.

Although he is now being treated as the first prince of the empire, if you think about it, Owen is not from the royal family.

On the other hand, what about Lord Masain, who treats himself with respect as a knight of the imperial palace? If he had not become Clanos, he would be the next closest to the throne after the Seonghwang, and be of legitimate imperial blood.

Speaking of a twist of fate, it was a truly ironic fate.

But it's really strange. Meeting Sir Masain for the first time in a long time, I was filled with a feeling of joy, no trace of discomfort.

"So what happened recently? "Like Amelia, my brother seems to have changed a lot somehow."

Perhaps it was because after attending Prince Mores, I suffered from mental hardships that felt like 10 years a day.

Masain laughed and subtly changed the topic.

"I always hear about your performance on the southern front. "It's truly admirable that you can achieve such feats all by yourself in a

faraway place!"

And Owen was able to hear in detail about Mores' recent situation from him.

"... Are you losing your memory?"

"Yes, it is."

Masaine nodded and explained Mores' recent actions with a worried face.

He did a great job in the Sigismund Territory, and the recently appeared demon species was also successfully exterminated thanks to his activities.

"Unfortunately, your body has not fully recovered yet, and you are currently staying in a temporary treatment room. Would you like to stop by?"

"... .."

Mores.

He was a very obnoxious and obnoxious idiot, but I still felt bad seeing him in so much pain.

Besides, I don't even have any memories from before, so how on earth should I deal with this guy?

"hmm... .."

After thinking for a moment, Owen made up his mind.

Well, let's just treat it without any fault! If I start to hesitate in front of him, wouldn't that guy, Mores, who doesn't have any memories, feel even more awkward?

So Owen blindly opened the door to the temporary treatment room and confidently shouted loudly at Mores.

"Mores, you goby! You man! No matter how sick I was, my brother

came and didn't even say hello... ... !"

But the exaggerated cheerfulness ended there. At the unexpected sight that unfolded before her eyes, Owen was momentarily startled and froze in place.

There lay a small boy, shriveled to half his former size.

'what's this! 'Why did he become like that?'

In Owen's memory, Mores was a round piglet that seemed to roll around much faster.

But what about now?

As big and ornate as the bed was, the skinny boy buried in it couldn't help but look even smaller.

"... Mores?"

When Owen asks quietly, the boy gives a blunt answer.

"okay. "It's noisy, you idiot."

"... ... !?"

That sassy way of speaking is indeed Mores, right?

A trembling voice came out of Owen's mouth without me realizing it.

"you... You, man... "Are you okay?"

What happened? How could a person have been so sick that such a handsome guy had shrunk to the point where he could only be held by a handful?

'Besides, why is the auror active like that? 'It feels like I'm going to die right now!'

Owen approached the bed with an urgent heart.

"why are you like this? Where on earth does it hurt? "Didn't your father treat you?"

At that moment, it seemed as if Mores's eyes fell on the bright red necklace hanging around Owen's neck.

But Owen, who was concerned about the guy's condition, couldn't even notice anything like that. He was frowning and fiddling with the pocket on his collar without realizing it.

'Perhaps what will happen with this?'

It contained the 'Ultimate Elixir' that Owen worked hard to obtain while playing games every night.

'It's definitely a possibility. 'This is the ultimate treatment that cures all abnormalities in the body, right?'

Still, there was only one reason for his concern. This is a mainstream essential item that I was lucky enough to obtain.

'I need to break the mainstream as soon as possible...'

Sisley, and by extension the royal family and the empire, may be in danger.

Moreover, if I used it this time, there was no guarantee that I would be able to get it again next time. When will I get the Ice Heart, which is in short supply on all servers, and summon Goddess Justitia again!

'but...'

Owen curled his hands and squeezed them.

However, we can't just leave this dangerous-looking guy like this. In the end, he closed his eyes tightly and held out a golden elixir.

With a solemn determination to work on Pangea Chronicle without a moment's rest starting tonight.

"Mores, you eat this!"

"..."

But an unexpected reaction came back.

That guy, Mores, who was looking at the item he held out with a sullen expression, immediately turned his head and responded like this!

"I do not need."

"... what?"

Owen opened his mouth stupidly at the unexpected reaction.

Although I agonized over using the elixir, I never thought they would reject it!

"You man! Do you know how good this is? Come on, try to take a good look."

But still, Mores was steadfast.

"I don't like it. Just by looking at it, it looks suspicious and tasteless."

"hey! "When someone gives you a gift, at least pretend to accept it with sincerity!"

"Uh, I won't accept it. "Because I'm not going to eat it."

Owen, whose blood pressure rose to the top of his head, had no choice but to hold the back of his neck and scream:

"... "This damn son of a bitch really!"

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372. The Return of the Prodigal Son (7)

Yes, Mores was always like this.

He doesn't even pay attention to what others say, and he's good at blaming people the moment he opens his mouth.

While Owen was trying to control his anger, which had been rising for the first time in a while, the boy waved one hand helplessly.

"Edith."

Then, Mores' personal maid, who was standing nearby, handed Owen a small package as if she had been waiting for him.

Puzzled, I opened it and found a small brooch and a wooden statue of a saint.

"... "What is this?"

There is something special about receiving something from that Mores guy.

As I took out the bald old man, who was smiling, and looked at the cooking, the boy gave me a short answer.

"souvenir."

"souvenir? "What kind of souvenir?"

"It's not an item with any special meaning. "I wondered if it was really necessary, but I just felt uncomfortable thinking about doing it without you."

After roughly explaining that, Mores immediately sank into the bed

and closed his eyes as if he was tired.

"Now that I've given you everything, go ahead. "Don't be a bother for no reason."

"what? men and horses! You're so annoying to the people who came to see you... ..!"

"There won't be time for this, right? You also need to prepare properly. "You're not planning on going out to the imperial palace dinner like that, are you?"

"huh? "What do you think you look like now?"

As Owen rubbed his greaves with a puzzled look, Mores frowned and scolded him.

"Are you asking because you don't know that? "A subject with a head like a chicken with all its feathers plucked out."

"Ssamdak... what?"

I opened my mouth dumbfounded by the harshest evaluation I've ever received, but Mores continued to criticize him with a sullen look on his face.

"Besides, what's with the clothes? "If you can't afford to dress up formally, you should at least give the impression that you are neat in the eyes of others!"

"no... .."

"You mean they did that and then held a triumphal ceremony? "The more I think about it, the more absurd it is."

Take an example from Logan. No matter how rough he gets on the battlefield, he maintains his uniform that looks as if it has just been ironed.

Do you understand? From now on, you should stop just wandering around the house and start to realize that you are the first prince of the Holy Empire!

Nagging comments that I never expected to hear from Mores poured out one after another.

Mores, who spoke bitterly like an elder knight disciplining a young squire, let out a small sigh with a slightly tired expression.

"Anyway, let's do something about that ugly chicken fur. "I also neatly trimmed my stray hairs while I was away."

"Chicken hair..."

Wow, isn't that such a harsh assessment?

This is the feather of a freshwater cormorant. It's a decoration that's like a symbol of a strong warrior! Even if you look at it, don't you feel that it has a gloss that is completely different from that of chicken fur?

However, Owen did not have time to properly correct the unfair evaluation. Because an eerie light flashed in the boy's eyes as he stared at him fiercely.

"what a waste. "If I had a little more energy than I do now, I would have plucked out all that ugly chicken hair."

"... ... !"

It was clearly a dying thing, but somehow I could feel a strange force in its bloody mutterings.

As the startled Owen flinched back, Mores' personal maid beside him smiled and walked toward him.

"Don't worry, my dear. "I will select them all on your behalf."

"Yes, Edith. Pass this message to the people who use the main palace. "Try to give that guy a proper shine before dinner."

"All right."

Thump!

"Then, Owen. "Please excuse me for a moment."

The strength of the arms of the maid pulling Owen was unusual. He looked a little embarrassed and asked Mores.

"Mores. What is this? "Your maid, you seem to be a fairly high-level Auror user, right?"

"hmm. yes."

Then the boy blinked as if he was a little sleepy and answered in a hushed voice. For some reason, he held out his small palm in front of him.

"So, look at this and listen to me as carefully as you did before. in vain... "Don't bother resisting."

Look at your hands? why?

I couldn't understand the English text at all.

"But why is this woman not in the knights' order, and is she acting as an unsuitable maid?"

"Yeah... To the knights, a plate for Edith... Since there is no one to throw it..."

... plate?

"What does that mean... ... ?"

But there is no longer any response from Mores. The boy slowly lowered his arms and then slowly closed his eyes as if he was falling asleep.

Even at first glance, it didn't seem like an ordinary sleep. Because his breathing was extremely unstable, and his rapidly flushed complexion was unusual.

Owen didn't know what to do due to the sudden situation, but Masain walked up to the boy's side, carefully touched his forehead, and said,

"... "Your fever is rising again."

Although he had a calm demeanor as if he had experienced this situation often, the driver was still unable to hide his worried expression.

Owen was also vividly feeling the severity of the situation. Even though I was just near the bed, I could already sense the intense heat radiating from Mores.

It was such a strong heat that it seemed as if it could burn a small boy in an instant.

'this... what?'

What on earth is happening to Mores now? Can the human body naturally generate such high fever?

"Don't worry, sir. "Your Majesty will probably come soon."

"Your father?"

But as soon as those words were finished, the door to the treatment room burst open and Seonghwang rushed in!

I had no idea how someone who had been at the conference hall just moments before knew and rushed to me so immediately.

"Mores!"

Wow-

As powerful divine power poured down on his head like a miracle, the boy's breathing gradually began to become more even.

The aura that was running wild in my body quiets down, and the heat that seemed like it could burst into flames quickly subsides.

'Your father is truly amazing!'

Owen, who had now reached a certain level, could roughly feel what Seonghwang was doing.

He was now using both divine power and auror, skillfully controlling Mores' auror as if it were his own.

A mysterious state that the current Owen cannot reach even in his dreams.

"... ..?"

But why?

At some point, the Holy Emperor completely stopped using Aurors, and began pouring out only divine power towards Mores. Even though he could still feel a slight heat somewhere in his body.

Mores seemed more comfortable than before, but traces of the fierce fever still remained in his exhaled breath.

"... why?"

Why on earth doesn't my father completely get rid of that heat?

Owen could not finish his question, but Seonghwang understood what he was saying and gave the answer obediently.

"Because this heat is Mores' natural auror."

"Mores's... "Are you coming?"

"okay. The flames that have engulfed my entire body have already become one with Mores, and I can no longer distinguish between Fia."

Therefore, the heat cannot be completely driven out from the son's body.

If you do something like that, not only will the child completely lose his auror and become a bad person, but if you make a mistake, you may even lose your life!

Owen's face suddenly contorted as he realized the seriousness of the situation.

"... Well then, father. What should Mores do now? ... ?"

Grumbling.

Owen, who had even forgotten the existence of the golden elixir in his hand, clenched his fist violently as if he were going to crush it.

Then Seonghwang, who stared at Owen's face for a moment, slowly raised his hand and covered his head.

And then he begins to lightly stroke the head of his godson, who has already grown to a similar height, as if he were a child. One day, when Owen couldn't sleep because of a nightmare, she always comforted him in that way.

"Don't make that face, Owen. "Isn't today an auspicious day for you to return to the imperial palace after many years?"

But why?

Although the touch had not changed at all from before, what Owen actually felt was not comfort but a trace of bitterness.

No matter how much I swallow it, it cannot be resolved, and in the end, it remains piled up in layers.

Perhaps the one who really needed comfort at this moment was Seonghwang himself.

"And in the end, all of this is something Mores chose himself."

* * *

I don't know what spirit I had in attending the imperial palace banquet.

Owen, who had lost all of his feather decorations to Mores' personal maid and was neatly dressed up by the imperial palace servants, was looking like a neat nobleman for the first time in recent times.

However, Owen was so preoccupied with the problem of Mores that he did not even notice how his appearance had changed.

Then, when he suddenly came to his senses, he was already inertically moving the dishes with the food in front of him.

'Meanwhile, the rice is really delicious.'

A rich table that shows special care was taken just for you. As I was hesitantly putting a piece of meat into my mouth, I heard bright laughter coming from beside me.

Crackling!

Even though it had been many years since they had seen each other, the twins still seemed like children, and they kept bursting into laughter as if they were having fun looking at him like that.

"Brother Owen. Are you listening to what we are saying? "Where on earth have you been preoccupied?"

In response to Herna's cheerful question, Kadesh, instead of Owen, responded politely.

"Brother Owen is probably worried about Mores. "You two have been very close recently, right?"

"... "What does that mean?"

Who are you close to? Surely you're not talking about him and Mores?

I've thought about it before, but sometimes the conversations the twins have are often incomprehensible.

"But Brother Masain ended up not attending."

"I can't help it. "Because you worry too much."

"Well, you never know when Mores will develop a high fever."

"okay. "I can't take my eyes off Mores."

It was the same for Owen.

If he hadn't been the star of today's dinner, he too would have been

unable to leave the temporary treatment room for even a moment due to anxiety.

"Prince Owen. At the triumphal ceremony, it was said that he displayed the outstanding spirit of a general, but now I see that there is no other nobleman so handsome. While you're in the ecliptic, why not attend some social gatherings? "The girls of Delcross will probably be lining up to take you as their husband."

It is not that he will be the princess, but that the ladies of Delcross will take him as their husband. It was Empress Tatiana who never forgot to say a meaningful word that seemed like a compliment.

"I am truly proud of you, Prince Owen. By performing your noble duties so well, you have become a good example for other princes and princesses. "You've had a lot of trouble in a foreign land, so let's stay in the imperial capital for a while and get some rest."

As always, the pure melody of the Empress's voice is heard.

However, neither the checks from Empress Tatiana, who tried to somehow remove him from the throne, nor the selfless praise from the kind Empress Melody, did not reach Owen's ears at all.

Because only the listless faces of Mores and the bitter Seonghwang kept lingering in my mind.

The sight was so unsettling that I even forgot for a while that I had to find a newbie right away.

'How did it happen like this? There were so many things I wanted to do when I came to the imperial capital, but why was this guy who I thought was doing well so upset like that?'

It is no longer a matter of using the ultimate elixir or not.

'Can this elixir really solve the problems inherent to humans as aurors?'

Yes, now the question was whether treatment was possible with this alone.

There are potential dangers that might attack Sisley and the Seonghwang family, as well as newbies waiting(?) for him somewhere in the imperial capital. It was nothing compared to the pain of my brother that I was seeing right now.

'Hey, Sang Tae-chang. I guess I'll have to hand this elixir over to Mores!'

Owen repeated this in his head several times, but fortunately there was no response from the status window.

It was an unexpected reaction, considering that they constantly interrupted me by citing penalties every time I did something that deviated from the quest.

But even if there is interference from Sang Tae-chang, what is the use of it all? Owen had already made up his mind.

'Starting today, this is a new quest I must complete!'

Just wait and see!

I will definitely feed this to that goby!

373. Mores Exploration Journal (1)

Owen still vividly remembers the day he first met Mores.

A chubby kid with a cute personality who was staring at him with cold gray eyes.

-What is this again?

Ironically, Mores could be said to be the most royal person Owen had ever met.

There must be something strange about people from other Seonghwang families who treat this innocent country worm who suddenly appears like a real family member.

-Owen Lockwood. The guy who came back from the dead managed to crawl all the way here.

Even after he fully entered the royal family, Mores would stubbornly call him 'Lockwood'.

Thinking about it now, it was a strange thing.

How on earth did he know his real last name? Owen never mentioned his real last name.

-Remember this clearly, you idiot! From now on, I will never call you brother. A brat like you wouldn't dare expect such treatment from this body, right?

The cold words that Mores utters every time he encounters him.

At this point, even Owen, who was unfamiliar with imperial aristocratic culture, could understand.

Mores That bastard, his personality is really shit.

* * *

It was like that...

'Mores, don't you think his interpersonal relationships are surprisingly good?'

Owen had been thinking about that recently.

As I was observing him in and out of the main palace every day, more people than I expected came to the temporary treatment room, worried about the ill third prince.

That stiff-looking Royal Guard knight was a representative example.

"Sir, how are you feeling today?"

"Very well, Sir Maria. My father treats me well. "By the way, I heard you don't have to come here every time."

"no. "It is the duty of our resident knights to protect you."

"There are royal guard knights in the main palace, right? Think of it like this is your paid vacation and go train at the training center.

"Don't worry about me."

Mores was as blunt as always when dealing with the knight who came to visit. At least that's how Owen saw it.

"What kind of useless waste of manpower is this? Moreover, since the most senior gentleman keeps coming to see me, aren't the other resident knights also getting restless and following him in and out of the main palace?"

But didn't the knight seem to smile at Mores' response?

"Thank you for worrying about the situation of our resident soldiers while they are sick. We were also very worried about the degradation."

"... "No, whatever."

Owen couldn't understand her at all. How on earth can you take Mores' words like that?

"Lowering. As you said before, we have compiled a list of new restaurants."

A knight full of freckles is also a face that Owen often sees recently. She remained particularly vivid in her memory, because her youthful face was full of unconcealed fondness and loyalty for her third prince.

"In particular, the recently opened Anatolian dessert shop is said to be popular. "I went there in person yesterday, and it was in no way inferior to the highest-end Breton pastry shops."

"Um, a dessert shop?"

Mores furrows his eyebrows. There was a clear difference in temperature compared to the driver who spoke cheerfully.

"Desserts aren't that interesting. Sir Claudia. "Is there even a menu there that could be eaten?"

Still, the driver had a smile on his face, wondering what was so good about it.

"Maybe there is. If there isn't one, you can ask them to create a new menu! Hehe, let's see if it can be packaged, shall we?"

There was also a young knight who visited with similar frequency to her. Maybe it was because of the large scar on her forehead, but she was a young man who looked somewhat dirty.

He asked Mores hesitantly, with an unusually awkward expression on his face.

"As you said... Recently, I have been devoting myself to training every day under the leader. How is my brightness now? Are there any noticeable changes?"

Even though he didn't seem to be very social at first glance, he seemed to have quite the courage to ask.

But didn't Mores, who heard those words, blatantly disparage him?

"What nonsense is that, Lord Calmen? What does auror training have to do with brightness? I guess you've been training too much lately. "You're saying all that nonsense."

"yes? Woo! But I'm sure you... ..!"

"what? Mr. Woo? Woossi? Hey, just stay there for a moment. Where has Edith gone? I'm sure I was here a while ago... .."

"Sigh! no! "I'm going to go practice now, sir!"

"why? "I'll give you a cup of tea. Drink it slowly and leave."

"it's okay! "I made a mistake!"

A young man with a strong sense of discipline stands in a straight posture and breaks into a cold sweat.

Then, Mores nagged him as if he were an old knight.

"Yes, work harder. "If you and I are going to discuss the brightness of aurors, the aura should at least be at a level where it can stably emit external air."

"But before...""

"What before?"

"... .."

"what? why? what?"

"... it's nothing."

The young knight left the temporary treatment room with a very embarrassed face.

He was a friend with a very strange personality, to keep going in and

out of this place while his face was blushing like that.

"But you."

Suddenly, Mores turned his gaze towards Owen, and he, who had been resting his chin dumbly until then, flinched and raised his head.

"huh?"

"Don't you have anything to do like that? When you come back after such a long time, you should think about going to various social gatherings and further solidifying your position in the imperial capital. "Why are you rolling around here on this stupid day?"

Only then did Owen suddenly realize.

If you think about it, you yourself were one of those people who went in and out of temporary treatment rooms every day without hearing good things!

"ah..."

Owen was shocked for a moment, but then remembered his purpose and took out a golden elixir from his pocket.

The reason why he visits the main palace every day recently. It was all because of the determination to feed Mores the ultimate elixir.

"Come on, Mores. Look at this. This brilliant medicine that shines gold. Doesn't it look as sweet as honey?"

"... "Are you talking about that again?"

The boy looked completely fed up.

"no. "I told you I wouldn't eat it."

"Is this really good? I found it the hard way. One bite, just one bite...
"No, can't I just taste it?"

"If it's that good, you can eat it all."

"Oh really... ... !"

I don't know if I've been in vain for several days already.

At this point, you might have listened to him at least once to see his sincerity, but the stubborn Mores guy was always stubborn.

'There's really no promise at this rate!'

Should I just feed it secretly? Owen was so conflicted for a moment.

However, no matter how good the medicine is, if you give it to the other person without their consent, how is that different from an attempt to poison someone?

In addition, Sir Martha, who never left Mores' side, was also a problem. A former knight commander who is rumored to soon become a Dekaron Knight.

Even though Owen is currently being praised as a hero of the Southern Front, it would be close to impossible for him to mix the elixir into Mores' meal without that person knowing.

"... .."

You can still see it now.

Sir Martha was staring at the elixir in Owen's hand with an incomprehensible expression. It looks like they are suspicious of the source of the elixir.

'In the end, it means that we have no choice but to persuade Mores himself.'

Anyway, why do I hate this so much? This is the ultimate elixir. It is an invincible recovery item that eliminates all status ailments and even death penalties!

"Oh, this is really good! "There is no way to express it!"

As Owen, frustrated, pounded his chest, Mores looked at him in bewilderment.

"... "Are you an idiot?"

While they were arguing, one of the main palace servants brought Mores a late lunch.

Owen looked into the tray out of curiosity, and there was a thin soup with a strange smell on it.

"Is this delicious? "It smells a bit pungent for a patient's food, doesn't it?"

Since it didn't look very appetizing, I asked about it, and surprisingly got an obedient answer.

"It's because it contains bear meat. "Once you get used to it, it's worth eating."

"Oh, I see."

Owen looked at Mores with a slightly curious expression.

Seeing that he somehow responds to my questions even though he clearly looks annoyed, it seems like something has definitely changed.

'that's interesting. 'I can't believe I can live so peacefully with this guy.'

So, it looks like he's probably going to keep talking to me next to me.

"By the way, bear meat? Mores, do you like that? "Before, I only ate sweets every day."

"What nonsense are you talking about? Of course, you eat it because you like it."

"okay? But why do you frown like that while eating?"

Owen asked quietly.

Are you sure you really like it? I'm trying to force myself to swallow, but somehow my stomach feels very uncomfortable.

'Besides, I feel like I have less energy than before... ... '

That was when I thought about it.

Cheer up!

The spoon was thrown to the floor with a loud sound. Mores didn't throw it, but the cutlery simply slipped from his weakened hands.

"Lowering!"

"Mores!?"

The two people were shocked to see Mores staggering while sitting, but the Holy Emperor, who came running straight from his office, immediately poured powerful divine power on the boy.

Paaaa-

The temporary treatment room is suddenly engulfed in bright light.

"Mores, are you okay?"

After a while.

In response to Seonghwang's worried question, the guy who was out of breath just now opened his eyes and happily pretended to understand.

"... Uh, father. "Are you here?"

Then, his face soon becomes normal, and he clicks his tongue as he looks at the messed up floor.

"Oh, what a waste of bear meat soup...""

Looking at that carefree look, I started crying without even realizing it! My stomach turned.

"Mores, you man!"

Owen was yelling at the boy without even realizing it. If he had been like him before, it was something he would never have imagined.

"Is soup the problem in this situation? Don't pretend like you're okay

and just think about eating. If you're sick, tell me in advance that you're sick! If you do that, what happens to the people around you! Huh?"

"hmm? But it didn't hurt that much earlier."

"Ah, this bastard is still... ..!"

Wow-!

As Owen felt his blood pressure rising rapidly and held the back of his neck, Seonghwang, who somehow knew, approached him and secretly showered him with divine power. He had a calm demeanor, as if this was not the first time something like this had happened.

Hwaaah-

The divine power that gave me a somewhat familiar feeling gave me a strange feeling, and the Holy Emperor continued to pour out the divine power towards Lord Masain next to him.

Then Sir Masain bowed his head politely and expressed his gratitude.

"Thank you, Your Majesty. Thanks to this, my chronic gastritis has gotten much better recently."

Owen somehow felt like he deserved to know.

How much trouble did Mores have to endure to cause chronic gastritis to occur in powerful Auror users as high as senior knights?

* * *

In the end, Owen, who failed to feed Mores the elixir again today, left the temporary treatment room with a slightly mixed feeling.

But it was just as he was about to leave the main palace lobby.

"Ugh! "Please save me!"

A rather familiar scream was heard from afar. It was a scream from a minority tribe in Barsha, something rarely heard in the imperial

capital.

"When are you coming back, Owen?"

Ah, Bartoja. I forgot about that guy.

Owen clicked his tongue and turned in the direction of the sound.

Eventually, the cowardly Bartoja, who was noticed by Wakana Tusai, suffered from extreme fear as soon as the Great Tribal Council ended.

So he grabbed Owen by the leg of his pants and clung to him desperately. She asked me to take her with me on my way back to the imperial capital.

The result was this.

He had been restlessly following Owen every day, but now he was screaming as he was crushed by a huge wolf in the courtyard of the imperial palace.

"Look at this, Owen! The tribal chief of Delcross is raising such a fearsome monster!"

What a monster. Although it is a little big, it is not an ordinary wolf.

As Owen approached them, the wolf that had been happily playing with Bartoja looked up and caught Owen's scent.

Sniff!

Then, something unexpected happened. The wolf suddenly lifted his muzzle and began howling mournfully into the air.

Awww-!

I couldn't understand the English text at all.

"oh! Owen! Purma's old friend!"

Meanwhile, Bartoja ran away and hid behind Owen. It seems like it was only yesterday that he came to me to seek revenge on the Purma tribe, but the more I saw him, the quicker he changed his attitude.

Ooooh-! Kiing! Wow!

"Owen! "Please, please do something to that monster!"

A wolf is howling loudly in front, and an annoying Bartosa is clinging to the back, trembling.

Owen scratched his head in embarrassment.

"Why is a wolf wandering around in the palace courtyard? "Isn't it dangerous?"

When I see the knights of the main palace guard keeping it quiet, I wonder if it is being raised by someone in the imperial palace.

I stretched out my hand and the wolf stopped howling and came closer.

Then he sticks his nose into Owen's hand and sniffs it again. Contrary to its violent appearance, it does not seem to be aggressive towards people.

"uh? How amazing? "Isn't Max the type of guy who is so kind to people he meets for the first time?"

At that time, a maid holding a large dog bowl approached and opened her mouth. She was the dedicated maid of Mores, who was also acquainted with Owen.

"I guess I caught the scent of Prince Mores from you."

"The smell of Mores?"

"Yes, sir. "This wolf dog is the dog kept by His Majesty Mores."

"okay?"

When he stroked the back of his neck, the wolfdog did not avoid his touch, but stared at Owen's face with amber eyes.

There was no sign of tail slapping or gentle stroking. It was almost like a noble attitude, as if she would just put up with this out of

consideration for her friendship with her owner.

'When I think about it that way, I think he kind of resembles that guy Mores... ..!'

Sweet.

When Edith put the food bowl down on the floor, the wolf-dog jerked Owen's hand away and began to eat leisurely. For a dog, he was truly unusual.

"Well, he's not easy."

"Yes, Max really knows people in a funny way. Isn't that the case in Barcelona? "If they show even the slightest bit of clumsiness, they are immediately treated as Max's toys."

???

While waiting for the dog to finish eating, Edith told Owen about the situation.

"His Majesty Mores has instructed us to keep Max away from him for a while. From then on, Max came to the main palace courtyard and cried, looking for his wife."

I never imagined that Mores would raise a dog. Looking at it desperately looking for its owner, it looks like it's very cute.

"But why are you only separating the dogs? "Even though he is in a hospital bed, everyone still visits Zalman Mores."

"From what I heard, it seems that it is because Max is very sensitive to the lower aura. So, you might be worried that it will affect you and make you sick."

"Are you sensitive to auras?"

Owen's eyes widened at the unexpected answer. However, the maid's explanation that followed was even more absurd.

"Yes, sir. It is said that Max will transform into a great person by

using the auror of Mores, right?"

"transform... what... ... ?"

Even though I heard it, I still can't understand what it means.

Owen was dumbfounded, but Edith added an explanation with an extremely serious expression.

"Yes, sir. It transforms. "This dog is [Wind], the divine beast of the main god, praised throughout the world."

... Huh?

374. Mores Exploration Journal (2)

A knight who defeated a demon race with the grace of the main god.

Savior of Sigismund and Bathurst.

The owner of the divine beast [Wind].

The second coming of the great Saint Bastian.

Surprisingly, all of these were modifiers referring to Mores.

Owen, who had been concentrating on feeding him elixir after returning to the imperial capital, was dumbfounded when he belatedly heard these rumors.

what? That guy, Mores, hasn't he somehow become a huge guy even though we haven't seen him in a long time?

"People all over the Imperial Capital are talking about that right now. "Maybe if Master Owen had even gone out of the palace for a moment, he would have known about it."

Carrie, the dedicated maid, lightly scolded Owen.

She is an old woman with a savory Rohan accent in every word she speaks. She was a well-established maid who took care of Owen while he was in the imperial palace, and I heard she even served the previous empress.

"Can't you see the pile of invitations over there? So many people are looking for you, Owen, so why don't you even think about looking into it?"

Current imperial figures were very interested in the heroes of the

Southern Front.

A young, handsome, unmarried prince.

There were many reasons to build friendships. Even though there were rumors that he was not Seonghwang's biological son, his enormous achievements and political influence were not something that could be easily ignored.

Of course, there would be genuine curiosity about the prince, who rarely shows his face in social circles.

But Owen's reaction was sour.

"Where do you have time to go to such useless places?"

"Owen is the eldest of the Seonghwang family. Shouldn't you build your network and presence in the social world? Even Prince Mores is said to show up at social gatherings once in a while these days."

"It's him. Either way. I don't have enough time to spend with my family. "If the situation in the South suddenly changes, we may have to rush to the front again."

For Owen, his position as a prince was a good thing. Because the only thing that mattered to him was the safety of the Holy Family.

"Oh my. "If you missed your family so much, they would have come back a long time ago."

Carrie shook her head.

"And when you come back, you don't stay in the Blue Rose Labyrinth even for a moment. Same goes for Logan and Owen. "The owners have left the palace empty for such a long time, so the old man has been lonely for a long time."

"hmm. that... "No shame, Carrie."

"Don't apologize if you don't mean it. Well, considering that I stayed at the imperial palace, it's good that things seem to have become easier in my later years."

Carrie, who was grumbling and sorting out Owen's clothes, was as affectionate as ever.

But the sight of her, who had aged significantly over the years, somehow aroused Owen's heartbreaking sorrow.

"By the way, Mr. Owen. "I made and sent out new, stiff clothes every quarter, so why are they all tattered?"

Owen, who couldn't see her threading with his bleary eyes, took the needle and thread from her.

"I couldn't help it, Carrie. I was always on the battlefield. "Every day was a series of tough battles."

"Heng! "You must be young."

Carrie snorted as she took back the neatly threaded thread.

"This old man assures me that not all knights on the southern front are like Owen. "You've been dressing very sloppily ever since you were young, right?"

... Was it like that?

Since I had freshly ironed clothes ready every morning, this was something I hadn't paid any attention to until now.

"If you think about it, even among the children of the Seonghwang family, Owen was really special. How did the clothes fall off so easily? She must have been fighting over clothes every day with Prince Mores."

"... huh? I?"

Owen blinked after hearing the unexpected words. She and Mores would growl at each other whenever they saw her face, but she couldn't remember the details of why they fought.

Then Carrie narrowed her eyes behind her reading glasses and responded.

"Why not? After being scolded for being unkempt in our clothes, we fight, and after another fight, our clothes become more dirty, and Prince Mores points this out again. Because that vicious cycle continued continuously. "I wondered what on earth they were doing to watch the two of them from the side."

"... .."

"Well, you were both young back then."

Carrie, who had said that, started sewing while humming.

Fluttering. The soft fabric is pierced at regular intervals, creating a rhythm similar to the sound of music.

Owen closed his eyes for a moment and quietly listened to Carrie's humming and the sound of sewing, which he had not heard in a long time.

"Still, there were times when this old man was grateful to Prince Mores."

At the sudden sound of Carrie's voice, Owen, who had been leaning on the sofa, opened his eyes and looked up at her.

"thanks? "To that guy?"

What on earth?

"Well, if Owen had a nightmare, wouldn't he have no appetite and be lethargic all day? But after fighting Prince Mores, strangely enough, I completely forget all my morning worries, right?"

That unlucky guy! I can never forgive you like this! If you want to fight him properly, you need to save up your stamina! Carrie had a humorous expression and imitated the grumpy Owen.

"You used to say that and empty a bowl of food in no time. "Owen, you should be a little simpler."

I thought she was vaguely reminiscing, but then a blasphemous word came out of her mouth.

Carrie has always had that attitude. She seemed to be getting older and closer to death, but she showed the courage to not care about minor blasphemies.

Of course, Owen actually felt comfortable with that aspect of her.

"I said that? "I don't remember anything at all?"

When Owen opened his mouth in surprise, Carrie wrinkled her eyes and smiled mischievously.

"Of course. So, sometimes, when I felt like I was feeling too lazy, I would ask the escort drivers to take a walk along the Jinju Palace street. "Have you not noticed that at all until now?"

"... .. !?"

Owen was almost delirious from repeated shock.

The person who always warmly comforted him when he had a hard time confessing the severe criticism he received from Mores.

A person like my paternal grandmother, who would greet me with warm bath water when I came home covered in dirt.

At least that's what Carrie looked like in Owen's memories.

'however... .. '

In fact, she considered their disagreements to be insignificant children's fights, and sometimes even deliberately encouraged them to clash?

No matter how glorified our childhood memories are, how can people change so much?

"Wait a minute, Carrie! Does that mean it's real? "I was very serious at the time!"

"Well then, why not? "When you're young, everyone is serious about trivial things."

"no! Really? What did that bastard Mores say to me when I was at my most sensitive... ..!"

"A person who is so sensitive runs around the entire imperial palace tearing off his clothes every time? You don't even care about being criticized? "Isn't it really funny?"

Owen's protests had no effect on Carrie.

"So, why don't you just let bygones be bygones? "Stop hating Prince Mores."

Rattling.

Owen creaked and turned his head at the sudden, direct remark that hit the nail on the head.

"... "Who on earth can you hate?"

When Carrie answered in a slightly weak voice, she stopped sewing and looked at Owen intently.

"Do you really think that? Don't try to fool this old man. "While Owen was on the southern front, did you ever send a letter to Prince Mores?"

"... .."

"This old man doesn't know that Owen thinks fondly of everyone in the Seonghwang family. But isn't it true that you only treat Prince Mores harshly?"

I couldn't bear to deny it.

Although Owen regularly sent news to the royal family and even to his personal maid, Carrie, he had never written a letter to Mores.

The reason was obvious.

Because I really hated Mores.

"Well, that guy told me first..." .."

"When you first came to the imperial palace, how many people behaved like that in front of Master Owen? But you didn't care one bit, Mr. Owen, did you? Think about it carefully."

"... .."

"I am saying that you have become a great general now, but in the past, Owen had many things that made him uneasy, even to this old man."

A boy who suddenly becomes the first prince of the empire and receives everyone's attention. The emotions contained in those sharp gazes could never have been friendly.

In addition, Owen was so obsessed with his parents' death that he had nightmares every day. Thinking back, it seems like his heart at the time was full of aimless sadness and resentment.

"Of course, His Majesty, the prince, and the princess worked hard for Owen. But I guess that alone wouldn't have been enough. "How can a person live by hearing only good things and saying only good things?"

"... .."

"But Mr. Owen doesn't know anyone else in the imperial palace.

"Then who else could there have been at that time, other than Prince Mores, whom one could easily curse and hate?"

"No, Carrie. that... ..!"

Owen, who was about to respond angrily, immediately closed his mouth and took a deep breath. Because he suddenly had strong doubts about himself.

Was it really not that?

The death of his parents, a rapid change in environment, and strong pressure to live up to his status.

Can you completely guarantee that you did not use the disagreement with Mores as a kind of breakthrough to relieve those heavy

emotions?

"Owen, you've become a full-fledged adult now, right? "You must humbly acknowledge what is acceptable and accept what is acceptable."

Sigh.

Carrie cut the thread with scissors and presented the neatly repaired shirt to Owen.

"In this old man's opinion, the fight you two had at the time was not something worth taking to heart. "He compares himself to other brothers and swears at them, right? Prince Mores wasn't that vicious at the time."

Owen could not accept what he had just heard. Mores is a vicious person. Isn't this a fact that everyone in the imperial palace knows?

-Don't you dare mistake yourself for being a member of the Holy Family, Owen Lockwood. You're just a village worm who was lucky enough to survive!

-Are you walking around the imperial palace proudly even though you're such a shabby person? It would be better for you to leave the ecliptic as quickly as possible and quietly settle down in a corner of the continent. And live as a puppet who only listens to what the next person tells you! Then you'll be at least half of what everyone else is doing!

Because Mores was a member of the Holy Family, the verbal abuse was even more heartbreaking.

But now Carrie is saying that all of that was just nothing.

"In this old man's opinion, Prince Mores was just a child who grew up spoiled and had no knack for dealing with people."

Carrie smiled gently, looking at the confused Owen. With eyes full of wisdom that only an old man who has lived through a long period of time can have.

"It is the duty of a superior to boldly forgive and move on from the facade of childhood. "Didn't our eccentric Mr. Owen, since he was young, have a generosity that was larger than the southern prairies?"

375. Mores Exploration Journal (3)

That evening.

Owen, who was influenced by Carrie and went back to see Mores, soon came to regret his thoughts.

'huh. It was all just your imagination, Carrie. Mores That bastard is the worst-tempered bastard on the continent! 'You're a stubborn idiot who can't be saved!'

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't communicate at all with Mores, who started acting recklessly.

'Why? I thought I explained it quite seriously, but why aren't you listening to me this much?'

In order to persuade Mores, he even made up the source of the elixir using his brain that was not working well.

It is an all-purpose cure that priest Bart, a living saint, personally brewed herbs said to be good for the body and prayed and blessed them every day!

Of course, I didn't ask for the person's permission, but I firmly believe that Priest Bart would understand.

"hey! Do you know how precious this cure is? We newbies worked so hard to find an item that was completely out of stock on the server...
... !"

It was so heated that the real source almost came out.

As Owen hurriedly covered his mouth, Mores glanced at him and responded with a sullen look on his face again.

"... No matter how good the treatment is, what do you do? It's no use to me now anyway. "I won't listen."

"No, that means you should try it out first to see if it's useful or not!"

"no. Why do I need to confirm something I know so clearly?

"Anyway, there is no cure stronger than my father's divine power."

"But there is one possibility!"

Owen shouted, unable to hide his nervousness. If it was any later, he didn't know when he would have another chance to persuade him like this. Lord Masaine's eyes were slowly looking at him and becoming unusual.

But perhaps unaware of his anxiousness, Mores' reaction was consistent.

"huh. doesn't exist. And that thing looks really tasty."

"Kaaaaak!"

In the end, Owen, who was caught by the back of his neck, was only able to calm down after receiving some divine power from the Holy Emperor who appeared a while later. It goes without saying that in the meantime, Mores had a high fever again.

'Why on earth are you so stubborn? For a subject that is having such a hard time.'

Looking at Mores, who was wheezing, Owen desperately grabbed the elixir. Then, Seonghwang, who was watching her silently, opened her mouth quietly.

"You keep bringing it up, Owen. "Can you tell me what it is for?"

"... Ah yes. father."

I never thought it would attract the attention of Seonghwang.

Owen suddenly came to his senses, hesitated for a moment, and then opened his mouth with difficulty.

"This... Obtained with great difficulty in the South... "It's good medicine for your body."

I couldn't bear to tell him a long lie, so I blurted out my words awkwardly, but Seonghwang nodded as if he didn't seem to mind.

"... okay. "It looks like that."

"... .."

"Mores says it's useless now, so doesn't that mean it might be different next time? Please take good care of it. "I will bless that place."

Seonghwang, who said something meaningful, poured divine power on the elixir and then disappeared beyond the office.

"... ..?"

For a moment, I was taken aback by a completely unexpected situation. Owen sat down next to the bed, collecting the elixir.

Still, there was one good thing. I felt like Lord Masaine's eyes had lost some strength as he looked at the elixir.

Owen sighed and caught a glimpse of a small window floating below his gaze.

[Main Stream 3? Progress 0%]

After completing Main Stream 2, it is a main stream that rarely progresses. Perhaps it's because the prerequisite quests haven't been completed.

[Special Quest? Let's go back to the ecliptic!]

[Quest Grade: E]

[The goddess who rules one dimension received a special request from someone and collected the essence of all things in one place. Thanks to that invisible effort, you were able to obtain the 'Ultimate Elixir' easier than you thought. It goes without saying that precious

things always have a valuable use. Now you must return to the ecliptic and find someone to gift this item to.]

[Reward: 30 P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

Owen took a close look at the quest floating at the top of the status window.

'When did you return to Delcross...? ... '

The title is 'Let's go back to the ecliptic', but why on earth does this quest show no signs of being completed? I asked Sang Chang-chang several times, but there was no clear answer.

So Owen was wondering if there were other hidden requirements that had to be met.

-Now you have to go back to the ecliptic and find someone to gift this item to.

okay. This probably means that you have to find someone and hand over the ultimate elixir.

Considering that the title of the main stream is 'Save Seong□!', finding that person named 'Seong□' would be an urgent priority.

But who is it?

Do you really mean Sisley or your father?

'Isn't there a possibility that the target is Mores?'

That was a pretty reasonable suspicion. How many days has it been since Owen has been insisting on giving Elixir to Mores, putting aside the quest?

However, there has been no response from Sang Sang-chang so far.

There has been only one such case so far.

'It means that my actions did not deviate greatly from the direction

that Sang Sang-chang wanted.'

Originally, Sang Tae-chang was meticulous and accurate in everything, to the point where he even gave instructions on the smallest course of action when meeting the tribal leader.

However, in some cases, the status window would give ambiguous instructions like this.

A representative example was the quest about Priest Bart.

Occasionally, when his visit and Owen's schedule seemed to conflict, Sang Sang-chang would urge him to return to camp, citing all kinds of strange reasons.

All you have to do is launch the quest 'Let's meet Priest Bart waiting at the camp!' Didn't he just avoid mentioning it at all, as if it was difficult to even talk about it?

'It was the same when I met Nazranka in the Volanta tribe.'

The quest Owen received at the time was like this.

[Special Quest? Get helpers to help you in Volanta!]

Other than that, there was no information at all, so I wandered around and was about to give up.

However, when I met a stubborn-looking shaman at the elders' council, I was surprised to find that the quest was suddenly completed!

I never dreamed that she would be a helper. Volanta's shaman, Nazranka, has long been famous for having great antipathy toward the empire.

As a result, she surprisingly maintained thorough neutrality, preventing excessive opposition from other elders.

When Owen once asked the reason, Nazranka answered:

-The Great Spirit wants me to do so.

Yes, even then, Sang Sang-chang didn't say anything. I just let Owen move on and let things go as they went.

While Owen was lost in thought-

Grumble.

Sir Martha drew a large armchair and sat down across the bed from Owen.

Then, he started taking out handicraft items from his arms.

"Still, seeing His Majesty Mores lying in the treatment room like this, while my heart aches, I think there is also a part of me that feels at ease. "You won't have any dangerous accidents for a while."

Then, in a polite manner, he begins to engrave cute flower petals on the blue cloth.

Owen, who was curious to see what this was, looked at him blankly for a moment and then asked.

"... embroidery? "Do you do all the embroidery?"

"yes. This is also quite a mental discipline. "There is no better hobby for dealing with angry emotions."

I also felt like I knew who I was angry about.

"Just wait a moment. Don't you think you have a worthy old man now? "I will make you a cone that suits you well."

"... ... ?"

Old man, what do you think? What is that?

He wanted to ask that, but Owen couldn't open his mouth quickly. This is because Sir Martha soon began to devote himself to embroidery with a serious attitude.

width. Slurp. Width, slither.

For a while, the quiet room was filled with only the sound of the

needle and thread moving.

"... .."

That was when Owen was rolling his eyes helplessly, looking at Mores' face and then at the needle.

"Childhood... So, before you came to the imperial palace, Prince Mores at that time was very different from the person you knew."

"... Is that so?"

"Yes, he was a very kind and lively person. "There has never been such a lovely little prince in the world."

Kind and... activity? Lovely?

It was a sight that Owen could not have imagined at all.

However, a gentle smile that could not be hidden was on Lord Masain's lips as he reminisced about the past for the first time in a long time.

"At first, I thought I should become an imperial knight for Ilshin's well-being. But not long after I met Prince Mores, I was able to discover the true purpose of my life. "Being by Prince Mores' side and dedicating my life to protecting him."

"... .."

"Whatever causes harm to Him, I will directly condemn with my own hands."

Sir Martha, who had said that, stopped sewing and looked directly at Owen.

"That's why I wanted to ask you from a long time ago. "This is the product that Your Majesty has forced Prince Mores to take several times."

Although his eyes seemed calm at first glance, a strong fire was quietly burning in the center of those eyes.

"Is it really a cure? Are you acting like that because you think it is absolutely necessary for Prince Mores?"

Owen realized something again at that question.

That knight, who just seemed like a good person, was the one who spent the prosperous era of his predecessors in the middle of the imperial palace when plots and secret tactics were rampant.

In other words, those who do not fully believe in these peaceful times. So, having already decided to stand on Mores' side, he is ready to make a heartless choice whenever necessary.

Oh soso.

Suddenly, a faint goosebump appeared down my spine.

Nevertheless, Owen was proud. Even though he could not completely sort out his feelings for Mores, his affection for the entire Seonghwang family was sincere.

And if something happens to Mores like this, his loved ones will surely be greatly saddened.

So I was able to answer confidently.

"Yes, it is. I understand that you might not be willing to believe this. But this is something that will benefit Mores, but will never harm him."

"... .."

"As proof, didn't your father just consecrate this himself?"

Then Sir Martha, who looked into his eyes for a moment, slowly nodded.

"yes. "I will trust you."

Owen was momentarily relieved by that answer.

But Sir Martha's business did not end there.

"If you do, can you leave it to me for now?"

"... yes?"

"I also have the same thoughts as Prince Mores right now. Now that His Majesty the Holy Emperor is by our side, there will be no cure in the world as helpful as His Majesty's divine power. But if the day ever comes when Prince Mores needs it... .."

Lord Masaine, who had said that much, hesitated for a moment and then added.

"And if a day comes when your Majesty is inevitably unable to help the prince, then Masain I will personally give you the cure. "Can't we do that?"

"... .."

Originally, it was something that could never have happened. A precious elixir that you never know when you can get it again.

However, perhaps because of the serious atmosphere that Sir Martha gave off, Owen was moving his hands as if he was possessed without even realizing it.

And just as I dropped the elixir into Lord Martha's hands-

Tiring!

Owen could finally hear the little beep he had been waiting for.

It was an update sound announcing the completion of the quest.

[Special Quest? Let's go back to the ecliptic! (Completed)]

376. Mores Exploration Journal (4)

Owen, who returned to the Blue Rose Labyrinth, sat down on the sofa with a dazed expression. In one hand she was holding a small cone that Sir Massaine had made for her.

[Special Quest - Let's go back to the ecliptic! (complete)]

As I looked at the small window blinking in front of me, I felt a strange sense of emptiness.

'The ultimate elixir is probably... ... '

It will be used by or for Mores. If so, there is a high probability that Main Stream 3 will also revolve around Mores.

'I was planning on giving it to him anyway, regardless of the quest.'

Nevertheless, when I found out the truth, I couldn't help but lose my motivation.

Owen has never neglected his quest even for a moment. First, to make myself stronger. Next, to be of some help to the Seonghwang family. And recently, I have devoted myself to a quest day and night to protect my beloved family.

But the person I tried so hard to save turned out to be that obnoxious guy I had been fighting against!

Of course, no matter what crisis was coming to Mores, Owen would not have turned a blind eye to it in the end.

But even if he had known the truth a long time ago, would he have been able to put all his effort into the quest like he did before?

Frankly, Owen couldn't guarantee that. Perhaps the status window was well aware of this, so it deliberately 'Save Castle□!' He might have come up with the same ambiguous title.

'You know what? I somehow feel greatly deceived, Sang Sang-chang!'

I grumbled into the air, but the status window showed no response.

Right then-

smart.

With a small knocking sound on the window, a small new figure wearing a stealth suit entered the room. He was an informant for the Monkey Watchtower who had been assisting him for a long time.

"Lowering. "I'm a little late."

Owen couldn't hide his joy and shouted at the round-faced woman who greeted him warmly.

"No. 9!"

She was a fairly old veteran informant who had remained on the southern front to finish the job even after Owen left.

It would probably be close to impossible to immediately hand over the complex task of moving between pagan tribes with diverse languages and customs to someone else.

So, after handing over the work to the successor informant as meticulously as possible, she belatedly followed Owen to the imperial capital.

"Welcome back, No. 9. "What's the mood like in the South these days?"

"For now it is quiet. Perhaps it's because Karazhan, the most aggressive of all, is being uncharacteristically cautious. Most of the other tribes also seem to welcome the truce."

Number 9 was using a quick and light tone that was unbecoming of

his middle age. Although he was naturally irritable and fast-talking, over the years he had been with Owen, this tendency had become more evident.

Owen was partly to blame for this as well. As he undertook his duties and stayed hidden among the Varsha tribes for a long time under his orders, his pronunciation of the imperial language gradually became muffled and eventually began to resemble the tone of the pagans.

"According to rumors, Wakana Tusai is currently struggling with the succession issue. "She has already chosen her young eldest daughter as her successor, but it looks like her eldest son Wakana Kushat's opposition is not easy."

Unlike Volanta, Karazhan is a tribe where power is mostly passed down through maternal lines. This was due to Barça's long-held belief that his daughter had a deeper blood connection.

However, parents do not always agree with their children's farming, and sometimes a child is born who is so outstanding that he shakes up all the traditions.

This was the case with Wakana Kushat, the eldest son of Wakana Tusai.

"okay. I saw him at the Great Tribal Council. He seemed quite confident and ambitious."

Owen also saw the potential for the next successor in Wakana Kushat. If anything, she would have thought of slowly becoming acquainted with him first, after putting aside old Wakana Tusai.

If Owen, an outsider, felt that way, he could well imagine how much of a waste of talent he must have been in the eyes of his fellow tribesmen.

Thanks to this, the Karazhan Presbyterian Council was recently divided into two groups, which seemed to be causing a lot of commotion. There was a reason why Wakana Tusai, the old fox, so obediently agreed to the truce.

"Anyway, how have you been these days? "Why does your

complexion look bad?"

"hmm. Actually... .."

Owen, who usually enjoys chatting with No. 9, slowly opened up about his recent concerns. Of course, except for the status window and quests.

And when No. 9 heard what Carrie had said to Owen, he immediately became angry.

"Does that make sense? "She's like a fucking old woman!"

"No. 9. "Do you think differently?"

"Of course! That old man really knows nothing! He's never trained as an Auror, so he's probably never heard the details of what you two were talking about! "Aren't you just saying that the kids are fighting among themselves again?!"

Number 9 wheezed indignantly, as if he had been insulted.

"Prince Mores has clearly crossed the line! "It was never a problem that could be easily resolved!"

"hmm. Right."

Although other people's positions were so clear, Owen, the person involved, was rather confused.

Maybe it's because people have changed so much, but recently I felt like my hatred for Mores was gradually diluting.

"Well, in a way, it's not unreasonable. Wasn't Grandma Carrie the faithful maid of honor to Empress Bethsheba? So, no matter what others say, if it's the people of Seonghwang, all we can do is look at it positively and move on!"

As said, Carrie's previous owner was Empress Bethsheba, the mother of the current emperor. She is said to have served and followed the abandoned empress both materially and spiritually until the previous empress threw her out to another villa.

Perhaps it was all thanks to Carrie that Empress Bethsheba, who had no divine power, was able to survive for so long in the villa where poisoning attempts were rampant every day.

Because she was like that, she would have been able to sincerely take care of Owen, who suddenly came in and joined the royal family. When she becomes a dedicated maid who has been in the imperial palace for a long time, her arrogance is bound to be high, most of the time unnecessarily.

However, unlike Owen, who was grateful to Carrie, No. 9 seemed to be dissatisfied with her dull and indifferent treatment every time.

"How dare you help me with such a lax attitude, I cannot forgive you! Well, that nasty old lady has always been like that! So, I can serve the mentally ill empress whom everyone else was reluctant to do without any thought... ..!"

psychopath?

When Owen flinched, Number 9, embarrassed, hurriedly picked up the words and swallowed them.

"... Oh, it's nothing. "I made a mistake, so just forget about it."

It seemed like he heard something loud, but Owen didn't inquire about it in detail.

Isn't the former Empress the mother of your beloved father? So, I didn't want to hear her gossip about her, no matter how absurd it was. Apart from that, though she felt the need to cheer up the overheated No. 9.

"Calm down, Number 9. "I also didn't just obediently listen to Mores' words at that time."

"that... ..!"

Number 9, who was getting angry, suddenly remembered the past and chewed his tongue without thinking.

It certainly was. When she was criticized by Prince Mores for being

ignorant, Owen would pour out a series of insults that matched her ignorance. These were swear words of incredible intensity that I had picked up on the outskirts of Rohan.

At least Carrie was probably right about one thing. When Owen played against Mores he was always full of energy and he never backed down.

"And Carrie has a point. We are not children anymore. "You can't just fight with him by the collar forever, right?"

"Lowering... .."

Number 9 looked very moved.

"I always think about you, you really have a big heart! "I wish Prince Mores could have been at least half as generous as you are."

"Stop talking nonsense, let's talk about work. Actually, number 9, there is something I really want you to do."

Owen brought up an important issue that he had been putting off because he was concerned about the sick Mores.

It's about finding the newbie you met at Pangea Chronicle.

"Lee Seong-jin... Is it called ? "It's such a strange name that the pronunciation is a bit confusing."

Number 9, who heard the whole story, tilted his head. No matter how much I listened to it, it didn't seem like a Delcross-style naming.

"okay. They said they were living in the imperial capital, but from what I heard, the surrounding environment seemed to be quite harsh. So, it would be better to search mainly in slums as much as possible."

"I understand. Just in case, I will make arrangements in areas near the Imperial Capital and report back as soon as information comes in. "Then take a break!"

Number 9 hurriedly greeted Owen and left. Due to his impatient nature, it seems that after receiving a new mission, his hands became

itchy and he couldn't bear it.

Owen, who was alone again, unconsciously placed the cone he was holding on the wooden statue in front of him.

'Looking at it like this, it seems like I get along quite well with you...
... .'

Owen looked blankly at the statue and gathered his thoughts.

In the end, the relationship between him and Mores will have to change somehow. Owen is now the only one who remembers the past resentment, and lately, it seems like Mores has been treating him uncharacteristically warmly(?).

'And there's the problem of the next quest.'

Owen moved his gaze and opened the newly shiny quest window.

[Main Quest - Find your own place! new!]

[Quest Grade: E]

[You have put to rest the long-standing feud with the pagans and brought about a truce that may have been the starting point of complete peace. You have proven yourself and established yourself as a great prince, but unfortunately, the foundation of all your achievements and reputation is currently on the Southern Front. The most efficient action to take when you don't have a solid support base is probably to help others and borrow their support. From now on, find out on your own where your power is needed within the imperial palace, and do not spare any assistance here.]

[Reward: 20 P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

Owen smiled involuntarily.

Now, take a look. Seeing as all the expressions are ambiguous, there is a high possibility that this is also a quest related to Mores.

'Well, I guess I'll just keep fighting next to him for a while. Every now and then, I receive reports about newbie searches.'

Owen stared at the statue's warm smile for a moment, then put on a black rabbit eye patch and slowly closed his eyes.

* * *

Originally, I had planned to head to the main palace as soon as morning dawned. But as soon as Owen left the auditorium's labyrinth, she had to immediately change her schedule. Because she had been asked by Amelia to take a moment.

And the place where Amelia smiled and led him was to the Pearl Palace, where the owner was currently away.

'The two of you are so close that you can come and go as you please?'

Jinju Palace had a brighter atmosphere than before.

As Owen looked around in confusion, a large number of employees came and went, politely offering their respects to Owen. Even without Mores, it seemed natural for them to come and go to Jinju Palace.

"This is the place."

The place where Amelia finally stopped was a large atelier with a bright view of the Jinju Palace courtyard.

A young painter who was concentrating on his work under a sunny window bowed his head as they entered.

"That person is the most skilled portrait painter in the imperial capital. "Mores signed a contract to employ him for life, and even provided him with a private atelier within the Pearl Palace."

"okay?"

I thought it was quite surprising that Mores would support an artist, but Amelia's next words were even more surprising.

"From now on, I will become a portrait painter dedicated to the people of Seonghwangga. He said he would draw pictures of his family throughout his life."

"... "You're drawing family?"

That Mores?

Owen once again looked at the picture the artist was working on.

It was a very magnificent picture. The image of a majestic boy standing with a wide field behind him, holding a huge sword.

"This... "Is this a portrait of Mores?"

Although it was still unfinished, it was an outstanding portrait, even to Owen, who was unfamiliar with painting.

Between the black clothes and the dark background, the person's quiet face and bright blonde hair stand out brightly.

The deep gray eyes of the boy staring straight ahead seemed to be looking through everything beyond the picture. Just as Owen often felt whenever he looked into his godfather's eyes.

"You drew it well. But doesn't he seem too mature for Mores?"

Owen looked back at Amelia with a shocked expression. Why not? In his mind, Mores was just a small child.

Of course, the reason I saw him after returning after such a long time was that he was curled up in bed and fretting.

"He's still a little kid, right?"

As I said out loud, "I'm a kid," the image of a cute friend I had recently met passed by.

Now that I think about it, I thought that Mores would be around the same age as Newbie. Sometimes he holds out his hand in front of his eyes while talking, which somehow reminds me of that little friend's habit.

He must have lived well in the imperial palace, eating only good things, but why is Mores still so small?

Then Amelia looked back at Owen and let out a small laugh.

"haha. What nonsense are you talking about? Mores is tall compared to his peers. "It's just that my brother suddenly grew so much that he looks relatively small!"

"... okay?"

"then. And how thoughtful and dignified is he? "It feels strange to me that my brother treats me like a child."

Deep in thought... Are you dignified?

That stubborn Mores who can't communicate?

However, Amelia's eyes as she looked at Mores' portrait while saying that were filled with deep, heartfelt affection.

Owen became somewhat puzzled.

When I think about it, I was the one who growled the most with Mores, but that was only because he confronted me loudly without any regard for face.

If you think about it, wasn't Amelia and Logan the ones who were hurt the most by that guy Mores at the time? But how are they doing so well now?

"By the way, Amelia. "Why did you ask to see me here?"

"Oh yeah. "I invited you to take this opportunity to paint a portrait of your brother."

"My portrait?"

When Owen asked dumbly, Amelia smiled and nodded.

"huh. The first picture is still unfinished, but I thought it would be good to change the order a little. That's what Mores said. Since I don't

know when I might be called to the southern front, I think it would be better to paint my brother's portrait first."

"Mores... .."

You asked the family artist to paint my portrait?

"Mores asked me to tell you that if Brother Jeong wants it, I won't say anything even if I draw it with chicken feathers this time."

Owen, who was suddenly speechless after Amelia's joke-like words, stared blankly at the boy in the portrait for a while.

377. Mores Exploration Journal (5)

That morning.

Before becoming the model for the portrait, Owen briefly composed the composition and discussed various aspects of the painting with Amelia.

Meanwhile, he received an unexpected request from a painter.

"You want to draw cormorant feather decorations?"

"Yes, sir. "I was very impressed by the victory ceremony that took place the other day."

The exotic decorations not commonly seen in Delcross seemed to have brought some powerful inspiration to this talented artist.

'Mores scolded me so much for being dirty... ... '

When Owen nodded absentmindedly, the young painter lowered his head with a brightened face.

"Thank you, sir! Now just leave it to me! The majestic appearance of that day, even the halo shining softly from behind the Emperor! "I will try to save every detail!"

It's good to be motivated, but what? halo?

'My friend, who is an artist, doesn't have a very good eye. Is it okay to leave it like this?'

While Owen was perplexed, Amelia, who was standing next to him, smiled proudly and added,

"good idea. Decorate all the feathers with gold, and draw long hair and a nice cape blowing in the wind. "I'm sure it'll be cool!"

"That's a bit...""

Isn't it too cringy? Was Amelia's taste like that originally?

Owen wanted to stop her, but when he saw her sparkling eyes, he couldn't stop speaking. Perhaps she didn't know that the image of an already completed portrait was glimmering before Amelia's eyes.

"It will be grander than the portrait of Emperor Remus, who was called the full body. "It will definitely be a great picture, brother."

"Yes, yes."

Owen had no choice but to nod.

"But will you be okay? That guy is a painter hired by Mores. "Mores seemed to be very fond of the cormorant feathers, but I wonder if she just drew them on as she pleased and later got criticized for it?"

Then Amelia opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"huh? Why would Mores do that? Oh, you say it's chicken hair? That's just a joke he's telling. "Mores was the one who first suggested drawing feathers."

"But it's messy for me...""

"Well, it was a bit dusty from the long trip. "Mores' personal maid will probably have cleaned them by now."

"..."

"Brother."

As if sensing something in Owen's expression, Amelia gently took his hand.

"It's not messy. Every single one of those feathers is a precious record, right? "It is an item that proves what my brother worked hard to

achieve on the southern front, so how could Mores dare to tamper with it?"

Owen was skeptical after hearing this, but there was no doubt in Amelia's gaze as she stared straight at him.

"Maybe Mores is a little worried about her brother. "Funny enough, some of the high-ranking priests are raising their voices saying that it is not right for the prince of the Holy Empire to follow the barbaric customs of the pagans."

"... .."

"Aren't they people who have been having a hard time finding fault with their older brother? So, Mores probably wants to show them a nice and familiar side for a while, and reduce their unnecessary resistance even a little."

"... "Amelia."

At this point, Owen couldn't help but ask her.

"How can you think so favorably of Mores' intentions? Even if he lost his memory. "You remember every detail of how the old Mores treated us all, right?"

"Brother... .."

Owen originally liked to think simply and did not bother to worry about unnecessary things.

That's why I've been ignoring other people's disdain for a while. I thought it was a natural check for a prince who suddenly came in. If you argue and listen to it for no reason, your reputation will only get worse.

Then all I had to do was pretend not to hear it and ignore it. After a certain amount of time passes and you show yourself to be the right person, isn't this a problem that will eventually subside naturally?

'but... ..'

Strangely enough, I could never get over it like that when it came to Mores. We got angry like children, raised our voices and fought with each other.

Where is that? Aren't the uncomfortable feelings that can't be resolved by just that still remain tightly coiled in your heart even after many years have passed?

It didn't seem like himself at all. So I was confused.

'What do I want to do now? Could it be that I said something unnecessary to Amelia? There is no reason to make an issue of trivial past events now... ..'

Now, I couldn't quite understand my own feelings, what on earth I wanted from Mores.

"okay. I see."

Amelia, who was silent for a moment, slowly nods her head.

Her gray eyes, just like those of Mores in the picture, met Owen's with deep understanding. It was a mysterious gaze that seemed to penetrate into the essence of everything.

"Do you really want to reconcile with her?"

"... ..!"

"If it were someone else's business, you probably wouldn't have worried about it. "If it wasn't for that girl in the first place, the events of the past wouldn't have left scars in my heart."

His younger sister, who has always been unusually smart for her age, not only understands Owen's feelings, but also accurately pinpoints his inner thoughts that even he doesn't know about.

"You could just cover it up and pretend that things are going well, but my brother still thinks that's not enough. Because that's probably not sincere. "He always wants to be close to his family sincerely."

"I, I... .."

"huh. So, I'm thinking that I want to face her properly even now and relieve all the clutter in my heart."

Amelia's eyes looking up at him were full of affection and trust.

"Thank you for not giving up on Mores and for still treating me sincerely. "Your brother is a kind person, after all."

* * *

To others, it seemed like he was resting and doing nothing, but in fact, Seongjin was anxiously trying various things on his own.

The terror of Gehenna.

It was not a flame that could be extinguished at will. However, it's not like you can just shake it off somewhere.

then-

"There is no other way. I must control it according to my will!"

The reason why Seonghwang, who comes running to him every time he suffers from high fever, leaves the last ember behind instead of extinguishing it.

Seongjin instinctively understood it without having to hear any explanation from him. So, every time he came to his senses for a moment, he tried his best to control the aura of Dantian that was left to the dust.

'this... ... !'

But the results were not very encouraging. If I touched the Danjeon clumsily, the interval between fevers would only shorten, and I would have to lose my mind again.

As I was going around like that, a month had already passed by.

Can the fires of Gehenna really be controlled? I wasn't sure. There was only a vague premonition that it would not be long before.

But there was no other way for Seongjin. Just the hope that someday I will be able to get my Aurors back, and that everything will work out well in the end. I have no choice but to cling to that one thread-like feeling.

'hey! Tell me, devil! This is the flame you used before, right? 'How on earth do you control it?'

When Seongjin became frustrated and asked this, the demon king just whimpered without answering.

What on earth is wrong with this guy? I don't know how to console myself. I'm tired of eating bear meat soup every time!

To tell the truth, bear meat wasn't really Seongjin's taste, but there was nothing else he could do for a guy who was stuck in such a situation.

The good news is that every time you share a taste, the devil stops whimpering and just concentrates on the sensation.

'This is why I can't give up bear meat... ..'

While he was suffering like this, there was another thing that was bothering him. It was Owen's son who came to the treatment room from time to time, clamoring for him to take the cure.

Contrary to the expectation that it would be awkward to see his face in person, he did not change one bit from his appearance in Pangea Chronicle. Moreover, in real life, he was a formidable brat.

'Is that guy crazy?'

Although he didn't express it outwardly, Seongjin was deeply embarrassed when he first saw the item he had brought out as a cure.

That cure was the item that Owen brought back with him when he went to see the goddess Justitia!

'You crazy guy! How on earth did you get this item, but are you giving it away so recklessly? 'I heard that's a must-have item for some important quest?'

Moreover, the bigger problem was that the treatment Owen offered was of no use to him.

Seongjin instinctively knew that fact, but unfortunately, it was very difficult to properly explain it to him. Because there was nothing else to base it on other than one's own feelings.

"No, that means you should try it out first to see if it's useful or not!"

look. This is how this tactless guy ends up.

"But there is one possibility!"

Seongjin was really heartbroken as he watched this guy who couldn't even pay his age and insisted.

'No, you idiot. Let alone the possibility.'

Is this guy out of his mind to ask me to use that precious item as a test? And if it just evaporates into thin air without any results, what are you going to do about it later?

Seongjin, who was irritated, turned his head and responded sullenly.

"huh. doesn't exist. And that thing looks really tasty."

So get it away. I will never eat it.

"Kaaaaak!"

When Owen eventually walked away holding the back of his neck, Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows as he looked at him.

So don't keep wasting your time here, and find something more productive for yourself while you're in the imperial capital, you idiot!

Then one afternoon.

Owen appeared with a slightly different expression than usual, and as usual, he pulled an armchair next to the bed and flopped down on it.

Then, uncharacteristically, he glances at Seongjin.

'What is this guy doing now?'

Seongjin, unable to bear the awkward atmosphere, asked Owen first.

"What? "Are you here to force me to take medicine again?"

"... "If I force you, would you ever want to eat it?"

"no."

At Seongjin's firm answer, Owen sighed as if he had lost some energy.

"Okay, whatever. I thought so. Just forget it. "Because it's already out of my hands."

For a moment, it seemed like Owen was secretly exchanging glances with Lord Martha, but Seongjin was preoccupied with something else.

'okay. You mean you no longer recommend treatments?'

thank god. You've been tired of refusing all this time.

Seongjin felt a little relieved and buried himself deeply in the bed.

"hmm."

As if the recent nagging had paid off, Owen had thrown away the old greaves he usually wore and was wearing proper Delcross attire. Of course, the long hair flowing carelessly and a couple of buttons undone were still there.

I inadvertently glanced at the bright red sign that was visible through my open shirt, but I wondered what Owen was thinking and quickly buttoned it up and made an excuse.

"Oh, my clothes aren't that neat? sorry. "I've been paying attention these days, but I feel frustrated after wearing clothes like this for the first time in a long time."

I didn't really intend to point out the attire. Well, first of all, where are all the dirty chicken furs removed?

However, seeing as he was being overly cautious, it seemed like

Owen was still keeping in mind what Seongjin had pointed out not long ago.

"... I told Edith to trim the chicken feathers. "You can take it later when you go."

Then, as if he had heard something unexpected, Owen stared at Seongjin for a while with wide eyes.

"you... .."

"what. "Why, what?"

"no. What Amelia said was really right... .."

"huh?"

"Hmm, so you've really changed a lot?"

Seongjin frowned for a moment.

'What does this guy want to do all of a sudden?'

However, perhaps because he was completely free from the pressure of having to refuse the treatment, Seongjin's heart became more generous than ever before.

"Well, I'm sorry if I've pointed out too much so far. "I'm sure you can take care of it, but I think I went a little too far."

"... ok?"

"see. Shall we think about whether there is anything more to be sorry about for throwing him out? "First of all, I heard that I had a lot of fights with you in the past, but I can't remember what I did wrong, so I'm sorry for that too."

"What?!"

Crash!

Owen was startled and jumped back in his chair. His face looked so tired as if he had seen a ghost, and Seongjin began to feel bad for her

sarcasm.

'No, you bastard! Even if the person apologizes!'

But didn't they say to remove the ox's horn as soon as possible? Seongjin, who could not shake off the feeling that the right moment had come, suppressed the bitter words that threatened to come out at any moment and continued.

"Well, at this point, if there's anything you've been upset about, you can tell me everything. "I'll listen to it first."

"... .."

It was right then.

Owen's expression seemed to soften, but then the hearty laugh that I was familiar with from Pangea Chronicles came out!

"haha. You and I didn't fight because something special happened. I don't remember the details either. "It's all in the past anyway."

That was Owen's sincerity.

Because as Carrie said the other day, all of that past suddenly felt like a child's fight over nothing.

Just as the ever-growing ice caps can easily collapse with just the slightest vibration, the core of tangled emotions could also disappear like melting snow with just the slightest trigger.

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

Owen's cheerful laughter echoes throughout the treatment room.

"... ..?"

Seongjin and Masain looked at each other in confusion, but Owen just smiled coolly like that for a while, paying no mind to their gazes.

378. Red (1)

Dongfeng, don't say that you pity him without thinking.

I will call his name Brilliant Glory.

If my song is praise that will be scattered in vain

I will throw myself onto the black waves right now.

A woman's clear voice resonates throughout the main palace.

No, it was a bit awkward to be a woman. That song was not a vibration of the air, but a melody created entirely by human thoughts.

'hmm. It looks like this story will end in tragedy. If possible, a bright song would have been better.'

A heartbreaking song sung by a woman in despair after losing her lover while looking at the mouth of the Breeze River. Even if you don't listen to the end of this, don't you think that she will most likely end her life by jumping into the river?

Seongjin is scratching his cheek nervously-

Jjieee-ing-

As expected, I can feel the Demon King's soul moving in deep sympathy with the lyrics. Why doesn't this guy seem more depressed?

"How are you? This is a popular opera that premiered on Rue Bertrand this time. It is said that the famous Sorbonne teacher wrote a screenplay for the first time in a long time."

Director Bruno, who finished singing with all his might, pulled his mustache as if embarrassed. Recently, he voluntarily performed performances of new operas for the demon king, who had become very depressed.

The problem may be that tragedy has been raging in the streets of Bertrand for a while. This means that most of the songs he brought strongly stimulated sad emotions.

[Sniff! It's such a beautiful and wonderful song that I'll be singing your precious name until the end!]

The devil bastard, who was savoring the afterglow for a moment, whimpered and praised me.

[Anyway, idiot, you really sing well, right?]

"Hmm. "That's too much praise, Mr. Red."

[so? Sniff! What happened to ambrosia in the end? Did she eventually follow her lover and throw herself into the Breeze River?]

"Yes, it is. "There is a story left to be sung by the bard. Would you like me to sing that song as well?"

[huh. Go ahead and try it. Sniff!]

Seeing him listen to it in such a sad yet entertaining way, I can't help but stop him from doing it.

Seongjin was making a complicated expression, but Director Bruno cleared his throat loudly with a flushed face. Even though it's not a song that actually uses your neck.

The cruel head towers collapsed one by one

For hundreds of years, stones and dirt piled up on top of it.

Considering that he absolutely hated being caught by others, the leader surprisingly sang obediently to the Demon King.

It seemed like he thought of the guy as a friend who had the same

hobbies as him. He seems to like the Demon King's strong reaction and praise a little.

Jumble-jump-

Just then, the sound of cheerful footsteps is heard from the hallway. This is Owen, who comes to the temporary treatment room every day at this time.

I will tell this sad story to you in the future -

"Hey, leader... .."

Seongjin tried to warn him belatedly, but the owner of the footsteps quickly approached and opened the door with force without even having time to warn him.

Quang!

"Mores! Brother Lee has arrived!"

"Ugh!"

Director Bruno, who was in a panic, was struggling with his limbs. To someone who didn't know him, he had such a violent reaction that it would have seemed like he was having a heart attack.

He was a Dekaron Knight in name and reality, but he seemed to have been so focused on singing that he didn't notice anyone approaching.

Owen, unaware of the airflow in the suddenly frozen room, approached the side of the bed with a grin.

"Did you eat properly today? Also, you didn't just fill it up with bear meat soup or something, right? Um, but why was Brother Masaine absent?"

"... .."

"Who is this person again? "Is this the first face you see in the imperial palace?"

In the end, even when Owen asked first, Director Bruno remained frozen, completely stopping his breathing. He was so surprised that he couldn't even remember how to show respect to the prince.

Seongjin, who was worse off, quietly warned.

"Calm down, leader. "It is in front of the first prince of the Holy Empire."

"... ..!"

The leader, who then remembered that Owen could not hear his thoughts at all, lowered his head with a belated expression of relief.

"1, meet the 1st prince. I am serving His Majesty Mores... "My name is Bruno Green."

However, the aftereffects of the shock did not go away easily, and the leader's legs were still shaking.

Seongjin looked at him with pitiful eyes.

'My father must be in the office next door... ..'

It was clear that the leader had no idea. Otherwise, there is no way I could sing opera with confidence while my father was listening.

Seongjin guessed that Seonghwang was probably trying to make his presence known before Manager Bruno arrived. It may be that he is being considerate so that he can sing with peace of mind.

However, when you see that Seongjin comes running to you every time he gets a high fever, it seems like he never leaves his office.

'That means my father is also listening to the director's latest performance every time.'

Well, for the sake of the leader's mental health, I think it would be better not to point out this fact. Because good things are good. At this point, my father is also changing his mood, right?

"Ah, are you the famous commoner knight commander? Nice to meet

you!"

Fortunately, Owen didn't seem to care much about the leader's disrespect. He smiled heartily and sat down in the armchair next to him.

"By the way, where has Brother Masain gone?"

"I have some business to do with the administration for a moment."

"executive? I heard the knight commander resigned? "Then your official duties aren't all about your security?"

"Originally, it's my job to do. "These days, Lord Masaine is managing the monster task force instead of me."

After joining the Knights of St. Terbachia, Seongjin officially became the head of the department. This means that working casually in a mediocre position as an advisor is over.

Moreover, since the giant demon species went on the rampage, it seemed that similar demon kin were being discovered here and there in the vicinity of the capital.

A seed of a demon species that follows the laws of the normal world and has not yet fully blossomed.

Since the demon energy was not clearly felt, it would have originally been under the jurisdiction of the monster department that deals with things other than demons.

It was a shame that Seongjin's body was not healthy now and the few people he had left had all been sent to the punitive force. It was obvious that when they returned, all of this would be passed on to Seongjin.

'And we must properly investigate the headquarters of the Penitent Church.'

As we trace the whereabouts of the escaped Giacomo Milo and the route through which Loperum's eggs were leaked, everything ultimately comes down to the Church of Penitence. So, as soon as his

body fully recovered, Seongjin planned to raid the Dark Church himself.

Until now, there were limits to the investigation using only the manpower of the Monster Task Force. But now that he has finally gained public power, wouldn't he be able to properly mobilize the exorcists under his command?

"swimming... .."

Then Owen looked at Seongjin with new eyes.

"Amazing? You're doing a pretty good job, aren't you? "I thought he would always be a wild, reckless kid."

... What, you bastard?

A little kid, who says this kid is a little kid now? If I had gotten married properly, I would have a grandson the size of you by now!

Seongjin, who had a shocked expression on his face, almost hit Owen on the forehead with as much force as before.

'... Oops!'

However, I soon came to my senses and had no choice but to put my half-raised hand back. Didn't this almost rekindle the rumor of discord between the 1st and 3rd princes that had been barely resolved?

'It was nice when I could beat the guy up with anonymity.'

There are times when I miss that creepy goat skin from Pangea Chronicles.

"Anyway, don't you have anything to do like that? "Why do you stay here all day after coming to the imperial capital?"

As Seongjin scolded Owen, he smiled inexplicably.

"hmm. When you come to the main palace, your father is there, right? Next to her is our pretty Amelia. So, while looking at her

family's faces, I'm stopping by you as well."

Seongjin's eyebrows twitched.

I was watching and I realized that this bastard is now treating people like a product that gives them bonuses.

"And even though it's like this, it's not like we're just playing around. "I'm looking for someone right now?"

"... .."

person?

Seongjin, who had a premonition of something sinister, did not bother to ask him who he was looking for.

"Some people come here to find something to do. Who said that? Help others and lend a foundation. "They said I should find my own place?"

What kind of bullshit is this?

Anyway, if you're looking for something to do, doesn't that mean you're free now?

"If you don't have anything to decide, please help Lord Martha next to you."

In fact, it didn't have to be Lord Martha, but it could have been done by Commander Bruno or the resident knights. It's just that he's been restless around me lately, so I just used work as an excuse to take him away for a while to cool off.

But every time he reluctantly returns to the administration, Sir Martha returns with a sour look on his face. Are you so anxious that you feel like you have chronic gastritis?

'No, even if you're next to me, you'll feel sick, and even if you're away, you'll get gastritis. 'What are you going to do with me?'

So I thought it would be better to bring in Owen, who was idle

without an official position. If you take care of this easy-going and sloppy little boy, wouldn't Lord Masaine be able to forget about his miscellaneous worries for a moment?

But Owen made a strange face when he heard the suggestion.

"hmm. Does that mean that this brother should come in and work under you? "You don't really feel like it?"

"I'm not asking you to come under me, I'm just asking you to help out with some light work. "Logan also worked on the monster task force for a while while he was here."

"Logan is such a brat that he doesn't even have a bell to begin with."

... That's true, but is that what your son of a bitch is going to say now?

"Well, it's nice to help Brother Masain. "I knew how to fight from the beginning, but I knew nothing about administrative work."

"Good. Then, take this time to learn properly from Lord Masaine. "You're not going to spend your whole life on the battlefield, are you?"

"hmm. That's right... .."

Still, the guy looked very worried, so Seongjin reflexively held out his palm in front of him.

"What are you making complicated? Now, don't talk nonsense... .."

It was right then.

Suddenly, Owen's face turns serious, and he grasps Seongjin's hand as if to shake his hand!

"uh?"

"... Ah, as expected. "It seems a little hot."

The guy suddenly got up from his seat with a look on his face as he

realized something. Then he suddenly runs into the next room and shouts:

"father! Looks like Mores is going to have a fever again! "That guy has a habit of putting his hands out every time he gets a high fever!"

... Did I do that?

Seongjin was feeling confused as he touched his forehead, but there was actually a big problem.

Director Bruno, who had been standing quietly in the corner of the room until then, suddenly began to turn pale as if something had occurred to him.

"Your Majesty... You were in the office... ... ?!"

uh. I guess I should have told you in advance.

After thinking that for the last time, Seongjin closed his eyes as he felt his fever rise rapidly.

Then, the children's voices, now familiar as background sounds, rang in my ears.

[Mores! It just worked out well. Would you like to go to Cyprus with us now?]

[Brother Logan and Sisley have already arrived! You will meet the puppeteer soon!]

What? Then, let's go without delay.

[No, Inum!]

It wasn't just children who were by his side.

I could also hear the old man's tearful voice appearing and scolding him whenever he forgot.

[I asked them to stop letting me go, but they ended up making one more person who is devoted to me! What are you going to do now?

What on earth are you going to do to me?]

No, this old man is very cruel.

Just looking at Owen, he is a man with no faith and is a sloppy person. What difference does it make if he puts in sincerity! yes?

[Are you saying that even after looking at me now? oh my! I'm so upset!]

Bang bang bang!

The sound of the old man beating his chest resonates loudly in my mind like thunder.

Well, you've become stronger and more confident than before, but what? What's the problem?

"Mores!"

After finally recognizing Seonghwang's voice faintly heard from afar, Seongjin began to wander into a half-asleep dream again.

379

379. Red (2)

A time when a giant demon species appeared, and the world was abuzz with rumors about it for a while.

Secret and mysterious things were happening all over the continent that people were not aware of.

It may be trivial, but for those who encounter it, it is a definite opportunity for change that can change their future course of action. It was a subtle movement that added cause and effect and the lack of cause and effect.

The coincidence first occurred in the imperial palace.

"... What is this?"

Pearl Palace.

Edith, who was tidying up the prince's empty room as always, found a small bead rolling around at her feet. It was an empty soul stone.

"Now that I think about it, it seems like Prince Mores often carried this around with him... .."

I didn't know how the prince's things ended up rolling around on the floor. But Edith didn't think much about it and immediately picked up his marble.

"I'll take it first and ask your Majesty."

There was no sense of danger about tampering with the prince's belongings. Because the person she served was not that flexible.

It was like that just the other day. Although she used the imperial

carriage as she pleased without permission, Prince Mores praised Edith greatly and even gave her a huge reward.

Thanks to this, I earned enough income to just eat and play for the next few years.

'But I can't take time off from work. I have to take care of Max, and sometimes it's fun to play plate throwing.'

Edith hummed and put the soul stone into her apron pocket.

* * *

Small coincidences come to any playwright.

"Master Sorbonne! This work is also a hit! It is said that re-watching 'Ambrosia of the Tower of Heads' is becoming a trend in the social circles of the imperial capital these days. "You truly have God-given talent!"

When the opera house owner raised his voice with excitement, the playwright, who had sensitive ears, frowned.

"Enough empty words. "What else do you want from me?"

"These are empty words, they are insincere! More than that, teacher. Shouldn't we start the next work soon? "I will support you with whatever you need!"

"what? It's been a while since you previewed your new work, but you're already on the verge of your next work, right? Hey, theater owner. "Aren't you thinking too lightly of the pain of creation?"

The theater owner, taken aback by her fierce opposition, stammered.

"B-but, teacher. 'Ambrosia of the Tower of Heads' has long been passed down from Cypriot bards..."

"Oh, it's noisy! "If writing a four-act long play based on an old song like that isn't creativity, then what else in this world can be called creativity?"

The playwright responded nervously and suddenly raised both hands at the same speed. Then he gets angry by pointing to the left and right sides of the theater owner's head at the same time with the same finger.

"Besides, as I've said before, didn't I tell you to pay attention to your parting when you come to my mansion? "If you see your crooked parting that disturbs the balance of the world, the inspiration for your work will soon get fed up and run away!"

"what... ... ?"

She was a woman who made pointless comments.

But the theater owner suppressed his anger. Currently, Mr. Sorbonne is the most famous star writer on Rue Bertrand. Any work with her name on it, even if it's a play in which she wrote her own lines, is sure to be a hit.

Aren't the teacher's personality flaws a trade-off proportional to his brilliant genius?

"Now, just wait a moment, sir. "I'll fix my hair in a moment, so let's talk about my next project for a little longer."

While the theater owner ran to the mirror to make the parting exactly 5:5-

Fight!

Suddenly, a book fell to the floor and made a dull noise.

"Oh, what's happening all of a sudden?"

It's not like the wind came from anywhere, so why does a book that was placed in good condition fall to the floor?

The playwright quickly picked up the book and put it back on the bookshelf. Even if he saw something that deviated from the symmetrical structure he had arranged for even a moment, he felt so uncomfortable that his internal organs were twisted.

But the title of the book suddenly appeared clearly in her eyes. A masterpiece of Ortona Romanticism, which once dominated literary trends on the continent.

'[The doll's song]...'

Well, this is a pretty good piece too. If you tweak the structure and ending just a little, it will become a story that shows some pretty cool interconnections.

"Shall we adapt some classic literature this time? "It will be completed much faster than completely creating it."

At the playwright's indifferent muttering, the opera house owner's face brightened.

* * *

A young man who was busy rushing down the road also encountered that small coincidence.

"We have finally arrived in Regina, Master Kenneth. "If you just go to the Breeze River like this and take a boat, you will be able to get to Cyprus safely."

"okay. "Good job."

The young man was Kenneth Diggory, who was imprisoned on suspicion of harboring a demon, attempting to murder a junior, and murdering two employees.

Perhaps thanks to his grandfather's enormous power, all of his crimes were ultimately concluded to be accidental accidents caused by a weak mind and body.

Kenneth, who was released after receiving a greatly reduced sentence and paying a large amount of bail, was currently secretly fleeing to another area to avoid the eyes of imperial officials.

"But are you sure you don't mind? Cardinal Diggory originally wanted you to go to peaceful Anatolia."

"What on earth can I do in the old landlords' stronghold? I'm going north. The wise man has always said this before. "All the mysteries of the continent lie in that wild and free north."

The young man, whose eyes were dreamy for a moment, soon came to his senses and looked back at the attendant.

"But there was something I wanted to ask you earlier. "I heard something like this flying all over the street. What is this?"

In Kenneth Diggory's hand was a small leaflet.

"that... .. ?"

"Suddenly, the wind blew it away and landed in my hand. "It felt as if the mystery of the world was willingly inviting me."

The attendant narrowed his eyes and looked at the flyer. A mimeographed paper with sloppy handwriting, not proper type.

-The secret of the future conveyed by the wise man.

The continent is facing the terrifying flames of hell that will soon come! Listen! Only those who awaken will open the shining door of salvation!

The attendant nodded.

"Ah, it's the story of a crazy wise man."

"Sage?"

Kenneth perked up his ears at the not-so-familiar title.

"yes. This is a crazy person who claims to have seen the hell prepared by God many years ago. It is said that they have now settled down near the Marquis of Benso to avoid the Inquisitors. "Seeing that they are distributing such fancy leaflets, it seems that the number of followers has increased considerably."

hmm.

Kenneth Diggory looked at the leaflet, lost in thought. And after a while, an odd sound came out of his mouth.

"hey. The trip to Cyprus is canceled. "Let's go to the Marquis de Benso first."

"... yes?"

As the attendant was taken aback by the sudden situation, the young man smiled straight, showing his even teeth.

"Isn't this the person who has been preparing for hell for a long time?
"How intense will such a person's intellect and exploration be, and how close will he be to the mysteries of the world?"

* * *

Even Archduke Asean, who lived far away from the ecliptic, could not avoid such a small coincidence.

"Isn't it really a long time since we had a banquet? miss... No, this is the first banquet you are attending since the Empress returned, right?"

While combing the hair of the empress, who had a grumpy expression on her face as if she didn't feel like it, the maids chatted hard to cheer her up.

"They say a large number of landowners from Anatolia will be attending this time, right? "When those villagers see your beautiful appearance, Lizabeth, they will probably be so dazzled that they won't be able to come to their senses!"

"... .."

Crackling... ..

As the Empress's expression remained frozen without the slightest change, the maids' forced laughter became increasingly heavy.

"Well, by the way, Lizabeth. I feel like my going out outfit decoration is a bit boring today. "The color doesn't match the red and gold

decorations you always wear. Is there any other jewelry that would go well with it?"

Clatter rattle rattle rattle.

It was when one of the maids was diligently rummaging through a jewelry box. Suddenly, a small trinket of hers rolled into her hand. It was a simple brooch decorated with crystals as white as ice, something I had never seen before.

"oh? There were all these items in the jewelry box? Lizabeth! "I think this would be perfect!"

The maid was delighted and put the brooch in her coat without permission. Then, too late, she noticed the other maids' pale expressions and her eyes widened.

'... ok?'

'hey! hey! stop!'

'huh? why?'

As the maid made a puzzled face, her companions made all kinds of expressions and silently twitched their lips.

'That, Lady Lizabeth, is trash.'

'Trash... omg!'

Empress Lizabeth's trash.

These are things that roll around the room like trash, but if someone touches them carelessly, they immediately startle you.

The maid, who belatedly realized the situation, looked back at the empress with her chin shaking. She expected that there would be an outcry right now.

"... .."

But surprisingly, Lizabeth didn't say anything. She just turned her

head and closed her eyes as if she was annoyed.

Thanks to this, the maid, who couldn't decide whether to take the brooch back or leave it behind, hesitated for a moment and then just left.

* * *

The mansion located in the corner of Asein could not have been a blind spot for coincidences that occurred simultaneously.

Cayenne, who had sent his confidant Rodrigo on an errand for the first time in a long time, received urgent information from his soul a short time later.

"... Caught by security?"

why?

After a long period of compiling the information sparsely received from his soul, Cayenne was finally able to roughly understand the reason.

It seems that Rodrigo obtained a rare poison from the dark city according to Cayenne's instructions. However, on the way back, the strap of the bag suddenly broke, and the bottle of poison ended up lying on the street.

However, it seems that he was accidentally caught by a security guard who was passing by.

'No, what is this? I'm so unlucky, what's going on?'

Rodrigo is currently the only soul in Cayenne that exercises complete control. So we'll have to get him out of jail somehow, and he's going to be a pain in the ass for a while again if he comes up with a clever move.

'It's completely ruined. Now what should I do when my father comes?'

After thinking for a moment, the boy looked around the chessboard,

which had been gathering dust for a while, with a disgruntled look on his face.

* * *

If someone you see every day suddenly catches your eye one day, it can be seen as a change brought about by a coincidence.

This was the case with Inquisitor Lumiere, adjutant of the Knights of St. Marsyas. For some time now, she had been unable to take her eyes off the little saint who was awkwardly accompanying them.

"An order to rest has come from the front. "Stop marching for a moment and wait!"

"atmosphere!"

"atmosphere!"

As one of the knights quickly reversed and announced, Lumie turned to the Inquisitors following him and gave instructions.

"It's just the right time. good night. "We don't have any special plans right now, so let's each take a break."

Then, Saint Sisley, who was nearby, nodded and lightly jumped off the horse.

Although she was a lieutenant and was on the same level as Inquisitor Lumiere, the saintess seemed to strictly follow Lumiere's instructions.

This was quite an unexpected result for Lumie, who expected a fierce fight with the young princess.

'Anyway, you don't look tired at all.'

Lumiere was secretly impressed. In a forced march that would have made even experienced Inquisitors struggle, the girl was maintaining her posture without the slightest disruption.

A flawless creation of the Lord, as if made from clean crystal.

As Inquisitor Lumie stared blankly at the little saint, she walked toward the head of the procession at a brisk pace. Then, as if she had made an appointment, she ran into Prince Logan, who was approaching from behind her.

As expected, the veins did not go anywhere, and the prince looked as neat as if he had been painted.

"Brother Logan."

"Yes, Sisley. Would you like to use this interlude to pray with me?"

"good."

So the siblings place their hands together and close their eyes reverently.

"ah... ... !"

At that moment, Lumie couldn't help but doubt her eyes.

Was it just a simple illusion? Somehow, a bright divine halo seemed to emanate from the two praying siblings.

"Lord. Please protect your children."

"Please take care of Brother Mores so that he can recover quickly."

The brother and sister's calm words come to mind.

Lumiere was somehow certain. If the Lord, who looks over all things, is looking down on the underworld, then at least at this moment, he will surely be fixating his eyes only on them!

Now, the little saint and Prince Logan were standing at the center of a world that was spinning.

'No, what kind of crazy idea am I having right now...''

Lumie quickly came to her senses and lightly shook her head.

Cry!

Is it because of my mood? For some reason, I felt like I could briefly hear the innocent laughter of children.

380. Red (3)

Inquisitor Lumie did not have much interest in the saint from the beginning. It was probably just a coincidence that piled up, the result of repeatedly stimulating her nerves that were as hard as steel.

When I quickly turned my head to avoid the sudden breeze that carried a lot of leaves, there was always a little saint at the end of my gaze.

As she was rubbing her eyes against the dust flying in from the procession, she was met with gray eyes that passed by her and looked at her with concern.

As this coincidence was repeated several times, Inquisitor Lumie began to follow the sight of Saint Sisley as a habit.

As I gradually got to know the little saint, a thought naturally occurred to me.

'Indeed, there is something different about someone who was ordained a saint at such a young age.'

Contrary to expectations that she would be the one to take care of troublesome children, Saint Sisley showed herself to be an excellent squire.

Even though he may not be very used to horseback riding, he drives the horse with a serious expression all day long. His concentration was unusual considering that even older Inquisitors dozed off from time to time.

Where is that? Among the members, he is the last to receive food and the first to respond to Lumiere's instructions.

Due to his young age, he was excluded from watch duty, so he woke up early in the morning and went to bed late at night to share his divine power with the Inquisitors who were on watch watch.

He willingly places himself at the lowest level of the Order and acts strictly as a member of the Order of St. Marsyas.

'Even Sister Ursula, who usually accompanied her on the path to deep learning, left her behind in the ecliptic this time.'

This is a clear contrast to Seo Yi-seo, another saint who accompanies the punitive force, comfortably traveling in a carriage with two sisters.

Seeing the saintess working so diligently, Lumie could clearly see that the members who had been awkwardly keeping a distance from each other were gradually narrowing the distance in their hearts.

She eventually had no choice but to admit it.

The little saint showed manners that were not appropriate for her age. Whether it's a manufactured humility or a truly innate character. She was so skilled that it was hard to believe that she had just turned 12 years old.

'No matter how young you are, does that mean you are a member of the Holy Family?'

Still, some questions remained. How was that little girl able to behave so naturally as a Holy Knight, which no one in the Knights of St. Marsyas had ever taught her?

'It's not like there aren't any guesses, though.'

Prince Logan.

Right in front of the saintess, there is another member of the saintly family who can be said to be a great example of a holy knight!

'okay. He uses his brother's appearance as a reference and coordinates his actions cleverly.'

As the stream of consciousness continued towards Prince Logan, Lumie also observed the Lilium contingent surrounding him.

"... ... ?!"

As a result, naturally, I was able to clearly understand the true nature of the Lilium Detachment.

"Lowering! I received my food here! "Please take a seat in the middle so that everyone in the unit can share an equal distance!"

"Why did I go through all that trouble when I could have gone? Thank you, Sir Ellie."

"Lowering! In time for prayer, I have opened the pages of the scriptures you read yesterday in advance! Would you like to go now?"

"Yes, I am always grateful for your thoughtful preparation. Sir Duchamp."

"Lowering! Lowering!"

What can I say, it was truly a sight to see.

It was to the point where I had the illusion that the Lilium Detachment was not serving Prince Logan, but rather that the prince was enduring their extremeness.

'I said Otto, Elie, Sir Duchamp...''

Inquisitor Lumie furrowed her brows.

This is the Holy Knights who must follow the will of the Lord and become His fair sword. But if you look at their behavior, doesn't it seem like a pseudo-group that purely worships Prince Logan, not the main god?

"What on earth are those idiots doing? "Do you have any pride or sense of duty as a paladin in mind?"

Inquisitor Boris, who was nearby, smiled and said. It seems that not only Lumie, but other Inquisitors who were watching also had this

thought.

"I guess that means they have deep respect for Logan."

Lumiere, who as a lieutenant could not officially see the other Holy Knights' misfortune, responded politely.

However, Inquisitor Boris shook his head with a tired expression.

"Even so, the extraordinary behavior of those idiots is going too far.

"Is it so bad that there are rumors going around that even the Archbishop of Wester is taking off his crane?"

It was already famous that the knights of Liliun replaced the icon of St. Bastian in the church for Prince Logan. If it's really for the prince, it means there's nothing to see.

"Who does the 'Liliun' of the Liliun Detachment really refer to?

"Those authors are worshiping a young paladin by giving him the image of a lily, which is a long-standing symbol of the Knights Templar."

The Inquisitor who had spoken so far turned his gaze to the small saintess riding a horse in front.

Saint Sisley. The appearance of a girl who has not lost any of the dignity of a noble saint, even though she is wearing a different form of armor than usual.

"They are truly ridiculous people. Aren't they making a fuss as if they are the only ones attending the greatest person in the world? To be honest, there are people in our knighthood who are greater than Prince Logan."

"Someone greater?"

"yes. Saint Sisley is the one who was canonized as a saint at an unprecedentedly young age. If you had to choose the true flower of the Holy Knights, wouldn't it be him? If they compare Prince Logan to a lily, our Princess Sisley is truly like a white peony... ..!"

"... .."

At Lumiere's rapidly cold gaze, Inquisitor Boris, who had been trembling, slowly blurted out his words.

"... I made a mistake. "Vice-captain."

Lumie pursed her lips and looked at the saintess ahead of her.

There was no intention of treating her as special just because she was from a prosperous family or because she was an adjutant-level person who suddenly fell through connections.

However, when I look at the little saint's flowing silver hair, my heart becomes heavy with the psychological pressure to somehow value her more than I do now.

'No matter what, Sisley is just a squire. There can never be any exceptional treatment!'

Lumie stubbornly steeled herself.

As time passed day by day, the punitive force soon arrived in Cyprus, a city at the mouth of the Breeze River.

* * *

Cyprus had a very unique political system. There is no separate king, and a new council is organized every year with eight elders as the central point to manage the city's major and minor affairs.

-This is the most beautiful and ideal form of politics that all countries on the continent should emulate!

I heard that Prince Benicio, who once led the republican government of Ortona, praised it like this.

In any case, the punitive force received a warm welcome from the elders as soon as they entered Cyprus.

Next, I was hurriedly invited to a council meeting without even having time to properly rest. As the fishing suspension situation became prolonged, the issue of subjugating marine beasts became more urgent than anything else.

"From now on, it is a meeting between practitioners. "I beg your pardon, but please wait here with the other members for a moment."

At Lumiere's instructions, Sisley nodded and stood next to the members.

An event attended by all adjutant-level officials, including Prince Logan, the head of the punitive force. However, in the case of the saint who was new to this subjugation, she judged that even if she attended anyway, she would not be of much help.

"... .."

Logan also glanced at her, but did not impose any special restrictions. Because the affairs of the Holy Knights are matters that must be coordinated within the Holy Knights.

In this way, Sisley was left standing inside the large council building with the other members of the punitive force.

"what? That woman named Lumiere. Isn't this too rude to Sisley?"
"Unlucky!"

When Seo Yi-seo made a small noise behind me-

Grumble!

One of the torches that illuminated the hallway burned fiercely, as if setting a rhythm.

But Sisley just smiled bitterly.

'I'm still a young child with a lot to learn.'

Although she was able to hold the position of adjutant from the beginning thanks to having the Holy Emperor as her assistant, she still did not fully understand the physiology of the Holy Knights. This is because the Inquisitors who were supposed to guide her behaved indifferently and were ostracized by her secret nature.

But we can't just blame them.

'From the Inquisitors' perspective, I am like an outsider who came in without permission. So, slowly comfort their minds and learn from them one by one.'

It was a time when I was calming down and maintaining an undisturbed posture.

"Saint."

Suddenly, an attendant came up next to him, bowed his head to Sisley and cautiously opened his mouth.

"With all due respect, one of the council members would like to see the saint for a moment."

... Council member?

"Why me? Besides, aren't all the council members gathered together and having a meeting right now?"

"He did not attend the meeting due to other work. "I happened to see the saint while passing by, and I think she was bothered by the idea of placing the little grace of the Lord here."

"... .."

"He said he would like you to rest comfortably for a while because we have prepared a simple table for you."

Sisley thought for a moment. She is now not a saint, but a member of the Knights of St. Marsyas. Is there really a need to accept that request?

However, just as I was about to say no, the attendant continued with an urgent comment.

"Please reconsider. "The person who invited the saint is Ambrose of Helios, the eldest son of Chryses, the head of the Senate."

Indeed, it was worth worrying that the servant would not be able to carry out the instructions.

Ambrose of Helios. He was so famous that even Sisley had heard about him several times through rumors.

His father, Chryses, was the most powerful among the elders of Cyprus.

What about his eldest son, Ambrose? He distinguished himself in politics from a young age, and is a powerful person who never misses a seat on the council every year.

Just because there is no king does not mean that there is no hereditary power. How could it be that in this place where there is no monarchy, people would call him the 'Prince of Cyprus'?

'If only Sister Ursula had existed...'

Sisley thought of his loyal attendant who was momentarily absent. Normally, in a case like this, she would have taken the initiative to prevent things that were deemed unnecessary.

However, because Sisley received the request himself, her answer now ends up directly representing the position of the Holy Family and the Orthodox Church.

'It's not that difficult to briefly attend a tea party.'

However, Sisley still had no choice but to hesitate.

If possible, I would like to refuse. For some reason, I don't want to go. It was because that feeling had taken strong hold of her entire body from earlier.

"Ambrosius of Helios, isn't he the one who is called the Prince of Cyprus? "It seems like he is asking for a seat out of pure kindness, so why not accept his request?"

Just then, a young paladin from behind suddenly opened his mouth. He was someone I had become acquainted with in one way or another as we had recently marched together near Sisley.

"Inquisitor Boris..."

When Sisley turned his head to look at him, the young Inquisitor scratched his head a little embarrassed and continued.

"I'm sorry for suddenly interrupting. But we, too, have been bothered by the idea of leaving the saint like this for a while. However, I cannot send Sisley to an unfamiliar place alone, so I will be by your side until the end."

When a member of the same knightly order appeared like this, I could no longer refuse the request.

Sisley couldn't help but nod his head and walked after the employee, who seemed greatly relieved.

But that was before Sisley could even walk a few steps.

Grumbling!

The torches illuminating the hallway suddenly flickered, creating dizzying shadows. Since it was inside the building, there was no place for the wind to blow, so it was really strange.

"... ... ?"

As I was watching the flames flutter, possessed by a strange premonition, the attendant urged Sisley once again.

"Saint, come this way."

Sisley did not delay any longer and obediently walked behind the servant.

Clap, clap, clap.

Every time I took a step, the unfamiliar friction sound of the armor disturbed my ears.

* * *

Same time.

An incident was also taking place at the imperial palace in the center

of Delcross.

"Father, is Mores running a fever again?"

Owen asked, tilting his head.

After summoning the Holy Emperor and showering him with divine power, it was only for a short time that tremendous heat was rising again near the bed where Mores was lying.

'weird? Normally, after calming her down with divine power, she would be quiet for a while without getting angry?

Owen looked at Mores' feverish face with worried eyes.

It was right then.

Grumbling!

Owen couldn't believe his eyes for a moment. At once, it seemed as if a fierce fire had risen from Mores, who was lying down.

"... ... !?"

what?

Owen rubbed his eyes and looked at Mores again, but the boy was just breathing heavily with his eyes closed.

'Of course it is. No matter how high the fever is, how can a person's body suddenly burst into flames?'

But Owen soon realized that something unusual was happening to Mores.

This is because the face of the Holy Emperor, who was once again pouring out his divine power towards Mores, had become pale and pale.

His voice trembled softly, faintly shaking the air of the temporary treatment room.

"Son. Stop it. "What are you trying to do there now?"

381

381. Red (4)

If you were born into this world as a human, you should move only with a human body and do not easily commit actions that are beyond human capabilities.

That was the restriction of the [agreement] required by the six-member council, and the condition that allowed Seonghwang, who had fully awakened as an oracle, to remain in the dimension for a long time.

Therefore, whenever the Emperor needed to leave the palace, he always had to seek the help of a psychic like Sir Sharon. Or, like a homunculus, a body with at least human characteristics was needed.

[Sir Sharon.]

Seonghwang urgently looked for the Holy Knight he had sent to Cyprus. However, her current situation did not seem to be so easy.

[It looks difficult to move right now, Your Majesty. The council building is relatively heavily guarded. Moreover, if I rashly try to withdraw from the ranks without my superior's permission, my fellow paladins in the punitive force will subdue me before the soldiers of Cyprus.]

Of course, there was a solution. The spirit of the Holy Emperor comes and moves her body directly.

But unfortunately, he couldn't leave everything aside and head to Cyprus. Because his son's condition was extremely unstable.

"Mores."

If the Holy Emperor leaves this place in his usual spirit state, he will no longer be able to control his son's critical condition by his side. Just a moment's carelessness would cause his son to be engulfed in the flames of hell and lose his life immediately.

The problem was that the son, who had thrown off the restrictions of Ilshin, also knew this fact. So, despite Herna and Kadesh's dissuasion, he is trying to go on a rampage without any hesitation.

-Wow! Mores, calm down! If this continues, we'll be in really big trouble!

-Let go of this! Don't disturb me! If I don't do something here... .. !

Even if I didn't pay attention, I felt like I could hear my young son's soul crying out like this.

'But son. If this is the case, you too will be greatly disrupting cause and effect.'

Exercising the power of the soul directly into the world. It will definitely cause my son to consume more cause and effect than he could imagine.

It is obvious that the child is a lot of sheep that can't be compared to the causes and effects that the child has acted like a joke. There was no longer any choice.

'I wanted to reduce the consumption of human resources even a little and be with my children for as long as possible.'

However, wouldn't it be difficult if you were to worry for no reason and end up with your child being ostracized by the world?

"... "Owen."

After a while, the Holy Emperor, who had made up his mind, called his godson.

"Yes, father."

A slightly trembling voice returns.

Owen also seems to have sensed the current dangerous situation, even if only vaguely. The eyes that were looking at Seonghwang were shaking uneasily.

"Don't worry about this place, leave it to me. "Would you please go to the administration right now and bring Masain here?"

"... .. ?"

For a moment, a puzzled look appeared on Owen's face. Isn't calling someone something that can be done by having another employee do it?

But it was the order of my dear godfather. Owen didn't express any question and immediately lowered his head.

"Yes, I will."

As his godson moved his body, the Holy Emperor expanded his consciousness without delay. In order to carry out two tasks at the same time, he completely released the constraints of time and place that were binding his soul.

Power enough to shake one dimension. And the aftermath of this appeared immediately in the real world.

"... .. !"

Owen, who was just about to push open the door, looked back in surprise. Suddenly, her back felt empty and empty, and she felt a cold, foreign feeling.

And Owen was able to witness it right away.

The sight of the sunlight shining through the window rapidly fading to gray -

The flow of air that quietly stops moving, and the time that freezes like frost spreading.

Owen also noticed his godfather's abnormality.

The Holy Emperor is still holding Mores' hand and pouring out his mighty divine power. But even with his eyes open, Owen somehow wondered if he had momentarily stopped breathing.

It's not that it wasn't, but the pale, frozen face of the Holy Emperor looked so inhuman that it could have been believed that he was a sculpture made of marble rather than a living thing.

Also, the eyes are half-open, completely losing any evidence of life.

In fact, there was nothing in Seonghwang's unfocused eyes. Nevertheless, his gaze was deep and distant, as if he was staring at everything in the world at the same time.

'... far.'

Owen thought so without thinking.

It was truly strange. Seonghwang is only a few steps beyond her, but he feels distant, as if a gray curtain has been placed between him and her.

"Father... .."

Startled, Owen tried to turn back toward him.

But it was the moment when I stepped into that invisible border. Suddenly, a dizzying feeling of dizziness attacked Owen's head.

A strange sensation of feeling like your mind is being sucked in and being pushed away at the same time. It feels like all the nerves in my body are shaking like a boat caught in a storm all at once.

I was surprised for a moment, but then a strong feeling of nausea came over me.

"Wow!"

Owen, covering his mouth, stumbled and slowly backed away from the spot.

"... What is this?"

I couldn't understand the English text. Because, based on his common sense, there was no proper way to explain the current situation.

But even in the midst of confusion, Owen was able to clearly perceive one fact.

This is why Seonghwang ordered him to run an errand out of the blue. Perhaps he wanted to keep Owen far away from this strange border.

'So this would mean that this situation is also under Godfather's control.'

After coming to that conclusion, Owen cautiously approached the invisible border again. Then he looked at the emperor with a nervous face and muttered.

"father. What on earth are you doing now?"

* * *

"Hurry up, Prince Logan! "The battleship the punitive force will take is already prepared!"

The council members all raised their voices. When they learned that the leader of the punitive force was the young prince, they seemed determined to push back with force alone.

But Logan wasn't so gentle.

"I want accurate information about the situation. "Please tell me in detail the type of demon beast, the area it appears in, and its scale."

"I can explain everything as we go. "Our navy has already planned a detailed subjugation operation!"

"Come on, we don't have time for this right now. Please know that while this is going on, the citizens of Cyprus are spending every day in pain!"

However, the prince of the Holy Empire did not blink an eye despite the pressure from the lawmakers.

"We acknowledge that this is an urgent matter for everyone. However, our punitive force only operates according to my plan. So, in order to successfully subdue it all at once, we need more detailed and accurate information about the demonic beast."

"... .."

When things did not go as expected, the council members urgently looked at the elderly lieutenants who were present.

However, they simply nodded silently at Prince Logan's words and did not make any attempt to reveal their presence in any way.

Only then did the council members slowly realize. Prince Logan's reputation is not just an exaggerated lie.

The young prince of the Holy Empire is truly their commander who personally plans and implements the subjugation strategy.

The council members exchanged glances for a moment and eventually decided to appease this formidable prince.

"I was rude in my haste. Don't worry about the reliability of the prepared operation, Prince Logan. Let me explain it properly. First of all, the weapon called [Ancient Fire] prepared by our Navy... .."

It was right then.

Wow-

With a heavy friction sound, the door to the tightly closed conference room opened.

"... ..?!"

"what? Why did you let the door open? What on earth are the guards doing... .."

The council members, whose meeting was suddenly interrupted, are muttering.

What appeared in front of the open door was a raven-like woman

wearing a gloomy gray uniform.

"... Sir Sharon?"

At Logan's name, the eyes of the deputies present all turn to her.

Everyone recognized her right away. Sir Sharon was the only exorcist from St. Terbachia who participated in this punitive force.

"What's going on here all of a sudden?"

"Why did you leave the ranks on your own?"

However, Logan's keen senses did not miss the moment when her eyes flashed with a strange silver color.

... Abama?

As I looked at him in confusion, the exorcist slowly opened his mouth with a stern expression.

[Degradation of Logan.]

A voice that sounds eerily close, as if it is echoing directly in my head. Although it was a voice he had heard once before, the Sword Master's senses sensed a strange gap that was somehow different from before.

[Please hurry.]

Her expression was also somehow different from before.

In the past, even though the soul of the Holy Emperor had been overwritten, it still had a human feel to it, but now it was extremely expressionless, as if it had been transformed into a complete mechanical doll.

Moreover, the words she uttered with great care were not smooth sentences. He appears extremely reticent, as if he is afraid of making a sound.

[The saint.]

But for Logan, those few words were enough.

My father came unexpectedly and mentioned Sisley. It probably means something happened to his younger brother.

As soon as his mind moves, all the auras around him carry the information he needs. A strange commotion in the hallway and my younger brother's unusually fast heartbeat.

'Sisley!'

Logan immediately stormed out of the conference room. Then, while everyone was stunned, he started running without hesitation in the direction where Sisley's presence was felt.

* * *

Preparations to subdue the demonic beasts were in full swing throughout the building.

While Sisley was walking with the guidance of an attendant, workers could be seen carrying several large wooden boxes on one side of the hallway.

"Hey, be careful moving there!"

"It's highly flammable. "Don't get too close to the torch!"

Meanwhile, the torches leading down the hallway were fluctuating more and more violently.

Crack! widely! widely!

It was so annoying that Inquisitor Boris finally uttered one word.

"Cyprus seems to use very poor quality oil for its torches."

Sisley just nodded without answering. As I began to experience the strange ominous feeling that had been felt earlier, it was gradually becoming physicalized into palpitations.

'what? 'Why am I so anxious?'

It was around that time.

A torch on the other side of the hallway showed strange movement.

Grumble!

The large flame that rose up high out of nowhere sent a small ember into the air, fluttering like the wings of a butterfly.

"... .. ?"

Sky sky.

The red embers that were flapping their wings alone without the help of the wind crossed Sisley's eyes with slow, dream-like movements.

"... hmm?"

And the place where the red butterfly finally landed was on a large wooden box that workers had placed in one hallway.

"Now, wait! I, I... .. !"

There was no time for the workers to do anything.

Grumble!

A fierce flame rises above [Ancient Fire], a secret weapon ambitiously prepared by the Cyprus Navy.

One after another-

Quaaaang!

A loud explosion shook the council building entirely.

382. Red (5)

"What the hell is going on!?"

"I'm buying it! A spark fell on one of the boxes containing the 'Ancient Fire'!"

"what? But why does an explosion occur?"

The sudden explosion completely collapsed a corner of the council building.

A couple of rooms adjoining the hallway were exposed without any boundaries, and the outer wall on the opposite side was also badly broken, giving a clear view of the adjacent courtyard.

And soon all of those spaces are quickly covered with hot scarlet flames.

Grrrrrrrrrrrr!

"Bring water! hurry!"

"it's crazy? No water! "The fire is only spreading further!"

"soil! Don't hesitate and get the dirt! As much as possible! All visible flames must be covered!"

While the workers were struggling in confusion, Logan, who easily navigated the crowded crowd, arrived at the scene of the accident in an instant.

"... ..!"

Three people were lying side by side in the burning hallway. Luckily,

I haven't been caught in the fire yet.

Logan, spotting familiar silver hair among them, spread his Auror curtain wide and ran straight to the edge of the flames.

"Sisle!"

I quickly picked up the little girl and examined her condition carefully. Fortunately, there seemed to be no apparent trauma. It seems she was caught in a strong explosion and lost consciousness for a moment.

Logan, sensing his younger brother's stable aura, let out a deep sigh of relief and increased his divine power.

Whoa!

After pouring out a ton of divine power on Sisley, Logan finally came to the senses to look at the surrounding situation.

And for a moment, I was speechless at the sight that unfolded before my eyes.

"... .."

It is a terrible fiery hell.

Riding on a secret flammable substance handed down from ancient times, the gigantic fire was devouring everything around it at every moment.

Patter-

Due to the aftermath of the explosion, the exterior walls of the building were still crumbling little by little, raising dust. Then, the dust generated there quickly bursts into flames, engulfing not only the floor but also the surrounding atmosphere.

A vicious cycle in which one fire creates another fire.

'... 'You managed to get away safely in this situation!'

Logan watched with slightly weary eyes as the hot flames split and spread to the left and right of the Aura curtain.

"Lowering!"

"Your Majesty Logan!"

"omg! "Saint?!"

The knights of Liliun, who belatedly ran after Logan, were startled and opened their Auror curtains one after another.

"Lowering! You must avoid it! "Hurry this way!"

Logan held Sisley and slowly retreated along the retreat route secured by the knights.

Sir Otto and Sir Ellie then rush in and safely pull the Inquisitor and servant who were lying nearby to the back.

Grumble! Good luck!

Meanwhile, fire extinguishing work was in full swing at the site. Guards from all directions join the workers and carry soil without stopping.

But that alone is not enough. The fire that had already begun to gain momentum only spread further and showed no signs of being extinguished.

"What a terrifying flame. I think this is the [Ancient Fire] the council was talking about."

Logan nodded at Sir Duchamp's muttering.

Seeing that the fire was clearly not extinguished, it seemed that fireworks could easily be carried out even on the sea.

At that moment, Sisley, who was in my arms, twitched slightly.

"... "Brother Logan."

"Yes, Sisley. "Are you out of your mind?"

Sisley blinked for a moment to focus, but then he seemed to come to his senses and opened his eyes.

"Brother! "What about Inquisitor Boris?"

"If you are referring to the Inquisitor who was with you, don't worry. He is safe."

Sisley turned his head and saw the Inquisitor and servant lying on one side of the hallway, frowned slightly, and slowly stood up.

"Anyway, what happened? Sisley. "Why were you caught in the explosion?"

"I am... "I decided to meet someone here."

"Who are you meeting?"

Sisley turned his head without answering. Towards a large room where the wall collapsed and the interior was completely exposed.

Logan, who had been unconsciously following the girl's gaze, suddenly sensed something and was startled.

"person... .. ?!"

Beyond the huge wall of fire, there really was another person lying there. He appears to be completely unconscious and does not even move even though parts of his body are engulfed in flames.

Logan was quite embarrassed.

'what? There was no sign of anything until just now? 'When are you there?'

Those who were extinguishing the fire seemed to have also noticed the person's presence.

"Ambrosius has been consumed by fire!"

"Priests! "Hurry and call a priest!"

"for a moment! Putting out the fire comes first! "Hurry up!"

At the commotion, Sisley suddenly woke up as if he had come to his senses.

"ah... ! Ambrose of Helios! "I was supposed to meet him, but I think he got swept up in the fire while coming to meet me!"

It meant that the author was the one who brought Sisley here on his own.

'But is that really a sign of a living person? 'It was so close to me, how could I not have noticed?'

As Logan hesitated, feeling strange, Sisley looked at Logan with an earnest look on his face.

"Brother Logan, I'm fine, so you hurry and help that person."

"Sisle."

"It may already be too late, but you can't leave people in the flames, right? "I'll take care of the other people who have fallen, so come on!"

It was a valid statement. Logan nodded his head and quickly jumped into the flames.

Wow-

As the powerful silver-blue curtain unfolded, the ferocious flames soon split apart, willingly clearing the way for the Sword Master.

* * *

The aftermath of the explosion was enormous. Even Seongjin, who started the fire, was unable to escape the shock.

No, maybe it had a bigger impact because I wasn't expecting it.

'Kkuek... ... !'

Seongjin's soul flew towards Delcross at once. The twins' soul terminals that were chattering next to her must have received a similar shock, and they flew off somewhere and their presence is no

longer felt.

Seongjin thought in the midst of dizzy confusion.

'what? 'Why is it exploding like that?'

As far as Seongjin knew, the substance contained in that box did not have the property of exploding at once. It was just liquid fuel that spread the fire quite quickly and was difficult to extinguish.

So Seongjin just quietly started a fire and tried to block Sisley's path. I thought it would be the icing on the cake if I could control the direction a little and completely burn down one annoying person.

'okay. What I was aiming for was the puppet master's life!'

To get rid of the puppeteer's soul, you have no choice but to hit the body it resides in.

But at the same time, Seongjin was well aware of the fact that the person himself was not actually a [Puppet Master].

It was a sin that could never be forgiven, just like attempting to murder a stranger. It was obvious that doing something like that with one's soul would consume an unimaginably large amount of cause and effect.

but-

'You will never have an opportunity like this again in the future. So, let's catch him off guard here! Even the puppet master probably never expected that I would twist cause and effect and use my hands directly!'

It's very breathtaking. However, if you use the things around you well, you probably won't completely exceed the limit of cause and effect.

At least Seongjin thought so.

'The culprit targeting Sisley and Logan! I'll completely destroy you right here!'

Although the spark was ignited in such a triumphant manner, the result was like this. It was completely different from what he expected.

I couldn't figure out why.

'There's no way such an explosion could have occurred just by pulling out a spark.'

My guess is that something got in the way. Someone had so efficiently manipulated a small amount of cause and effect that even Seongjin had not noticed, completely reversing the outcome of the event!

'Who on earth?'

Are they from the 6-person meeting? No, they still don't know what the puppeteer is up to.

Perhaps one of the high-ranking demon lords? But you won't really gain anything by interrupting me now, will you?

or not...

'... 'No way, father?'

That was when Seongjin thought about it.

Beep-

Soon, along with the loud ringing in my ears, my mind began to blur as always. Seongjin struggled to keep his thoughts going as his mind rapidly became blank.

'Not yet, not yet! We need to find out more about what happened! I have something to tell Logan and Sisley! That box... ... !'

... But wait a minute. Box?

How do I know what that box is?

No, more than that, where was I just now? What on earth am I for...

... .

Shoot ah-

Memories drain away like the ebb of the tide. It's very vain, but as it always has been, it's something we're used to now.

In the end, Seongjin gave up on the idea, relaxed his soul, and waited for the memories to disappear completely. She returns to her body and waits for Mores to open her eyes again.

[Lee Seong-jin.]

Just then, someone calls Seongjin. When I turned my head, I saw a small spark that looked quite familiar, twinkling faintly.

'Devil?'

Seongjin's soul, which was currently half-out of his body, could be seen clearly even without using his spiritual eyes.

But for some reason, the Demon King was no longer crying. In fact, unlike usual, he is giving off a rather determined atmosphere!

'mind...'

Seongjin was about to call him out once more, but the devil struck first, opening up the conversation.

[Wait a moment, Seongjin Lee. Wait a minute, would you like to talk to me a little bit right now?]

'story? What, suddenly? If that's the case, let's do it later. First, I wake up...'

[no. It's now or never! I don't want to lose my precious memories anymore!]

'... ... ?'

[Because it's only this one time! huh?]

It's a completely incomprehensible sound.

Nevertheless, the emotions in his earnest voice were vividly conveyed, and Seongjin suddenly felt like he wanted to grant whatever request he had.

Then, as if somehow knowing that thought, the Demon King's small flame swayed gently as if smiling.

[...] thank you.]

'... ... '

Seongjin looked at the shabby flame in front of him without answering.

For some reason, he didn't seem like the usual demon lord. He was an insignificant guy who whined like a child every day, but for some reason, I felt a kind of dignity about him now that was different from before.

[My business is nothing special. I thought today was the time to tell you my real name.]

Seongjin became curious.

'Why now?'

Didn't he do that before? He said it was difficult to say his own name out of his mouth. There's a lot at stake.

[Because the heavy gold decorations have become much lighter now.]

'taboo?'

[huh. As you know, I just received permission.]

'... ... ?'

As I was staring at him out of curiosity, the Demon King came up to Seongjin's eye level and blinked, as if making eye contact.

And he said each word slowly, with force, as if he was repeating it to

himself.

[Listen carefully, Seongjin Lee. My name is Kalpagni. He is the great Fire Demon and the annihilation of Gehenna, which brings about the destruction of the dimension.]

Kalpagni.

But that was the moment I heard that name.

Cheong-

Seongjin suddenly felt a huge impact hitting his head and stumbled.

'This... ... !'

A pain that is not that unfamiliar. It was definitely the same shock I received when I saw a puppet show being performed in a mess on the rue de Bertrand one day.

While Seongjin was deeply embarrassed by the unknown phenomenon, the Demon King asked in a disinterested voice.

[Tell me honestly. Seongjin Lee. You were in a lot of pain just now, right?]

'... ... !'

[okay. That's right.]

I felt like I got hit out of nowhere. However, the demon king, who was actually the one who created this phenomenon, had a calm demeanor as if he had anticipated everything.

[It has to be that way. Because that name has already become a misnomer. Now, the name of the Fire Demon may no longer be 'Kalpagni'.]

'what... ... ?'

[Do you remember the puppet show story you told me earlier?]

The Demon King was talking about a memory that Seongjin recalled.

[From then on, I thought something was strange. It must have been me, the Fire Demon Lord, who attacked by calling the wrong name, so why did you also suffer such a big blow?]

'... ... '

It's a problem I don't really want to think about. Because I knew that the more I dug into it, the more I would come to an unexpected conclusion.

But I couldn't stop the demon lord's words now. Anyway, didn't he promise to listen to what he said this time?

but.

[Lee Seong-jin. Do you know how the generational change of the devil takes place?]

Don't do it though.

Say no more, devil.

Seongjin wanted to say that. Part of her mind was deeply aware that what was coming had finally come.

[Take everything you can as long as you have the power. And the weak lose everything to the stronger. That's how demons live.]

The fact that I have been holding on to the devil's true name and trying hard not to recognize it until now.

[And it was the same for me, the king of one dimension.]

The spirit of the Demon King continues his detailed explanation, occasionally flashing irregular lights. A faint light that is so insignificant that it feels a little sad.

[You killed the demon king of one dimension alone. And he was qualified to rule over all of Gehenna.]

The Fire Demon had completed the generational change at that time. The Demon King who said that seemed either very sad or a little

happy.

[okay? Seongjin Lee. From the time you first came to this world, you were already the Fire Demon Lord and my monarch.]

383. Red (6)

A generational change has already occurred.

But at first, the Demon King did not realize this fact either. I don't know how he survived the ravages of hell, but somehow his soul was preserved intact.

As long as he wasn't completely destroyed, he thought he was the Fire Demon.

There were times when I felt that my condition was a little strange. But for some reason, he gradually stopped thinking about it too deeply.

The same thing happened one day when Lee Seong-jin asked me about my name in passing.

'There are many things at stake in my true name. If you mention this name carelessly, something irreparable will probably happen.'

Because such vague fear was eating away at his soul so strongly, the Demon King was unable to give a proper answer and ended up giving a vague answer.

'What did I do around midnight yesterday? 'Did you sleep?'

Of course, there were times when I noticed gaps in my memory that were noticeable.

But until then, the Demon King just thought that his soul was so bored that he was taking a short sleep.

Isn't it really strange? These are things that should have been detected and worried about a long time ago. Perhaps something

invisible was directly interfering with the Demon King's soul, castrating his doubts and sense of crisis from the beginning.

For example, the Demon King once heard something like this from an idiot.

-... And I was able to hear a detailed explanation from them. Red is not an evil spirit, but is actually your loyal servant.

How dare you call yourself, the great Demon King, a mere servant of a human! The Demon King was immediately outraged, but strangely enough, after a while, he stopped caring about it at all.

Another time something like this happened. Was it the time when I lent my spiritual eyes to Lee Seong-jin and examined objects in the normal world?

?List of spirits that can be summoned as summons 2/4?

?One. □□□□ (inactive)?

?2. □□□ □□ (inactive)?

?3. Hayes Martin (active)?

?4. Is red (active)?

An object from the normal world that always shows only objective information marks itself as Lee Seong-jin's summoned beast, not the Demon King?

At that time, the Demon King was so shocked that he even sobbed for a moment, forgetting about his body pain!

However, as some time passed, he once again ate the bear meat provided by Lee Seong-jin and gave it up.

I should have questioned all of those things early on.

Why did [Soul Detection] not work on Lee Seong-jin from the beginning? And how was it possible for Lee Seong-jin, a human being, to hijack his senses at will?

And then it finally happened. The day Seongjin Lee encountered a crazy old woman at Sigismund Range.

Lee Seong-jin, who was extremely indignant, temporarily removed the restrictions he had placed on himself and revealed some of his power in front of everyone.

-You will never be forgiven for your sins. You won't be able to sleep peacefully until you die. Even after death your soul will never rest.

A curse so powerful that it is so deeply engraved in the human soul that no one can even think of resisting it.

Each of those heavy words left a huge impact not only on the old woman who was the target of the curse, but also on the soul of Orden who was by her side.

So, what must the Demon King have felt when he vividly witnessed the scene in his spirit state?

That day, the Demon King felt something from Lee Seong-jin that was like a distant [force] that he could never overcome.

A mysterious energy that even he, a demon lord of one dimension, could not fathom. The shock of being defenselessly exposed to the gaze of a high-ranking demon king of superior rank.

And, a terrible pressure that felt like it would crush my soul in an instant.

The Demon King, who had been trembling in fear for a long time, eventually had no choice but to ask Lee Seong-jin:

-Are you really Lee Seongjin?

What did Seongjin Lee say at that time?

-are you okay. My father fixed everything. Everything is okay now, devil.

There was no way it was okay at all.

However, at Lee Seong-jin's answer, the Demon King found himself strangely relieved.

Before he knew it, he was being overly influenced by Lee Seong-jin's every move and even his emotional state.

'It's really strange. There is a strange side to my relationship with Lee Seong-jin that is difficult to explain...'

Just as the Demon King is the enemy who destroyed Lee Seong-jin's world, Lee Seong-jin is also the enemy who took away everything from the Demon King...

But why did the Demon King become so happy or sad at every word Seongjin Lee said, and desperately wanted to become the person he needed? Why did he voluntarily go to the trouble of sharing his spiritual eyes for his safety?

[and...]

The Demon King, who had said that much, stopped blinking for a moment and stared quietly into Seongjin's eyes.

[Lee Seong-jin, why did I think I wanted to stay in this world with you even though I could have killed you and returned to Gehenna?]

'...'

[Of course, we can know for sure now that the ban has been lifted. Perhaps, if you had disappeared in flames at that time, I, who lost my status as a demon king, would not have survived so well.]

okay. That must have been the case.

The current Demon King is like a candle in danger of being extinguished with just one careless gesture.

[You probably already knew that, right? So, at that time, you told me not to go back. Why did you do that? Why did you decide to save me now?]

As for why, there was no other reason. At that time, didn't the devil

decide to save Seongjin first? So he just responded with the same kindness to the kindness he showed first.

'I told you, right? You should stick by my side and become my traveling companion someday.'

When I answered harshly, the Demon King seemed a little embarrassed and started blinking the light rapidly.

[...] ... !]

'And you are quite useful. 'You can lend your spiritual eyes, become a lie detector, or even become a reconnaissance drone, right?'

[But Lee Seong-jin. If I hadn't been there from the beginning, you would have been...]

'From the beginning, what?'

[therefore...]

'what? why? what?'

[...]]

The Demon King, who was dazed for a moment by Seongjin's blunt attitude, soon shook his soul gently from side to side as if shaking his head.

[...] no. My new monarch has an unusually merciful side. Not like a devil at all.]

That's right, devil, because I'm not a devil.

Seongjin thought so without thinking, but he didn't say it out loud, even if it was in vain. Because he shouldn't define his existence carelessly.

Moreover, isn't it absurd to deny in advance something that you are not sure about?

[Anyway, after that day, I tried my best to control the fire of

Gehenna. But no matter how hard I tried, things didn't go as planned. So I gradually realized it. The fact that I have already completely lost control of the fire of Gehenna.]

Originally, this realization would have gradually faded away as usual under prohibition.

But is it because Seongjin's condition has become extremely unstable recently? The prohibition also became unstable, and the Demon King slowly began to reflect on the questions he had put aside in his consciousness until now.

[So I naturally learned how to solve the current awkward situation.]

I don't want to hear it.

Seongjin thought so.

But still, I had to listen. Because I tacitly granted the Demon King's wish that I no longer want to lose my memories, and that I would listen to the words he desperately wanted to convey to Seongjin.

[Lee Seong-jin. When the scale of power was completely tipped that day, our generational change had already begun. But, as you know, the process did not end so neatly.]

Because I still have my soul left, right?

The Demon King muttered that and began to move his soul from sky to sky.

[I gave the last command to the fires of Gehenna before I died. Burn everything in the world together with Lee Seong-jin. Even my soul, the owner of the cowardice, is everything.]

But somehow, their souls survived. That's why Gehenna's annihilation continues to this day, with every effort being made to burn those designated as its final targets.

[Of course, if the two of us are swept up in that fire together now, my shabby soul will probably burn and disappear before yours. And you will barely survive, eventually taking control of the ravages of hell. In

other words, all of this is going to happen anyway.]

'... ... '

[Yes, I know very well. The fact that my soul still remains in this world is nothing more than a small mercy shown by the person who has been appointed as the new monarch. But that reprieve cannot last forever.]

The place where the Demon King's soul headed was to Mores' Danjeon. A place where the small embers of Gehenna that are still alive flutter their tongues, looking for an opportunity to rise again at any time.

Only then did Seongjin know for sure.

The reason why the devil bastard has been sobbing and depressed lately.

Perhaps he had already decided on his end from then on and was slowly preparing for this situation.

'Wait a minute, devil. What are you doing now? ... !'

Seongjin was startled and tried to control him again, but the demon king's soul, which had already escaped the ban, was moving far away toward the fire of Gehenna.

Only the lonely sound of his thoughts are heard more and more clearly into my ears.

[I know that? The original principle of action of demons is quite simple. They try to pass on their pain to others and use their misfortune as a driving force to escape their own pain.]

Seongjin quickly moved his soul along with the guy.

But for some reason, the more I tried, the further the distance between me and him became.

[Now that I know a little about human physiology and emotions, I think about this. Isn't the devil's soul, unable to keep anything

precious, perhaps the most painful soul in the world?]

Perhaps Seonghwang had done something to it some time ago. He used his own method to completely distort time and space so that the flames of Gehenna were as far away from Seongjin's soul as possible.

[That's why Lee Seong-jin, I still can't truly apologize to you. It is my nature as a devil to destroy and devour dimensions. If there is even just one way for me to regain the power of the Demon King, I will someday repeat the same thing again to fill the deep void in my soul.]

The Demon King who had said that far stopped moving for a moment and blinked a faint light towards Seongjin.

[But this is also an undeniable fact. Although I have reigned as the king of the demon world for a long time, I have never had an experience as dense and fulfilling as the past few months with you. It could be said that those memories are the most valuable things in the world that I never want to lose.]

Seongjin finally gave up trying to catch up with the guy and shouted.

'Hey, man! what are you doing? 'Stop it now!'

But the Demon King paid no heed, and continued to deliver words that sounded like a will.

[So, I am grateful to you, Seongjin Lee. Taking someone as a servant means carrying that person's karma on your back as well. Thanks to you, I was able to escape my devil nature for a moment and experience many emotions as if I were truly human.]

'You say you are my descendant? Then listen to my orders! Stop there!?'

[Thank you so much for giving my soul a long reprieve so that I can accumulate enough happy memories.]

'... 'Don't do that, devil.'

[And thank you for making me feel like I don't want to lose it forever,

even if I end up disappearing.]

The demon king's soul, who had spoken up to that point, spoke for the last time, emitting bright light.

[Hello, Seongjin Lee.]

384. Conflict (1)

'Should I ask someone for help?'

Owen paced in front of the strange border with a nervous look on his face.

'Brother Masain! If my brother were here, he might have told me a way to resolve the situation somehow!

As soon as my thoughts reached that point, I wanted to run out and find him right now.

But with my father and Mores in such an unstable state, I can't leave here alone!

"Is there anyone outside? Chamberlain! Louis!"

Owen shouted out the door several times. But strangely, there was no sign of Lewis, who was obviously in the office next door.

Where is that? The hallways, which would normally be crowded with people, were also quiet, as if the people had disappeared at once.

It felt as if the temporary treatment room itself had become a place that did not exist in reality, or as if it had been pushed somewhere far beyond the scope of human perception.

How long had they been standing guard in front of that gray, faded space?

sparkle.

Suddenly, the boy lying on the bed opened his eyes as if it were a lie.

"Hey, Mores! you... ..!"

Owen smiled and called out to him.

However, just as he was about to approach the bed, Owen soon flinched back and trailed off. I realized that the strange boundary of space still remained there.

It seems that this strange situation is not completely over yet. Above all, the condition of the boy who opened his eyes seemed very strange.

'... ..?!'

Mores, who stared straight ahead for a moment with his eyes wide open, soon began to slowly sit up with an expressionless face.

However, the appearance looks very heterogeneous, as if a mechanical doll is creaking.

'Why is that guy acting like that all of a sudden?'

Owen unconsciously felt goosebumps forming on his skin. At first glance, the boy's body seemed cold and solid, as if it were made entirely of inorganic matter, not a living organism.

In the midst of that lifeless appearance, the only thing that seemed alive was the boy's eyes.

The bright gray eyes, shining brightly, emit a strange silvery glow in the dim shadows of the backlight.

The scene was unfamiliar to Owen, but also not unfamiliar at all. Wasn't Seonghwang's state similar to this, as he had been frozen in a daze from earlier?

Above all, those eyes-

That bright light that shines alone in the dark reminded me of a mysterious friend who once in a dungeon would sometimes give off a strange glow in his eyes.

-Let's go to the middle!

-hey! Don't jump out, newbie! It's dangerous!

??!

The image of a small goat running forward without hesitation, making cute footsteps, suddenly flashes through my mind.

'... Newbie?'

No, but-

Owen shook his head.

'Am I out of my mind? Why are you suddenly thinking about the wrong guy? Right now, the work of my father and Mores is more urgent than anything else!'

It was right then.

The boy who was staring straight ahead with no expression suddenly rolled his eyes and cast his gaze at Seonghwang next to him.

* * *

[why!]

Owen probably hadn't even guessed.

However, as soon as Seongjin opened his eyes, he was furiously venting his anger towards Seonghwang.

[Why on earth did you do that! I thought I was leaving everything to my will, based on my judgment!]

Is it because of the Demon King's sacrifice that he was not even aware of? Seongjin's emotions were so intense that he opened his eyes with a part of his consciousness that he normally completely suppressed. Because of this, he is currently a little confused about who he is.

So, for the first time since I woke up in this world, I actively shot out thoughts using the flame crystal while maintaining normal

consciousness.

[Why did you do that! Wasn't it you who said that two oracles could not coexist at the same time?]

As the deeply suppressed aspects of one's personality are revealed, an accurate perception of the current situation naturally also rises to the surface.

Thanks to this, Seongjin was able to clearly recognize that the interference that occurred earlier was Seonghwang's doing.

[To avoid a conflict of perceptions, one of the two must completely give up their will for the future! So it's always been that way, hasn't it? But why, at such a critical moment, do you suddenly come to the fore and disturb me?]

The person in front of him is someone who can understand and manage all the affairs of the world if he wants to.

Therefore, there is no other person in the world that Seongjin can argue with as much as he likes, other than this person.

[If only I had just killed that guy, many future problems would have been resolved smoothly!]

I burst out in anger.

A target that was narrowly missed. Because of this, the most ideal future that Seongjin had in mind disappeared by just a hair's breadth!

[To Sisley! To Logan too! And to you too! There would be no doubt that it was a much better future!]

It was a fierce backlash that had never been seen before.

Nevertheless, Seonghwang seems to have expected this and just looks at Seongjin without answering.

[In the end, if you were going to do this in the end, why on earth did you do that to me... .. !]

Seongjin was currently filled with a strange sense of betrayal and frustration. It was not just because his will and that of Seonghwang directly clashed.

Now, Seongjin, who still has his personality and memories, albeit imperfectly, knows what burden Seonghwang shouldered to stop him.

That made me even more angry. Because of this incident, I could clearly see what price he would have to pay in the future!

[What on earth do you want? Why do you take the easiest path and manipulate cause and effect into such a complicated tangle? Even so, what more do you want to add to a topic that has so many things foolishly burdening you with? What on earth are they all?!]

A cause and effect so subtle that even Seongjin would have had a hard time understanding it right away. Even though such a small cause and effect was twisted and rolled, the ramifications of exercising power directly with the soul would be enormous.

It was truly infuriating. There are degrees of foolishness among people!

[Your greed is too excessive to converge all those countless branches of cause and effect into one point! It's not like you don't know! A perfect future without sacrificing anything never exists in this world!]

Blink.

Then Seonghwang, who had not moved a muscle until then, slowly moved his eyelids.

But his mind was actually full of other thoughts.

okay. Because the future of that wrong thing was also important to you. So, even though I subconsciously anticipated and prepared for it, the unexpected sacrifice it showed was such a shock.

[...] Son.]

After choosing his words for a moment, Seonghwang called out to Seongjin, who was extremely upset, as if to soothe him.

[You are the oracle of the next generation, and the fact remains that your will is paramount in everything that will happen in the future. But you must know this for sure. Only when you look at the world through the eyes of a complete oracle can you understand all the causes and effects that led to the current outcome and intervene in them in the way you want.]

[Undoubtedly, I have moved all causality so far as a perfect oracle. He went as far as erasing his own memories every time out of fear that the results would be even slightly distorted! Do you really want to say that I expected you to intervene as you please? In the end, are all of these things the result 'I' wanted?]

[I don't mean that.]

[then... ... !]

[I was just saying that your judgment as an oracle may be a little different from how you are now, who maintains a little bit of personal will.]

Until now, Seongjin had not made much of a distinction between the two. But it wasn't until today that I got to truly experience it.

'I' probably anticipated the devil's actions and prepared for them.

But wasn't I completely unaware until just now that the Demon King was prepared to make such a sacrifice? Since he didn't want that at all, he didn't even assume that his family would go against his will.

[That's essentially the Oracle's perspective. If you try to carry out a clear will from the beginning, it becomes impossible to keep everything in sight.]

It is extremely difficult to maintain that gaze forever. Seonghwang added that.

[Unless the original will and emotions are completely destroyed, humans will never be able to be rational in the face of all the vortex of cause and effect.]

Seongjin pondered his words for a moment. But then he suddenly

snaps and gets angry again.

[But at that time, I made an extremely reasonable and rational decision! Even now, that thought has not changed! Killing the puppet master was the only best choice for everyone in the Seonghwang family!]

[okay. Then don't ask.]

In response to Seongjin's strong protest, Seonghwang was not embarrassed and continued speaking in a low voice.

[Son. Was that the best choice the result of sufficient consideration of your own safety?]

[...] yes?]

[At the moment you decided to take the puppeteer's life, did you also exist with everyone in the future that your intention envisioned?]

[that...]

Seongjin was speechless for a moment.

Of course, I thought it could be dangerous. However, he did it because he calculated that as much as he would lose something, the value of what he gained would be just as valuable.

But if you think about it carefully now, there are some parts that take some time.

'To be honest, I didn't have any desire to resolve my personal grudge against the puppet master.'

Even in a world where puppet masters have disappeared, other dangers are sure to arise.

So, if you ask whether it is the most perfect and efficient choice for the future, there may be some differences of opinion depending on your perspective.

[But for Sisley or Logan, it's much more...]

As Seongjin muttered stubbornly, Seonghwang slowly shook his head.

[You also fully know the answer to that. Do you really think that those children are not even capable of taking care of themselves without your help?]

[...]]

Seongjin remained silent for a moment, then slowly looked away with a slightly softened attitude.

[...] Well, I understand what you said. But from now on, don't ever interfere with me like this again. Because I can do it more perfectly in the future.]

[...]]

[So, what I am saying is, don't waste the little time you have left like that. Do you understand?]

Then Seonghwang sent a gently shaking wave. This is evidence that although he has lost some control of his body due to breaking away from the laws of the world, his emotions are still active as usual.

However, along with that faint smile, the feeling conveyed simultaneously from the thought was a strange bitterness.

[How far are you trying to be inferior to others on your own? Why, from now on, are you planning on not just erasing your memories, but also practicing killing your own emotions more completely?]

[...]]

[In the end, I want to believe that you will not make the same choice as your grandmother.]

Seongjin's eyes, which had been completely expressionless, only then slightly wavered.

Because the current Seongjin never knew what choices the former Oracle made and what the results were in the end.

[...] Well, let's move on from what has already happened. The problem is next.]

Seongjin quickly called attention.

It's not just that I narrowly missed the puppet master. Recently, Seonghwang's position as the guardian of the dimension has been very precarious, because he has been neglecting his job of taking care of the Delcross dimension by continuing to stick by Seongjin's side.

However, there was no way those who invaded this place would tolerate the prosperity.

Those who thought they had an opportunity launched a more aggressive attack than usual, and in the end, Seonghwang had no choice but to hold on, delaying action as long as possible and twisting the flow of time.

If he tries to sneak in again and deal with them, this time he will have to endure an offensive that cannot be compared to the large-scale air raid that took place last time.

[Considering what happened today, the six-person meeting will definitely not sit still this time. Why on earth did you do something like that?]

But even with all these karma in front of him, Seonghwang just responded resolutely.

[There is nothing to worry about. All preparations have already been made.]

[...] prepare? Are you saying that even after looking at that mess?]

I'm not a kid who piles up a mountain of vacation homework and pulls it out the day before school starts.

But Seonghwang really seemed to think nothing of this mess.

[Everything is still completely under my control. Don't worry too much.]

After responding like that, Seonghwang moved his stiff facial muscles and slightly raised the corners of his mouth.

[You are still 650 years too early to worry about that.]

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

[...] I'm definitely trying to overcome my age by at least 10 years.]

In the end, Seongjin let go of his anger and muttered.

Logan and you do exactly the same thing. How can they be so consistent?

* * *

Wow!

Suddenly, Mores curls up and retches loudly.

"... ... !"

At the same time, the boundary in front of me collapses like a lie, and the space that had faded to gray regains its usual presence.

Owen was startled and ran towards the boy.

"Mores! Are you okay? "What's going on here?!"

But the boy, with his head down and his mouth covered, was urgently gesturing somewhere with one hand!

"ah... ... !"

"huh? what?"

"Father... "Wow!"

"... ... !?"

Owen was confused, but soon realized what Mores really wanted to say.

Slurp-

The body of Seonghwang, who had been sitting stiffly until then, slowly collapsed to the side as if he had suddenly lost the strength to support him.

Slurp!

"father!? What the hell is this... .."

Owen panicked and grabbed him, but Mores struggled to catch his breath and continued speaking.

"Katrina, call the leader. right now!"

"... "Director Katrina?"

"okay. And, Eddie... .."

After speaking up to that point, Mores lay down on one side of the bed in the living room and suppressed the nausea that came over him for a moment.

"Call Edith here, right now!"

385. Conflict (2)

"your majesty!"

Quang!

There was nothing else to do but go and call Owen.

As soon as the gap that hindered human perception completely disappeared, the Holy Emperor's loyal shield immediately sensed something abnormal and rushed to the temporary treatment room.

Katrina, who opened the door in an uncharacteristically harsh manner, noticed Seonghwang leaning on Owen's arm, and her complexion immediately became pale. But her years of experience were not in vain, and she soon regained her composure and calmly approached them.

"Excuse me for a moment."

She carefully checked the pulse of the success and seemed to quickly grasp the situation.

"Sir Francis. Assemble the paladins. "We must go to the prayer room with His Majesty right now."

The adjutant who followed behind with a confused look nodded and quickly ran away.

"Prayer room? why? My father suddenly collapsed for no reason. "Then isn't it better to treat the underlying disease first?"

When Owen, who knew nothing, asked worriedly, Katrina smiled reassuringly as she took the bus from him.

"Don't worry, Prince Owen. No disease in the world can dare invade Your Majesty. "You yourself are working miracles even in places you can't see, simply for an important task."

"A miracle... Are you holding an event?"

"Yes that's right. That's how you work. "There is no corner of the world that His Majesty's hand does not reach, and it is just that the eyes of criminals like us cannot dare to capture it all."

Katrina had learned this from past experiences.

In case the soul of the Holy Emperor leaves unexpectedly, his body must be made to escape the laws of physics on earth as much as possible. That it was the only way to alleviate the shock his soul received from the gap.

The place for this is the prayer room located in the heart of the imperial palace.

Just one thing that bothers me-

"Your Majesty Mores. "Are you feeling okay?"

This is what happened to the young prince who is still lying in bed and groaning.

Fever of unknown cause.

After Prince Mores was seriously injured and brought to the main palace, the Holy Emperor set up a temporary treatment room and did not enter the prayer room even once from that day. This was because the prince's condition was so unstable that it was impossible for him to be away for a long time.

"What should I do? Is it okay to move His Majesty to the prayer room like this?"

As Katrina worried later, Seongjin guessed what she was worried about and waved his hand.

"Uh, I'm okay now... So come on, dad... "Wow!"

"... "It doesn't look good at all."

"This is just motion sickness. If it's a fever, my father will be fine now... You said you would. So, you left the place with peace of mind."

As Seongjin responded incoherently, Owen, who was listening from the side, looked strange.

"ok? When did your father do that? You were just sitting still and then suddenly collapsed! "Aren't you just making up nonsense to put people at ease?"

what? Why did I do that?

What on earth does this guy think of me?

'I had a long conversation with my father, mostly through reflection... ah! There's no way Owen knew that!'

When Seongjin made a shocked expression, Katrina also confirmed it again with a firm face.

"Is that true? Please tell me exactly what your current situation is, sir. I can still feel this heat... .."

"Uh, this is just... It's a light fever. It's no big deal. "It's just the nature of my Auror."

As he said, Seongjin was truly feeling a sense of liberation for the first time in a long time. The auror combined with the fire of Gehenna began to stir again in the Danjeon, but the heat was no longer enough to threaten Seongjin's life.

It was truly amazing.

It's not like the devil of hell suddenly lost his power. The fire, which had seemed like a disaster beyond human control not long ago, was now trying to fuel the flames at random, but it felt like Seongjin was secretly watching out for them.

'I thought it wouldn't be long before this happened.'

okay. I had a premonition that if I took the time and worked hard, one day I would be able to control the fires of Gehenna.

'So my father must have waited for me too. But what did my father say to me earlier? For some reason, it seemed like he was saying that he had been idle for a while, and that he was now going to do some backlogged work... ..'

Of course, the current Seongjin did not know the details of how things came to this. The memories that had vaguely remained in my mind since I opened my eyes were quickly disappearing.

but-

'Well, what's good is good, right?'

Moreover, I did not forget any important facts that must be left behind. This radical change is in no way thanks to the crybaby demon king's sacrifice for Seongjin.

and-

'We have to get him back. Surely I did something at the end! 'That's how I feel!'

Fortunately, the nausea that felt like I was suffocating is slowly stabilizing. Seongjin struggled to lift her head and winked at Katrina.

"So don't worry, I'll just take my father and go."

"Yes, sir."

Katrina did not dig in any further and bowed her head politely.

She was well aware of the strange bond between the Holy Emperor and this mysterious prince. That they see a world that the criminal cannot understand, and that they sometimes communicate in ways that only they know.

So I asked this.

"Is it by any chance that His Majesty gave us special instructions?"

"Oh, that... .."

Seongjin removed the hand covering his mouth and frowned.

"So, what did you say? that's right. He said that from now on, all political affairs will be left to the Empress. "He said that the rest of the work can be done as usual, and Chamberlain Louis will probably understand."

"... .."

Are you planning to be away for a long time again? What kind of urgency had happened that even those simple instructions had to be delivered through Prince Mores?

Katrina could not hide her expression of concern and looked at Seonghwang's face, whose eyes were quietly closed.

"Captain! "We're ready!"

At that time, Francis returned, leading the Knights of St. Aurelion.

Following Katrina's instructions, they skillfully prepared to secretly move a person. He is the monarch of a holy country with a supreme name and appearance, but it was not good for others to see him unconscious.

Chamberlain Lewis came running after them, saw them off with a very worried face, and tidied up the messy temporary treatment room.

"right. Looking at her face reminds me. And it turns out that I had something to ask the Chamberlain too."

"What is that, Prince Mores?"

"Uh, some kind of document I prepared in advance... He told me to send it. "Luis, you say he knows what he's talking about."

"... "You mean the official document, 'Do not reveal yourself.'"

huh? 'Do not reveal yourself' official letter? What on earth is that?

Seongjin inadvertently tilted his head, and when he felt his barely stable vestibular system shaking again, he covered his mouth.

"Wow!"

"this! Are you okay, sir? 'I'll bring you some tea right now to help ease your upset stomach!"

Meanwhile, Owen, who knew nothing, could only mutter with a bewildered expression.

"ok? So when did your father say those things? Why does it feel like everyone understands it except me? What's this?"

After some time has passed like that.

Seongjin, who had barely escaped severe motion sickness, had Edith bring a few things. These were items from the world of symmetry that had been stored in Jinju Palace.

These are the magic stones I received as a gift, several transparent soul stones, a half-signpost, and the lycanthrope race key.

Seongjin put all of them aside and finally picked up an elaborately crafted metal necklace.

?A sign of Nebraska?

At that very moment, Owen, who was watching Seongjin doing something nearby, noticed something strange.

"... ... !?"

The boy's silver-gray eyes glowed faintly once again, and the strange pupils occasionally emitted red light.

'What is this guy? 'Are you really in a good state?'

Owen's gaze at Seongjin becomes increasingly sharp.

But Seongjin had no time to worry about the small doubts he felt. Before he knew it, he was naturally using the spiritual eyes he had

borrowed from the Demon King, but he also roughly ignored the reason for doing so.

Because there was something I had to quickly check with my eyes right now.

?List of spirits that can be summoned as a summoner 1/3?

?One. ☐☐☐☐ (inactive)?

?2. ☐☐☐ ☐☐ (inactive)?

?3, Belinda Miles (active)?

As soon as I concentrated my mind, texts came to mind in a blur.

Seongjin felt his heart sink when he saw that the Demon King's name had disappeared from there. There seemed to be something strange stuck at the end, but that wasn't that important.

The problem is, where is the soul of the demon king who disappeared from the list now?

'no! Not yet! 'It's still too early to be disappointed!'

Seongjin tried to suppress his pounding heart and rummaged through the soul stones rolling around next to him.

'When I first summoned Hayes' evil spirit as a test, his name was removed from the list. So, his soul may still remain somewhere in the form of a soul stone!'

But it was no use. The few remaining empty soul stones are just sparkling with a shockingly transparent light.

?Soul stone?

No, it's difficult to do this! You can't do this!

Seongjin desperately shook his head.

'I summoned Hayes' evil spirit and it became a soul stone. Then Vajra? What about his soul?'

I remember that he, who was being manipulated by a lycanthrope lord, was naturally sucked into the soul stone that was nearby as he faced death at the hands of Seongjin.

'Is that really the case? 'Isn't it okay if there isn't a soul stone nearby?'

In that case, how can the soul of the Demon King in the main palace be preserved in the soul stones left far away in the Jinju Palace? No, no! I had a premonition! I'm sure I did something!

'Hey, devil?'

I tried calling him again with a faint hope, but as expected, I could not feel the slightest sign of his soul. My mind feels empty and empty.

"uh... ... !"

Seongjin's complexion worsened by the minute.

Is it really the end? Is there no way to return the favor I received from him now? You can't tell me to shut up anymore, and I can't hear you sing loudly while eating bear meat?

As Seongjin bit his lip nervously while holding the amulet, Owen asked worriedly from his side.

"Hey, Mores. "Are you really okay?"

It was right then.

"Oh, that's right. Come to think of it!"

Edith seemed to have suddenly remembered something and walked up to the cabinet on the wall.

"I picked this up in your room a few days ago and forgot about it. "I brought it here to give it to you, but I forgot about it after putting it in a bucket where you suddenly got a fever."

... what?

When Seongjin raised his head with a blank expression, Edith searched through the drawers of the dresser and pulled out a small bead.

Unlike the transparent soul stones, there is one small bead colored in deep red.

"uh? what? wait for a sec. Was it this color? "Do you think something has changed?"

While Edith was confused, Seongjin looked fascinated at the faint text slowly emerging from the bead.

?Red's soul stone?

* * *

"It's all because of me! This happened because I inadvertently encouraged Sisley... ..!"

Inquisitor Boris, who had been taken to the treatment room, beat his chest and lamented as soon as he came to his senses.

"I shouted loudly that I would assist you. "But even though I can't protect the saint by my side, I fainted so ugly that I even received treatment from the saint!"

Ugh!

Looking at the junior Inquisitor who was struggling with self-destruction, Lumie had a confused look on her face.

If you think about it, it could be said that Lumie was also responsible. What would have been done by just taking the saintess to her conference room was done for no reason in order to control her discipline, so they created this sad situation.

"I swear to the Lord that I will make up for this humiliation! From now on, I will stay by Saint Sisley's side for the rest of my life and pay for my sins forever!"

Inquisitor Boris, who suffered for a long time, finally became overly

motivated and made this oath.

Of course, Lumie, who was nearby, was not much different. On the outside, she was holding her weight as the person in charge of all the Inquisitors, but inside, she was making this promise.

'You must have been surprised by the sudden accident, but you showed camaraderie by taking care of your injured fellow Inquisitor first. What is the point of testing and being wary of such a person for no reason? From now on, I will serve Sisley as politely as possible and never take my eyes off him!'

Right then.

A young man's voice was heard next to them. He was the victim of another explosion that had left him unconscious earlier.

"In the end, the Lord's small grace found me this way. "You made me get caught up in a sudden accident by making a pointless request, so you really have no shame."

Although he sounded listless as he had just woken up from a hospital bed, it was still a voice with a strange charm that penetrated deeply into people's hearts.

"And I would like to meet Prince Logan, a knight of the Lord, renowned even in Cyprus. "Thanks to you, I barely saved my life, so I don't know how I can express my gratitude appropriately."

Ambrose of Helios.

The Prince of Cyprus, who had saved his life, looked at Sisley and Logan in turns and gently curled his mouth.

386. Conflict (3)

There was great commotion for some time in the Council of Cyprus.

The little saint who came running to subdue the demonic beast was caught in a fire as soon as she arrived due to the carelessness of the workers.

An unexpected accident that not only raised questions about the stability of the secret weapon they had confidently prepared, but also could have caused great diplomatic friction between Cyprus and the Holy Empire if they were not careful.

The good news was that, except for one council member, there were no major injuries.

[Ancient Fire], a chemical weapon that is said to not be extinguished once it catches fire.

The box exploded right in front of the saint's eyes, but she lost consciousness for a moment and not a single scratch was left behind. She was truly amazing.

'Ah, Lord! thank you!'

'They said it was a small grace from the Lord, and it's true! If something had happened to Sir Sisley, Delcross's subjugation team might have raised their swords at us instead of at the demonic beasts!'

Should I say that I am glad that the worst situation was avoided?

Of course, the elders and council members did not dare to express that thought outwardly. After all, the one injured person was the

eldest son of Elder Chryses, the most powerful person in Cyprus.

"They say Ambrose has just come to his senses! He suffered serious burns all over his body, but fortunately his life was not in any danger!"

"Oh oh! It is truly the care of the Lord! "Didn't you say that you were at the center of a big explosion and that your whole body was engulfed in an ancient fire that could not easily be extinguished?"

"I heard Prince Logan saved you in time? "He's always in good health, so those burns will get better quickly if he gets treatment from the priests!"

Other elders relay the news of the accident and carefully watch Chryses.

However, Elder Chryses did not show any interest in this and seemed to be thinking deeply about something.

"... "Let's continue the strategy meeting tomorrow."

After a while, he declared in a low voice.

"The order now is to first resolve the accident and then inspect the 'ancient fire' again. A proper strategy meeting will probably only be possible after that."

Even though my son almost lost his life, his reaction was strangely dull.

As the elders and council members muttered in confusion, Elder Chryses slowly stood up and added,

"Tell the punitive force to be treated more hospitably today. Aren't they the grateful people who willingly extended a helping hand to the citizens of Cyprus? "On top of that, you saved my son's life, so I don't know how to express my gratitude."

With those words, the older man walked out of the conference room with strides. With a stern expression without the slightest hint of gratitude.

* * *

"You are very fortunate, Mr. Ambrose."

And the person involved in the accident was currently sitting in bed, smiling softly at the people surrounding him.

"yes. This is all thanks to the saint and Prince Logan. "Being by the side of two people who are favored by the god, the invisible hand of care extended even to me, a humble person."

"Could you please lower your posture for a moment? "I will change the bandage on your shoulder."

Ambrose of Helios, his condition could not be said to be good even with empty words. When Logan ran, his body was already engulfed in high-temperature flames along with highly flammable substances.

Although Logan quickly put out the fire and joined forces with Sisley to pour out divine power, most of his skin had already melted due to severe burns.

The areas with large and small blisters are in good condition. Most of his upper body and right arm had already turned completely gray and hardened.

Evidence that the muscles may have been completely cooked beyond the deep layers of the skin.

But despite such severe injuries, the man was smiling with an innocent face.

"It was a shock so strong that it shook the very foundation of my soul."

At the time of the accident, his face was intact, except for part of his lower abdomen, as he was covered with a mask.

Ambrosius struggles to move his remaining skin and smiles a rather charming smile.

"It was to the point where I thought a part of my soul had really died.

It can't be anything other than a truly fortunate and sad thing. "Thank you again."

What on earth is happy and sad?

Sisley, who was somehow caught by a strange feeling, looked closely at Ambrose.

"The author is the Prince of Cyprus... .."

He was a very neat-looking man. Bright blonde hair and a sharp, strong lower crown that is rarely seen in the eastern part of the continent. A voice that is soft and polite, but at the same time has a pressure that makes you nervous.

According to rumors, it was said that he was close to young age. However, in Sisley's opinion, he seemed too mature for his age.

'... what? Haven't I seen this person somewhere?'

Even though it was clearly their first time meeting, Sisley felt strangely familiar to him.

As it turns out, she wasn't the only one who felt that way.

"Ambrosius. "It would be presumptuous to ask under these circumstances, but have we met somewhere before?"

In response to Logan's question, the man's eyes widened as if he was amused.

"well. At least not from what I remember. Even so, the construction work was so busy that I never visited the Holy Empire even during the birthday party."

truth. Although there were some subtle nuances, the man's words were clearly sincere.

"Why on earth did you think that way? If it's not rude, do you mind if I ask why?"

"It's nothing special. "I just thought he looked a little like someone I

knew."

"ha ha ha... . "I'm so glad you feel that way."

Ambrose, who had been letting out a low laugh, stiffened his face for a moment as if he was experiencing strong pain.

"Well, I guess there's no place to guess. Do you know? "My mother was the youngest sister of Grand Duke Asein."

"then..."

"exactly. "Your younger brother, who is famous in many ways, is like a distant relative of mine."

"..."

... Mores' relative?

Logan closed his mouth with a stern expression. To be honest, there was nothing about that guy other than his bright blonde hair that reminded me of his younger brother.

In addition, there was a slight discomfort that was getting on the sword master's nerves from earlier.

It was truly a strange thing.

Ambrosio of Helios has always maintained a polite and gentle demeanor from the beginning, but strangely, Logan felt that it was difficult to treat him calmly.

"Big... ... !"

At that time, Ambrose let out a soft moan again. The therapist's hands that were peeling off the hardened skin must have touched a nerve that remained unburned.

Dots of red blood come out from the cloth that is being wiped off the messed up skin.

"... "I will help you with treatment."

As Logan's hand went to the wound, Ambrosius quickly shook his head.

"I decline. I am not shameless enough to expect any more effort from those who have generously poured out their divine power so far. "The therapists in Cyprus will take care of everything from now on, so you two can get some rest."

"... .."

"As an aside, I would like to properly thank you two. If it weren't for you, would I have survived until now? So, will you please stay at my father's mansion this evening? "I hope you give me a chance to repay this favor in some small way."

Kkugit-

At that time, he felt a hand gently pulling the collar of his uniform from behind.

"Brother."

Sisley's voice sounded somewhat nervous.

Logan, who realized the youngest's intention without even looking back, shook his head in a polite manner.

"Similarly, I am not shameless enough to expect a seriously injured person to be treated as a guest. "We will be leaving now, so please rest comfortably and focus on your recovery."

After giving a cursory greeting, Logan held Sisley's hand and hurried out of the treatment room.

I felt earnest eyes looking at him from behind, but I didn't want to worry about him anymore.

[...] I wondered why that evil thing had to send me along, and it turned out that there was a dangerous person here.]

It was Seo Yi-seo, or rather Cadmus, who greeted the two outside the door of the treatment room.

The iris, shining brightly in gold, tightens as if assessing the scene inside the closed room.

"Do you know someone?"

I asked without thinking, and the answer I got was shocking.

[At one time, I thought that was a close friend. Before I was fooled by that guy's sweet words and wasted 700 years in a coffin.]

"... yes?"

Logan and Sisley exchanged looks.

Are you really someone who knew the first king? Could that be possible?

Ambrose of Helios probably didn't live for a thousand years, but how on earth did that happen...?

[Descendants.]

Cadmus growled and continued, paying no heed to the two people's embarrassed looks. The gaze toward the treatment room door still had a menacing glow in it.

[If possible, it would be best not to encounter the author any more. Both you and Sisley.]

* * *

Wong!

A powerful cry echoes through the hallway of the main palace. Seongjin stood up with a smile on his face.

"Max!"

The first thing Seongjin did as soon as he woke up from his sick bed was to call the wolf dog that was kept in the palace courtyard.

As soon as permission was given, Max rushed in like the wind, sat down in front of the bed with his feet together, and began to cry

mournfully.

Whoa!

-How could you do that to me? Why have you left me for so long?

"I'm sorry, Max. "This was all done for you."

Ooooh-!

-You knew I was waiting! You knew I was calling!

"Okay, okay. I did everything wrong. "I'll play with you more often from now on, okay?"

Kiyiing.

Then the wolf-dog appears a little more relaxed and gently wags its tail.

"Wait a moment. There must be a bag of snacks that Edith packed here somewhere... . Ah, here it is! Do you want a snack, Max?"

When I waved a piece of beef jerky around to soothe him, Max immediately raised the corners of his mouth and wagged his tail.

Then he immediately jumped up on the bed and started licking Seongjin's face like crazy.

??!

"no! Ugh! Max! Eating a snack... ! Ugh! "It tickles!"

Seongjin was rolling around on the bed with Max. Owen's eyes widened as he watched the mess.

"what? "Do you think that noble, mean-spirited guy can be cute like that?"

Lose your temper? Who on earth?

"Are you really talking about our cutie Max? "Aren't you mistaken?"

When Seongjin asked, barely pushing the wolf dog away, Max also vigorously hit Owen.

Wong wong!

-that's right! You are wrong! Just as my master said, I am strong, huge, and even cute!

Owen was overcome with a great sense of betrayal by his calm and shameless attitude.

"No, that guy really! While my owner was sick, I fed him every day, gave him snacks, and even took him for a walk... ..!"

Kiing.

In response to Owen's complaint, the wolf-dog slightly turns his head and whines. Then Seongjin's eyes suddenly became sharp.

"Owen! You're a bastard! Why are you mistreating a dog that knows nothing? "What does this little thing know?"

"no... ..!"

Hey, wait a minute! Can't you see those shameless expressions on your faces? Do you really think that guy doesn't know anything!

As Owen gaped in bewilderment, Edith, who was standing behind him, muttered in a somewhat sorrowful voice.

"Hehe, your Majesty will probably get used to that cowardice soon. This isn't something that happens in a day or two. Yes, it's all just a futile effort."

387. Conflict (4)

"This case is the only one we need to consider, Lord Masaine."

Masain sighed in relief at Jibril's words. The paperwork that seemed like it would never end has finally come to an end.

As he received the last document from her, Masain looked around inadvertently.

'Anyway, with only the two of us left, it somehow feels like this place is empty.'

It's also funny to feel empty in a not-so-spacious office. However, wasn't it a space where Prince Mores, Sir Valerie, Sir Sharon, and even Prince Logan were usually busy talking together?

Masain, who had been immersed in strange thoughts for a moment, soon shook off the distracting thoughts and squeezed out the last of his concentration.

"... Looking at the content, it seems like he simply had a fever. "The difference from the gray plague is clear from the initial symptoms."

"As expected, right? "If you just confirm, I will send it back right away."

In response to Jibril's obedient answer, Masain asked what he had been curious about earlier.

"Representative Jibril. Wouldn't it be better for the Lyora Plague Society to filter out these clear cases first? "What is the reason why they are all brought up to the monster task force without distinction?"

"well? First of all, there was an order from Prince Mores to bring in all reports of suspected cases."

The Monster Task Force was originally established to investigate the Gray Plague. Therefore, the plague doctors of the Lyora School, spread across the continent, are still consistently sending reports about suspected cases of the Gray Plague to the imperial palace.

Then, the monster task force collects them all, and selects and manages the parts that need investigation.

"Besides, Mr. Mores is surprisingly quick at processing documents."

"hmm."

Masain sighed.

but. This was something Prince Mores usually skimmed over, so he didn't expect there to be so many corners to look into.

Just today, it's like that. He had been struggling all day long, holding on to only one month's worth of documents, but if Prince Mores had been around, he might have finished them all in time for a cup of tea.

'You are by now... ..'

As Masain made a blank face again following the stream of consciousness, Jibril nodded with an expression of understanding.

"You're worried about me again, Lord Masaine."

"... Does it look like that?"

"yes. "You've been constantly looking in the direction of the main palace whenever you get a chance, right?"

"... .."

Of course, the biggest problem is that worries prevent you from getting things done properly.

However, when Prince Mores suffered from a high fever, there was

nothing Masaine could do for him.

In that case, wouldn't it be of greater help to you later if you took care of these chores?

"Oh, and Sir Martha. Now that you're here, there's something I'd like you to see. "This is a report from Sir Valery to you."

"yes? Isn't he with the punitive force now? He probably hasn't even started subduing the demonic beast yet, so what on earth is he going to report... .."

"It's more of a whining letter rather than a report. "I keep sending it to you, so can you please do something about it?"

The letter thus presented to Masain was as follows.

-Mores degraded. While heading to Cyprus with the punitive force, I heard a very interesting story. Well, some crazy guy who calls himself a prophet is deceiving innocent people by telling nonsense that the end of the world has arrived and that the fires of hell are coming. I think this is something our monster task force should take action on.

If true, this would be a perfect issue to get on the Inquisitor's nerves. Masain was convinced and read the following letter.

-Lowering! As I listen to the rumors, it becomes more and more shocking. Well, that crazy guy is making a huge advertisement for people to come to him for salvation! Instead of calling yourself a servant of the Lord, you idolize yourself as a new savior. Isn't this blasphemy and heresy? This is an urgent matter. Please allow us to begin our investigation!

Indeed, there were even expressions of blasphemy and heresy. Masain opened the next letter, feeling a pounding headache.

-Lowering! Please reconsider! It is said that the crazy wise man is already expanding his influence around the Marquis of Benso. Expanding their power so quickly raises reasonable suspicions that there is a dark sect working behind the scenes. Valerie, if your Majesty gives permission, you can leave the punitive force immediately and run to the Marquis' Territory!

Letters come in every day.

As if to represent Sir Valerie's nervousness, the tone of the letter also becomes increasingly urgent. As I was looking at it, I felt a pain in my head.

'If Haejae had been there, he would have given a clear answer... .. '

Masain thought for a moment, but eventually had no choice but to send a reply like this.

-His Majesty Mores is still in bed. I will give you a separate report when I have time, so sir, please return after successfully subduing the demonic beast. As soon as we arrive, let's devise an investigation plan together.

Of course, my mind was filled with various thoughts.

Can I handle this report on my own? Could it be that he postponed the investigation even after receiving the report, and that the Heresy Tribunal later caught Maures for no reason?

'It would be better to allow Sir Valerie to do whatever investigation he wants... No, but His Majesty personally ordered Sir Valery to join the punitive force... .. '

As I think about it, I feel sick again.

Masain stood up while rubbing her chest, and Jibril gave her a small spray of rose perfume with a pitiful expression.

"Oh my. If you are that worried, please go back quickly. Please don't forget to quarantine around the treatment room."

When Masain returned to the main palace in the evening, what he found was not a prince suffering from a high fever, but a cluttered treatment room where a sumptuous feast had been spread.

Prince Mores, as well as Prince Owen and his personal maid Edith, are chatting loudly while spreading out food in an informal manner in the room!

Masain's eyes were slightly shaken with embarrassment.

"No, sir? What is this... ..!"

Then the prince, who was engrossed in his meal, welcomed him with a bright face. He looked so lively that it was hard to believe that he was someone who had been begging for help not long ago.

"Lord Martha, welcome! "I couldn't even eat because I was working late, so please sit here quickly!"

"Hey, my dear. "What on earth is this?"

"huh. These are the foods that Edith bought directly from 'Bertrand & Lee, a salmon specialty store.' "I asked Owen to pack all the signature dishes so I could taste them too."

After explaining that, the prince suddenly smiled bitterly as if something was coming to his mind.

"You should eat all the delicious food now. "I think I'll probably have to eat only bear meat for a while."

"... yes?"

Didn't you find it because you liked it so far?

As a dazed Masain sits down between them, Owen pushes a plate of well-grilled salmon steak to the side. Also, on the other side, Edith has suddenly laid out a new set of cutlery.

"Don't worry too much, brother Masain. Mores seems to be doing really well now. "I didn't have a fever once all afternoon."

"... Is that really true?"

It was like a dream. When Masain, who still had not found a sense of reality, asked blankly, Prince Mores quickly swallowed his food and answered.

"of course. "Your father didn't leave for no reason?"

"Your Majesty... .."

"Yes, he went to the prayer room to do his overdue homework. Don't worry too much about your father. Lady Katrina is by her side, assisting her properly, and the Empress will take care of any pending political affairs."

"... ..!"

It's been a while since His Majesty went to the prayer room. As she recalled what that fact meant, Masain's mind slowly began to clear.

Her Majesty, who sometimes postpones government meetings to stay in the treatment room, spends a long time in the prayer room, to the point where she leaves the work to the Empress.

This means that he has decided that he can now leave His Majesty Mores' side with peace of mind.

then-

'Your Majesty, now you really... ..'

Suddenly, all the tension in my body was relieved, and a strong sense of relief washed over me like a tidal wave.

I'm crying!

In order to hide the strong emotions welling up inside her, Masain quickly turned her head and put a piece of salmon in her mouth.

"Anyway, I can't figure it out. "I was next to you the whole time, so when did you and your father have that conversation?"

"You explained it earlier, right? "I spoke quietly and well."

"... what? Does that make sense?"

"Noisy! If you have time to talk nonsense, try this. This is a traditional Cypriot salmon recipe. "Do you think you can try something this rare in the South?"

"No, if it's precious, it's precious. Why are you showing off with food? huh?"

"That's because it's all worth bragging about. "Can you imagine how hard I worked to get this in?"

While Masain's eyes were red, the brothers were busy chiding each other in a friendly manner, as if it was natural.

'hmm. That Mores guy. Are you calling me a country bumpkin? For that matter, it seems like they are encouraging you to try various things quite carefully. 'Should I like this or be angry?'

One of the two was thinking this-

'Owen guy. Normally he just ignores it like a hog, but sometimes he's picky in strange places. Since you're so noisy, should I give you a good slap? Even if my father catches me later, I think he'll just turn a blind eye to it for once.'

Another one was seriously considering the possibility of violence for a while.

How much time has passed like that?

After calming down a little, Masain was finally relieved of his deep sense of relief and was able to gradually recognize several problems.

therefore...

"Lowering. However, I can still feel a slight heat coming from my lower abdomen..."

"It's okay, Sir Martha."

To his hesitant question, the prince answered definitively:

"It's because the nature of Aurors has changed a bit. "It will be okay soon."

"... Is that so."

Masain answered like that, but somehow he felt something was not clear.

The nature of Aurors has changed... . On top of that, I was angry with an unprecedented heat.

I served as a knight commander for a long time and looked after the seniority of the squires, but I had never heard of such a case before.

"If you do it, you're welcome."

And there remained an even more serious problem.

"Why is the activity level of the lower aurors still..."

Are you not able to recover as before and are you just that weak? Masain was about to ask that.

It was a bit of a cautionary issue, but it was definitely something that had to be addressed. He is also the swordsmanship teacher of Prince Mores, and he knows very well how absorbed his student was in his training.

But the prince responded firmly before he could even finish asking the question.

"That's because I'm recovering. "After some time, everything will be okay."

"... .."

Masain felt a strange sense of déjà vu. Recently, while assisting Prince Mores, an eerie feeling came to me from time to time.

And that feeling of déjà vu became clearly visible after we finished eating.

"I want to rest early today. So, Sir, please go back to your room and get some rest after a long time."

While biting Prince Owen and Edith, the young prince had secretly requested that Martha leave the place as well.

"yes? But it's low. It's still early! At least until today to confirm that the condition is completely stable... .."

However, the prince's attitude was strong.

"It's okay, just do as I say, Lord Masaine. "Haven't you been taking a nap on the couch in the treatment room for almost a month?"

"... .."

"Since you're going through such a hard time, I can't rest even if I want to."

There is something. It definitely exists!

Masain was confident, but he could no longer disobey the prince's orders. He had no choice but to bow his head politely and answer like this.

"I will stay nearby, so if anything happens, please call me anytime, sir."

However, as he left the treatment room, his eyes were shining fiercely with firm determination.

"I'll have to monitor the treatment room all night today. It would be a good idea to call Director Bruno too. And I must tell the guards to further strengthen the security of the main palace!"

* * *

After completely sending Masain out, Seongjin lay quietly on the bed and waited for it to get dark.

All the high-ranking priests who came in and out of the main palace have returned, and the Knights of St. Aurelion are all at their peak in the prayer room.

When he finally decided that the time was right, Seongjin quietly got up and took out the red soul stone that had been hidden next to the bed.

?Red's soul stone?

Seongjin, who repeatedly checked the words that came to mind with a trembling heart, took a moment to gather his thoughts.

'It's about summoning the devil's soul into reality. I don't know how much demonic energy will spread. Originally, it would have been better to go to Jinju Palace and test it out, where priests are completely prohibited from entering.'

Now that my father was away, I somehow felt that I shouldn't make a hasty move on my own.

Moreover, he went to take care of Seongjin and take care of a lot of backlog, so it's impossible for him to go back alone without seeing him return safely.

'But I can't just wait until I get back to Jinju Palace.'

Seongjin thought so and picked up the Nebraska Amulet.

Sweet.

My fingertips trembled slightly due to tension, but fortunately, the Demon King's Soul Stone clicked into the groove of the amulet as if it was returning to its proper place.

Then, as I experienced once before, a new information window pops up in front of my eyes.

?Summon red?

?Summon/Disarm?

iced coffee. thank god.

Now, there was only one worry circling in Seongjin's head.

'Is the demon lord summoned with this really the same demon lord I knew?'

It's unknown.

Hayes was a completely different person from the good-natured person he was when he was alive, and Vajra also seemed to have undergone some changes.

Didn't Seonghwang also give this advice some time ago?

-Perhaps it is the kind of thing that fundamentally changes the soul. It's clear that it's valuable, but it would be a good idea to be a little cautious when using it.

But this is the only trace of the Demon King left to him.

'Then there's no other way, right?'

Seongjin gathered his strength and made a decision. This time, even if it gives off a horror movie feel, I will maintain my composure.

Doesn't Hunter Lee Seong-jin have enough respect to be scared by a petty demon lord?

?*Summon* / Release?

Let's press select so carefully -

Pop!

It suddenly appeared in the middle of thin air, like a drop of water falling. In the form of a small red flame that I have seen several times with my soul's eyes.

'... ... !'

There was no smoke or ominous magic filling the room.

Is the difference simply that it is slightly larger than before and is clearly materialized to the point where it can be seen with non-spiritual eyes? What was there was still an ugly, insignificant red flame.

[...] ok?]

The demon lord who suddenly appeared blinked red as if he was

anxious about something. This is definitely something a foolish demon lord would do.

[Huh? ok?]

Seongjin was able to intuitively realize this.

Even though it changed into a visible form, the essence of its soul did not change at all.

[What is this? Is it a flashlight? Am I seeing the magic that humans are talking about?]

"... "As I live, I hear all sorts of strange things."

When he lets out a cracked voice, the flame flinches in surprise and looks at Seongjin.

And after a while-

[Hey, Lee Seongjiyiin!]

The guy screamed loudly and rushed towards Seongjin.

388. Conflict (5)

It literally had the appearance of a burning flame.

The body, which has grown to the size of a child's fist, has become a kind of red light source that emits visible light.

If you see the shadows of the furniture swaying in response to the movement of the flames, it would be safe to say that they clearly have substance.

The feeling that I was not just a simple soul, but that I was wearing the substance of fire like a body. If you think about it, it's just that the essence of the soul hasn't changed much, but you can say that the demon lord has also gone through quite a dramatic change.

'Is it closer to the appearance of Demon King No. 2 that I made before?'

It was only for a moment that Seongjin remembered such sentiments.

[Lee Seong-ji!]

The Demon King, who came to his senses, suddenly cried and flew in front of Seongjin.

Grumble!

[Lee Seong-jin! Lee Seong-ji!]

"... ..!"

Seongjin couldn't help but frown reflexively for a moment. When the blazing fireball came into direct contact with her skin, her face instantly became hot due to the strong heat.

Fortunately, like the fire of Gehenna, the heat itself did not seem to cause any harm to Seongjin. Of course, she didn't get scorched or burned, but she still had the feeling that she was pretty hot.

[Ugh! It's Seongjin Lee! Lee Seong-jin is really here!]

Either way, the overly excited demon lord seemed to have nothing to see.

The thing that was frantically circling around Seongjin's head seemed to sweep across the floor, twisting like a snake, and then shot up to the ceiling.

Crackling!

A jarring noise is heard, as if a spark had sprung from the chandelier that he had narrowly passed by.

"hey. "You're crazy, so stop and come here."

At Seongjin's call, it flew overhead again and began drawing a fast orbit.

[what! How did this happen? Why are you with me? Are you sure you're not dead too?]

This guy, I can't seem to see him, is he always following me around like this?

Seongjin, who was dumbfounded, followed the guy's fast movements with his eyes and responded.

"Who dies? "I just called you back to Delcross."

[What? how? I would have jumped into the fire of Gehenna and disappeared completely, right?]

The Demon King still looked confused.

[Why on earth does my soul still remain? How is that possible?]

"Hmm, it's a bit long to explain."

And to be honest, I couldn't really remember everything.

While Seongjin was deciding what to say for a moment, the devil changed direction again and quickly flew towards the corner of the room.

[Wow! It's real! It's Delcross! This really is a treatment room! Is it the same as the last time I saw it?]

The demon king, who had been flying around as if examining the entire room, came back in front of Seongjin with a sneer, as if he had remembered something.

[But Lee Seong-jin, why are you talking out loud to me earlier?]

"huh?"

Seongjin blinked.

"That's it... "Because you're not in my head right now?"

Even without testing it, I had a feeling that the same conversation as before would be impossible. The presence of the Demon King, which I always felt in my head when I concentrated, still hasn't returned. It would be safe to say that he has now completely separated from Seongjin.

"That said, I don't even know how to consciously send thoughts to you."

[what? Then I just have to go back, right?]

The devil's flames rush towards Seongjin's head. I think he's probably trying to get back into the flame crystal -

Grumble!

[...] ... !?]

But, in vain, it passed right through Seongjin's head. It was as if her head had been put in an oven and only the heat left behind.

'hmm. 'That's pretty hot.'

When Seongjin shook his head with a shocked expression, the Demon King seemed embarrassed and sparks flew out.

[that... ! You really can't go in, right? So where should my soul stay now?]

There is already a great answer for that. Seongjin held out the red-stained soul stone to the Demon King as if showing off.

?Red's soul stone?

[...] ok? What is that?]

"As you can see, it's a soul stone. Thanks to this, you were able to preserve your soul just before it was completely destroyed."

Until now, the Demon King had used Seongjin's flame crystal as a temporary home, but now he has a new, more stable home.

Perhaps thanks to this item, the Demon King's soul partially falls under the laws of the world of normalcy and is thus completely separated from Seongjin.

"That means there are no more problems between you and me. It ended well. So... .."

[Generation change?]

"... "No matter what."

[So are you now properly the Fire Demon Lord? Does the fire of Gehenna no longer bother you?]

"uh... .."

And of course, the thing that was hanging in his mouth... It looks like something is a little loose.

[huh? Seongjin Lee. Why are you suddenly saying nothing?]

"... .."

[huh? huh? Seongjin Lee. Lee Seong-ji!]

"... uh. "Shut up."

Don't say any more nonsense!

[...] Sniff!]

I wondered what would happen if this guy asked more questions, but fortunately, it seemed like that wasn't the devil's main interest.

The red flame's light has faded slightly, as if reflecting his deep disappointment. Perhaps, in human terms, it would be closer to pale and tired?

[This can't happen! This can't be happening! You know? We were originally having a soul conversation! Besides, I really don't like that ugly bead!]

"What's wrong with the soul stone?"

[Are you asking because you don't know? Compared to flame crystals, this looks ridiculously simple! Just wait and see! Because I'll go back to your decision again!]

Grumble!

The Demon King, who was spewing out flames and strengthening his fighting spirit, flew back and passed through Seongjin's head like a ghost.

Hwiik-

'Ugh... ... !'

I tried my best not to recognize it, but the thought of it being a ghost made me feel bad.

[weird? This can't be happening! This can't be happening!]

The Demon King wanders around restlessly, then quickly rushes into my head again.

Whoop-whoosh-whoosh!

Finally, Seongjin couldn't stand it anymore and shouted.

"hey! hey! wait for a sec! Are you saying it's all useless? "Stop for a moment!"

Is this what it feels like to have your head evenly grilled while hanging on a spinning grill? If this continues, her hair will really set on fire!

However, heedless of Seongjin's dissuasion, the demon king wandered in and out of his mind meaninglessly several times.

And after a while, the exhausted Demon King finally realized the reality and became deeply frustrated.

[Unbelievable... ! my... Where is the home of my perfect icosahedron? What about the seven arches that were symmetrical left and right and stretched out with a wonderful curvature?]

Is it true that you can't play around corners anymore? Can't you enjoy the thrill of accelerating as you ride the arch? Is that it?

The Demon King trembles, and instead of tears, small sparks pour out. If I feel sadder now than when I said my final goodbye after being prepared to make a sacrifice, is it because of my mood?

"... .. ?"

But a little problem arose here.

The sparks he dropped on the carpet seemed to have created black scorched marks, and then a strong fire began to burn from there.

Grumble!

"uh... .."

The scene seemed so unreal that Seongjin stared blankly at the burning carpet for a moment.

Meanwhile, the fire was spreading quickly, quickly reaching furniture and curtains. The entire temporary treatment room is soon engulfed in a huge fire.

Roar!

Only after the dark room became brightly lit did Seongjin finally come to his senses.

'omg! 'We're in big trouble!'

For some reason, it seemed like a while ago, every time he brushed against an object, there would be a strange crackling sound!

Seongjin was belatedly trying to put out the flames with a bedding, but there was someone who reacted a step faster than him.

Doo doo doo!

The sound of urgent footsteps running down the hallway.

Seongjin reflexively clicked on the selection window without even having time to think any more.

?Summon red?

?Summon / *Release*?

[Oh! wait for a sec! Seongji Lee... ... !]

Pop!

Almost at the same time as the demon lord's figure evaporated in thin air, the door to the treatment room was opened roughly.

Quang!

"Hey!"

It was Lord Masain.

He spotted Seongjin, who was just approaching the fire, and his face immediately became pale.

"What are you doing here now, sir?"

"Ah, Lord Masaine. sorry. I'll put out the fire right now... .."

But Seongjin could not finish speaking. He was caught by Lord Masain who rushed at him quickly, and was quickly dragged out to the other side of the hallway.

"Fire! A fire broke out in the treatment room. "Guardians, quickly extinguish the fire!"

As Lord Masaine carries the Auror and shouts loudly, the knights and guards in the main palace all gather in front of the treatment room.

"omg! Lord Masaine? What happened to this... ..!"

"Fire! "There's a fire!"

"Hurry and get it over with before it spreads to Her Majesty's office!"

this. It became a huge commotion.

When Seongjin turned around with a disappointed look on his face, Sir Masain was still wearing his royal guard uniform.

It looks like you're not even ready for sleep? I told him to rest, but this guy really doesn't listen to people.

But perhaps it was Lord Martha who should be angry, not Seongjin.

"I knew it would be like this!"

Masain glared at Seongjin with burning eyes.

"Why are you doing this? Once your body has finally recovered, you should rest comfortably and preserve your stamina! "Are you unable to stand it anymore and wake up late at night again to play with fire?"

"No, playing with fire. Sir Masain. That's not it... .."

Seongjin, who was trying to make an excuse, was speechless as he saw the people rushing by and the fire shining brightly outside the

hallway.

Oh, it really is.

No matter how you look at it, it's a great scene of playing with fire.

Fortunately, when Seongjin kept his mouth shut, Lord Masain, who quickly cooled down, draped the cloak over his shoulders.

"I will inform the dedicated maid so that you can rest in another room today. When are you going to grow up?"

"what..."

No, Lord Masaine! I feel wronged!

This time I really didn't do it on purpose!

* * *

The next morning.

At Cardinal Benitus' request for a convocation, all five cardinals gathered in the conference room for the first time in a long time.

Cardinal Meyer, head of the Holy Congregation.

Cardinal Diggory of the Executive Branch.

Cardinal Cesare, who is in charge of all aspects of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Lastly, there is Cardinal Caffran, the head of the council and the father of the Empress.

"Anyway, is it okay for you to summon us? Cardinal Benitus. "I believe His Majesty must have sent you a courtesy note."

At Cardinal Meyer's point, all the eyes of the other cardinals turned to Benitus.

Official letter: Do not reveal yourself.

Since Cardinal Benitus was so concerned about the incident, it was already customary to send an official letter in the absence of the Holy Emperor.

Then Cardinal Benitus was startled and quietly avoided people's gaze.

"that... It's not a big deal! Don't we have more important problems at hand? 'I'm sure you've all felt that the demonic energy radiating from 'him' has become stronger recently."

He.

There was no way to know who it was referring to, but no one could point out his blasphemies.

For that to be the case, the aura that Prince Mores has been giving off recently has been too ominous. All five cardinals were feeling it implicitly.

"Everyone probably knows that His Majesty has been keeping him close to him for over a month under the pretext of treating him recently! Why on earth would you do that?"

The five cardinals are more aware of the miraculous divine power of the Holy Emperor. It would not have taken so much time simply to treat the body.

And Cardinal Benitus had already deduced the answer in his head.

"When His Majesty takes care of him, it's definitely when a big problem arises. 'It has become something that can no longer be handled simply by banning the entry of priests.'"

"What do you mean it's something you can't handle?"

"Isn't it obvious? 'This time, it has revealed my evil nature!'"

Benitus paused for a moment and proudly looked around at the cardinals, then continued to speak loudly and emphatically, one by one.

"Can't you see that I'm scattering demon energy all over there? 'That

evil clearly belongs to the devil's power, so I don't think we should dare allow someone to impersonate the servant of the main god!"

"Benitus, you. no way... ... !"

Cardinal Meyer's complexion changed when he realized what Benitus meant.

What is required to be ordained a Holy Knight is three or more high-ranking priests and two or more leaders of the Holy Knights.

But to relieve him of his duties? Five or more high-ranking priests or the leader of the Holy Knights are sufficient.

And now, all five cardinals are gathered here.

"exactly."

Benitus' eyes shone brightly.

"We are gathered here now to discuss his dismissal."

389. Conflict (6)

A heavy silence falls over the heads of the cardinals.

Dismissal? Sigismund's savior who returned with the Knight of Grace? The hero of Bathurst Spirit who made the most outstanding contribution in defeating the giant demon species?

Above all, the son whom Seonghwang takes great care of, even putting off government affairs?

"... "That shouldn't be said."

After a while, it was Cardinal Cafran who broke the silence and spoke. His dignified and refined appearance was closer to that of a high-ranking nobleman than that of a priest.

"There needs to be a clear basis for the dismissal of a Holy Knight. As provided in the Holy Law, there must be a serious disqualification for him, such as summoning the devil or worshipping the devil."

"There's a demonic energy radiating from him! "If that is not the decisive basis for devil worship, then what is?"

"We cannot discuss the dismissal of Prince Mores simply because we feel an 'unfamiliar energy' without clear evidence. "Maybe some of the erosion is left behind as an aftereffect of dealing with the giant demon species too hard."

Cardinal Kapran showed caution by not even hastily saying the word 'Magi'. Unlike Cardinal Benitus, who speaks harshly and goes on a rampage, he speaks politely and politely to members of the royal family.

"Besides, if Prince Mores had really committed such a crime, would His Majesty the Holy Emperor have protected him to such an extent?"

Perhaps it is not because he really respects Prince Mores. He is simply aware through his experience that his position can collapse at any time with a single gesture of success.

So, in the absence of success, we had no choice but to be more passive. Even though there was a golden opportunity to defeat his grandson's rival in one fell swoop.

"The thousand-year holy kingdom ruled by the representative of the Lord is a sacred land that cannot be invaded by anything evil. Even daring to entertain such suspicions can be considered blasphemy, so you should not rashly conclude that something is 'magic' without any evidence."

It was an attitude of pretending not to know something that was clearly visible, but Cardinal Kapran's point cannot be overlooked. Cardinal Cesare, who was next to him, nodded his head.

"That's right. Delcross is the kingdom of the Lord established on earth, and a kingdom that all countries on the continent look up to. But if it becomes known that the prince of the Holy Emperor was dismissed for such reasons, what will our empire's reputation be like?"

For Cesare, who was busy keeping the Orthodox Church and Archbishop Wesker in check, Prince Mores' position was a good thing. Therefore, as the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he cannot help but be concerned about the opinions of other countries.

In response to the cardinals' passive attitude, Cardinal Benitus suddenly distorted his face.

"no! Is that something that can be said by those who are now the closest servants of the Lord? That evil thing is proudly walking around the imperial palace! Moreover, while Your Majesty is away, they are setting fire to the imperial palace! But are you saying that saving face is more important to you now?!"

Benitus jumped up and down, ready to spout fire from his eyes at any moment.

But the cardinals' reaction was shocking. Even Cardinal Diggory, who was crumpled in a corner, was sweating profusely and speaking in an uncertain voice!

"For such an important matter, we must first find out His Majesty's will. I guess waiting until he comes out of the prayer room... .."

Diggory was filled with fear. Recently, due to insufficient evidence, his grandson Kenneth was taken out of the ecliptic.

However, if you frame Prince Mores once again, you cannot be sure what kind of spark will fall on his grandson.

"Oh my, this is happening..." ! Are you truly not ashamed in front of the Lord?"

When Benitus, whose blood pressure was high, stumbled and held the back of his neck, Cardinal Cafran responded gently, as if to comfort him.

"Calm down. Cardinal Benitus."

"Even though the truth is clearly visible to your eyes, you are closing your eyes for fear of the consequences that will come! How can I calm down after seeing such deception!"

"I am not deceiving you, Your Excellency. I am simply saying that everything must be done according to the sacred law."

Cardinal Capran's blue eyes sink deeply as he stares at Benitus. It was the kind, intelligent gaze that was passed down to Empress Tatiana and Prince Logan.

"If you say that Prince Mores truly has grounds for disqualification from blooming, please bring evidence that is clear enough to at least convince His Majesty the Holy Emperor, who is the representative of the main lord. "If not, I, Kafran, will no longer stand by the disrespectful practices that disparage Him."

"Hmm... .."

At that time, Cardinal Meyer, who had been silent until now, fell silent. On the surface, it appears that the author Kapran is openly opposed to the prince's dismissal-

'I want solid evidence.'

It was not difficult to guess his intentions.

Kapran is the person who contributed the most to creating an atmosphere in which the current leader, who inherited Kornsim's ominous blood, could ascend to the throne without noise.

In the end, she elevated her daughter to the position of empress and spared no effort in supporting the punitive force so that her grandson could make a name for himself throughout the continent. All of his actions ultimately lead to the next throne.

To him, Prince Mores would be an unexpected rival to his grandson. Recently, the 3rd Prince was quickly recovering his reputation, even being praised as 'the second coming of Saint Bastian' among his subjects.

"... "How about organizing it like this?"

When the head and oldest member of the Holy Congregation finally opened his mouth, the younger cardinals stopped arguing and quietly listened to his remarks.

"Prince Mores' dismissal will be difficult right now."

"But that..." ... !"

"Benitus."

Cardinal Meyer, who silenced Benitus with a heavy look, continued speaking in a low voice.

"But it might be possible to invalidate his appointment to the Holy Knights."

What was the basis of Sir Leander's dogmatic decision to have Prince Mores join the Knights of St. Terbachia? It was the undoubted power of [annihilation] shown by his record.

But what about now? Isn't the prince in a state where he can barely hold his own, let alone lift his sword? There are even secret rumors that he has lost all of his Aurors.

"So, let's ask Prince Mores to prove the ability of [Destruction] directly. "If he shows his power properly in front of everyone, it will be an opportunity for everyone to see whether that power is in the realm of evil."

"... But, but there is no way it would just reveal its identity... ..!"

"Then, since he has not proven the power that a paladin should have, wouldn't it be okay to politely ask him to resign?"

That was the smoothest solution Meyer could think of.

If it were a picture of the prince voluntarily resigning, rather than the cardinals' deliberate dismissal, wouldn't it be seen as a virtue of humility in the eyes of other countries?

It's a bonus that you don't have to fully bear the wrath of the Holy Emperor who comes out of the prayer room later.

"dismissal. After all, isn't that an overly moderate treatment?"

Benitus still looked dissatisfied.

But Cardinal Meyer could not stand by and watch him cross the line so blatantly. To him, Benitus, like Archbishop Wesker, was a precious junior priest with whom he lived and died.

"Benitus."

He threatened with a stern expression.

"Please don't show off. "I will no longer forgive you for making light of an official document with a royal seal."

"But Your Excellency! That's just something His Majesty always sends... ..!"

"I hope you understand carefully what your intention is in sending the same official letter every time. Don't you know that this is the final mercy given by His Majesty? Please do not take this lightly. "This is all advice for you."

* * *

"Hey, you crazy bastard!"

The next morning.

Owen, who visited the imperial palace, was furious at Seongjin. The guy who was always laughing even after getting beaten up in the game showed a seriously angry face for the first time.

"Playing with fire? Are you going to make a fire? Mores, are you a child? Are you a little boy who can't even tell the difference? "What on earth is this?"

"No, that means it wasn't playing with fire... .."

"Noisy! Do you really know what you did? If you did something like that after biting all the people, what would you have done if you made a mistake and got caught up in the flames? "He hasn't fully recovered yet!"

"... .."

Unbelievable. I can't believe the day will come when I will be pushed out of my cause by this idiot.

As Seongjin closed his mouth, Owen became even more enraged and began to run wild.

"Are you listening? huh? Please try doing this one more time, I just... ..!"

"Hey, you!"

Lord Martha, who was fidgeting next to him, couldn't help but soothe Owen and take him outside.

"Lowering. Prince Mores is also fully reflecting. So, just calm down."

"You are being too soft on Mores! You need to speak clearly to that troublemaker! hey! Did you understand? Remember! You'll never be such a fool again... ..!"

The voice shouting loudly goes far away in the hallway.

Oh, it's noisy. It feels like a typhoon has swept over me.

But unfortunately that wasn't the end.

"Mores!"

Amelia, who heard the news late, ran into the room with tears in her eyes.

"There was a fire? Are you hurt anywhere? Ah, such weak auror activity! Instead of doing this, lie down right now!"

"sister... .."

Seongjin eventually had to catch Amelia and explain for a long time that her father had completely cured her illness yesterday.

"So you're saying the fever won't rise anymore?"

"Yes, it is. sister."

"okay... .."

Then Amelia asked with a somewhat anxious expression.

"But why doesn't my auror activity recover at all? "It still feels to me like you're very sick."

"hmm."

Seongjin closed his mouth with a slightly complicated expression.

The aurors were clearly back under Seongjin's control. If I meditate and regain my aura even now, I will probably recover to my previous state in less than half a day.

However, Seongjin was currently being extremely careful.

His aurors are now fused with the fire of Gehenna. When it is activated, wouldn't it give off strong magical energy?

However, in the absence of Seonghwang, I cannot discuss this issue with anyone.

'It's not like I, who don't have divine power, can sense demon energy.'

So Seongjin was currently trying to tie down the Aurors to the Danjeon as much as possible.

I wanted to test the changed aura right away, but to be safe, there was no other way.

"Mores... .."

I don't know what she was thinking at that time, but tears began to form in Amelia's clear eyes again.

"Please don't hide it and tell me exactly what your condition is. Even if you are sick, you try to hide it until the end for fear that others will worry. "Because you are a kind child."

"no... .."

Seongjin could not hide his absurd feelings. What on earth does this sister think of me?

However, Seongjin had no choice but to surrender in the end, as his eyes were filled with deep remorse and sadness at the same time.

'Well, it would be okay to show a little bit of aura, right? 'Because you don't feel demonic energy like I do.'

After confirming that there was no one around him other than Lord Masain and Owen, Seongjin carefully gathered the Aura of the

Danjeon into his fingertips. It was a trick of 'opening a small sword screen' that I learned from Logan not long ago.

Activating the aura of the entire body is risky, but it would be possible to at least emit some of the aura of the dantian in a visible form.

"ruler. Look, sister. "My aurors are fine like this."

Grumbling.

Soon, the aura that materialized at Seongjin's fingertips created a small flame. Unlike the original gray aura, it is an ominous aura mixed with dark red light.

"... ... !"

Amelia's eyes widen in shock.

Seongjin, who caught a glimpse of her, spoke quickly before she could be more surprised.

"It's a little strange, isn't it? It seems like an aftereffect of a fever. So I'm being careful not to activate it until my father confirms that it's okay."

Blink.

At that time, Amelia blinked her long eyelashes, brushed away the remaining tears, and muttered this in a trembling voice.

"... "Black devil."

"yes?"

Strongly-

Why? It's not like she didn't expect such a reaction, but Seongjin felt strangely touched by Amelia's words.

"No, sister. But... If you are a devil..."

The end of the words tremble slightly and become blurred. Even

though I tried to speak calmly, it felt awkward, as if my voice belonged to someone else.

However, her subsequent reaction was a little different from what Seongjin thought. Amelia suddenly smiled brightly and held Seongjin's hand tightly.

"I see! 'I'm so glad, Mores!"

"... uh?"

As she looked at me in confusion, a light of indescribable and intense emotion suddenly began to shine in Amelia's eyes.

"okay. 'You finally got your Auror back!"

"that... .."

"Besides, hasn't he turned out to be so cool? 'What a beautiful aura of light, undulating with vitality!"

... Is this sister serious?

Seongjin, who was dazed for a moment, immediately felt a shock as if he had been hit hard in the back of the head.

'that's right! It did. 'I forgot about your taste for middle school students!"

So, to this person, 'the devil' wasn't a compliment among compliments, meaning he was extremely cool and cool.

Seongjin, feeling somewhat relieved, answered cautiously.

"It's a little weird... Don't you? 'I've never heard of a person's aura being this color... .."

But Amelia reassured Seongjin and nodded.

"It's okay, Mores!"

"yes? What is okay... .."

"You don't have to worry about your Aurors. "This is definitely the aura you will have someday!"

"... .. ?"

what? What about that unfounded confidence?

However, there was no hesitation in Amelia's subsequent praise.

"Just wait and see. Soon this beautiful Auror will become a symbol of your strength. "For the enemy, it will be an inevitable fear and disaster, and for our allies, it will be a stronger weapon and support than anything else."

"uh... .. ."

"So take it easy, Mores. "Your Auror isn't strange at all."

The affectionate gaze returned kindly has not changed one bit from before. Seongjin, who was strangely relieved by her teeth, couldn't help but smile at her in the end.

"... yes. "I really hope so, sister."

It was sincere.

Seongjin Lee, who had never prayed even once in his life, prayed deeply in his heart that for the first time that day, this wind could reach someone.

390. Conflict (7)

"That goby! "Look at that unimpressed expression!"

Meanwhile, Owen, who had been dragged out into the hallway, was unable to calm down easily and was wheezing.

In the imperial palace, which should be safer than anywhere else, I almost got caught up in a fire accident!

It was also because a nightmare I had the other day suddenly came to mind. The image of a boy walking into hell covered in fire, with his entire body covered in dark red flame-like aura.

Now, a lot of time has passed and only a blurry impression remains, but at the time, I remember thinking that the boy was a newbie.

However, it felt as if the scene in that dream overlapped with the present-day Mores, and I couldn't control the rising anxiety.

"Let's pay close attention now, brother! "We must make sure that troublemaker never dares to play with fire again!"

"haha."

Masaine, who led the jumping Owen to the end of the hallway, let out a small laugh.

"If it had been that way, Prince Mores would have understood it well. So just calm down."

"but!"

"I understand everything, sir. "I don't know how you feel about the fire accident."

"Ugh... ..!"

As Masain patiently and repeatedly coaxed Owen, he reluctantly kept his mouth shut.

If you think about it, isn't Sir Martha the one who went through all the trouble of resolving last night's incident? What good would it be if he came running late and lost his temper at him?

"I behaved disgracefully in front of you. "There is no shame."

"no. Aren't we all part of the same family? "It's natural to be angry."

When the answer came back softer than expected, Owen looked at him blankly.

Is it because of my mood? Somehow, it feels like Masain's attitude has become strangely relaxed compared to before.

"I am... "I got angry a little presumptuously."

Owen, who was suddenly depressed, muttered in an uncertain voice.

Although he manages to get along with the group in a friendly manner, he knows better than ever that he cannot truly become a member of the prosperous family. Still, what would it look like to others to see me running all alone?

'Especially because Brother Masaine especially cares for Mores.'

Then Masain shakes his head with a straight face.

"I don't think that's presumptuous at all. "Isn't it all for the safety of Prince Mores that you went to such lengths?"

"that... .."

It was an unexpected reaction. Because of their ironically reversed positions, weren't the two people having a slight sense of distance until now?

Just a few days ago, he gave Owen a suspicious look regarding the

elixir.

But what is Sir Martha's expression looking at him now? His vigilance is everywhere, and he even looks somewhat relieved.

Perhaps it was because someone had coolly poured out what he wanted to say on his behalf, but Owen had no way of knowing that fact.

"If you stay here for a long time, the presence of someone who is not afraid to say bitter things becomes more precious to you, my uncle."

Masain said with a peaceful smile on his face.

"His Majesty Mores probably thinks so too. "Even though he looks so immature, he has a surprisingly sharp side."

"... "You mean Mores?"

"yes. He is someone who instinctively knows the physiology of the imperial palace. "In this place, those who approach with a casual smile are the scariest."

"Okay... "I see."

Owen could only answer hesitantly.

People who smile are scary. The imperial palace that you experienced as a child, just how terrifying was the battle?

Coincidentally, after a while, Owen was able to meet a specimen of that 'person who approaches with a delicate smile'. This is because an elderly man with a gentle and sophisticated air came to visit them.

It was Cardinal Cafran, Logan's maternal grandfather.

"I meet Prince Mores."

The man, who was overly polite to the young prince despite being a high-ranking priest, then bowed his head towards Masain and Owen.

"I meet you, Masaine, and Prince Owen. "It's a refreshing feeling to

see the two of you together like this."

It's a greeting that has a strange nuance.

Masain, who was the eldest son but lost the right to succeed to the throne, and Owen, who ostensibly had the right to succession but did not inherit the blood of the royal family. Was it really necessary to mention the two together?

"Isn't it great to see the two of you showing such deep friendship?
"His Majesty the Emperor will be very happy."

It seemed like it wasn't just Owen's luck. Masain's expression hardened a little when he heard those words.

Cardinal Capran. Although he had an impeccable attitude, he somehow had a knack for making people feel strangely offended.

"Suddenly, Your Excellency, what are you doing here? "Your Majesty's condition is serious, so your Majesty has ordered you to refrain from making personal visits to the hospital as much as possible."

Masain asked without hiding his doubts.

Just as there is a limit on the number of people entering the Jinju Palace, the same principle applies to the temporary treatment room in the main palace. It goes without saying that high-ranking priests were prohibited from entering.

However, even though he openly shows such caution, Cardinal Kapran does not seem embarrassed and gently curves his mouth.

"I do not dare to disobey His Majesty's orders. I am honored, Masaine.
"I didn't stop here to visit the sick."

"then?"

"I just came to gather the opinions of the Holy Assembly and convey them to Prince Mores as a representative."

Cardinal Capran's eyes turned again to Mores. As I looked at the blue

eyes that felt somewhat familiar, a slight discomfort quickly appeared and disappeared. This was because she strongly sensed the prince's aura of reluctance towards her.

"The Holy Assembly requests the following from you. first of all... ...
."

Cardinal Kapran, who skillfully controlled his expression, calmly began to recite his business.

Roughly, they give long-winded explanations like, 'I am worried about something about the Holy Assembly, and accordingly, I want you to prove this and that in front of everyone.'

Owen thought blankly while listening to that boring story with one ear.

'... He looks somewhat similar to Logan, but he looks completely different. 'I don't think he'll be very likeable in the future.'

however-

"I'm so embarrassed."

Mores' reaction upon hearing all of his business was unexpected.

The boy looked at the man with a sullen expression for a moment, then snorted with an unpleasant expression.

"The Crusade also makes quite trivial demands. Is everyone crazy? There is a separate loading dock. 'I'm sure you all know that I am the hero who saved the Imperial Capital from the demonic species, right?'"

Unexpectedly strong backlash. Also, a hero? Are you saying that out of your own mouth?

'What did that guy eat wrong? 'Why is it like that all of a sudden?'

Owen looked at the sheep he was doing in confusion.

It wasn't that long since I came back to the imperial palace and faced

Mores, but he hasn't been that kind of person lately, right?

"What do you think, Cardinal Cafran? Am I getting angry now? "No matter how much I think about it, I can't bear the discomfort!"

But what about now? Holding his chin high and looking down on people with an arrogant expression made me feel like I was back to being the old bastard Mores.

"Everyone just wait and see! "As soon as your father comes out of the prayer room, I will tell you in detail about the wantonness of my Holy Assembly!"

"... "I apologize, sir."

Then Cardinal Capran looked at Mores for a moment, then smiled sadly, as if he were looking at an immature child.

"This is all our foolish negligence, so please kindly respond to the request of the Holy Assembly."

"of course. "I don't put myself in a position like that like a coward."

"thank you. "If you do so, I will convey my condolences to the crusade."

"okay. Please tell me well. There is no use in begging and regretting it later. I tell the cardinals to wipe their necks and wait. "I'll go and show you the truth myself!"

As Owen listened, his mind became increasingly confused.

Who on earth is that stupid brat? Are you really Mores?

"... ..?"

However, Masain's expression standing next to him was even more bizarre.

Who is Cardinal Kapran? He is one of the five most powerful cardinals in the Holy Empire, and is also the father of Empress Tatiana.

But even though I can't help but urge such a person to show proper courtesy, isn't his face filled with pride as if he were seeing his grown-up grandchild?

After the time of shock and confusion passed, Cardinal Capran again politely bowed to everyone and retreated.

However, Mores's eyes, staring at his back as he leaves the hallway, have already returned to their original calm glow!

"... It looks like the Holy Society is moving faster than expected. "I think I should suggest to my father that from now on, it would be a good idea to send a 'don't show off' official letter to all five cardinals."

"... .. !?"

Look at me. People have changed again!

While Owen was very embarrassed, Masain walked towards Mores with a bright smile on his face.

"That's great, sir! "Your conduct was truly outstanding!"

"... Eh?"

What does this mean?

Owen blinked dumbly, and Masain's subsequent explanation was even more shocking.

"Cardinal Cafran, along with the Empress Dowager, is the person who, knowingly or unknowingly, keeps the lower ranks in check in the imperial palace. "You deliberately show such an immature attitude to make someone let down his guard. After all, you really know the physiology of the imperial palace!"

Then, Mores looked at Masaine with a somewhat dissatisfied face and responded bluntly.

"What kind of foolish thing are you talking about? Sir Masain. "I don't do such troublesome things."

"Yes, I guess so."

"Is it true? I was just being grumpy because I didn't like that guy.
"Looking at that disgusting cowardice, I just wanted to show off."

"Yes, I know everything. "I am truly proud of you, sir."

"... No, I mean, even if that's not the case."

Owen, who was listening blankly, felt like he was going out of his mind. Could it be that the imperial palace was still a battle of deceiving and deceiving each other? Could it be that he, who was traveling around the front lines, was just being overly naive?

While Owen was in confusion, Mores and Masain put their heads together and discussed the future.

"Anyway, sir, wasn't it too hasty to give a definite answer now? We cannot ignore the cardinals' long experience. "It will definitely require very difficult and difficult proof."

Masain seemed full of various worries. It was natural. The prince, who had taken great care to avoid being exposed to high-ranking priests, was now able to enter their lair on his own.

But Mores' attitude was calm.

"are you okay. "It's not like I'm being summoned to the Heresy Tribunal, and all I have to do is show off my appropriate abilities at the Holy Assembly, right?"

"But I want you to prove the power of [Destruction of Evil]. What should I do now that my Aura is not intact..."

But for some reason, the young prince nodded with great confidence.

"I told you not to worry? Sir Masain. "I think I know what they will prepare and what they will ask of me."

* * *

Two days passed, and the day of proof requested by the Holy

Assembly finally arrived.

Seongjin woke up early in the morning and quietly began preparing to attend the crusade.

Fluttering.

As I put on the crisply ironed dark gray uniform on my arm, a bright silver sword and two hooks were placed in the center of my chest. It was the pattern of crossed shottels, symbolizing the Knights of St. Terbachia.

-Just wait and see. Soon this beautiful Auror will become a symbol of your strength.

Crash.

On top of that, he wears silver brief armor, and finally, he wears a sword belt with a nutcracker attached to it.

-So rest assured, Mores. Your Auror is not strange at all.

Meanwhile, the words Amelia had said were replaying in Seongjin's mind one after another.

These are words that a sister who knows nothing about Magi said without knowing anything. It probably won't be of much help in a place where high-ranking clergy are trying to find fault with their eyes.

'but... ... '

Nevertheless, right now, Seongjin was finding amazingly great comfort from every word Amelia said.

My mind, which was full of various worries, felt brightly clear after that day.

'okay. Simple solutions are best. Let's collide first. Who cares if things go a little wrong? 'My father must have expected this to happen anyway.'

As soon as he returns from [Gap], he will definitely think of a suitable excuse for Seongjin.

Creak.

When I finished preparing and left the room, Masain and Owen were already waiting for Seongjin with anxious faces.

And next to them, a courtesy paladin was also sitting.

'Francis Azen.'

A person entrusted with all religious and legal matters that arise in the absence of Seonghwang or Katrina.

A faint look of embarrassment passes through his eyes as he greets Seongjin. It seems that the demonic energy emanating from Holy Jin has become quite thick, to the point where even those who are only holy men like Francis can notice it.

'Even though the Aurors are tightly tied up like this.'

But Seongjin wasn't the least bit worried about him.

As long as Seonghwang is on his side, Katrina will always be on his side. Therefore, even that lieutenant, who is extremely loyal to the leader, will never be able to harm Seongjin through his own arbitrary actions.

"Keuhum!"

Sure enough, Francis, who cleared his throat slightly, controlled his expression and opened his mouth.

"Sir, please think again. "This summons to the Holy Assembly has many procedural loopholes."

"If you think again?"

"This means you can refuse attendance at any time. Wouldn't it be better to put it off by making an appropriate excuse and wait for His Majesty to wake up before solving the problem?"

"hmm... .."

It's not like Seongjin hasn't thought about that too.

but... ..

'Somehow I get the feeling that my father won't wake up anytime soon.'

Now, as long as Seongjin lives and breathes, the invisible magic energy will continue to bloom from his aura.

There was no answer to this problem just by avoiding it forever. It's impossible to keep Aurors tied down.

'Besides, now that my father is away, perhaps this will be an opportunity to firmly suppress the opposition of the Holy See.'

After gathering his thoughts for a moment, Seongjin walked again and spoke.

"Let's just proceed like this."

"We can easily postpone the summons even now. "Have you not changed your decision?"

"Of course."

When Seongjin answered firmly, Francis immediately sighed and pushed up his glasses.

"... We will have some members of the Knights of St. Aurelion waiting outside the venue. "So that even if something happens to you, you can sufficiently demonstrate force while others come to help."

Seongjin couldn't help but be taken aback by those words.

Wow, this guy says he'll be in big trouble when he says let's see? Are you saying that you would point your sword at cardinals and high-ranking clergy at a sacred assembly to protect a person who is full of demonic energy?

"Don't worry. "Because that probably won't happen."

Seongjin responded like that and walked past Francis.

Clap, clap, clap.

Every time I take a step, I hear the slightly unfamiliar friction sound of the brief armor.

Accompanied by three somewhat trustworthy people, Seongjin walked with great strides to the conference hall where high-ranking priests were waiting.

391. Negotiation (1)

The conference hall was engulfed in chilling tension.

An event attended by most high-ranking priests, including five cardinals. Even unlike usual, fully armed paladins were standing around the conference hall to keep a watertight guard.

"... .."

They were waiting in silence for only one person.

The one whom everyone was subconsciously wary of.

A person who causes the head of the Heresy Tribunal to make blasphemous remarks in public.

And recently, ironically, someone who has achieved such great achievements that he has even been called the second coming of a saint.

"... "Keuhum!"

Someone who cannot bear the heavy pressure lets out a small sigh.

Something big is happening. Although they didn't say anything, everyone in attendance subconsciously felt it.

"... "I didn't know the prince would come out so obediently and agree to attend."

As Cardinal Cesare muttered inadvertently, Archbishop Wesker, who was sitting across from him, furrowed his eyebrows.

"why? "After setting up such a nasty trap that no one can escape, are

you finally feeling guilty that you did something so pointless?"

"What? What a trap! "Stop your words, Archbishop Wesker!"

"Why did I say something wrong? The elderly noblemen were so anxious because they could not keep a check on the young prince who was only the age of their grandson... ..!"

"Shh! "Stop being quiet."

When the leader, Cardinal Mayer, warned them, Archbishop Wesker glared at Benitus and Cesare in turn and threatened them.

"Everyone, please be aware. "When His Majesty the Holy Emperor comes out of the prayer room later, he will most likely not ignore this issue."

"... Tsk!"

Cardinal Benitus clicks his tongue, showing his discomfort.

But their chat did not continue any longer. Because regular footsteps began to be heard from beyond the open entrance to the conference hall.

Clap, clap, clap.

The slight friction sound made by the brief armor echoed in the wide hallway, creating a strangely ominous sound.

"Prince Mores is eating it!"

And before everyone's eyes, a neat-looking boy wearing the uniform of the Knights of St. Terbachia finally appears.

"... ..!"

The conference chairman was in quiet shock. Even Archbishop Wesker, who had been protecting the prince until now, was speechless and opened his mouth blankly.

"omg... ..!"

At first glance, Prince Mores was in excellent shape.

Gray livery without a trace and a confident gait. Calm eyes that look down on everyone surrounding him.

Prayer is also excellent. Despite the weakened auror activity, no one could sense that the boy was a patient who had just woken up from a sick bed.

iced coffee. Perhaps it could have been thought that, following Prince Logan, another knight of the Lord of the Lords that the Empire could be proud of had been born.

If it weren't for that ominous energy slowly emanating from him!

"Well, I... ..!"

Cardinal Benitus, who was pointing at the young prince with a trembling hand, was unable to speak and his chin dropped. This is because he was greatly shocked by the unexpectedly strong magic energy he felt.

"Such a mistake... ..!"

Before he could openly pour out profanity in front of the prince, Cardinal Mayer came to his senses first and spoke in a trembling voice.

"... "Thank you, Prince Mores, for responding to my summons."

"Yes, of course I should be grateful."

The boy nodded arrogantly.

"It's like I saved a lot of time that you were wasting needlessly by personally moving. Normally, there wouldn't be time for this, right?"

Cold gray eyes that closely resemble those of Seonghwang scan the faces sitting in the conference hall one by one.

"Now, it must not be easy for you to properly handle the tasks delegated to you by your father, right?"

"I think His Majesty the Holy Emperor will understand. Because the issue is the issue."

okay. As expected, their concerns were unfounded.

Cardinal Mayer's eyes darkened as he stared at Prince Mores.

'Is there really a need for proof?'

Probably not.

The priests gathered here could feel it keenly. There is no doubt that that prince belongs to the forces of evil.

"... "Can you explain?"

Before ordering the Paladins to be arrested, Cardinal Meyer asked one last question out of respect for the Holy Family.

However, what the prince said in response to this was truly absurd.

"What is there to explain? "All of this is the Lord's will."

"... "What?"

Without any time to be embarrassed by that unexpected reaction-

Whoa!

Suddenly, Prince Mores's mood began to change.

A strong spiritual pressure erupts like a storm, and the weak Aura begins to pulsate violently.

The dark red aura that became stronger and more clearly materialized became a blazing flame, blooming all over the body.

Naturally, the demonic energy emanating from the boy's body also grew uncontrollably strong!

"... ... !"

Slurp!

The paladins had their swords half-drawn with pale complexions. Even Francis, who was guarding the prince's back, was so surprised that he took a couple of steps back.

"... "Wow!"

"Huh!"

The shock the high-ranking priests received was indescribable.

The weak priests, whose only pastime was to pray every day, were oppressed by the prince's powerful demonic energy and broke into a cold sweat, like small animals that had encountered a natural enemy.

"... Ah, the devil!"

"Come on, we have to stop it... ... !"

But just as the Holy Knights were about to attack the ominous prince.

Shooooooooo-

Isn't the demon energy that was so powerful sinking without a trace just as quickly as it appeared?

"... ... ?!"

Everyone there was embarrassed and blinked.

I couldn't even properly guess what had happened in that short period of time. Only the person who created this whole situation looks around at them with a face as vague as a lie.

"Everyone, listen carefully."

The boy who had repeatedly hit the priests on the back of the head opened his mouth with a calm expression. The prince now standing in front of them was just gently flowing out his demonic energy, which felt much more subtle than before.

"All who stand before the Lord are nothing more than His faithful instruments."

"... ... ?"

"This must be proof that all things in the world can never escape the will of the Lord."

... What kind of bullshit is this?

While everyone was in shock and pricking up their ears without realizing it, the sly prince raised the corners of his mouth and confidently declared.

"So get out of this narrow vision and open your eyes! Listen carefully to the words of this person who has no hesitation in front of the Lord's holy temple. "I am a seeker who has been tested by the Lord, and at the same time, I am an apostle who carries out His noble mission!"

"... ... ?!"

* * *

"Lord Haven? "What are you doing here?"

Sir Maria, who stopped by the knight's quarters for a shift change, found Haven sprawled out in the lounge and asked.

Of course, it is true that there is no prince to attend to at the palace, so there is nothing to do during work hours.

"Why are you being lazy alone? "The other knights are all busy training at the training ground."

It was as Sir Maria pointed out.

While Lord Masain, who was leading the resident knights, was away to guard the prince's side, there was a person who belatedly awakened to become a tiger instructor -

This is Captain Bruno, a close associate of Prince Mores.

He basically rolled his disciple, Lord Calmen. As a result, he even came to look at the sword of Sir Claudia, who was exceptionally good

at combat with his student.

As the time spent in the training hall increased, most of the resident knights were now in a situation where they were rolling around under his orders.

"Didn't you work yesterday and today? "Are you sure you were drinking all night when it wasn't even your off duty?"

At Lord Maria's scolding, Haven raised her head with a gloomy expression.

"Lord Maria. Could you please take a look just for today? "If you knew what trouble I had all day yesterday, you would never say that."

When I saw that his voice was cracking, I could see that his condition was unusual.

And, the story I heard from Haven was unexpected.

"Recite a biblical story? In front of His Majesty Mores?"

"Yes, that's right! I think I have recited all the fairy tales and fairy tales that have been published so far. But do you know what's even weirder? "At that time, you were reading another book by yourself!"

... Reading a book and reciting another book at the same time? What on earth does that mean?

When Lord Maria looked puzzled, Haven nodded vigorously.

"Right? "It's really strange, isn't it?"

"... "I guess your ears got bored while reading."

"That is absolutely not the case! Well, aren't you listening to my recitation correctly? "Sometimes, if something seems strange, he just points it out like a ghost and ignores it."

For example, it was like this.

-Read it carefully, Sir Haven. Since Kyung keeps leaving out words or sentences, the context becomes awkward.

-uh. That story is over now. The framework is not that different from the scripture fairy tales I read earlier. Just move on to the next volume.

-Wait a minute, Lord Haven. Things are going pretty interesting, huh? I'd like to go over it step by step, so could you read it again from the beginning?

Sir Maria stuck her tongue out.

"You instructed me to do that one by one while reading the book?"

"yes. You won't believe it, right? "I was like that too, until I experienced it myself."

Haven shook his head.

"But even so, he didn't take his eyes off the book he was reading even for a moment. "Even turning the pages was incredibly fast!"

"hmm."

Why did you do something like that as soon as you recovered?

Sir Maria rested her chin in thought, but no matter how hard she tried, she could not come up with an answer.

* * *

Seongjin's strategy was simple. Since ancient times, simple things are strong and clear.

Originally, Seongjin had no interest in scriptures and had not even read the introduction to Introduction to Theology properly. So, no matter how much time you spend cramming, it would be absurd to fight with logic with old people who have been debating and debating the scriptures all their lives.

Then the answer was simple.

'Let's present anecdotes that are easy, clear, and intuitive.'

What Seongjin had to persuade was not just the old members of the Holy Society. Ultimately, people across the entire continent, including the imperial subjects, must be able to accept his existence without hesitation.

The answer lies in the scripture fairy tales that have been published so far.

"When Saint Aurelion received a revelation from God and tried to move, what the Lord used was a group of stray crows."

Although it is recorded in passing in the scriptures-

-After discovering a flock of crows hovering beyond the mountain, Aurelion, the servant of the god, discovered the whereabouts of the disappeared Magi.

The anecdote was expressed like this in the scripture fairy tale.

-To inform Saint Aurelion of his destination, the Lord himself moved a flock of ravens and used them as guideposts on his journey.

The same goes for 'Saint Bastian and the Finger Devil', which was published recently -

-Faithful Bastian rode the wind and chased after the devil worshiper.

This simple content is changed like this in fairy tales.

-Saint Bastian drove the divine wind and made the devil's agents subordinate to him as his guide.

At first glance, it seemed like the sentences were changed to be easier to read for children, but somehow, the devil's power was transformed into a tool of the god.

If you look closely like this, you will find that many fairy tales that have been published so far subtly distort the contents of the scriptures.

Although he did not know the original text accurately, Seongjin was able to easily capture such subtle nuances by reading the biblical fairy tales one after another.

'Is it a coincidence? Or did your father prepare all of this in advance?'

It is impossible to know for sure now that the Holy Emperor is in the prayer room.

However, if there is a plate ready to eat, wouldn't it be the duty of a child to take advantage of it?

"I'm sure you all heard the story that when I was fighting the demon race, the holy grace of the main god covered the entire place, right? Then I clearly heard his voice. "In order to be reborn as a more faithful servant of the Lord, we must overcome stronger trials."

So it suggests something similar to the story of a biblical fairy tale. Even without pointing it out, high-ranking priests would probably think of the 'trial of misunderstanding' given to Saint Grazie just by mentioning this much.

"And there is also the deep meaning of the Lord God hidden there. This new power won't just be an ordeal to test me personally. "Isn't it true that sometimes we have to deal with the evil energy of demon species in the same evil way?"

The story of Saint Terbachia also hints that he actually ministered to the devil in order to destroy him.

A dark saint with only a couple of fairy tales published compared to the numerous anecdotes of other saints. Coincidentally, Seongjin is currently wearing the uniform of a knight order honoring him, and is deliberately vividly reminding priests of an anecdote they would like to forget.

"And above all, I am safely worshiping the Lord in his kingdom, surrounded by divine grace, together with his servants. "Is there any way to clearly prove that I am God's tool?"

All these leaps of logic and unreasonable claims are shoved into your head as quickly as possible.

At this moment, after receiving one great shock after another, they have not yet regained their senses!

"that... "That is sophistry!"

How long was the silence?

Cardinal Benitus, who was listening to those words with a mesmerized expression, finally managed to squeeze out a cracking voice.

"This kind of blasphemous and evil energy can't really be a trial given according to the will of the main lord... ... !"

"What the hell is the problem? Are there one or two examples of wrong things being used as His tools? "Cardinal Benitus, you should read the scriptures properly again."

"... ... !"

Although Seongjin was the one who actually had to read the scriptures. Well, the important thing here is not an excuse to criticize the cardinal.

"Have you still read the recently published scripture fairy tale? In order to destroy the five fingers of the finger devil, the Lord directly sent the devil's servant to Saint Bastian as a guide."

"Don't say nonsense! That's a matter of interpretation... ... !"

"That interpretation is the correct opinion published through the review of the Holy Assembly, right?"

The old man, who usually never paid attention to fairy tales from the scriptures, belatedly regrets his karma and closes his mouth with a pale face.

Seongjin then continued his attack with great vigor.

"It seems like you are very dissatisfied with what I said, so let's hear it somewhere. "Why do you think my father, God's representative, left me like this without purifying my power?"

"... ... !"

"If that isn't proof that my strength comes from God, what is it?"

As expected, it was bullshit.

But isn't it important to confidently push forward with something like this?

"Well, if you really find it hard to believe, there is another way."

Seongjin, who paused for a moment after speaking to that point, leisurely looked around and then glanced at Benitus again.

"Well, if you're confident, you can try purifying me right now."

At that very moment-

Cardinal Benitus saw the intense red light emanating from the pupils of the boy he was facing.

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392. Negotiation (2)

Seongjin, who could not feel divine power, did not know how that power worked. How can it destroy evil, or how can it purify evil?

But at least one thing could be confirmed. Even his father's mighty divine power does not harm him, so who in this world would dare to purify him!

That's why you can clean your mouth with peace of mind.

"Well, if you're confident, you can try purifying me right now."

The conference chairman becomes quiet as if water had been poured on him. Because the implications of that proposal were greater than I thought.

Trying to purify someone who couldn't even be successful? Or are they trying to deny and purify the person whom the Holy Emperor has permitted?

No matter how it is perceived, this is blasphemy that directly challenges the authority of God's representative!

"... .."

Of course, even putting blasphemy aside, there were many problems.

What if purification is truly impossible? Not only is it like admitting your own lack of ability in front of everyone, but you are also taking the lead in acknowledging that wrongdoer as an apostle of the Lord!

'... This is a role that must be avoided at all costs!'

Murmur.

The priests look at each other and whisper.

However, there are bound to be people who rush to any place without thinking -

"profit! "Do you think I can't do it if I tell you to?"

Cardinal Benitus came down from the podium with a huff and rushed towards Seongjin.

Masain's eyebrows twitched at the extremely disrespectful attitude, but before his hand could reach the sword, Seongjin quietly raised his hand to stop him.

'Hang in there, Lord Masaine. We came here to persuade them peacefully.'

'... 'Are you serious about that?'

The one who just spewed out his aura and put pressure on the priests?

Pretending not to notice Masain's absurd gaze, Seongjin calmly watched the skinny old man's hand stretched out in front of him.

"You bastard! "Get out of this hall of godly gods right now!"

Whoa!

From the hand that grasps the gray conquest, a sacred white light soon bursts out. It was the powerful divine power of Benitus, one of the five cardinals of the Holy Empire and once renowned for his slaying of demons.

'... That's amazing! Now I just thought of him as a useless old man in the back room... ... '

It was the moment when the high priests saw him again.

Of course, for Seongjin, who was exposed to the Holy Emperor's divine power every day, it was an embarrassing power to even call it light.

"... ... ?!"

When Seongjin showed no reaction despite being hit directly by divine power, Benitus looked embarrassed for a moment. But soon he began to exhaust his arrogance and squeeze out his soul.

"Hey!"

How much time has passed like that?

In the end, the poor old man lost all his energy and collapsed into his seat, out of breath.

"... "Uh, how does this happen?"

"Well, everyone saw it, right?"

widely.

Seongjin neatly straightened his wrinkled collar and looked around the venue.

"Isn't it this clear? I am not an enemy of the Empire, nor am I someone you must defeat. "The power given by the Lord is an expression of the Lord's firm will."

"... ... !"

No matter what the result, we will never be deceived by the sophistry of false things. It was a common thought among the priests present.

However, when an unexpected result unfolded before their eyes, a stronger resonance than expected occurred in their minds.

'... for a moment. I thought it was impossible, but maybe?'

'possiblity... Is it there? Like the 'ordeal of misunderstanding' that Saint Grazier experienced long ago, has the hand of the Lord really touched Prince Mores?'

While the air in the conference hall was quietly rumbling, Cardinal Meyer watched the whole scene with sunken eyes.

'This is not a good trend. 'Isn't everyone feeling suspicious?'

It's been about 10 years since the devil species completely disappeared from the ecliptic. Among the young priests, there were those who did not properly understand the nature of devils and devil contracts.

'That's probably why they are so shaken by the prince's words.'

Cardinal Benitus seemed to have no doubt that Prince Mores was 'something other than human'.

'Prince Mores may be a devil contractor connected to a high-ranking devil.'

A demon contractor is only a human being until the demon directly descends into his body.

Therefore, not only can one live in the grace of the main god, but it is also possible to erase the demonic energy itself without communicating with the devil for a long time.

"... dismissal."

Archbishop Wesker seemed to have thought the same thing. She looks at Cardinal Meyer with her anxious eyes like never before.

"Prince Mores may be... .."

"Shh! Don't make the mistake of saying something you're not sure about, Wesker. "If the lower class had been in some kind of contractual relationship, erosion would have already occurred at the point when the devil's power was strongly revealed like before."

okay. That was the problem.

Contractors who descend on the devil or strongly release the power of the devil will eventually be caught up in the erosion and have their souls taken away.

But lo and behold. Even after committing such a terrible act, doesn't Prince Mores still look fine?

Suddenly, a fearful assumption crossed Cardinal Meyer's mind.

It would be fortunate if Prince Mores were a tool or an apostle of the main god. Otherwise, 'that' would mean something that already surpasses the power of the Lord.

"... But, Your Excellency. "Now that things have come to this, shouldn't we properly investigate Prince Mores?"

When Archbishop Wesker whispered again in a trembling voice, Cardinal Mayer clicked his tongue slightly.

"inspection? "How?"

How do you usually investigate a contractor who is no different from an ordinary person if they are trying to hide their identity?

Originally, it was simple. Anyone suspected of this can be taken to the Heresy Tribunal and tortured and treated repeatedly until they confess.

but-

"There is no way His Majesty could justly throw His favorite son into a torture chamber! In addition, the prince himself claimed to have been tested by the main god, and only after proudly displaying his demonic energy..."

"Okay, then. "Is there really any possibility that what the prince said is true?"

"well..."

Cardinal Meyer was skeptical about that.

The 'ordeal of misunderstanding' that Saint Grazie suffered literally refers to an episode in which she was accused of being a witch and brought to the Heresy Tribunal. This means that there is no record of the saintly woman exuding demonic energy or anything like that.

However, with such a simple frame-up, didn't she ultimately have to endure all three sets of 'trials of a saint'?

'But it is also ambiguous to tell Prince Mores to prove it as the saint did. Aren't these trials that His Majesty himself has already banned? Unless the prince steps forward, we cannot force him to undergo trials from our side first.'

A frustrating situation where you can't do this or that. If the young prince had thought this far before acting, we can't help but say he was truly clever.

As Cardinal Meyer's worries deepened, someone called the attention of the confused conference president in a gentle voice.

"everyone."

It was Cardinal Cafran, the head of the council.

He spoke slowly, without any sign of being disturbed by this series of events.

"You seem to be mistaken for a moment, but today is not a place to accuse Prince Mores of any kind of charges."

"What do you mean now? "You can't even hear such a thing coming out of your mouth when you see all that evil energy flowing out of you?"

"Calm down, His Excellency Cardinal Benitus. We have gathered simply to prove the power of [Destruction] that you have. "Don't forget that."

Kapran looked rather calm.

okay. What does it matter whether the prince was deceived or whether he was truly an apostle who was tried by the Lord? The moment he gave off that kind of evil energy, he was already pushed out from the 18th throne.

"Yes, yes! "There it was!"

Flash!

At his point, Benitus's eyes, which had been blurry, regain vitality.

that's right. Didn't we create a trap that could never fail? I swear to the Lord that I will never allow something so wrong and dangerous under the glorious name of an Apostle of the Lord!

"ruler! Come on and prove it! hurry!"

He hurriedly ran to the stage and gathered the small statues he had prepared in his arms.

"If you are truly an apostle of the Lord, you will probably be able to pass this test! Come on, let's solve these!"

Slap!

He returned at a quick pace and roughly threw the items he was holding into Seongjin's hands.

Patter!

"Did you tell me about Saint Terbachia? Did I say that you deal with evil energy in a negative way? Then prove it! "Purify all these evil things and show the world their proud ability to destroy evil!"

"... .."

Seongjin glanced at the statues placed on his palm.

They were pieces of wood the size of two fingers, and at first glance they looked like monsters or dinosaurs.

'Yeah, I thought it would be like this... ..'

On the day a large demon species appeared, a strange phenomenon was observed where the demonic energy flowing from it was dragged to various parts of the ecliptic.

After searching the place for a long time, what the Paladins found were the unidentified 'seeds of the devil species', in other words, these small wooden statues.

I heard that the priests attempted to purify it several times, but it was never destroyed. Dasha carefully informed me that this was

information that was handled with utmost secrecy at the Crusade.

But now that I see it, it was worth it.

'Because these are objects from the normal world. Unless the conditions are met, it cannot be easily eliminated by the power of the original world.'

okay. I had a guess that they would eventually bring this up.

How will they test the power of [Destruction Evil]? Even so-called priests cannot come forward and summon demons to the ecliptic.

Even if it were possible, the demon would not be able to withstand the grace surrounding the ecliptic the moment it was summoned and would simply disappear.

'Then you are throwing yourself a task that cannot be succeeded from the beginning. If I really prove my strength, the situation of those who summoned me will be quite difficult.'

As I guessed, not only Benitus but most of the high-ranking priests were staring at us with some strange enthusiasm. It seems that the story was already finished at the Seonghoe line before Seongjin was summoned.

'Without a doubt, they think I'll never be able to solve it.'

I couldn't help but laugh. It wasn't unexpected, but doesn't everyone's intentions seem really transparent?

Ignoring Cardinal Benitus' confident gaze, Seongjin gently touched one of the statues with his finger.

Ugh-

As soon as he rouses his will, a faint red light appears in Seongjin's pupils. And soon, as expected, a faint window appeared before his eyes.

?Spinomegalosaurus Summoning Ticket?

?You can summon Spring Valley's field boss, Spinomegalosaurus, once. Immediately after summoning a dinosaur, the summoning right disappears. If you select destroy, it will be deleted from the item window.

?Physical resistance B. Water resistance B.?

?Monster Grade: B+?

?*Current Northland servers cannot be confirmed.?

The demon species that swept over Bathurst Territory some time ago were ones that followed the laws of the normal world.

I wondered where on earth such a strange dinosaur came from, and it seemed like it was probably created with a summoning ticket like this.

'You mean you can summon it or destroy it?'

As I was staring at it, as expected, another small selection window appeared next to it.

?Destroy the right to summons??

?Delete/Cancel?

okay. It may be impossible for anyone here to guess, but the current Seongjin could easily destroy these things without even lifting a finger.

Is there any other proof method in the world this easy?

?Giganotoallosaurus summoning right?

?Arhinomosasaurus summoning right?

The same was true for all the other pieces of wood.

If you focus your mind, similar explanation windows will appear.

"If it's too much, you can give up now, Sir Mores. "No one forces a young member of the Holy Emperor family to do anything beyond his

or her ability."

Cardinal Kapran's relaxed voice could be heard from afar.

It may sound like he is gently soothing, but the emotion hidden inside is excitement and joy, hoping that his grandson's rival will fall like this.

Seongjin raised the corners of his mouth with a grin.

Well, is there any need to hesitate? When the boards are laid out so beautifully, it is natural to walk with ease.

"It would be good to keep this clearly in those two stubborn, distant eyes."

Seongjin raised his chin arrogantly and declared. Even if you don't shout at the top of your voice, your clear voice filled with aura resonates all the way to the corners of the conference hall.

"This is the power of the apostle given by the Lord, the miracle of the Lord!"

Seongjin took a glance at his surroundings while holding a statue high-

?Destroy the right to summons??

?*Delete* / Cancel?

Without any hesitation, I pressed the [Delete] button on the selection window that appeared before my eyes.

393. Negotiation (3)

Pass...

The statue held high above its head showed a drastic change. Without any sign, let alone a crashing sound, it disappeared into the air without a trace in an instant!

"... ... ?!"

The hall was filled with shock.

It was a sight I couldn't believe even when I saw it with my own eyes. Wasn't it the 'devil's seed' that remained intact even after high-ranking priests took turns pouring out divine power and paladins pounded it with their Auror blades hundreds of times?

"... "Kkeok?"

The one who was more embarrassed than anyone else was Cardinal Benitus. His jaw dropped, his mouth opened, and he made a strange sound, as if he were a chicken with a twisted head.

Anyway, I can't help but be surprised.

-The cause and effect for the search has already been filled. So, even if Rebekah reveals the secret a little early, the outcome will not be much different.

These are the items that the leader of Arenja, who was usually very careful, rolled up his hands and feet and led the Holy Knights to find them.

-These are the ancient arrangements of the sower. Since it is outside the laws of this world, it will not be easily broken. It would be better

to give up on purifying it and just store it deep in the imperial palace.

He even assured me that it would never be purified.

Isn't that why I brought it out to the test with confidence? I firmly believed that there would never be a solution to that evil prince.

But what is the result?

Benitus, who was closest to the prince, could clearly feel it. The magical energy that was steadily flowing from the statue disappeared in an instant with the prince's shout.

Truly unquestionable proof of [annihilation]!

'But, but how can that be? That thing is clearly wearing the mask of a prince... ... !'

Cardinal Capran's situation was not much different from Benitus.

The elderly man, who never lost his dignity no matter the situation, was looking around in the air with wide eyes, uncharacteristically forgetting his body pain. It seems as if the prince thinks he is using some kind of trick to defraud everyone.

"ruler. Did you see everyone? "This is the power I have to destroy evil, and it is the power that proves I am the servant of the Lord."

The only person who is calm is the one who caused this [miracle].

Feeling the cold atmosphere of the conference hall, Seongjin calmly said goodbye in his heart.

'Hello, Spinomegalosaurus.'

In fact, it's not that I didn't have a desire to summon an actual dinosaur with the summoning right.

Wasn't Seongjin who had a grand dream of becoming a Tyrannosaurus in his old days? I was very curious about what kind of dinosaur design the game director of [Kong: Jurassic Island] came up with by combining Spinosaurus and Megalosaurus.

but-

'If I actually summoned him, he might become a member of the devil that pours out harmful magical energy like the giant devil species from before, right?'

I have a feeling that even if I had it, I wouldn't be able to use it at all.

If so, there is no need to linger any longer.

"... "This can't be happening!"

At that time, Benitus suddenly came to his senses and grabbed Seongjin's livery.

"What kind of trick have you pulled? What on earth have you done! This is wrong! "Can't you please tell me your tricks in detail?"

"Cardinal Benitus! Let's see, let's see, really... ... !"

Seongjin, who once again calmed the growling Lord Masaine, presented the remaining statues to Cardinal Benitus in a casual manner.

And when he suddenly took them over -

chuck!

He raised his finger as if he had been waiting and pointed to another statue.

"The Apostle of the Lord gives this command in your name."

I thought it was a bit too condescending, but it was still a gesture that others would find quite cool.

"Disappear."

sparkle.

With the command, a red glow appears and disappears from Seongjin's eyes again.

?Destroy the right to summons??

?*Delete* / Cancel?

Crispy!

Giganotoallosaurus turns to dust again.

I guessed that it was probably a theropod dinosaur with a nice snout full of powerful teeth, but now I have no way of knowing what it looked like.

"... "Huh!"

Benitus looked like he was about to pass out as another piece disappeared like dust in his hand.

He threw away the pieces of his grip and fell to the floor with a bloodshot face.

"Ahhh... ... !"

Degurrrrr.

Sculptures poured out indiscriminately were lying shabby on the floor. To the statue that had rolled to his feet, Seongjin ordered again as if it were obvious.

"You disappear too. "This is a wicked tool of the devil."

Pass...

"... ... !!"

The air in the conference hall was now completely frozen.

Three miracles happened one after another before my eyes.

"Is everyone clearly aware of this? "All of this is God's will."

The prince's voice ringing next is vividly pierced in my mind as if it were the voice of God.

"I am a faithful seeker who follows the will of the Lord, and a faithful apostle of the Lord who carries out the will of the Lord."

My mind, paralyzed by shock, could no longer think of any other opinions.

They saw the prince shed evil energy but stand firm in front of the power of the main god. I also saw the prince purify the ominous devil seed without even lifting his hand.

How can you deny this series of miracles that happened right before your eyes!

"You who dared to test the apostle, who is being tried by the Lord, by your own inadequate human standards. "You foolish servants who judged God's will and even tried to observe it."

Prince Mores slowly drove the wedge into their confused ears.

"All these trials given to me will ultimately become the foundation for realizing God's kingdom in this world."

The prince's noble appearance is in no way inferior to that of the saints in the scriptures -

"So, everything I do in the empire is nothing more than exercising the will of the Lord."

The voice is also exquisitely clear, as if it were that of an angel announcing the Lord's will -

"Everyone should keep this in mind and no longer presumptuously meddle in my affairs."

There is only cold and heavy silence in the hall.

This is because great guilt and strong doubts were mixed together to tighten everyone's hearts.

Were their eyes really clouded by greed and stubbornness? Maybe that's why I wasn't able to recognize the Lord's will, which was so clear...

"Cow, you must not be fooled!"

At that moment, Cardinal Benitus, who came to his senses first, cried out like a madman.

"Everyone, stay alert! Don't be deceived by that evil thing anymore...
... !"

Jeez.

At that moment, the prince takes a step towards Cardinal Benitus.

"omg!"

The poor old man was trembling, pushing the floor with his arms without realizing it.

Just the light steps typical of an Auror user. But how can you feel the weight of Taisan in that sound?

As Benitus trembles under the growing pressure, a boy's shadow appears over his head, and then an abstract scolding descends.

"The Lord always said to have pity on the ignorant. However, there is a limit to tolerating the resulting negligence."

Of course, Seongjin did not know whether such words actually existed in the scriptures. I just thought that since everything recorded in detail in the thick scriptures was the teachings of the Lord, there would probably be at least one sentence like that.

Perhaps that guess was correct. The eyes of the old man looking up at him began to tremble with a slight sense of guilt.

"How dare you ignore the 'don't show off' official letter directly issued by your father, and don't hesitate to make such profane remarks in front of a member of the royal family."

"Well, that's... .."

"Cardinal Benitus. "How long do I have to put up with your insults and rudeness?"

Jeopuk-

Seongjin takes another step.

In his mind, which was growing distant due to the ever-increasing pressure, Benitus tried not to lose his mind by constantly repeating to himself.

"That's not a human. It's nothing more than a deception, disguised as a human being and deceiving us! So, no matter what it shows in front of you, never, ever be deceived... ..!"

However, when I come face to face with gray eyes that look exactly like Seonghwang, my mind begins to bleach white, as if the firm determination I had made up until now was in vain.

"Do not seek mercy from me anymore. Do you understand?"

Silver-gray reflected light that looks strangely inorganic.

Eyes that have the power to deeply penetrate not only a person's heart but also his unconsciousness, and ultimately bind his soul so that it cannot even move.

That scary gaze was coldly looking down at Benitus, warning him.

"Keep in mind. Never again, Cardinal Benitus."

* * *

"Ahh! "Holy shit!"

At the old man's careless screams, the already narrow cave resounded with loud echoes.

Romain stopped sewing the hand puppet and looked up.

"Why are you doing this? Please calm down, seedling. "Lord of all diseases."

Then the old priest shouted at him.

"If you don't know something, stay silent, doll! "Do I look serious

now?"

After an accident occurred in Bathurst Territory where the members of the Plantation were suddenly released, they lost the hut they had used as a meeting place and had to take refuge in this shabby cave.

But the real problem came after that.

In the aftermath of the incident, the guardian of Delcross noticed an abnormality in the vicinity of the imperial capital and ordered the Holy Knights to search the surrounding area like teeth.

In the end, sowing had to lose most of the seeds of the clan that had been hidden.

'No, it may actually be a good thing. Because they moved the seeds to the interior of the Imperial Capital on their own.'

But that optimism was short-lived; now even the seeds are being destroyed for no reason!

"How on earth can humans destroy that? "It's definitely something that borrows the laws of the normal world, right?"

Then Greed, the girl with pigtails who had been listening quietly, tilted her head.

"After all, aren't they objects that bear the reality of this world? Whatever the main law that is affected, it would not be impossible to find a way to eventually destroy it."

"But I heard that it is impossible, at least not with human capabilities! "That's why I paid such a high price to buy it!"

At the point of greed, Pajong threw a tantrum.

"When Ae-yeol sold them to me, I thought they were an extremely efficient choice! "It was an innovative way to create usable power immediately without wasting existing subordinates!"

Moreover, because it had the characteristics of the normal world on the surface, it was difficult for even priests to see through it.

So, I buried them all over the area and waited for the day when I could summon them all at once!

"Sowing. Are you sure those seeds are really from the normal world?"

"okay. "I saw Aeyeol pull it out herself."

"okay."

Romain frowned as he realized the implications of this.

Could it be that the guardian of Delcross did this? Since he is such a difficult person to estimate the limits of his abilities, it may not be impossible at all.

'But no matter how much he did, I never thought he could directly control the codes of the normal world... ... '

Romain had an ominous thought that his ability to write code might not be as much of a threat to Delcross as he expected.

"But sowing. "If they are able to interfere with the seed, wouldn't they be able to summon your family at will from over there?"

"omg! What?!"

Pajong jumped up from his seat.

I hadn't even thought about the possibility until now, but after thinking about it carefully, I think it's probably not impossible at all.

"Holy shit! "I should just throw it all away!"

In the end, Sowing shed tears of blood and had to hastily cut off all connections with the seeds.

It was only recently that the imperfect descendant, awakened with the amplification of the crack, consumed an enormous amount of his magical energy.

However, if I made a mistake and even those things woke up like that, it was clear that this time, Sobong would lose his magic energy

to an irreversible degree.

Rather than conserving your resources by sparing your subordinates, you may find yourself in a position where you have to worry about 'generational change' as you are pushed out by those subordinates!

"Hehehehe! It's a shame I'm dying! "This can't be refunded, right?"

"... .."

There was a dull silence inside the cave for a moment. The appearance of a high-ranking demon king with tears streaming down his nose everywhere was truly unsightly.

"Ugh! This can't be happening! This can't be happening! "How did I buy them!"

In the end, the lesser greed became irritated.

"Do some work, sowing. "Isn't the problem that you sowed those seeds without a plan in the first place?"

"Well, it is beneficial to sow a lot of seeds whenever you get the chance!"

"Ha, how foolish you are!"

The little girl stood up in disgust.

"Now who are you going to blame? "It's just the price you pay for relying on such vague and uncertain things instead of cultivating your original strength."

As she hurriedly walked towards the cave entrance, Romaine asked in confusion.

"Greed? Lord of hunger. The countermeasures meeting is not over yet. Where are you going now... .."

"I'm so pathetic that I can't hang out with you anymore. "We're going to take a short break, so you guys can cool off in the meantime."

The girl's long, braided hair sways gently as if she's saying hello.

With that, the small figure of Greed disappeared without a trace.

"oh! Lord of Hunger... ... !"

"Don't worry, doll. Greed will soon return. Maybe it won't go that far?
"It's obvious where that guy is headed."

Pajong blew his nose and shook his head.

"Isn't it the place where the most greedy people flock, and the country of commerce where the lord of hunger often satisfies his hunger?"

At that explanation, Romain naturally thought of the name of a small country located in the southwest.

"... Principality of Asein."

"okay. "He made up various excuses, but he was just afraid of sparks flying so he took refuge in a place where he felt most comfortable."

The guardian of Delcross may have the ability to control even the laws of the normal world.

It may be a slim possibility, but wouldn't it be possible to trace back their movements using the 'seed' that they lost?

In the worst case, a situation might arise where they aim their swords at themselves, taking advantage of the causal effects of the previous summoning of the demonic species.

So, until the current messy situation is sorted out, I'm trying to stay away from Sowing, the culprit of everything.

"Still, we have a lot of affection from our time together, but he seems like such a sneaky guy!"

But they had no idea.

In fact, the guardian of Delcross that they are guarding is currently in

a somewhat complicated situation.

* * *

Grumbling-

Nate looked up after seeing four chains wrapped around his arms.

[Elder, what does this mean?]

For a while, I ran around day and night trying to defeat the intruders that had piled up over a period of over a month.

Currently, Nate was summoned to the [Six-person meeting] in the gap as soon as everything was sorted out.

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Nate swung the salmon without even having time to breathe. She must have felt that her arm, which was being restored in real time by strong divine power, was feeling numb due to pain.

Another problem was the rapid accumulation of fatigue in the mind that had not been able to rest even for a moment.

Nevertheless, the invaders continued to pour in.

The boundaries of the twisted dimension have already been opened and closed thousands of times. In the meantime, Nate created countless [GAME OVER], and another game company suffered from fierce protests from consumers, but that would not be a very important issue.

After moving non-stop for days and days like that, we had finally 'almost' defeated the dimensional invaders.

Suddenly Nate felt a strong force pulling at his soul.

'This... ... ?'

Has it come?

Nate, who soon grasped the situation, did not feel the need to resist and submitted himself obediently to the force. Soon his soul was enveloped in a thick fog and dragged somewhere.

Blink.

After a while, the sight that unfolded in his recovered vision was a huge corridor that was already familiar to Nate. and-

Grumbling...

It was a golden chain that wrapped around his entire body and restricted his movements from all directions.

[...]]

The total number of chains is four.

This meant that, except for the currently absent Lycanthrope Lord, all remaining border race representatives had activated the key.

Instead of resisting the restraints, Nate slowly raised his head and looked around.

He was currently standing in the very center of a huge corridor. And the members of the [6-member council] surrounding the son-in-law are each standing on a platform of different heights and looking down at him.

[Haha, are you a little surprised?]

Mitra, who was nearby, raised a large bottle of liquor as if to say hello.

The scales of this Draconian, who was always drunk, had turned a dull blue color, like corroded bronze, since I hadn't seen him recently.

[But please understand our position, Nate. Without doing this, it's hard to see your face.]

After him, a huge stingray lets out a shrill scream.

[Kya?!]

The heavy body, covered in small corals and barnacles, looked more like a piece of land had been scooped up from the seafloor than that of a living creature.

This poor representative of the race, who had lost his essence and completely lost his senses, anxiously ground the [key] with his teeth and made a meaningless noise.

[Kyaarbyaaaaak! Bye! #%%kak!]

The giant woman with the storm on her head also did not miss the opportunity to criticize Nate.

[I don't think you would dare complain about your treatment. All of this is your own gain!]

As if reflecting the woman's emotional state, her long hair was shaking wildly in the air in the windless corridor.

The hem of her clothes, which must have shined beautifully like a rainbow, had already lost its luster a long time ago as it had become soaked from the heavy rain she had caused herself.

It seems that Nate has been suffering a lot during the past month when he has been slacking off.

[I knew you would do something like this one day! He neglected his duty as a guardian and abandoned the dimension, and in the end, he even became involved in the life and death of humans, greatly disrupting cause and effect! How on earth are you going to sort out all these problems!]

There was another unfamiliar face there.

A member with an elongated body unique to the tree race politely greets Nate.

Now, it was a young tree that had taken over the position of new representative of the tribe, replacing the old tree that repeatedly spit out echo-like thoughts.

[I am very sorry to have to meet you for the first time this way, Guardian of Delcross.]

At first glance, he seemed like a man full of dignity.

The branches extending gracefully from the top of his head were as majestic as a deer's crown, and the cloak, finely woven from dry grass, had a subtle luster as if it had been melted down from gold dust.

[Unfortunately, it turned out like this, but please know that our intention is to provide a venue for dialogue.]

After taking a quick look at the faces of the race representatives, Nate finally looked back at the old man standing in front, the elder dragon who was the representative of the six-member council.

It was truly amazing.

The only ones who were very nervous about this situation were the members of the [Council of Six], and the attitude of Nate, who had become their prisoner, was extremely carefree.

[Elder, what does this mean?]

[...] Nate.]

[Have all the border races agreed to join me? So, can I take this to mean that you have decided to protect the Delcross Dimension yourself from now on?]

Then the old man trembled and, uncharacteristically, became angry.

[Oh, do your best! Isn't this all because of you? So why have you been confined to the imperial palace, ignoring external invasions and not even responding to calls?]

[...] There were circumstances.]

[Don't be ridiculous! If there was such a thing, shouldn't it have been properly explained at least to our members who are wary of the dimension!]

[...]]

[What on earth are we supposed to do? No matter what I try, there is no answer, so the only way to hear your voice is to forcefully activate the emergency summons!]

The reaction of the [Six-person meeting] was not something that could not be understood.

While the only guardian of the dimension was silent and closed off communication, hundreds or thousands of armies rushed towards the Delcross dimension at once.

They were caught up in the distortion of the gap created by Nate, and rushed towards Delcross at different speeds.

For the representatives of the race who had to face the destruction slowly approaching from beyond the border of the dimension, the past month must have been like a hundreds of years of nightmare.

[And what else did you do in Cyprus not long ago? Why do you stay quiet for a while and then suddenly cause a huge accident that affects the life or death of humans!]

[...] I am not particularly involved in anyone's life or death.]

Nate protested in an unusually confident voice.

That was partly true. He simply vaporized a small portion of the flammable fuel prepared by the Council by slightly changing the temperature and pressure.

The fire would have happened anyway according to the son's will. In this case, it would not be such a big problem as the vaporized fuel caused an additional small explosion.

... maybe.

[Hey, Nate. Why are you like this these days? You are not a child who cannot communicate!]

It seems like a lot has accumulated over the years, and the more he talks, the more the old man's face turns red.

[Haven't we been doing well for a while since the last 'agreement'? There must be a good reason for you to suddenly act like this.]

[...]]

[Well, it's not too late. Please, do us a favor and explain it to us properly! What on earth happened to you in the meantime?]

When Nate did not answer any more and stubbornly kept his mouth shut, the old man, who noticed his rare expression like a ghost, lamented.

[Ah, yes! There's only one way you'll end up like this. It must have been related to 'that'!]

The elongated iris of the old man looking at Nate tightens to the point where it can no longer get smaller.

[Once again, for the sake of 'that', I have wasted my precious cause and effect on something so useless!]

[...]]

[So you thought it would be a hindrance if we found out, so you refused to communicate at all! Then, I left it until the invaders were just a stone's throw away, making it impossible for them to forcefully summon you here!]

hmm.

Nate, who had nothing to say in response to this, looked down and gently pulled on a chain wrapped around his body.

Then, beyond the border of the gray space, a long golden chain extending somewhere invisible follows his movements, heavily scratching the floor.

Charrrrr...

[Look, Nate!]

The chain was stronger than it looked. Perhaps they used the key to borrow some of the power of the tribal barrier.

but-

'There's nothing you can't destroy if you put your mind to it.'

If you commit it, you will be completely at odds with the tribal representatives from now on.

[Nate! Are you listening?]

Also, it would be a little painful to know that as the barrier connected to the chain is broken, the boundary between dimensions will be greatly weakened.

[Nate!]

[I guess you don't have to try any harder, old man.]

When there was no progress in the conversation between the two, the Storm Lady intervened between them.

The giant woman's beaky eyes were burning with anger, and as if in sympathy, small lightning bolts flew out from the heavy rain on her head.

[I knew my guy would make a sad deal like this someday. Don't you always put your duties on the back burner and always end up doing things wrong because you are obsessed with your own personal goals? So, I will feel relieved if I get a clear answer from him this time!]

Oh my, it was obvious that if the leadership of the meeting was handed over to that woman, this place would become increasingly tiring. Nate protested to her half-heartedly.

[This is too much interference, heavy rain. It was delayed due to some circumstances, but anyway, all the invaders were taken care of and the dimension is still intact. What is the problem?]

[...] what?]

[Now that everything has ended smoothly, please let me go. We have to go see our children right now.]

[No, I can't do that!]

This time, it was an elderly person who intervened in their conversation.

[Everything ended smoothly? The results are good, so there are no

problems now? Nate, please stop being funny!]

The old man glared at Nate with a mixture of anger and worry.

[Do you know why we nag like this for our own good? Please worry about your limitations! Nate, you are only human!]

Distorting hundreds or thousands of dimensions at the same time. And to make them delicately hover inside the gap so that they cannot easily notice the gap in time.

That enormous mental work is something that even an oracle who is said to be the ideal of the essence of the race cannot easily handle.

Nate has endured such unreasonable behavior alone for over a month.

[Do you know how much I have worried about you all this time?]

I wonder if the guardian he appointed will eventually go crazy. Could it be that he lost the balance of his mind and emotions and even let go of the power of disaster he held in his hands?

He will destroy everything he loves, including the Delcross dimension, with his own hands, and in the end, he will even completely destroy his own soul...

[You are just like Delcross. There is no way for this dimension to exist without you! But why aren't you the only one who doesn't know that?]

[...]]

[Why don't you try to preserve cause and effect! Why are you ready to throw away everything at any time, like a person with no regrets, and go on like that!]

Nate stood silently.

This is because he knows very well that even if he had a long conversation anyway, the difference in opinion between him and the old man would not be narrowed and would forever draw parallel

lines.

For Nate, it is not he who determines the existence of this dimension...

[You are already wrong, old man.]

At that time, Mithra took a swig of his drink and opened his mouth in a cheerful voice.

[Look at that guy's expression over there. They have no intention of listening to us at all. If I make a mistake, it seems like I'm thinking about whether it wouldn't be a big deal if I broke one of the barriers as a test!]

Kill, kill, kill!

The self-mocking laughter of a drunken Draconian shakes the heavy air of the corridor.

At that time, the young tree, unable to see the growing atmosphere, took a step forward and looked around the crowd.

[Now, everyone, calm down. The atmosphere seems to be getting too heated right now. I don't yet know the details of this convocation, so I dare to ask...]

[Hatasu Titi.]

[It may have been a little late to react, but I think our guardian completed his duty well. How about this now? Anyway, there is no other solution for us other than that, right?]

[If you don't know the details, at least try to understand the atmosphere, young tree!]

The Storm Woman lashed out at the tree.

Isn't she, a young girl who has just taken on a heavy responsibility, a representative of a race that doesn't need to show any respect to an elderly woman?

[Listen carefully. Now, that arrogant person is relying on the false name of Oracle to arbitrarily test his own limits and threaten the safety of the entire dimension!]

[haha.]

At that time, Nate let out a soft laugh for the first time and started walking.

Grumbling-

As he moves, the long chains sway gracefully as if they were decorations for his robes.

[How dare a non-Oracle judge and criticize Oracle's limitations?]

[What?]

The angry giant woman was about to get angry at Nate.

[Wait a minute, this is... .. !]

Suddenly sensing something amiss, she opens her eyes wide and stares into space.

Then after a while-

[What is this! What happened? Why are they going into our territory... .. !]

As if screaming, I scream towards Nate.

Soon, one by one, the members of the [Council of Six] also realize what is happening and are greatly embarrassed.

A large island where giants gather.

A new black vortex had formed in the sky where the heavy rain had not been good.

It was a gate.

[...] ... ?]

[Demon King from another dimension? Where on earth did so many armies suddenly appear... ... !]

Then they naturally realized the cause of the situation.

The invaders' dimension where the time axis has been twisted and twisted a lot over the past month.

One of them has belatedly regained the flow of time and is rapidly rushing towards Delcross.

[Isn't it all over? How on earth did this happen, Nate!]

The ancient dragon urgently asked Nate.

[Oh, my.]

However, Nate, who received reprimanding looks from all the members, did not blink and calmly opened his mouth.

[sorry. It looks like my calculations were a little off.]

[...] what?]

[Didn't you just say that? heavy rain. I am human after all. As you feared, you ended up making this mistake because you had blind faith in Oracle's abilities.]

[...] ... !]

No one there knew that it was bullshit.

395. Negotiation (5)

Black storm clouds are gathering.

The foreshadowing of a disaster caused by tens of thousands of monsters gathering together in droves began to cover the stormy sky of the island in pitch black.

[iced coffee...]

[Council of 6] looked up at the scene in shock. The [Key] connected to the barrier relays without filtering the frighteningly vivid scene of the invasion.

Crackling. Co. Co.

The appearance of monsters swimming around, wriggling their long segments surrounded by carapace, resembled midges or centipedes at first glance. The only difference is that its size is so huge that it cannot be compared to those of them.

At the forefront, a low-ranking demon lord can be seen leading them.

Except for the three pairs of wings with distinct leaf veins, it doesn't look that different from its relatives. Perhaps the status of the individual was not that high, but it seemed that he had acquired the qualifications of a demon king by taking advantage of the unique collective consciousness shared by a group of demons.

Crack, cluck.

The monsters, who had already gnawed away everything in their world, were rushing like crazy as the path to a new dimension full of abundant food was opened.

Just like that, dimensions collide at full speed.

T-huh!

And soon, he was stopped for a moment by hitting a transparent membrane floating in the air. It was one of the five racial barriers that protected the Delcross dimension.

[...] Inhale!]

When the giant woman let out a moan that was unclear whether it was relief or a scream, Nate opened his mouth in a calm voice.

[It is fortunate that the gate was opened outside the barrier. You were lucky today.]

[...] ... !]

The Storm Lady glared at Nate with a look in her eyes as if she would eat him at any moment.

It was impossible not to know that everything, not only the opening time of the gate but also its location, was done through his thorough calculations.

[But how long can that barrier hold out?]

Indeed, that was not the end.

As if responding to Nate's words-

Coo! thud!

The incoming monsters continue to pound the transparent membrane violently.

As the entire dimension shook with shock, the corridor where the [Council of Six] gathered also began to vibrate in the aftermath.

Kurrrrrr...

[...]]

Since appointing a new guardian, this is the first time that the barrier has been attacked so directly. Everyone looks at Nate and the woman alternately, mesmerized by the unprecedented situation.

It was right then.

Crank!

Suddenly, one of the chains that was holding Nate began to be dragged somewhere at breakneck speed. This was because the interconnected barriers became extremely unstable.

Cheaeng-!

Nate, who stumbled for a moment due to the tight pull, soon managed to support the chain with one hand and looked back at the storm woman.

[What do you want to do? heavy rain. If I apply just a little bit of force, this chain will break right away.]

If the chain is broken like this, the racial barrier will also take a big hit. Then, the incomplete barrier will not be able to hold out for long and will be destroyed by the intruders.

Those terrifying dark clouds are pouring down over the giants' hideout in an instant.

[Doing something mean...]

Wow!

The giantess grits her teeth and glares at Nate. As if reflecting her emotional state, a series of fierce thunderstorms roared through her wildly flowing hair.

But what can you do? In the current situation, there is only one path for her to choose.

[...] I can't help it this time.]

Pass...

As the woman operates the key with resignation, the chain that had been pulled tightly disappears in an instant into thin air. It was an inevitable choice to protect her barrier.

[Remember one thing clearly! I will never forget until the day I die that you forgot your duty as a guardian and threatened the safety of our people!]

Finally, the woman who gave Nate a harsh look turns around and disappears, as if melting into the air. She moved to her island to protect her people.

[...]]

A cold silence falls between those who remain for a moment.

[...] What do we do now, Nate?]

The ancient dragon who broke the silence sighed and asked, and Nate answered, tilting his head to one side as if puzzled.

[Why are you asking me that? You are the ones who summoned someone who was busy defending the dimension to this place, even using the power of the key.]

[I don't think you would have caused an accident like that without taking any precautions. Surely there must be a way to solve it now?]

[You are saying unreasonable things.]

Nate's gray eyes looked at the ancient dragon with an unusually docile glow.

[According to the 'agreement', my body cannot take even a single step outside the imperial palace. It is impossible to move to the site right now.]

[But your soul...]

[Casality is very insufficient to exercise the power of the soul. As you know, don't miracles always require appropriate cause and effect? It may be a little late, but from now on, I'm going to follow the advice

of my elders and try to conserve some of the cause and effect.]

Due to the sarcasm that was bordering on polite, blood started to well up on the ancient dragon's forehead.

[Oh, look, Nate! Do your best!]

It was right then.

Crispy! Slurp-

Once again, a chain wrapped around Nate's arm disappears. At this, the ancient dragon was frightened and looked at the person who had lifted the restraints.

[...] Mitra!?!]

[haha. Nate, this is what you want, right? Could you do me a favor and stop them for poor Rain? Since this has come to this, I will also release some of the causal effects that were restricted at the time of the agreement.]

[No, wait a minute! Mitra, what on earth are you doing without a shirt? ... !]

Then the draconian, in a dull state, looked at the ancient dragon and scratched the double-layered scales on its eyelids.

[Well, that's how it happened, old man. There is no other way for now, right?]

[that... ... !]

[As you know, the racial barrier and the safety of the Delcross dimension are not that important to me anymore. There are no longer any people or tribal territories left to protect.]

On the day when Ionia was engulfed in disaster, the representative of the last race that had lost all of its compatriots gazed at the former guardian with a deepened gaze. In his eyes, which are wrapped in a transparent nictitating membrane, a faded sadness that cannot be dismissed as just drunkenness flashes.

[But old man. At the very least, for the sake of unnecessary conflict with that friend, I would like to avoid having the barriers, the last legacy of Ionia, destroyed without meaning.]

[...]]

However, Mitra was not the only one who took unexpected action.

Crispy-!

With a small noise, one chain after another disappears. The young tree, who had become the new representative of the tribe, manipulated the key, albeit clumsily.

[...] Hatasu Titi?!]

[Mitra's words that there is no other way sound quite reasonable to me.]

[It's not such a simple matter! What would you do if you recklessly released the cause and effect that was limited by the agreement?]

[In order to prevent this situation anyway, don't we have to solve part of that person's cause and effect?]

[that... ... !]

While they were fighting, Nate, who had become considerably lighter, walked slowly with the one remaining chain wrapped around his body. She escapes from this chaotic situation and heads towards the giant stingray, which is all alone and intent on gnawing at the key.

Charrrrr...

[Lord Manta. What would you do?]

Then, the stingray, which was clenching its teeth together, stopped acting like it was a lie and looked down at Nate blankly.

[...] That's right; view??]

[It's not a big issue to worry about. As you can see, the consensus of the 'meeting of six' seems to be converging like this.]

[Sbi ⊢ Jadal\$Rock ⇔ T!]

[Yes, of course.]

At that absurd sight, Mitra and Hatasu Titi exchange glances.

'I'm offended, but Mithra. Was he able to communicate?'

'That's right. It really becomes something like a conversation. I just found out too.'

They weren't sure, but it seemed like something meaningful had been exchanged between Nate and Manta. After a while, the last remaining chain disappeared helplessly.

Passsss...

[Thanks for your cooperation.]

[Lord Manta!]

In response to a cry similar to that of an ancient dragon, the stingray also screams without hesitation.

[Kyakkahi; Hey? That's you!]

[What are you doing? If you have a mouth, please explain!]

[Chapu?Maje#?Kkeburukkak!]

[no! So please speak in a way that I can understand!]

In the midst of the confusion, Nate, who felt lighter for the first time in a long time, leisurely raised one corner of his mouth.

[The opinions of the 'Meeting of 6' were well received. You will never regret this decision today.]

* * *

Kurrrrrr...

Along with the black gate, the entire army of monsters is transferred.

A miraculous sight in which the twisting of a large space is effortlessly pushed into an even more vast twisting!

When Nate finally disappears into the [gap] along with the entrance to the dimension, the gathering dark clouds disperse and the distorted sky returns to its straight appearance.

[...] It's really amazing.]

The young tree, which had opened its mouth in a daze, let out a pure exclamation in a low voice.

The situation is the same for other members. Although it was not the first time they had seen the guardian of Delcross exercising his power to the fullest, the wondrous sight was enough to capture their attention. Even if they are representatives of a race that has led the race for a long time and even survived the worst of the destruction of Ionia.

[ha ha ha! It's a wonderful sight!]

Mithra raises the bottle high into the air. It was the Draconian way of showing respect in front of everyone.

Of course, the family members who would sympathize with him no longer remained by his side.

[For some reason, I felt like I was obediently complying without resisting the forced summons. They must have been planning to rob us of cause and effect in this way from the beginning. He is a very clever friend.]

On the other hand, unlike them, the ancient dragon was caught up in somewhat complicated feelings.

[...] Hatasu Titi.]

[Yes, old man.]

[It's been quite a while since I've known you. But that behavior just wasn't like you at all. Unlike usual, where I always stick to the principles, I feel like I was quite impulsive earlier.]

Then the young tree thought for a moment and nodded.

[Your point is valid. Great ancient dragon. When I think about it carefully, there are things that feel a little strange even to me.]

It's not that it wasn't, Hatasu Titi had been feeling strange emotions from the moment she first saw the guardian of Delcross.

A bit of familiarity, or an exciting welcome.

They were pieces of extremely ambiguous emotions, but in any case, judging overall, they could probably be lumped together as good feelings.

It cannot be denied that that unusual first impression had some influence on subsequent judgment.

[The moment I saw him, I felt very trustworthy. He probably thought that if something like that was said, it would be okay to just follow him. It feels like I'm under 'enchantment'.]

When he tilted his head, the long branches extending from his head hit each other and made a monotonous friction sound.

[But it's really strange. Somehow, I had a strange sense of déjà vu, as if something like this had happened not too long ago... ..]

* * *

Slurp and clatter.

Nate slowly opened his eyes, feeling the ripples of a light slap on his cheek.

Is it because of my mood? It must have been less than a week since I entered the prayer room, but I felt like I had returned after being away from my body for a very long time.

"Peha!"

As I woke up from the pond, Katrina, who looked much haggard than before, came running to greet me. She also got a lot of nagging from Francis later on.

"You've been gone longer than expected, Katrina. Has anything special happened so far? "What about the children?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. That is... .."

Then the loyal knight commander awkwardly averted his gaze. It was a somewhat subtle reaction, unlike her, who always shows her restrained side.

And a little while later, Nate heard the news as if it were lightning.

"... okay. "Did the child do that?"

He called himself the apostle of God. In the middle of a holy meeting where all the high-ranking priests gathered, he proudly showed off his demonic energy.

"It's not surprising anymore because that's what he does."

However, regardless of being numb to the shock, there is no change in the fact that the situation must be resolved.

How on earth should we end this huge accident!

"Although it is a little early, please hurry up with the publication of the scriptural fairy tales that were in the preparation stage. And I told Francis about the academy curriculum... .."

Nate, who was quickly giving instructions, was suddenly overcome with skepticism, so he slowly raised his hand and washed his face.

396. Pian (1)

As with most primitive religions, there was something extralegal about the main religion that has been around for thousands of years.

Once someone becomes suspicious, an innocent person can be referred to the Inquisition without any evidence. There is no limit to the level of punishment, so there are countless cases of people ending their lives after making a bad joke.

The five great emperors, however, reorganized the sacred laws and specified crimes based on the scriptures and appropriate punishments for them.

However, aren't such legal provisions ultimately a matter of extracting and pasting them?

-The author held a private worship service with the residents of his territory. Wouldn't it be the act of heresy to arbitrarily establish a sanctuary for the Lord without permission from the Orthodox Church?

An estate happens to be destroyed due to the false accusations of a neighboring lord. This is because it is much cheaper to pay bribes to high-ranking priests than to start a territorial war by consuming food and soldiers.

And the following year, the lord who had accused his neighbor was brought to the Inquisition by one of his vassals. For reasons exactly opposite to those he accused.

-The sages of old said that we must build a church in our hearts even in desolate wastelands. However, that ruthless person used the permission of the Orthodox Church as an excuse to betray the faith of

the people of the territory who wanted to properly worship the Lord in the sanctuary!

But now that the situation has reached this point, it has become impossible for those who are in the know to recklessly impose the provisions of the law. It could also be seen as a side effect of the exercise of extralegal power.

-Hey. It all depends on what you say. I know it, you know it, we all know it. But do we really have to go to this length just to win this once?

-Residing within the 'grace' of the ecliptic means proof that we are not devils who have used the kalpa. Let's leave this to each other. If you cross the line, do you think others will leave you alone?

In this way, a tacit agreement had already developed among the imperial officials. As long as they don't openly commit a serious crime like summoning a demon in front of everyone, at least they don't make false accusations among themselves.

This was one of the reasons why they could not easily detain and torture the prince, even though Prince Mores revealed his naked 'magic spirit' and arbitrarily called himself an apostle of the main god.

"This is ridiculous!"

Archbishop Wesker, who had been suffering for several days, stormed into Cardinal Myer's house late at night and complained.

She was the one who stood at the forefront of extermination of demons along with Seonghwang in the past. Therefore, she was bound to react more sensitively to the demonic energy displayed by the 3rd prince than others.

"Are you saying you're just going to leave the 3rd prince like that? dismissal! "It clearly belonged to the devil's power!"

Cardinal Meyer looked at his beloved junior with tired eyes. In fact, she wasn't the only one who had trouble sleeping for several days.

"What do you want to do, Wesker?"

"I need to make everything clear right now! As an apostle of the main god with demonic energy, there's really no way something like that is possible, right? "We need to properly investigate whether what the prince said is true or not!"

"how? Are you going to lead the Holy Knights into the main palace and take him away by force? "Without His Majesty's permission, at the place where His Majesty resides?"

"that... ..!"

If you think about it, it's the same as treason. Perhaps that is why the clever third prince is still staying in the main palace.

"Calm down, Wesker. "I don't feel at ease either."

Cardinal Meyer sighed deeply.

He just hoped that the third prince, who was embroiled in various controversies, would take care of himself for the time being. It was a carefully prepared event so as not to cause any harm to either party, but the prince himself took a step forward and ignited the controversy!

'Prince Mores's intentions are clear. 'He has no intention of giving up the position he has barely secured.'

I expected there would be some level of backlash.

However, because it was such a bold frontal attack, there was no time to respond. While everyone at the Holy Assembly was overwhelmed by demonic energy and confused, the grandly prepared proof event ended in a dull manner.

'Cardinal Cafran's face was truly a sight to behold.'

What's interesting here is that the reactions of his favorite juniors were sharply different.

First of all, Archbishop Wesker showed unprecedented caution. His

attitude is quite different from the way he looked at Prince Mores' incidents and accidents as if they were cute.

On the other hand, Cardinal Benitus seemed to have a lot on his mind, and was just praying for several days in seclusion in the prayer room provided in the Inquisition.

The leader's attitude is so careless that even the Inquisitors under him do not dare to make any hasty moves.

"dismissal. No matter how minor a hazard may be, it must be ruled out as soon as its presence is realized. That is truly the path for the subjects of Delcross!"

"I'm not saying we should just ignore the risk. "At least there is no doubt about the power of [Destruction] that Prince Mores possesses, so let's just wait and see what happens until everything becomes clear."

Cardinal Myer comforted Wesker, who was extremely upset.

"In a way, no matter what the truth is, doesn't it definitely touch on the practicalities you consider important? Prince Mores also said this. Did he say that he would accept the trials given to him and spare no effort to ensure that the kingdom of God on this earth prospers forever?"

"... "Don't you know the purpose of that statement?"

Wesker protested in a slightly weakened voice.

At that time, Prince Mores made a statement in front of the Holy Assembly that he would serve Delcross for the rest of his life.

However, if you think about its true meaning, it means that everything you do is the Lord's work, so do not dare to interfere with it.

"It was really bold. "He didn't take a single step back until the end, which was quite unusual."

"Come on, leave it at that. As soon as His Majesty returns, everything

will be resolved neatly. So don't worry about it anymore, and go back and get some rest."

After finally coaxing Archbishop Wesker out, he suddenly spotted a familiar new figure standing in the corner of the hallway.

Julia Meyer.

A beautiful granddaughter of whom he was always proud, who became an adjutant of the Imperial Guard at a young age.

She may have been a little late getting off work, but she was still dressed neatly in her knightly uniform.

"... "Did you all hear it?"

Then the granddaughter bowed her head seriously. It was a clear positive meaning.

"Nothing is certain yet. So please refrain from making unnecessary speculations."

"Yes, grandfather."

Julia nodded slowly and continued speaking cautiously.

"However, scandalous rumors about Prince Mores are already spreading throughout the imperial capital. Shouldn't you properly express your position on everything at the Holy Assembly? "I am concerned that public sentiment will be unnecessarily shaken."

"... .."

Cardinal Meyer blinked for a moment and looked at his granddaughter. This was because there was an unusual trace of worry in her voice.

"The child's behavior and character are flawless, but I was always worried because his interpersonal relationships were not maintained at all... .."

Surprisingly, it seems that he was building a good relationship with

Prince Mores, with whom there was talk of an engagement.

"Hey. Do you not doubt Him at all? "The rumors surrounding the prince may not be completely unfounded."

"But that can't be possible, can it?"

In response to the cardinal's question, Julia asked a puzzled question.

"This is the imperial capital, grandfather. Everyone knows that no evil spirit can enter this sacred land without permission."

"... .."

The cardinal was silent for a moment and stared at his granddaughter with darkened eyes.

"Honey, Julia."

"Yes, grandfather."

"Have you ever heard anything from your mother about our family's progenitor?"

"father... "Do you mean that?"

Julia thought deeply for a moment and then shook her head.

My mother, the current head of the Mayer family, was a very busy person. Even when Julia was just weaning, she barely had time for a leisurely conversation.

But her grandfather wouldn't have asked such an absurd question.

"I haven't heard anything else from the head of the family. "Does the founder of the Mayer family have something to do with this?"

"... "No, it's nothing."

The cardinal's purple eyes gently widened, and he momentarily caressed the eyes of his granddaughter, who looked just like him.

"I see you said this nonsense. "It's not a big deal, so just forget about

it."

* * *

The air inside the imperial palace was full of tension.

At first glance, everything seemed peaceful, but that peace was as dangerous as thin ice on a torrent.

It was Seongjin who felt the dangerous atmosphere more than anyone else. So, even though his body fully recovered, he did not rush back to Jinju Palace and left the main palace.

"Mores. I happened to know some interesting anecdotes. "I heard that they may soon be published as scriptural fairy tales. If you have time, would you like to read the stories with me?"

What is coincidence?

Amelia, who came with a scripture, had dark circles around her pretty eyes.

It seemed clear that, after hearing what had happened at the Holy Assembly, he had stayed up all night searching the scriptures to find anecdotes about Saint Terbachia.

"Thank you, sister. But you are also very busy helping the Empress with her government affairs, right? "I will read this carefully later."

Feeling her heart aching with guilt, Seongjin neatly stored the scriptures she brought in a corner of the room.

Whoa!

-Owner! Come play with me! Come on, make me big, strong and cute!

Sometimes Max would barge in front of the door and howl loudly with his snout raised.

It was something that could never have been said. Because I couldn't be sure how the changed auror would affect him. Even if you succeed

in transforming without any problems, you will just be viewed with suspicion by others.

If we just maintain the current situation, even if something happens to Seongjin, Max, who has been recognized as a [Divine Beast], will not have any problems.

"No, Max. Now, I'm going to throw Edith here, so play nicely with the wooden plate. Understand?"

"yes? Lowering! yes?!"

Edith, who was confused, was pushed by Seongjin and chased out into the garden with the wolf dog.

"no! What kind of nonsense are these people talking about? What more proof do you need here? You really showed the power of [Destruction] in front of everyone. Isn't that what happened then? "Everyone must have lost their minds!"

Occasionally Owen would come by, very indignant.

Recently, as I was wandering around the imperial palace without doing anything in particular, I seemed to often hear ugly whispers exchanged between priests and servants.

Seongjin looked at this untrustworthy eldest son with pitiful eyes.

"Do you think other people are stupid and just say things like that without any basis?"

Such a thoughtless brat. I don't know about anyone else, but shouldn't you be a little suspicious of me? What will others think if they see you doing this?

If you don't have a special position in the ecliptic, at least learn the ability to read the atmosphere. You were so stupid that you barely restrained yourself from reflexively flying away!

"ok? Huh?"

Owen somehow felt an eerie premonition. She reflexively grabbed

her forehead and turned her head back and forth.

"... .."

However, what made Seongjin worry the most was Lord Masaine's reaction.

I thought he would be as excited as always and ask Seongjin about the source of the 'magic', but surprisingly, he just did his job with a calm expression.

Masain closely coordinated the security schedule with the 2nd Guards of the main palace, and also took time to check on the resident knights of the Jinju Palace.

Sometimes, when he comes to see the work of the monster task force on Seongjin's behalf, he writes up a very detailed report and reads it out one by one.

Still, when I had time, I sat next to Seongjin and quietly embroidered.

Width, Sarak.

Width, Sarak.

Under steady hands, beautiful flower petals are being completed one by one.

At first glance, the scene seemed truly peaceful. If only Sir Masain's eyes weren't burning brightly as he glared at Doan.

"excuse me... Sir Masaine?"

"Yes, sir, please do so."

"... "Uh, it's nothing."

It was a day when I was living such a dangerous day.

"... ..!"

Seongjin, who had become more sensitive than before, suddenly sensed an abnormality in which the flow of auras in the air was

suddenly reversed.

The air in the area is calmly aligned like a magnetic field, as if someone had passed a strong electric current through a conductor.

Seongjin couldn't overcome his joy and jumped up from his bed and shouted.

"... father!"

397. Pian (2)

As soon as Seonghwang came out of the prayer room, he quickly organized his backlog of work.

This is the first time I have been away for such a long time without notice since the heretic riots two years ago.

The good news was that the gears he had finely tuned over a long period of time rolled properly without any derailment.

And what maintained the center of the mechanism was the presence of a virtuous and capable empress.

"That's amazing. Although he was unable to properly hand over the affairs due to lack of time, he took care of the state affairs perfectly with almost no room for intervention. Tatyana."

Empress Tatiana unconsciously lowered the corners of her mouth that were about to rise due to the pure admiration of the emperor.

Although it has been like that for a long time, she was the type of person who was energized by focusing aggressively on her work and felt satisfied through the achievements and recognition that came from it.

Of course, the two people facing each other in a friendly atmosphere had completely different thoughts in their heads.

'For the sake of the future, I think it would be better to leave a little more political affairs to the empress from now on.'

'It was close. I thought I was slowly reaching my limit, but what would have happened if His Majesty had been just one day late!'

Even looking back on Tatiana herself, it was an amazing achievement.

There have been many times when she has taken Seonghwang's place, but has she ever completed all her tasks this long and successfully?

"Princess Amelia's help was great. She was always there to help me when I needed it. The more I look at it, the more I realize that he is truly a great administrative talent... .."

Perhaps it was because her mood had eased, but Tatiana, who had been inadvertently complimenting her, was startled and trailed off.

Until now, wasn't she busy subtly criticizing other children in front of Seonghwang? When she suddenly tried to compliment her, which she had never done before, beyond her awkwardness, she felt embarrassed as if her true intentions had been discovered.

"... .."

Tatiana reflexively glanced at Seonghwang, but fortunately, he just listened to her without expressing much emotion.

"Having people in an appropriate manner is also an empress's benevolence."

"... .."

Tatiana closed her mouth and quietly looked up at the Holy Emperor's face. Although she seemed extremely emotionless on the outside, Tatiana could tell that she had been looking at her for a long time. She saw the trust, understanding, affection, and a little bit of sadness in his eyes.

A long time ago, the future Tatiana dreamed of for her young prince was quite different from the present.

Likewise, Seonghwang must have been looking at a future that was completely different from the present. Maybe there was no such thing as Tatiana next to him.

But they reunited in an unexpected way and decided to embrace each other, albeit imperfectly.

The only thing that Tatyana didn't expect was that she felt that her current situation was more peaceful and warm than she expected.

"... yes. What more can I say? "They are all Princess Amelia's official documents."

Tatiana sighed softly and leaned her head on the Emperor's shoulder. Even if she were to spread her gossip about the princess here, her holy gaze towards her probably wouldn't change much.

The relationship they built over a long period of time was like a solid and beautiful castle that would not easily collapse, even if it was not perfect.

Tatiana sometimes feels weak like this because she knows that the Emperor will completely understand and embrace her no matter what happens.

"Probably, without the princess, I would never have been able to lead the country as I am now."

"That's not true."

"no. For a while, I even suspected that the princess was reading my mind. "How can you see through people so clearly?"

"It must have been possible because it was your job, not someone else's."

Seonghwang's answer was sincere.

The current Amelia is, in name and reality, the most noble rose of the Holy Empire.

However, when she first entered the imperial palace, she was just a shy and clumsy little girl.

Then, at some point, the child began to straighten his back and smile with authority as if he had drawn it.

Seonghwang knew very well that he was trying to spend as much time as possible with his child out of his spare time. The fact that Amelia tried to imitate the empress and empresses, especially her noble empress's every move.

-Tatiana Oh my mom.

The well-mannered child's only friendly title contained a respect and affection that the Empress had not yet realized.

"... .."

"... .."

And the two were caught up in their own thoughts, leaning on each other's shoulders in silence for a while.

"... "Big"

"Hmm! "Hmm!"

The cardinals who couldn't wait cleared their throats outside, until Luis finally entered the office with an expression of regret.

Since then, Seonghwang's busy schedule has continued.

He had to listen to many reports through thoughts from all over the continent, including Arenja.

Next, the five cardinals entered the Holy Emperor's office with anxious feelings, and after a while, they staggered out with their faces bleached white.

It was late in the evening, and it finally came to the last moment.

It was the moment to face the troublesome son who had committed a truly rare accident and was showing off his magical aura in front of everyone in the Holy Assembly.

"father."

The child, who has now completely regained his health, sticks his

head in the doorway of the office with a nervous expression. She had a somewhat solemn expression, as if she had prepared for something great.

Seonghwang thought.

'Yes, how could I fail this child's expectations?'

As soon as I made the decision, a thought arose, and as a result, my hands moved like lightning.

Ta-kong!

"Kkuek!"

* * *

'In fact, isn't Takbam just an excuse for this gentleman to pour out his divine power?'

In the bright waterfall of light, Seongjin rubbed his forehead and had such a strange thought.

As such, Seonghwang was busy pouring out divine power by putting in a lot of effort and effort over a long period of time. Even though the pain from last night has long since disappeared.

However, Seongjin could not hastily tell Seonghwang to stop. His expression looked very heavy, as if he was deep in thought.

How much time has passed?

Finally, as if he mustered up as much strength as he wanted, Seonghwang sat down and gently pointed to the sofa across from him with his chin.

"Sit down."

"yes."

"explanation."

"yes!"

I couldn't figure out what to explain. So Seongjin began to tell his story, step by step, from the beginning of this accident.

I don't know the cause - I guess the demon lord probably did something, but I decided to ignore this part - his auror and the fire of Gehenna were completely combined, making it impossible to hide the demonic power at all.

Using this as an excuse, the Holy Order urged the Knights Templar to voluntarily resign under the pretext of testing him.

At best, they had taken over public power, but they did not want to be tied by their useless checks.

"And then this thought occurred to me. Now that things have come to this, can't we turn that testing moment into another opportunity? Why not go one step further and establish yourself as a difficult opponent for them to talk to?"

Of course, it wasn't a very noble and smooth way, so Seongjin was prepared to get hit at least one more time.

However, Seonghwang, who was listening calmly until the end, unexpectedly gave Seongjin a light word of praise.

"okay. Good job. "In situations where you think you are being tricked, you can seize the opportunity to catch your opponent off guard and catch them off guard."

"then... ... !"

"But it's true that as a father, I'm a little worried about the way you're behaving."

Seonghwang, who added words later, made eye contact with Seongjin with slightly sunken eyes.

"Keep this in mind, Mores. Right now it may seem like you've won an easy victory over them. However, not everything in the world works so simply."

Seonghwang continued his explanation in detail.

Because it is played within the established rules, it can become a complete game.

However, if something doesn't work out as expected and you completely ignore the rules and turn the game over, there is no way to use it later when you need that game.

"Think about it. If you always turn the tables in ways no one expects, eventually no one will easily invite you to their negotiation table.

"You also don't want that kind of ending, do you?"

"... .."

"Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, father."

Seongjin fully understood his advice. But there were circumstances that he could not avoid. Because I didn't do this just to overcome the inspiration of the crusade.

Seongjin had one more important goal left.

"Actually, there is something I would like to ask my father separately regarding that matter."

"ask."

"Yes, father."

Seongjin responded briefly and took the amulet around his neck out of his shirt. It is an object from the world of symbols with the demon lord's red soul stone embedded in it.

"The reason I revealed my magical aura to them was actually a stepping stone for this guy."

Even though he said he was using his father's help to get away with it, he couldn't think of a way to convince the crusade.

But isn't the Demon Lord too pitiful to keep him locked up in a soul stone for the rest of his life?

"I think this is probably the first time I'm showing this guy to my father. Actually, he thinks his father knew everything, but... .."

Seongjin, who had said that, clicked the option in the window that vaguely appeared before his eyes.

?Summon red?

?*Summon* / Release?

OK-

Pyoeyong!

With an incongruously cute sound, a small flame appears and brightens up the office.

[Lee Seong-ji!]

As insignificant as always. Sure enough, as soon as the Demon King appeared, he started whining towards Seongjin.

[Hey, you guy! What if I cancel the summoning like that? And why didn't you call me right away... huh?]

Then, the Demon King noticed the strange atmosphere and slowly rolled his eyes and looked around. And then-

"... .."

[...] ... ?!]

After seeing Seonghwang's hardened form, he became contemplative and screamed like a chicken with its head broken.

[Hey! Standing, thriving?!]

ah.

In the rapidly freezing air, Seongjin, who felt the need for quick intervention, hurriedly poured out an explanation.

"Swing. This guy is the devil. But as you can see, my father is just a

small and powerless summon now. "I can definitely promise you that it is absolutely harmless!"

"... .."

While Seonghwang stared at the burning fireball, speechless, Seongjin began to hastily come up with an excuse.

"Well, of course this guy was once a demon lord, but now he has become my complete descendant. Your father did that before too, right? Because this type of dependency is absolute, you can't betray or rebel without a thought! In other words, this guy will always be on my side! It's clear!"

"... .."

"Besides, if you think about it, it's no different than me making him like this. So, this guy is my responsibility to take care of, in a way, my child... "Isn't that the same thing?"

Still, when there was no answer from Seonghwang, Seongjin slowly began to get nervous. Out of urgency, he winked at the frozen fireball.

ruler! Demon King! Come on and show your cute charm! Try to properly appeal to your father that you are like my child and how harmless and insignificant you are!

[Ugh... .. ?!]

Did Seongjin's inner support work? The demon lord had tears pouring out of his eyes, which was unusual for a fireball, and he finally opened his mouth with difficulty in a hushed voice.

[Ah, hello, how are you? nice to see you. under... ..]

under?

[...] grandfather?]

"... .."

"... .."

Shoot ah-

It was a clear autumn evening, with a cool wind blowing from somewhere.

398. Pian (3)

[hey! Isn't it really too much for you to do to the devil? I thought he was finally calling me, but it happened right under your father's nose!]

"Uh, I'm sorry."

Seongjin could fully understand the embarrassment of the Demon King, who had suddenly been summoned before God's representative and had to be punished.

But he also had his own reasons. Since it was impossible to guess the extent of the demonic energy that the demon lord was spreading, he could not prepare his mind by summoning it from somewhere else in advance.

In that case, I should have committed it in front of my father and received confirmation that it was harmless. Even if other priests stumble, my father will definitely be a strong shield.

'Well, I didn't expect this guy to suddenly talk about his grandfather.'

Still, in the end, the devil's irrational moves showed some effect. This is because Seonghwang, who had been silent for a while, finally sighed deeply and personally placed a sacred barrier on the bastard.

Seongjin couldn't feel it properly, but it was clear that the intensity of the demonic energy emanating from him had probably decreased even further.

Where is that?

-Find out my method. In the meantime, try to hide it from others as

much as possible.

Since his father said so, now Seongjin just has to trust him and wait. Isn't that a huge benefit for just a little bit of shame?

Of course, whether the benefit was enough to compensate for the damaged dignity of some poor soul was another matter.

[This is all because of you, Seongjin Lee! Then why do you call me like a child for no reason!]

Sizzling.

Sparks drip from the Demon King's eyes, creating dotted burn marks.

Fortunately, there was no fire again, because the Demon King was currently resting on the fancy plate that Seongjin had prepared in advance.

He was so sad about losing his salt crystal, so I asked him to prepare the most extravagantly crafted plate in the imperial palace in his stead.

Well, looking at it like this, it looks like a lantern. It's quite charming, isn't it?

"Anyway, demon lord. "Shouldn't you think of a suitable name now?"

After waiting for the guy to calm down to some extent, Seongjin carefully brought up the business he was thinking about.

He planned to keep the Demon King by his side as much as possible from now on.

However, in an effort to hide his identity, I even asked my tired father for an unreasonable request, but I guess I can't call him 'the devil' in front of people.

[huh?]

Of course, the Demon King was confused.

[Why do you need that? I also have a proper name that is as cool as a demon lord, right?]

"that..."

When Seongjin couldn't answer and trailed off, the devil's eyes suddenly became sharp.

[No way, Lee Seong-jin. Have you just forgotten my true name?]

... hmm.

"It's not that important, devil. "There is a reason why I am making this suggestion."

[reason? what reason?]

So, think about it.

Let's say I'm literally introducing you with a 'demon king-like and cool' name. Wouldn't people who already doubt your identity look at you with even more suspicion?

Also, for safety reasons, it is better to use a pseudonym.

I heard there are many books in Delcross that have been banned because they contain the truth of other worlds, like [Apocalypse Now], right? Maybe your true name is actually written somewhere in those books.

Aside from Sir Valerie, who is addicted to banned books, there is a good chance that someone will discover your identity someday.

In that case, wouldn't it be better to let people's guard down with a pseudonym that seems a bit insignificant?

After explaining it for a while, the demon lord got angry, sparks flying.

[Lee Seong-jin. Are you saying that now?]

"why? Isn't it cute? Red..."

[don't do it!]

In the end, the demon lord couldn't hold back his anger and began to stir the room as he pleased.

Crackling, crackling.

The objects he passes by emit an ominous noise along with acrid smoke.

[Never call me that! The moment you say that name, I really feel like my existence will be irrevocably fixed!]

hmm.

"There's nothing to think too negatively, devil. Anyway, since you had a temporary name like that, wouldn't there be a faint trace of you left on the soul stone?"

[what? Have you said everything? Wow!]

Cheesy!

The sound of scorching objects as he passed by seemed to be getting stronger, but Seongjin calmly followed his movements with his eyes.

Now, my body is fine and my auror is extremely full. Even if the devil fails to control the flames again and a fire breaks out, we are fully prepared to prevent it this time!

[Lee Seong-jin, you bastard!]

But the Demon King, who had been wandering around for a while, suddenly came right in front of Seongjin and grumbled.

[Do you think I don't know what's inside you? I know you're in a really good mood today, but stop teasing me! Why are you more excited than usual?]

"... I?"

[Yes, you! Even if you didn't say it, you felt very relieved earlier,

right?]

"... ... ?"

As Seongjin blinked inexplicably, the demon king sighed and exhaled residual smoke.

[I am preserved in the soul stone anyway, so it is not a big problem if you summon me a little late. But why were you in such a hurry to bring me face to face with your father, and why did you say something you didn't even mean to say about me, calling me like your child?]

... uh?

[Tell me honestly. Are you sure you weren't sure how your father would accept your sudden presence of demonic energy? So, you probably wanted to check his reaction by putting me in front of him instead.]

"..."

[Now, am I wrong? If you have something to say, say it!]

Seongjin was at a loss for words and looked blankly at the Demon King. However, he shook his head resolutely at the conviction that soon crossed his mind.

I wanted to check, but that couldn't have been possible. My father has known of my existence since long ago. And he willingly called me 'son' and even said that he would be by my side forever.

... I don't really remember when it was, but I'm sure it is! So there's no way you could doubt a father like that, right?

"what..."

Still, feeling good about his reaction is a separate matter.

So, I personally gave my father a rabbit sleeping mask so he could get some rest after a long time. I couldn't shake the thought that he was giving me bottles and medicine.

Seongjin stared at the red, blinking flame for a moment, then raised the corners of his mouth and continued speaking.

"So let's stop talking nonsense like that and have a proper discussion about how to behave in front of other people starting tomorrow. huh? Red... .."

[Oh, don't do it!]

* * *

Seonghwang was alone in silence. This is thanks to the rabbit eyepatch that Owen gave me as a gift.

-You must have had a hard time in the meantime, but for today, don't think about anything and rest well. Don't worry at all about the Delcross dimension.

This is what his son said himself as he held out his rabbit eye patch.

'If the child said so, then it would be okay.'

I endured it for almost a month, cramming hundreds and thousands of dimensions into the gap. And it took a week to put it all together.

Having expended so much mental power that it would have been impossible for anyone else to spend a lifetime, he decided to obediently listen to his son just for today.

As my head, which was always noisy, quieted down, my senses became more sensitive and the voices in my memories began to sound like hallucinations.

-Why don't you try to preserve cause and effect! Why is this person who is ready to throw away everything at any time without any hesitation, and just go on like a person with no future?

The old man was yelling at him like that all the time.

But he had no idea. The reason Seonghwang can sometimes act as he pleases is not because he has no backs, but rather because he has a strong backs.

Look at how state affairs run smoothly despite being away for a long period of time. Aren't the things that will replace him like this gradually being prepared as time goes by?

Finally, Seonghwang, who remembered his son's confident face, felt a little relieved and slowly closed his eyes.

Squeak-

After a while, the door to the room where he is resting opens quietly. Katrina had even disarmed some of her weapons in case she disturbed the lord's rest.

"... .."

She looked at the resting Seonghwang with a surprised face for a moment. When she was still a young knight, she was never seen except when she was serving the young prince.

Since he spent an unusually long time in the prayer room, the Holy Emperor must have taken care of important matters that Katrina could not even imagine.

'Please forget your worries for now and rest comfortably... ..'

The loyal knight commander, who prayed in his heart, soon closed the door with a peaceful smile.

Not long after that, an agile assassin secretly visited his room.

"... .."

The assassin, who had been wandering around the palace for a long time while the Holy Emperor was in the prayer room, worried for no reason, returned with a slightly relieved expression upon seeing that the Holy Emperor was fine.

Of course, it was only later that he remembered his original purpose of assassinating the Holy Emperor and made a dumbfounded expression.

And although no one who visited this place would have noticed,

there were small spirit terminals hovering around Seonghwang from earlier.

[...]]

[...]]

The little souls, each blinking in blue and pink, quickly landed on Seonghwang's bed as if they were going to lie down together.

[This is the first time that Seonghwang's father doesn't know that we've come to visit him. I feel a little strange?]

[Dad, Your Majesty needs to get some rest too. Honestly, I thought it was a bit too much this time.]

[Then what about the Delcross dimension?]

[Mores is here, right? Nothing will happen.]

And the two remained silent for a moment and looked at the Holy Emperor's face.

In fact, their father was a very shrewd man, so it was like seeing him so calm and defenseless for the first time.

After a while, the souls who felt they had seen enough of him soared into the sky again.

[good. So today, let's guard the dimension instead of Father Seonghwang.]

[okay. If anything happens, let Mores know right away!]

[...] Should we just go see Mores now? Red also seems to have changed a bit compared to before.]

[No, let's stop. If I sneaked up to Mores' side like before, I'd be caught right away, right?]

And the two looked at each other for a moment, their souls blinking.

[But isn't it really strange? How did Mores, who does not have

spiritual eyes, create such alternative spiritual eyes?]

[You used Red's eyes before. Couldn't it have completely hijacked Red's abilities?]

But how on earth is that possible? The two soul terminals circled around Seonghwang's bedside, each lost in thought. And the conclusion I came to after a while was simple.

[Well, there's nothing strange about it. Because Mores is Mores.]

[I see. Because Mores is none other than Mores.]

* * *

Seonghwang, who rarely had a good night's sleep, was greeted with a refreshing morning for the first time in a long time. That meant that he was fully prepared to deal with the strict cardinals.

And Cardinal Meyer, who was the first of them to be called, was dumbfounded after hearing unexpected words from the Holy Emperor.

"Fire fairy... "You mean?"

"okay. I'm planning to publish a fairy tale about mythical spirits. So, we need to revise some of the heresy court's arrest guidelines and release some banned books."

"... .."

Cardinal Meyer was momentarily speechless at such a bold request.

"Well, Your Majesty... .."

"As you know, the story of the First Emperor and the Moon Fairy Olivier is still very popular, isn't it? So much so that for a while every girl born was named Olivier. Perhaps the subjects will also greatly welcome the new fairy tale."

All of these things will ultimately have to be approved, at least formally, by the Holy Assembly. So, they will give their leader,

Cardinal Meyer, the word first.

-This is what I mean, so proceed without making a big fuss.

Fortunately, Cardinal Meyer was not a tight-lipped person like his junior, Benitus. Like Archbishop Wesker, he was not impatient and knew how to handle all the priests of the Holy Synod well.

In other words, it means that he is the best person to be successful, a person who maintains standards but has flexible thinking.

but-

"your majesty. A fairy... .."

Cardinal Meyer spoke with a shocked expression.

These were beings that only appeared in old myths that were passed down orally. It was a foolish belief at a time when the people did not know the light of the Lord and suffered in ignorance.

The Heresy Tribunal defined the very existence of these 'fairies' as 'evil'. Because everything that was not specified in the scriptures as 'the Lord's people' was a group of evil.

Stories that were passed down orally were prohibited from being told, and most of the few works that remained in writing were designated as banned books.

The reason the story of Olivier the Moon Fairy survives is because most of the anecdotes are full of praise for the achievements of the first emperor.

"I am not someone else, but a member of the Mayer family, so it is a bit presumptuous for me to say this... "Your Majesty, please reconsider one more time."

Cardinal Meyer's thoughts were firm.

We must not give even the slightest room for 'evil' to penetrate. You can never communicate with 'evil'.

If we lower our guard little by little to suit the circumstances, doctrines will soon deteriorate and vices will turn into virtues.

Suspicion and immorality toward the Lord will be wrapped up in a fancy way under the name of reason and rationality. And it won't be long before the subjects of the entire continent will fall into deep despair as they fall for the devil's trick.

I'm sure that's the case -

"... Cardinal Meyer,"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"How long do you think the Lord, who has lost not only his personality but also his name, will continue to support his subjects?"

Coincidentally, the person who greatly shook the cardinal's faith was the representative of God, who was believed to be closer to God than anyone else in the world.

399

399. Pian (4)

- Why do you not command us to call on your name?
- For only then can my staff rest in your hand.
- Why do you close your eyes and refuse to see us?
- That is why I do not predict in advance the direction of the staff.
- Why do you say that you will not judge whether the outcome is good or evil?
- So your causality belongs entirely to you.
- Then, how on earth can we pursue to fulfill your will?
- Establish a church in the most pious place in your heart and ask yourself this-
- Is that important to you?
- Is that correct in your judgment?
- Are you going to bear the consequences?
- If you say you have no hesitation about this, then I will gladly minister to you, and there will be nothing lacking in accomplishing the work of salvation.

* * *

According to the scriptures, the Lord said that he would no longer judge good and evil. He did not even reveal his name to the apostle who received the revelation.

Until now, Cardinal Meyer had believed that it was purely because God allowed humans free will.

Until just now, I heard words that seemed like a lightning strike from God's representative.

"How long do you think the Lord, who has lost not only his personality but also his name, will continue to support his subjects?"

"... ..!"

Cardinal Meyer's eyes shake slightly in shock.

However, it was not because the Holy Emperor himself said something denying God. It was just a shock because something he had vaguely feared was finally confirmed to be true.

"... .."

Seonghwang, who was quietly watching the cardinal, frowned so subtly that he could not notice. This is because it took more cause and effect than expected to even say this one word.

Perhaps, if the [Council of Six] had not robbed me of a little bit of cause and effect, I would not have been able to say even a part of the truth.

'It is a choice that cannot be helped.'

Among the remaining high-ranking clergy, Cardinal Meyer was the only one who vaguely knew about the [original agreement].

Considering what has happened so far and everything that will happen in the future, he, the head of the clergy, must firmly hold the center of the Holy Assembly from now on.

"... your majesty."

After a while, Cardinal Meyer, who had finally calmed down his shock, opened his mouth in a trembling voice.

"Your Majesty, perhaps you know something about the progenitor of

the May family...?""

But Seonghwang no longer listened and cut him off. There was no more cause and effect left to devote to the cardinal.

"There is no need for a long explanation. "After you and your sister, you must have realized that there will no longer be anyone with divine power born into the Mayer family."

"... ..!"

The suspicion in the cardinal's eyes soon turns into confidence.

For centuries, the Meyer family was known as a prestigious family that produced many high-ranking clergy.

However, this was not because they were especially loved by the main god; it was simply that the evidence of the [promise] made by the progenitor of the family was passed down through their blood.

'okay. I heard that the founder called it [the pact of the beginning].'

The truth about the progenitor that Cardinal Meyer heard from the previous family head and also passed on to the current family head several years ago.

'but... ..'

As Seonghwang pointed out, it is true that recently, for some reason, no one, including the current head of the family, was born with divine power.

After hearing the truth, Mayer already vaguely guessed the cause. This means that the time when the [original agreement] that their progenitor spoke of will end is slowly approaching.

"If all the words of the progenitor are true... .."

After the shock had subsided, there was now a slight sense of fear in his eyes. It was as if the overwhelming reality that was difficult for humans to handle had suddenly taken on a tangible form right in front of his nose.

"In that case, Your Majesty. What should we do now... .."

"Instead of just reciting prayers lazily like now, we should have a humble attitude of seeking the truth. "All instructions I have given are consistent with this."

"... yes?"

"Hasn't the Lord also spoken? "As long as you build the church in your heart and do not neglect to ask yourself questions, all these efforts will come together and one day achieve a great work of salvation."

... But your majesty. At least, I don't have the slightest idea that spreading the story of the fire spirit to the world is the truth that the seeker should pursue.

Cardinal Meyer immediately thought of something like that. Fortunately, despite the successive shocks, I still had the self-control not to ask such questions to Seonghwang out loud.

"Don't forget this, Cardinal."

The Holy Emperor spoke calmly to the Cardinal, who was clearly confused.

"The grace that protects the imperial capital will remain intact in the future, and the devil species will never extend its power to this place. "It means that if you have a more flexible attitude than now, you will never be easily fooled by the devil's tongue."

"... .. ?!"

Then Cardinal Meyer's eyes widen. This is because my thoughts suddenly wandered to someone who was majestically scattering demonic energy within the imperial capital.

"But, Your Majesty. day after tomorrow... .. ?"

"... .."

The cool, sinking atmosphere.

Cardinal Meyer quickly bowed his head before the Holy Emperor and shouted.

"Well, I made a big mistake. Please forget it!"

* * *

The existence of the fire spirit was accepted more easily than expected. Why did Cardinal Meyer, the head of the Holy Congregation, maintain such a strong stance?

Additionally, it is said that Cadmus, who is no longer here, had a great influence.

-Lee Seong-jin. I feel a strange power somewhere inside me? It feels somewhat unclear to be considered a divine power, but it is too sacred to be considered a magical power.

As the Demon King commented when he first appeared, the energy emitted by the First Emperor seemed to have some resemblance to demonic energy.

Is the feeling similar to a sacred barrier surrounded by layers of holy emperors, and the demon king's magic energy faintly felt between them?

'The fact that the Demon King's natural magic power is already extremely weak may have played a role in reducing the priests' resistance.'

Of course, Seongjin had no intention of frustrating the Demon King by pointing out that point. He was already very discouraged about his new identity.

[fiery... government ordinance? This great Demon Lord is such a trivial person...]

When the shocked Demon King stumbled and landed on the plate, a squiggly wave pattern appeared in the center of the plate due to the high heat.

Hmm, as expected, glass plates crumble easily in flames. I'll either use

a metal plate with a high melting point like before, or I'll look into porcelain plates from Brittany.

Anyway, once the existence of the spirit was accepted into the Holy Assembly, everything was smooth sailing from then on.

Seongjin was safely recognized as an 'apostle' of the Lord. At the same time, the change in his auror was also reduced to 'a blessing given by the spirit of fire to undergo the trial of the main god, blah blah blah.'

Given the situation, the overall atmosphere in the imperial palace towards the Demon King had to be soft.

"Our fire spirit is so cute and beautiful! "Mores, somehow, looks a lot like your Auror."

Amelia let out a pure exclamation when she saw the brilliantly shining flame on the glass plate. No matter what ugly rumors were going around behind the scenes, as long as it looked similar to Seongjin's auror, it was always a good thing.

"Now you're going to openly play with fire? Mores, you man, from now on I will be watching you with my eyes straight open. "Did you understand?"

Owen looked a little disapproving and started nagging Seongjin about the dangers of fire. He was usually a foolish and pushy guy, but sometimes he was strict in strange places.

"An ancient spirit recognized by the Holy Assembly... .."

And Sir Masaine.

He looked more relaxed than before. Although he didn't show it outwardly, it was hard to tell how stressed he was as the frequency of embroidery had decreased significantly.

"okay. "It was something like that."

To Lord Masaine, whether it was a suspicious fire spirit that suddenly appeared or something else, the mere fact that the prince he served

was free from issues related to demons seemed to be a blessing in disguise.

Of course, there was not completely no noise around.

"what? government ordinance? What kind of far-fetched fabrication is that? Masain. No matter how you look at it, it's magical... .."

"Would you please just get out of here? Otherwise, just shut up that nonsense talker. "Francis."

"... Masain? "Did you have this kind of personality?"

However, there was someone else in the imperial palace who reacted more strongly than anyone else.

"I can't believe it! Finally, I can finally see your true self with these two eyes!"

Director Bruno was deeply moved as he sat on a pretty plate and welcomed the fluttering fireworks. Of course, there were still tactless remarks that poured fuel on the burning devil.

"Isn't it cuter than you can imagine? Of course, the voice I listened to with resignation was nothing short of cute."

[...] what?]

A statement that can never be passed off as a compliment. The Demon King was extremely indignant and let out fireworks.

[Are you ignoring this great Demon King now? Don't call me by such an unflattering name, you idiot! Because of you, Seongjin Lee is getting used to that name!]

Then, Director Bruno rolled his eyes with a very resentful expression.

"... But, doesn't Red always call me stupid?"

[That's because you always choose stupid things!]

"If you say so, isn't Red always and unchangingly red...?""

[what?! You bastard! Are you really going to try it with me?]

Grrrr!

The Demon King quickly rushes towards the leader and fires fiercely high-temperature flames at him.

However, Director Bruno leisurely created a sword screen using the recently strengthened Auror layer.

Badong, badong, badong!

The Demon King, blocked by the sword curtain, flutters flames and struggles. However, the leader, who was a former Dekaron Knight, had no talent against Red, who was only an E-rank summoner.

Seongjin looked at that cute figure with strange sadness.

'It's cute, but a little... 'Is it pitiful?'

Now, I think I have a worthy title of 'Ancient Spirit', and it would be nice to have enough power to show my dignity to others.

'But that guy is a soul. 'What should I do to increase my soul's strength?'

I thought that perhaps the Pangea Chronicle might contain a clue. This is where the rank of the summons is measured, and there is also a summons level up system.

Since I've always wanted to enter the game together, it would be nice to log in there with the Demon King someday.

[Lee Seong-ji!]

While I was lost in thought, the demon king suddenly looked back at Seongjin with a tearful look on his face.

[This idiot keeps climbing up! You should also say something to that guy!]

"yea, I got it. "Come here for a moment."

Seongjin held out a plate of food he had prepared in advance and gestured to him.

If I had to pick one good thing after the Demon King left the flame crystal in my head, it would definitely be this.

You no longer have to share your taste buds with him and force him to eat bear meat.

[...] and! This?]

"It's fresh bear meat brought in from the Sigismund Territory. "It's well-cooked, so give it a try."

[really? Is it really okay for me to eat this alone?]

I nodded, and soon a strong flame erupted over the meat.

Grumble!

After gaining substance, the demon lord was able to burn food and make incense like this. There are no longer any restrictions on the food you consume.

[Bear meat~ Bear meat~ Bear meat with a strong aroma and a fiery taste!]

Soon, along with the acrid smell of burning protein, an exciting tune rings out in the room. It was the devil's song that I thought I would never hear again not long ago.

"hmm..."

Seongjin relaxedly leaned back in his chair, listening to the monotonous melody.

A peaceful moment that I enjoyed for the first time in a long time. Perhaps it was time to return to Jinju Palace.

400

400. Pian (5)

Less than a few days later, Seongjin was finally able to resume his long-awaited morning practice.

When the 3rd Prince, who had been sick for a long time, appeared in good health for the first time in a long time, the resident knights in the training hall ran towards him with joy.

"Lowering!"

"Are you back at Jinju Palace? "Are you feeling okay now?"

"Thank you, Lord! "I've been waiting so long for your return!"

Seongjin felt a little shaken by their enthusiastic welcome.

'what? "Why is everyone looking at me like I'm some kind of savior?"

It was probably because Manager Bruno was becoming more and more enthusiastic about running the resident knights, but there was no way Seongjin would have known this fact.

"Go and practice. Why are you making such a fuss as if it's been a while since you've seen each other? "Didn't you come to the main palace every time you were escorted?"

"That's just a visit to the hospital, it's not official work, right?"

And soon, the resident knights were distracted by the small flame circling around Seongjin.

"that... No, she's the ancient fairy we've been hearing about!"

"It's mysterious. "Fireworks are really flying through the air!"

"Wow! "The little thing is somehow cute!"

As the knights throw words at each other, the training hall quickly becomes noisy.

"Are you really saying that he is the same as Olivier the Moon Fairy?"

"Until now, I thought fairies were just something from fairy tales!"

Director Bruno, who could not see this, stepped forward, stroking his sharp mustache.

"Quiet! Everyone, listen carefully! This is Red, the fire fairy and the faithful servant of Prince Mores! "I hope that from now on, whenever I meet this person, I will always greet him with courtesy and show him the proper courtesy of a knight commander!"

"Oh oh... ... !"

The resident knights exchanged sparkling glances.

'It's Red!'

'Isn't the name really cute?'

Grumble!

As if to confirm those words, red flames began to circle at high speed above Director Bruno's head.

Of course, that was just an illusion on the part of the resident knights, and in reality, the 'Fire Fairy' was mad as hell towards the leader.

[shut up! Shut your mouth! What kind of bullshit are you talking about now? I've said it over and over again, but my name is not Red!]

"Hmm."

[Lee Seong-jin! Lee Seong-ji! Stop this idiot!]

However, in the eyes of the other knights who could not hear the devil's thoughts, it just seemed like a lively fairy playing around.

"I think that little fairy likes Captain Bruno very much."

"I'm so jealous that you've already become friends with a fairy!"

"Hmm! "It's no big deal."

[no! No! Hey, you idiot! Why are you acting smug about what they say? Tell everyone no right now! hurry!]

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The fast-moving flames hit the leader's auror screen here and there, causing sparks to fly.

Then, Max, who was playing with a wooden plate in the distance, pricked up his ears and quickly rushed towards the flame.

Wong wong!

-what? What is that? Is it a new toy?

A large wolf dog begins to jump towards the flame. It was a time of unprecedented suffering for the Demon King.

[Why are you like this again? go away! You stupid mixed breed dog!]

As the 'Fire Fairy' soared into the sky in frustration, the resident knights started to stop the frightened and excited wolf dog.

"Bah, Red! Calm down and come back here!"

"Max, you guy! "Red shouldn't threaten you like that!"

"Red! "Red!"

[Oh, everyone shut up! Because I'm not red!]

Leaving the chaotic training ground behind, Seongjin pulled out the sword from his waist for the first time in a long time.

Since ancient times, being an unmanned person must be able to maintain concentration in any situation. No problem! It's definitely not because I get a headache looking at those guys.

"Whoa... .."

I take a long breath and raise my sword.

In the meantime, the familiar handle of a nutcracker was wrapped around my hand, where all the calluses had disappeared.

'at las!'

My heart is pounding.

Tinnitus, throbbing in my ears, constantly knocks and wakes up my mind that is trying to quietly retreat inside. It was because her heart, fluttering with sheer joy, did not calm down easily.

Seongjin, who took a moment to catch his breath, eventually gave up his complete composure and decided to simply surrender himself to the joy.

Imperial Knights' standard sword technique, type 1.

Three-pronged downward slash.

Hwiik-

Soft morning sunlight pours down on the blade of the sword, which stands straight ahead and falls.

The beam of light that flowed diagonally, not daring to interfere with the sword path, eventually created a long shadow on the floor of the training hall.

'... 'Isn't it strange?'

Whilick- Whilick-

Seongjin thought blankly as his body moved as if it was flowing as it remembered.

It was a strange feeling somewhere. If the movement is completely the same as before, if you try to cut it for a long time, the air will automatically move and empty the sword path.

When I used a defensive stance by crossing my swords, the low-density atmosphere hit the blades, creating an unexpectedly cheerful bounce.

The air pushed the blade in rhythm with every quick thrust and retrieval of the sword, and danced as a small whirlwind with every light hand gesture.

It seemed as if the whole world was singing along with Seongjin's sword.

"... .."

The once noisy gymnasium was suddenly engulfed in silence. Everyone was holding their breath and watching the scene.

The prince's sword son-in-law, whom I haven't seen in a long time.

It had always been admirable in the past, but the way the prince was showing now was clearly different from his previous movements. Anyone with a certain degree of intelligence would never be unaware of that fact.

"... "That's amazing."

"Are all geniuses like that? "You took a long break from training, but your skills have improved even more than before."

"Shh! quietly!"

Seongjin, who had completely tied up his auras and was focusing solely on his sword, finally stopped moving after performing the standard sword techniques of the Imperial Knights twice in succession.

"after... .."

As he lowered his sword and exhaled softly, Masain, who had been watching the scene from beginning to end, spoke quietly. This is because he knew that the prince's concentration was over.

"... Even from his hospital bed, he was just thinking about training. "It

is not the sword of someone who just sits still."

Seongjin let out a small laugh.

"haha. Did you get caught? In fact, while I was at the main palace, I repeated the imperial sword techniques in my head whenever I had time."

I was dying to swing a sword. If I hadn't done that, I might have rushed out to the training ground regardless of whether I had a high fever or not.

"how is it? Don't you think training just in your head can be quite effective? "Somehow, my body seems to move much more lightly than before."

Seongjin shrugs his shoulders and takes his stance again. Then Masain asked again as if he was puzzled.

"But you. Your auror layer has fully recovered, so why do you keep tying up your aurors and training with your sword? Are you planning on skipping meditation today?"

"hmm? Rather... .."

How should I say this?

"Actually, Lord Masaine. "I tried meditating as soon as I got back to Jinju Palace last night."

Like sword training, Auror training is also one of Seongjin's favorite things. But I couldn't bear to meditate in the main palace.

Even though the conclusion was 'what about the blessing of the ancient spirit', wouldn't it be very uncomfortable to unleash aurors in the main palace crowded with paladins?

So, I tied down the Aurors as much as possible and was patient, and as soon as I returned to the Pearl Palace, I became excited and started meditating.

"I did... .."

"I thought so?"

"As you know very well, my Auror has blessed me... Because of that, it turned into a very hot energy, right?"

Of course, no matter how hot the fire of Gehenna was, Seongjin's body, which controlled it, was fine. But when it came to things around us, the story was a little different.

"As soon as the aurors started circulating actively, the pajamas I was wearing burned up."

"... yes?"

Masain's expression quickly became serious.

"Are the Aurors so hot that they burn your clothes? "Are you really feeling okay?"

"Yeah, don't worry. "This fire will never harm me."

But 'Haha, I'm excited! From now on, all attacks will receive +3 additional fire damage! The same initial plan had no choice but to be completely reorganized.

If I don't control this heat somehow, every time I use my aura, everything, including the clothes I'm wearing, will become kindling.

Of course, it is still possible to control the temperature to some extent if Seongjin strongly wishes. It just takes a little more time to handle it as naturally as breathing.

"Hey? They say it's a fairy's blessing, and that's amazing. "Is the auror's temperature that high?"

Sir Haven, who had been listening with his ears pricked up next to him, poked his head in with a curious expression.

"That seems like it would be great in the winter, but there really is no answer in the summer, right? "I feel like sweat is already streaming down my back as I think about escorting my Majesty by his side again next year."

'... summer.'

Seongjin frowned for a moment as he remembered the hot summer with the fire of Gehenna. But he soon decided to be optimistic.

Well, wouldn't we be able to completely control the temperature by then? First of all, winter will come first.

* * *

Seongjin, who had spent most of the day training for the first time in a long time, finished dinner and had a restful rest for the first time in a long time.

'If only the aurors were fine, I would have meditated to my heart's content.'

Of course, that didn't mean I had any intention of wasting my time playing around meaninglessly. There was still something I had been waiting to find out when I came to Jinju Palace.

Sweet.

When I picked up the Amulet of Nebraska with a bit of mixed feelings, the faint text of the example flashed before my eyes. When I summoned the Demon King before, I was in a hurry and skipped it over.

?List of spirits that can be summoned as a summoner 1/3?

?One. ☐☐☐☐ (inactive)?

?2. ☐☐☐ ☐☐ (inactive)?

?3, Belinda Miles (active)?

I knew it.

In place of Haze and Red, who disappeared after being placed in the soul stone, a new friend is sitting proudly on the summon list. It was truly absurd.

'What is that guy again? 'Why are you stuck here all of a sudden?'

Belinda? Could this be the Belinda that Seongjin knows?

-okay. I thought that I could one day approach God beyond the pain. I had no doubt that there would be a perfect other side.

A remnant of the Penitent Church who was captured by Seongjin and his party as soon as they escaped the Heresy Tribunal, and was eventually beheaded by Logan's informant No. 19.

-Finally, I come to the Lord's side... ... !

Nevertheless, as the last moment approached, a fanatic of the Dark Church whose eyes were strangely flashing with joy.

"Okay..."

As Seongjin hesitated for a while while holding the amulet, the demon king, who had been resting in his favorite bowl for a long time, flickered a flame.

[Whether or not you know him or not, wouldn't it be clear if you call him?]

"hmm. That's it, but..."

If you think about it, the reason why Seongjin was struggling wasn't much. When I think back to how the first fanatic I summoned with the soul stone appeared, I just thought that I never wanted to face another fanatic.

In addition, Belinda suffered all kinds of torture until the moment of her death, and in the end, her head was cut off. Just imagining what kind of form that vengeful spirit would turn into and appear before her eyes made her shiver.

[and... Are you really afraid of that? The name and color are demons of fire...]

"Oh, no! So shut up! 'How many times do I have to tell you that it's just a little annoying?'"

Seongjin cut off the devil's words. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't think of any other solution other than directly summoning the soul.

Finally, with a small sigh, Seongjin picked up the empty soul stone and selected the window that appeared in front of him.

?3. Belinda Miles (active)?

?Choose your soul??

?*Accept* / Reject?

Wow-

As soon as you select it, the soul stone is colored with a dark light. The soul of the summoned evil spirit dwells there.

After a while, only a small, ultramarine blue soul stone remained on Seongjin's palm.

?Belinda's soul stone?

Oh, I really hate it.

?*Summon* / Release?

Let's choose to summon with unwillingness -

Whoa!

As expected, a powerful spiritual pressure instantly swept over the entire room. If she was stronger than Hayes, she would have been stronger, and she never lacks momentum!

[O Lord! Did you call me!]

However, the scene that unfolded before Seongjin was a little different from what he expected.

"... Belinda?"

When I ask in doubt, the summoned spirit nods its head vigorously

and answers.

[Yes, it is. Master. This is your faithful servant, Belinda.]

"... .."

Seongjin couldn't help but feel embarrassed.

Instead of an unpleasant evil spirit shedding black tears, there stood a strong warrior wearing armor and equipped with a huge club.

401

401. Pian (6)

The appearance of the summoned soul was quite different from the fanatical parish priest that Seongjin remembered.

Hard armor covering thick muscles.

A vicious club that looks like it can crush the spine of any vertebrate with a single blow.

If it weren't for the evidence of long penance that covered her skin, Seongjin would probably never have recognized her.

"... Belinda?"

When I asked in doubt, an extremely polite answer came back from the soul.

[Yes, it is. Master. This is your faithful servant, Belinda.]

okay. Looking at her softly turned eyes and the sword image of her neck left by No. 19, I think it's her...

'How on earth did this happen?'

Why has this Penitent Church guy suddenly become my summon?
Why are you calling me 'master' without any hesitation?

[Hmm.]

At that time, the Demon Lord, who was watching the new summon with interest, opened his mouth as if he guessed something.

[I guess he came to his senses only after he died. Now that I have become a pure soul, I have gained enlightenment that had been

blocked by the limitations of my body.]

[Yes, that is correct.]

Belinda's spirit nodded.

[Owner. The soul that has faced death opens its spiritual eyes, which had been distant, and is able to catch a glimpse of the truth of the world. In this way, I came to know the true nature of the 'other world' that I had longed for during my lifetime.]

The reality of the other side?

[iced coffee! How can I possibly explain in words the fear and despair I felt in the face of such an unbearable truth! If you weren't the owner... ..!]

Ugh-

As Belinda becomes agitated, her powerful energy that fills the room begins to stir.

[If it weren't for your help! I would have crumbled to dust without even realizing my own foolishness!]

"... .."

Seongjin quietly looked down at the soul of the fanatic kneeling in front of him.

She is a person with a strong spirit who has never been lazy in tempering herself during her lifetime.

If the appearance of the soul clearly shows the essence of the human being, then the excellent armor she is wearing can be said to be an indicator of the status and solidity of the soul.

[O Lord! Because of you, I have finally achieved true freedom of soul. So how could I not take it seriously!]

"... "Stop talking nonsense."

Sensing that the story would be long, Seongjin sat down comfortably on the bed and ordered.

"Please explain in detail from the beginning. "How did you become my summon?"

[Yes, master. You are prepared. I am willing to tell you everything.]

After answering that, Belinda raised her head and looked up at Seongjin with sparkling eyes.

[To do that, I must first explain what happened after my death.]

* * *

That day, Belinda died by being decapitated by No. 19.

'iced coffee... ... !'

As soon as she left her body, the emotion she felt was intense joy.

Belinda walked through the pitch darkness filled with joy. Because she knew that under her strong guidance, her soul was moving straight toward [repentance].

'Bethelah! At the end of a long period of penance, my soul finally returned to the Lord... ... !'

Although it is now ostracized as a 'dark sect', the essence of the underground sect is also worship and praise for the main god.

Unlike the Orthodox Church, they simply uphold the incarnation of the Lord who came down to earth. Four incarnations called [Payment], [Sowing], [Repentance], and [Rest] respectively.

Among them, Belinda was deeply influenced by [Penitence], who endlessly undergoes penance along with humans. So ever since she grew up, she has never stopped whipping herself every day.

'Bethelah... ... ?!'

However, [Confession], the joy of arriving at the Lord's side was

short-lived. Belinda could not help but be astonished at the truth revealed by her spiritual eyes that had just become brighter.

Because the place she arrived was not the place where the main god was, or even the world of the other world.

'... hmm?'

Empty black outer space.

Among them, there was a gigantic being that was unable to overcome its own density and was collapsing, pulling in everything around it.

'... 'Penitence?'

For a moment, Belinda doubted her own spiritual eyesight.

Is that really the 'incarnation of the Lord' that he longed for?

No, it was questionable whether he was even a proper personality, let alone a god. To Belinda, it just looked like a large wheel with countless saw blades.

A huge spiny wheel so large that it cannot be seen at a glance greets her, wrapped in echoing screams and blood pouring like a waterfall.

-Repent.

Perhaps it is another penance or ordeal given by the Lord? Belinda thought so for a moment.

Until I saw the sight of a soul being sucked in from somewhere, caught in that thorny wheel and instantly torn apart.

[Kwaaah... ... !]

The soul, unable to utter even its last words properly, was torn apart by the wheels in the blink of an eye and disappeared without a trace.

'... ... !'

Belinda suddenly became anxious and tried to look at the incomprehensible being. This can't be happening, this can't be

happening!

'... Penitence! 'My Lord!'

But it was no use. The spiny wheel, which I thought was a single shape at first, begins to lose its proper shape and boundaries the more I focus my attention on it.

It was one, but it was not one.

The giant thorn wheel was a collection of many other bloody wheels, and the bloody wheel was filled with even more wheels of pain, spinning as they pleased.

It would be much easier to capture a grain of sand on the beach at a glance.

At that moment, the spiny wheels, as numerous as the stars in the universe, blinked their colorful eyes and stared at Belinda as if crushing her.

-Repent.

ah! Who would dare call that a 'bian'? That visible thing that exists solely for the sake of 'pain'.

The sum total of all the tortures and pains that have appeared countless times in history, and those that have never appeared before, that deeply quench the soul.

'no! Quenching?'

That sounds like a no-brainer! There was no way a soul could withstand the reality of that even for a moment.

It was the frustration of all those who committed suicide, and the intense regret that made them willing to burn down cities, countries, and even civilization itself.

It was a sorrow that caused stars to fall to the ground and even galaxies to lose their light. It was such a tragedy that he could not allow himself the opportunity to repent even after his death.

It was a scream of remorse uttered by the entire universe, something that cannot be expressed with human senses.

'ah... ... '

Tens of thousands of voices that can never be rejected, pounding mercilessly into a soul trembling from shock.

-Repent. Repent.

'Ahhhh... ... '

-Know your original sin that you commit by existing. Don't even dare try to repent, just shed bloody tears with your whole body! Embrace all your sins with your soul and quietly pass away from the world as if they never happened!

Belinda was overcome with extreme fear and frustration. To the point where I want to end all of this right away, even if it means killing my soul over and over again.

okay. Maybe it will happen as soon as you get a little closer to it. Her soul cannot bear its existence, and in an instant it will become nothing and scatter in all directions.

Belinda's soul let out a desperate scream.

[...] no! That, that is not my god!]

Ah, yes, that merciless and hateful saw blade that mercifully attracts and deceives humans, is ecstatic and beautiful, and even if it is a great god or penitence itself, it will knock tens of thousands of times and praise it as precious blood, and in the end it will leave no trace. It is a penance that will make it disappear, but it is a blessing that allows all things to be completely inhabited. It is the only escape allowed for the soul, and there is no longer a place for the soul...

It was right then.

Whirling-

Suddenly there was a black curtain blocking Belinda's vision.

[Look away now, sister!]

[Ahhh... .. !]

[You must not look directly at that. The feelings her sister feels now are not hers alone, so she must not be deceived any longer. First, let's close our eyes completely.]

The person covering her eyes was a skinny man wearing black robes.

Still, when Belinda was shaking from shock and unable to control her soul, he eventually led her soul himself and began to fly away quickly somewhere.

-Repent!

The voice that resonated horribly in my head slowly fades away.

[...] All, you?]

Belinda, who was slowly coming to her senses, reflexively wondered how far she had run away from 'it'.

Then the man turned his head and gently wrinkled his dark eyes.

[I am the brother of the Last Rest and the third apostle appointed by the Master of all souls.]

[Of rest... ..]

[exactly. I have come to help you according to the will of the owner of my soul, and now your soul is saved.]

Belinda was led into another mysterious world by a man she had never seen before.

In a world of complete death where everything is pale and nothing is alive.

But to Belinda's soul, which had been strained to its limits, even that eerie silence felt like the tranquility of heaven.

* * *

Belinda's soul suffered a great blow upon encountering the reality of [Repentance], but fortunately, it did not take long for her to recover.

Ironically, the training and abuse of her body thus far - especially the suffering suffered by the crazy Inquisitor of the Heresy Tribunal until just before her death - seemed to have strengthened her spirit even more.

Belinda, who fell into a short sleep, soon regained consciousness and began to slowly look around this new world.

'It was Brother Rest who saved me from [repentance]. Then, can I say that my staying here is also a will for [rest]?'

At first, she thought that 'another incarnation of the Lord' would command her to do something in return for her salvation. But no matter how long Belinda waited, she showed no sign of being called from [rest].

Eventually, Belinda got tired of waiting and decided to enjoy this unexpected peace.

This is a world of complete death.

A rigid space where gray corpses in deep sleep are endlessly tangled beneath one's feet, and heavenly bodies that have lost their light are frozen like reliefs in the sky.

As time passed, my curiosity about this world grew, but in this place where everything seemed to be dead and asleep, there were almost no souls that could interact with Belinda.

Moreover, the black spirit who brought her here was extremely quiet.

[Don't be in a hurry to tell me too much, sister. For now, it will be enough to simply lay down my soul here according to His will and rest in peace.]

Fortunately, there was a kind senior who would occasionally talk to Belinda. She had been dead for not very long, and it was said that she was the spirit of her woman, who often awoke from her sleep.

[Come over here. Let us help you meet the true owner of this place you are curious about.]

At the woman's suggestion, Belinda flew after her as if bewitched.

They quickly passed over the tombstones that were as dense as the grass in a field, the charnel urns with cracks here and there, and countless corpses lying arbitrarily on the ground.

It was a scene as if a huge telephone had struck all at once, but strangely enough, the emotions on the faces of the lying souls were extremely peaceful...

[stop! Be careful not to keep your eyes on one place for a long time. As soon as you come into contact with the essence of rest, you will immediately crave endless rest without even realizing it.]

A slender woman flies ahead and gives warning.

[You seem like a soul of quite high rank. Therefore, in order to heal the wounds of life, you will need more rest, and it is easy to fall into the temptation to sleep.]

So, in order not to fall asleep too deeply, the woman emphasized again that you should move around and look around, but not pay attention to one place for too long.

[Of course, you shouldn't wander around randomly and disturb the sleep of other souls.]

Belinda looked at the figure of the woman ahead, and suddenly noticed that her right arm was missing and her shoulder was tattered.

'Who is he? She doesn't look like a warrior at first glance, but what on earth was she doing when she was alive? That arm wasn't cut by a blade; it looked as if it had been bitten mercilessly by a wild animal.'

Then the woman ahead turns her head and looks down at where her arm once would have been.

A space where the thoughts of the soul are conveyed as thoughts. Of course, Belinda's questions also had to be heard by her ears.

[...] I can't say it wasn't a rough life, but at least it wasn't the disaster you think. It's just that my child ate my soul whenever I could.]

Eat it... what?

Belinda's doubts deepened, but the woman's eyes looking back at her were extremely dry.

[But it may also be thanks to that child that I was saved. Instead of being dragged along by other demon lords, I was enveloped in a bright light and flew straight here. Among those who died together, I am the only soul saved.]

The woman calmly told Belinda about herself.

He was kidnapped by bandits at a young age and was exploited his whole life. And in the end, she was brutally killed by the child she was raising.

[that... Wasn't that such a sad life!]

At Belinda's lament, the woman slowly shook her head.

[It's a trivial story. After I actually faced death, I realized that the pain I experienced during my lifetime was nothing compared to other people's. Among the souls sleeping here, there are some who have endured lives of suffering that ordinary humans cannot even imagine.]

While we were talking like that, the surrounding scenery was slowly changing.

The frequency of lying souls became increasingly rare, and the rough ground and fragments of broken weapons began to be noticed occasionally.

'This place... Was it someone's battlefield?'

Belinda intuitively realized that fact.

How long did he fly after the woman like that?

[Now, here it is.]

Belinda finally arrived at her destination and opened her mouth in a daze at the majestic sight that immediately overwhelmed her.

'... ... !'

A huge black cavity with no end in sight. There was a place where tens of thousands, no, hundreds of thousands of demon corpses were entangled and towering like a mountain.

[They...]

[These are the descendants of the former 'Sabbath' who opposed their master.]

The weapons embedded in the hearts of the demons had not yet rusted, and the blood flowing from the mountain of corpses had not yet hardened.

Their stiff, distorted expressions, unable to be liberated even after death, are vivid evidence of the struggle they fought with all their might against the disaster that hit them like a tsunami.

[Isn't it amazing? I heard that so many demons rushed towards 'him' at once. They say it is a sign of an unprecedentedly fierce generational change.]

I was thrilled.

He established his authority by taking the lives of so many demons and piled up their corpses to claim his own position. How could he not call the black throne at the top the king's throne?

[iced coffee... ... !]

And Belinda, facing the figure sitting quietly at the top, was unable to control her overflowing emotions and was shedding tears before she knew it.

ah! There was the truth she had been longing for all her life, the eternal escape.

[okay! This person is the true owner of my soul... ... !]

* * *

Patter!

As Belinda said that, black tears suddenly began to flow from her eyes.

402

402. Pian (7)

Patter!

Belinda's soul suddenly begins to drip black bloody tears.

Thanks to this, Seongjin, who had been listening closely to her story, had to let out a silent scream as a horror attack suddenly struck his field of vision.

'Holy shit! For some reason he looked fine. After all, that guy is an evil spirit!'

Quick!

Fortunately, she quickly got over her emotions. Belinda continued in a wet voice, sniffing her black nose in a soulless way.

[And so I came to receive you there, my lord. Thanks to you, my empty soul has become extremely filled with joy and joy.]

"Well, Belinda. I'm sorry about the story..."

Seongjin couldn't help but point it out.

She is a member of the Penitent Church who claims to find refuge by the side of [Confession] through penance.

Even if Seongjin is indeed the [Archbishop of Rest] that Hayes says, isn't he from a completely different lineage from Belindane? But is it okay to change the object of worship like this?

But at that question, Belinda shook her head firmly.

[I have become a pure soul, and therefore I will never tell lies to my

master. I could not have known that it was you who I must serve. O prepared one, master of the soul!]

Belinda's logic was simple.

The reason she served [Repentance] during her lifetime was because she thought he was the main god who appeared in the world under a different name.

There was a reason why all brothers of the Dark Church prided themselves as servants of the true Lord.

However, the one prepared for the main deity is now with [Rest], another manifestation of the main deity.

In other words, rather than serving [rest] itself, she is serving the Lord who will realize salvation through [the prepared one].

Seongjin, whose expression hardened at the explanation, was silent for a moment and then asked again.

"... Are you trying to avoid false salvation and serve another 'false'?"

[O Lord! Of course, the 'repentance' I believed in was false salvation. However, the will I felt from your 'left' was absolutely not a lie, as much as the promise of 'rest' that would last forever.]

"... .."

[I dare say that the place where you are is the only 'other side' that exists in the world.]

The large woman, with her body flat, raised her strangely shiny eyes and looked at Seongjin passionately.

[So, I will serve you with all my heart. If you want, I can show you the proof right now.]

"evidence?"

[yes. I will turn my back on the beliefs I was born with and only follow my master. I will help the owner find the missing Giacomo

Milo. I will tell you everything I know about the Penitent Church, as much as you will allow!]

... Oh my.

What passed through Seongjin's mind at that moment was not joy, but subtle discomfort.

Somewhere, as the workload increases, I think I can hear my father and Sir Martha sighing?

* * *

Premonitions are rarely wrong.

just as expected. Masain, who heard about Seongjin's plan, put his hand on his upper abdomen and sighed heavily.

"Arrest of Milo supremacist... "Do you mean that?"

"okay."

After Giacomo Milo went missing, the trial was held without a defendant and he was eventually sentenced to death. These are natural words from a devil worshiper who summoned a demonic beast and committed large-scale murder.

The wealth at the top was already reverted to the empire, and a small bounty was placed on Giacomo's head. This meant that from now on, anyone who found him could legally kill him.

"Lowering. Giacomo Milo has probably already hidden himself deep within the Dark Church."

"okay. "I guess so."

"Then you know how difficult it will be to find him."

Masain continued speaking with a heavy face.

"Over the past few years, Inquisitors have searched the entire continent, but it has been impossible to find the Dark Church's

stronghold. But is it really necessary for our department, which is just now establishing itself, to take on such a task?"

His point was valid.

It was only a few days ago that the prince he was serving was summoned to a sacred meeting because his qualifications were questionable. But even if you show decent results right now, it won't be enough, so you're going to suddenly jump into a search with no guarantee?

"Isn't it the job of the Inquisition to arrest devil worshipers in the first place? Just by gathering the evidence and bringing him to trial, the Monster Task Force has already done a lot of work."

"Well, that's true."

Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows.

But Sir Masaine. I have a feeling that if we don't catch him soon, we'll be in a lot of trouble sooner or later. However, if you watch the Heresy Court at work, you can't trust them at all.

Moreover, although I couldn't tell the truth, I couldn't say that the search was completely hopeless. Didn't Seongjin have a high-ranking member of the Penitent Church as an information provider?

Of course, there were some limitations.

-Owner. Since I am completely free of the limitations of the body, I should be able to inform my master of Giacomo Milo's current location right away. But now, I feel a kind of 'restriction' that strongly binds my soul.

-Restrictions?

-yes. The 'restriction' warns against causing unnecessary backlash by carelessly disclosing information outside of the scope of human resources. Therefore, the information I can give to the owner will probably be mostly limited to what I knew while I was alive.

That is why Belinda's spirit did not say that it would 'tell' Giacomo

Milo's whereabouts, but that it would 'help him find it.'

~... ..

Seongjin inadvertently looked back at the small flame placed on the bowl. Even after listening to Belinda's words, the carefree Demon King still doesn't feel any agitation.

Seongjin decided that there would be no good in this story being longer, so he nodded towards Belinda.

-Ok, fine. Then, as 'Belinda, Vicar of the Penitent Church,' tell me all the information you know about the Church.

While Seongjin briefly recalled last night's events, Masain's earnest attempts to dissuade him continued.

"Lowering. Giacomo Milo's impressions have already reached exorcists wandering around the continent. "It's their job to hunt down devil worshipers, so why not just leave this job to them?"

"hmm. Speaking of The Exorcist... .."

Seongjin patted Masain's neatly ironed uniform collar.

Tuk-tuk.

"Lord Masaine. "I'm sure you know where I belong now, right?"

"... ah!"

Masain looks blank as if he was caught off guard.

okay. Even if the [Destruction of Evil] performance shown at the crusade was entirely a fraud, Seongjin is now a clear exorcist since he officially joined the group.

"So, if you think about it, the search for Giacomo Milo should also be my mission. I told you this at the crusade before, right? "I will accept the trials as an apostle of the Lord and will not spare any effort for Delcross."

Therefore, he said loudly that he would expect generous cooperation in the future for the monster task force not only from the Orthodox Church but also from the other four Holy Knights. At that time, the faces of Cardinal Benitus and other high-ranking priests changed significantly.

"Huh?"

But suddenly, a small laugh was heard from next to me. It was Owen who was looking through [Apocalypse Now] in a corner for fun.

"what. Did that mean you would serve the Empire then? "I also thought you were threatening the old people by telling them not to dare to interfere, as you will do whatever you want from now on."

"... "You're talking about threats, what do you think of people?"

Seongjin is sullen, so let's reply, percussion! Owen closed the book loudly and gave me a strange look.

"The more I look at you, the stranger you really seem. "Why is this guy who used to just laze around aimlessly in the villa, and now he's doing things he shouldn't have to do?"

"Then why are you following me here and nagging me for no reason? "Isn't there so much to do?"

Then Owen drooped his eyebrows and made an exaggerated expression.

"Wow, that's really too much! At one point, he begged this older brother to help him with the monster task force, and he was so bewildered! Now that you've shaken off your illness and woke up, are you saying you don't need my help anymore?"

Who on earth ejaculated and when?

"Do not be ridiculous! When do you refuse because you are not good at administrative work? If you're going to call me your older brother so shamelessly, take an example from Logan first. "He would have been happy to help me even if I hadn't told him first!"

"That's because Logan is a brat with no reputation."

"... Besides, you've been making a mess of the office for no reason, right? "Logan did his job with all his heart and sincerity without me having to tell him!"

"That's of course because Logan is a brat with no reputation."

Is that so?

Seongjin, who was almost persuaded, soon composed himself and glared at Owen harshly.

"Why are you saying that to Logan in the first place? Of course, I admit that he is quite sloppy and has a temperament, but he is not a thoughtless idiot like you who gives things to everyone!"

"You're funny! Who cares now! As I saw earlier, someone here said he was willing to take on a task that wasn't his job. "How on earth is what you're doing better than Logan?"

"What, man? Who are you comparing me to now? "Have you said everything?"

"And you! "Why are you comparing me to a bastard like Logan!"

The two people once again took on a serious attitude. Of course, it looked a little different to others.

Looking back at Masain's miserably distorted face, Representative Jibril whispered in a low voice.

"Lord Masaine. "Why are you two competing against Prince Logan right now?"

" "

* * *

Fortunately, not long after, the argument between the two naturally calmed down.

It had been a long time since Seongjin had been to work at the monster task force, so he had to somehow process the backlog of documents.

"I think we're missing all of the southern third quarter plague reports, Representative Jibril. "What happened?"

"Oh, my dear! "Lord Martha reviewed that matter twice a while ago!"

"okay? It must have been a daunting task, and you must have worked hard. But Sir Martha?"

"Yes, sir."

"What are those documents in the corner? Official letter for cooperation in investigation of 'Devil Seed' found in various places in the suburbs... ..?"

"Oh, that is!"

A look of confusion appeared on Sir Masaine's face. Looking closely, it seems like he decided that it wasn't something related to the department and set it aside without Seongjin's knowledge.

"that... I'm sorry, my dear. I heard that it was an official document distributed to all departments of the executive branch... .."

"okay?"

... Well, it doesn't really matter?

If this is the case, it's probably already been resolved. Because Seongjin easily deleted the items from the normal world at the crusade the other day.

Seongjin threw the official document aside with a nonchalant expression.

'Anyway, the future is the problem.'

I knew very well that Lord Masaine was overly sensitive to matters related to demons.

But from now on, isn't Seongjin having to work as an exorcist at the same time? In the future, reports about devils and devil worshipers will come up frequently.

"That gentleman, if I continue like this, will my chronic gastritis be okay?"

Seongjin was caught up in somewhat complicated thoughts, and unfolded another bundle of documents next to him. The letters were so large that they were bound together like a small booklet.

-Mores degraded. While heading to Cyprus, I heard a story about a crazy man who called himself a prophet. He... ..

-Lowering! The more I listen to the rumors, the more outrageous they become! well... ..

-Lowering! We must go to the Marquis de Benso! We must catch that crazy wise man and investigate! I am attaching evidence of this heresy here, so please be sure to take action!

"This... ..?"

"Ah, this is Sir Valerie's letter. "We have been receiving reports every day about an apostate called 'The Wise Man' who has recently settled in the Marquis of Benso."

"okay?"

There is another friend who buys and creates work. Seongjin thought so and unfolded the attached evidence. It was a small leaflet, crudely printed with mimeograph paper.

-The secret of the future conveyed by the wise man.

The continent is facing the terrifying flames of hell that will soon come! Listen! Only those who awaken will open the shining door of salvation!

It was only the size of the palm of one's hand, but it contained all the information for people in need.

There is even a small picture drawn on one side of the leaflet. An illustration depicting humans struggling in the midst of fierce flames.

"hmm."

Seongjin covered the flyer with a nonchalant expression. However, contrary to Masain's expectations that he would throw it to one side like the previous official document, Seongjin folded it neatly and placed it inside the knights' uniform.

"... "Hey, you?"

"huh? Why, Lord Masaine?"

"no way... "Just out of curiosity, do you plan to start investigating that matter as well?"

Seongjin answered calmly to Lord Masain, who looked anxious.

"Yes, of course. Isn't it probably something very important that Sir Valerie cares so much about? "The more ambiguous a matter is, the more our monster department has to step in and solve it."

Sir Masain's face immediately paled.

"But you! No matter how you look at it, isn't this an ordinary scammer? As it turns out, the whole continent is full of such foolish writers!"

"This case is a little different. "Surely our Lord Valerie would be so eager to report such nonsense to me?"

"No, you usually don't even listen to what that friend says... ... !"

"That is a mistake, Sir Martha. "I fully respect that friend as a fellow paladin."

"Since when did you say that you were a Holy Knight... ... !"

While Seongjin and Masain were arguing like that, for some reason, Owen sat quietly lost in thought.

No one present realized it, but right now, in front of his eyes, a small text window was blinking, indicating an update of information.

[Main Quest - Find your own place! (complete)]

A quest that was suddenly completed in vain.

'As expected, my guess was correct. You can only proceed with this main stream if you are next to Mores!

Perhaps his new position meant the monster task force. If so, the conditions for completing the next quest will also be the same.

[Main Quest? Find the crazy prophet! new!]

[Quest Grade: B]

[Sometimes people's daily lives change significantly due to unexpected encounters. What should I do? Weak humans can only scream helplessly due to the twists of fate beyond their control. Here is a human being who happened to face an unbearable truth and chose to go crazy. Meet him and hear the truth of that day. You may get a chance to reexamine your situation and get a clue as to the direction in which you should move forward.]

[Reward: 100 P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

For someone like Sang Sang-chang, the compensation is generous. This means that it may take some time to proceed, or that you may have to struggle for a while to complete it.

"So people like that aren't even proper fraudsters. It's just a common maniac on the streets! "If we investigate these people one by one, there will be no end to it!"

"Well, while I'm looking for Giacomo Milo, I'd like to stop by the Marquis de Benso. "This is something that worries Sir Valerie so much, but doesn't Sir Martha even care about him?"

Owen sighed softly, listening to the sound of the argument next to

him.

'Anyway, the recent quests all have no context. I always think about finding someone like this without much information, but Sang Sang-chang is so reckless...'

403. Head Tower (1)

The climate of Delcross was relatively mild for an inland area. In particular, the clear autumn air, with its humidity greatly reduced, had a way of stimulating both a clear intellect and a full sense of emotion.

-You promise me a beautiful sky.

I whisper like a bird that I will give you a shining star.

But I am the only one in the world.

I want your soul like a jewel.

Crunchy.

A playwright who had been working all night, immersed in the emotions of autumn, lowered his quill as the sunlight seeping through the curtain grew stronger.

"If I write just a little more, chapter 1 will be completed. Okay..."

Unfortunately, today's work seems to end here.

When I started to worry about the fact that I couldn't hold the quill equally with both hands, I thought my concentration for the day was already over.

"Hmm."

The playwright turned his back and neck around and quickly glanced over the content he had worked on so far.

'... It seems like it'll be fun, but since the doll is the main character, I

wonder if it might be a little dangerous?'

[The Doll's Song], which she is currently working on, is Ortona's classic literature that deals with the events that occur when a beautiful doll created by a person comes to life. At the time, it was highly regarded for containing her reflection and criticism on human dignity and sense of subjectivity.

But here in Delcross, things were a little different. If done incorrectly, it could be seen as a heresy that challenges God's authority over the creation of life.

'It's not specifically a banned book, but I touched it, but it would be safer to go in the direction of teaching a lesson with a little bit of a sense of encouragement and punishment, right?'

The playwright thought for a moment and then shook his head.

Let everything happen. What's the problem? If it were his lover, even if a controversy arose, he would be able to immediately dismiss it.

"Then let's end it here for today."

She stretched out her arms and stretched greatly. It also happened to be the right time for her to finish her work.

smart.

Soon, with a small knock on the door, identical faces appeared as if they had been stamped out of a mold. These were her children, Herna and Kadesh.

"It's time to wake up, Joe."

"Come out and eat, Joe."

The playwright stood up with an unusually broad smile.

Yes, my lovely treasures!

* * *

Jocelyn Langster.

Transformer of tragedy, magician of conflict.

This young playwright, who is better known to the world as 'Master Sorbonne' rather than his real name, was a person who had the eccentricities that sensitive artists sometimes exhibit, which were especially noticeable compared to others.

First of all, she couldn't tolerate the 'twisting' of things well. In particular, she was particularly easily fatigued by 'unbeautiful' or 'asymmetrical' shapes. It was because my mind was constantly trying to correct everything I saw into an ideal form.

Because of this, it is natural for interpersonal relationships to turn into a mess.

She didn't even bother to look at her own face in the mirror. After working all night, she often felt asymmetrically sunken eyelids, which she lacked confidence in.

In that respect, her children could be seen as perfect beings to spend time with. Because both sides always spoke to each other equally, and the sculpting of the face was also perfectly beautiful.

Think about it.

What a great tragedy it would be for parents if they were unable to smile sincerely at their beloved children due to extreme brain fatigue!

"yes. A person with an imperfect personality like me could meet a lover with perfect looks, fall in love, and even end up with these jewel-like children. I can't help but see this as a miracle from God.
"Nothing."

Quickly.

As she sniffled with renewed relief, two identical pairs of purple eyes looked up at her with a look of worry.

"I guess I'm not feeling well."

"Did you work all night again?"

A small hand comes up to Jocelyn's forehead. Herna was a person with a strong sense of action.

"I don't think you have a fever? Still, just in case, take your medicine carefully. article."

Another small hand wiped the corner of her mouth with a napkin. Kadesh is always thoughtful.

"No matter how much inspiration comes without a crowd, you have to lead a regular life. article."

Jocelyn, who is often treated like a child by small children, is both happy and caught up in an uneasy feeling.

"These children are a miracle from God to me, but what am I to them? A companion human that needs to be looked after and played with occasionally?"

Before the discomfort escalated into uncontrollable self-destruction, Jocelyn quickly changed the topic.

"Oh! Guys. "Would you like to go see a performance with me sometime soon?"

"A performance?"

"suddenly?"

"okay. A play I adapted a while ago is all the rage right now! That story about 'Ambrosia of the Head Tower' that you guys like. "It will finally be performed in the biggest theater on Rue Bertrand!"

It was no coincidence that Jocelyn, who was renowned for her purely original plays, chose 'Ambrosia of the Tower of Head' as her first adaptation.

When she was young, it was a fairy tale that her children always asked her to read to them before going to bed, so she naturally reached for it first.

"Hmm?"

But when the twins heard those words, they looked at each other and looked somewhat shocked.

"Well, it's not like we particularly liked it at the time."

"Because Mores always came and begged me to read it."

"... huh?"

"We just listened to what Mores wanted."

"Mores couldn't read well at the time, and he was a little lonely."

"And she wanted to collect a lump sum of images from people."

"No matter how weak the spirits are, they can exert power when the collective consciousness unites."

Jocelyn couldn't help but be puzzled by their answers. I have never met the Third Prince in my life, so how could he come all the way here and beg me to read a book?

However, as adults who do not understand children well tend to do, she soon made her own judgment and was convinced.

"Do you guys like Mores that much?"

Isn't this a name that comes up in the twins' mouths every day?

It's so bad that Jocelyn, without realizing it, comes to regard the Third Prince, whom she has never met before, as familiar.

"hmm. "If you ask me if it's good, it's probably good."

"He's interesting just by looking at him."

But this time, the answer that came back was unexpected. The twins soon started grumbling with pouty faces.

"But these days, Mores only plays with red."

"Well, sometimes I call other kids."

"It was fun to hang out with him every day for a while, but recently, Mores has become very busy."

"Because it's training, they only focus on the monster task force, and now they don't want to play around even at night."

"But if you want Mores to lie down in pain again, then Seonghwang's father is so pitiful."

"The bigger problem is that every time she does that, a major accident occurs. "Because it's so hard for your Majesty, Dad."

"... .."

Jocelyn had no idea what was happening.

While the 3rd prince was sick, wasn't the regular audience time drastically reduced? Thanks to this, Herna and Kadesh did not leave the mansion for a while and just played chess with each other all day.

"hmm... Instead, you guys go to the imperial palace to have fun these days, right?"

After the 3rd prince woke up from his sick bed, the twins were frequently visiting Jinju Palace to have lunch as before.

"Yes, the food is delicious. "We even get delivery directly from Bertran & Lee's salmon specialty store."

"Joe, why don't you come with us next time? Mores would probably welcome Joe."

"well... .."

"I think we could just live in the imperial palace at this point, Joe."

"that's right. "It's going to be a lot of fun hanging out with everyone, Joe."

"... .."

This wasn't the first time Jocelyn had heard such a suggestion. It was also what her lover wanted in the first place.

but-

"Herna. Kadesh. Do you know how strict life in the imperial palace is? "I won't be able to stay in my pajamas all day like I do now, and I won't be able to stay up all night playing chess."

"... is it?"

"Maybe?"

It's not that she wasn't, Jocelyn was extremely satisfied with her current life.

A daily life where one can fully enjoy material abundance and social status, and no one can say anything even though day and night change. Isn't this the highest peak of independent life that humans can enjoy?

"And there is the most important matter of all! Did you know that the structure of the imperial palace is horribly asymmetrical? "It is not as perfectly and beautifully balanced as this mansion we live in."

"Joe is probably the only person in the world who says this mansion is more beautiful than the imperial palace."

"Well, that's why we like Joe. "It's interesting just to look at it."

"Okay, okay. "Thank you for the compliment."

Jocelyn, who had finished eating completely, yawned profusely. The aftereffects of working all night are slowly starting to show.

"Are you going to the imperial palace now? Well then, have a nice trip, guys. "After I send you all away, I'll just have to sleep soundly."

"and... .."

The twins' faces suddenly changed to look like parents with a teenage daughter who can't stop themselves.

"Are you going to sleep right after eating, Joe?"

"It's going to be very bad for your health, Joe."

"It's okay, guys."

She, who was more immature than her children, patted her chest confidently and responded.

"Anyway, if you go to the imperial palace, your father will treat you completely, right?"

* * *

At the same time, the imperial palace.

Nate, who had been quietly moving the dishes, suddenly looked up in surprise.

"hmm? Why are you doing this all of a sudden? Does the food taste strange?"

"No, no. It's very delicious... .."

Nate looked down at the unfamiliar dish called 'Smoked Cham Salmon Eggs Benedict' that his son had brought for the first time in a long time.

For some reason, I feel very uncomfortable.

Why? Although I always believe in doing the best for my family, why do I sometimes feel anxious these days, wondering if I'm doing something seriously wrong?

"Did you do something else this time?"

"... yes?"

Then, the troublemaker son was confused for a moment, but then smiled with a proud face.

"Ah yes. So, I told you I was going on a business trip again. "I have a fairly reliable informant, so if I do well this time, I think I will be

able to arrest Giacomo Milo."

"arrest... .."

"yes. On the way, I also inspect the business entrusted to Branch Manager Schmidt. Lastly, we will stop by the Marquis de Benso. "Lord Valerie has specifically asked me to investigate something."

"... .."

Nate felt a little strange and looked at his son.

Recently, his son had been wearing his neatly ironed uniform of the Order of St. Terbachia with some sort of pride. This may not be simply because the child gained the 'public power' to sing.

Nate, who always closely monitored his son's condition, sometimes sensed a slight sense of relief from the child's hand stroking his livery, as was his habit.

Since he has an idea of what is so unsettling, Nate becomes very confused every time he sees the child like that.

"really! Since this business trip is an official business of the Holy Knights, I plan to properly budget for it within the Holy Order. "You don't have to give me any extra pocket money."

After all the money was ripped off from me, the old men of the crusade will be very upset, right?

My son, who was grinning happily, took a sip of his tea and added, "Ah."

"I'll pay the bounty as well!"

"... .."

Is it really okay to leave this child alone... ..

Nate sighed quietly, thinking that the piece of salmon he had just swallowed was somehow stuck in his throat.

404. Head Tower (2)

Preparations for the business trip went smoothly according to Seongjin's plan.

First the cost.

Fortunately, the Seonghoe gave Seongjin the budget he requested without any hesitation. Even though I paid quite generously because I thought I would get a discount.

-As an apostle of the Lord, I will spare no efforts in my power for Delcross. So, I believe that in the future, not only the Orthodox Church but also the other four Holy Knights will fully cooperate with the work of the monster task force. Because that is the will of the Lord.

It looks like the threats thrown at the crusade worked. Of course, rather than cooperating, it seemed like the intention was to wait and see how far that guy could go.

And personnel.

After sending all of the few members of the monster task force to Cyprus, there was no choice but to recruit new personnel centered on Lord Masain and the resident knights of the Jinju Palace.

"I want to go too."

What was surprising was that Owen suddenly decided to follow Seongjin.

"you? why?"

"There's nothing special to do, right? The portrait work is almost

finished, so I don't have to go to the atelier regularly anymore. really! Mores. Can I take Bartoza with me?"

"Bartoza? "Who is that?"

"huh. He is a survivor of the Purma tribe, but unfortunately he was hated by the strongest tribe leader in Barsha. Contrary to his appearance, he is a timid guy and gets very anxious when I'm not around. "If you take him with you, he will probably do a great job as a porter."

Seongjin looked at his eldest son, who seemed to be at ease alone, with a disapproving expression.

Owen's long hair had already grown full of cormorant feathers. Even if they were kept in the ecliptic for various reasons, they would be antagonized by high-ranking priests and would be a perfect fit for pagans.

"Yeah, something like that."

Seongjin obediently gave permission. Rather than nagging him to dress up like a prince, it might be easier to take him with you.

Then this time Rep. Jibril also raised his hand.

"Can I go with you too? Lowering? You never know when someone might get injured, so it will definitely be of great help if I accompany you. "There are no conferences that I have to attend for a while."

"Well, it doesn't really matter."

Seongjin, who was about to give a positive answer, suddenly found ominous jars piled up in her place. Huge perfume jars, each emitting a strong and unique floral scent.

"... No way, Rep. Jibril. Are you planning on taking all those perfumes with you?"

"Yes, sir! I am a doctor who fights the plague. "I don't know how long I will be away from the imperial capital, so I plan to prepare for quarantine as thoroughly as possible!"

"ah! Now that I think about it again, I think one person should still stay in the office. "We also have to deal with epidemic reports coming in from all over the country."

"yes? No, you lower! Why?"

A large number of people were assembled, excluding Rep. Jibril, who was so shocked.

Except for the division and selection of the resident knights and the fact that Sir Kurt and Sir Maria argued with each other over who would follow Seongjin during the process, everything went smoothly.

Then one day.

An exorcist I had never seen before came to the monster task force. It was accompanied by an officially completed move-in report.

"You are my senior?"

"Yes that's right. Lowering."

He was an older man with a dull expression, with messy curly hair and flat glasses. It gives a dry impression, like tree branches that have been dried out by a long drought.

It was the same for Sir Leandros and Sir Sharon, but I thought that the overall characteristic of exorcists was that they looked desolate. If you struggle with loneliness for a long time and deal with the devil alone, it seems that everyone changes like that at some point.

"The Knights of St. Terbachia rarely gather and train new members like other knights. Instead, new exorcists are individually assigned a senior person to guide them for a while. "It can be seen as a kind of apprenticeship-style guidance."

"okay. I understand. But why are you suddenly transferring to our department? "There's already Sir Sharon in the monster task force?"

Then the exorcist straightened his posture and immediately made a straight face.

"Sir, I respect Sir Sharon as a junior with outstanding skills. But you don't really expect that you can really learn something from her, do you?"

"... .."

Seongjin, who remembered the exorcist laughing like he was crazy every time, had no choice but to inadvertently agree with his words.

Well, it involves hitting the stronghold of the Dark Church. I would be grateful if at least one more paladin were added.

"okay. Well, anyway, thank you. that... .."

Seongjin added, glancing sideways at the moving-in notification form.

"... Sir Robert."

"Please call me Robert, sir. "My parents were from Brittany, and I have been called by my Breton name ever since."

A monotonous voice with little pitch. At first glance, he had an extremely businesslike attitude, but he still seemed the most sociable among the exorcists that Seongjin knew.

Seongjin nodded slowly and answered him.

"Of course, Sir Robert."

* * *

Unlike other Holy Knights, it is somewhat absurd to say that the Knights of St. Terbachia is a huge public power. Basically, exorcists were scattered throughout the continent and most of the time they performed their missions alone.

So, even if a new exorcist happened to come in, there was no proper way to systematically train him. So, for a certain period of time, it became a kind of custom to follow a veteran and move together.

In this way, the new knight follows his senior like a teacher and

learns everything he needs to know as an exorcist.

"But, unusually, you were given the rank of adjutant upon joining the service. So it became impossible for an exorcist to treat me like a squire."

Of course, there were many other reasons why the precious prince of the Holy Emperor could not be taken to remote places.

Thanks to this, a laughable situation arose where Sir Robert, an experienced exorcist, followed his junior and registered his transfer.

"Well, I feel a little sorry for you, Sir Robert."

"No, sir. It's almost time for me to start working. Moreover, since you have a solid foundation in military power, you will be fine without me having to follow you around for a long time."

In addition, Seongjin had another unique feature that set him apart from other new exorcists.

The most troublesome training for senior paladins is teaching juniors about sacred barriers?

however-

"I don't have divine power?"

"Yes, so the distance to teach has been greatly reduced. "I may be presumptuous, but this is truly fortunate for you and me."

Those who don't know may think that all you have to do is simply unleash divine power, but creating a sacred barrier involves a more complicated process than you might think.

It is the act of forming one's own power into a certain form and releasing it to the outside in a stable manner. If you think about it, it's the same as using divine power to spread a sword of a certain shape.

In particular, deploying a large-scale barrier with other Paladins is more problematic. So, you have to repeat the practice of defending

an exact range with a certain intensity and at the same time resonating with the power of others to harmonize with it.

"Uh, just hearing that gives me a headache?"

"That's exactly what I want to say, sir."

Wow, I never thought there would come a day when I would be glad that I don't have divine powers.

"But then, doesn't that mean I have nothing to learn from Sir Robert? Lord Masain is already taking care of my swordsmanship."

"No, sir. "A paladin has basic skills that are more important than the sacred barrier."

"Basic knowledge?"

"yes. Examples include the review ceremony, the chairman's demonstration, and the easy washing of uniforms."

"... .."

Come to think of it, I once heard this story from Logan.

-This is a fact that outsiders don't know, but the first thing you learn when you join the Holy Knights is how to properly dress up and conduct a review ceremony.

-A four-line ceremony? Not swordsmanship?

-okay. In a way, it is also about penetrating the essence of the Holy Knights. In order to spread God's will to the world, it is more important to 'show' it well than to use 'force'.

At the time, I thought it was a half-joke, but could they really learn something like that?

Well, Logan isn't the type to make pointless jokes.

"And there is the most important thing that you, who do not have divine power, must learn properly. "It's a way to use tools that have

been prepared in advance."

After speaking up to that point, Sir Robert began to unfold the large bag he was carrying.

"After your joining was decided, Director Leandros immediately ordered me to be your new recruit. "It's not often that an exorcist who has been active for a while is called to the Imperial Capital, but isn't there a reason for such an unusual appointment?"

"reason?"

"yes. I dare say that of all the exorcists, I am the most adept at using tools. "It means that I can teach you in more detail than anyone else how to use exorcism tools in the right place."

As Sir Robert had assured, his bag was filled with countless items.

From large and small holy water bottles to complex magic scrolls engraved with the symbols of the main deity. A pile of wooden awls and mallets. And an old straw doll with black thread wrapped around it... ..

Perhaps they are all sacred tools blessed by priests.

[Wow. Scary guy. Are you carrying around such ugly things?]

The demon lord sitting on the desk was fed up. To him, it would seem like a feast of weapons.

"... ..?"

Meanwhile, there was one object that caught Seongjin's eye. It was a teddy bear as white as snow, and no matter how you looked at it, it had a somewhat familiar design.

"Sir Robert. This?"

"Ah, that is the newly consecrated amulet. He said he was the guardian of children, [Vince Bear]. "It is an item that exorcists have recently consecrated and carried around as a companion."

"... Eh?"

what. Is this really a doll modeled after Bingsu No. 3?

But why on earth does an exorcist carry a doll like this as a talisman?

"In the end, the one who gives power to meaningful images is the one who exerts the strongest power. Plus, it looks pretty cute, doesn't it?"

"... .."

"They say it's quite popular even among imperial officials. "Did you have no idea?"

and. I thought the teddy bear was a design that would work well anywhere, but I never thought it would be popular among exorcists too!

* * *

Romain had been feeling a suspicious atmosphere recently.

I visit Bertrand Street every few days to collect information, and the atmosphere there is noticeably changing day by day.

"Vince Bear! Buy Vince Bear, who protects the Lord's little favor!"

"A cute knight of the Lord who willingly came down to earth for Saint Sisley, the Lord's apostle!"

Romain noticed the white teddy bears lined up at the stall and quietly broke into a cold sweat.

'... How did this happen? Why is there a teddy bear in this Delcross dimension?'

But what was strangest of all were the one-act plays taking place here and there on the streets.

"Ah, it's so sad! "The story of the moon fairy's unrequited love for His Majesty the First King!"

"A new play is here! The bizarre adventures of the beautiful Saint

Bastian and his faithful servant, the Shadow Fairy!"

"Come see the mischievous fire fairy puppet show! "If you watch, we'll also give you some delicious fire fairy candy!"

Romain could not understand the current phenomenon at all. Decades ago, the story of Olivier the Moon Fairy was sensationally popular, but how could the atmosphere of the city change so suddenly?

No matter how you look at the phenomena that are happening now, they are unusual and even artificial.

'... 'Why suddenly?'

There is no way to know whose influence is behind it. So Romaine felt fear sinking into his bones and could only tremble helplessly.

'What are these paving stones for? I can't read anything, nothing! Guardian of Delcross! What kind of future does he see... ... !'

405

405. Head Tower (3)

Romain trudged back to the cave he had used as a temporary staging area.

Originally, while I was there to collect information, I was planning on putting on a puppet show or something on the streets of Bertrand.

But amid the wave of gorgeous 'fairies', I couldn't bring myself to take out my old dolls. It felt like it was clearly showing the gap between himself and his current success.

As he entered the cave helplessly, [Pajong], who was rolling around on the floor, turned to him and asked.

"What are they all, doll?"

Romain inadvertently looked at the age spots covering the old man's face.

Although it may have been a hasty measure, it was a temporary body. The old man's body was rapidly deteriorating after becoming the devil's vessel.

'I'll have to prepare a new bowl soon.'

With that in mind, Romaine politely responded to the high-ranking demon king who was spread out on the floor without any hesitation.

"These are my poor dolls, Lord of Disease. "Didn't you see repairs being done here every day?"

"Well, I saw it. "As you said, they were so unsightly that I had no idea that those rags could actually be called 'dolls.'"

At his harsh evaluation, Romain once again looked down at his hand puppets.

"... .."

Even from a subjective perspective, his dolls were not in very good condition.

It is already difficult to recognize the original color due to hand stains here and there, and here and there there are also marks of poor sewing skills.

The Fire Demon Lord doll, which was originally supposed to be red, is now completely indistinguishable from the gray warrior doll. If this were the case, even if the puppet show had been performed, it would have been difficult to see any meaningful results.

The [form] that should be the basis of the flame has collapsed to this extent, so no matter how much you charm people with the power of your voice, there will inevitably be limits to building a barrier to the flame.

"It's tattered. It looks like the dolls were aimed at a specific target. Could it be that they were damaged by the [rebound] of the curse?"

Surprisingly, the high-ranking demon king's sharp eyes immediately recognized traces of the unnatural power that had damaged the tattered dolls.

"It looks like they were trying to strike a curse-filled flame barrier against a target that was no match for them. Doll. "Who on earth were you trying to harm with those clumsy tools?"

"... .."

Several months ago, the presence of the Holy Emperor protecting the Imperial Capital temporarily weakened.

At that time, Romain did not miss the opportunity and attempted to find the busiest street in the imperial capital and deploy a proper [Flame Barrier]. He intended to deal a fatal blow to his archenemy.

However, if you try to attack a living, arousing opponent with flame images, there will naturally be a [reaction] against him.

The dolls that were unable to completely suffocate the enemy began to be damaged by the recoil. Even though it wasn't played a few times, it was ruined so badly, as if it had been hit head-on by hundreds of years.

'Still, there is one thing I have learned for sure. 'The fact that both the hero and the fire demon lord and the two dolls reacted means that they still exist in this world just fine.'

The generational change is not over yet. His nemesis ultimately failed to become the Fire Demon Lord.

Ah, how fortunate this is!

'And the Fire Demon Lord, who survived until the end, must have not forgotten his grudge and is still wandering this Delcross dimension chasing my soul.'

I also confirmed this fact myself some time ago. It was the day Romain infiltrated the imperial palace by clumsily creating a soul terminal.

At the time, when the soul's defenses weakened due to imitating the imperfect secret arts, didn't the Fire Demon immediately pursue him and chase him into the human body he had occupied?

-Is it you? Did you bastard make such a trivial attack on me?

Romain, who was thinking back on the incident for a moment, suddenly felt puzzled.

Now that I think about it, I didn't even pay attention to the shock of losing the terminal at the time, but it seemed like the Fire Demon didn't recognize me at all.

-Oh, is that you? It became so insignificant that I almost didn't recognize it! Where did something that couldn't even die suddenly appear?

-what? You bastard? You know me? what is your identity?

no way.

'me... Don't you remember? Was it just that someone attacked him and he followed the traces of the flames that remained to track down the attacker?'

But how can that be? There is no way that the Fire Demon Lord would not remember the Dream Demon King who tricked him so well that he lost everything.

'Or does this mean that my existence, completely separated from the puppeteer, is no longer the [Dream King] he is chasing?'

Strong-!

Maybe it's because I'm deeply immersed in incomplete memories, but a sharp pain suddenly arises in my head. Romain distorted her face, hidden behind her half-mask.

One day, Romain was unexpectedly separated from the puppeteer, and some of his memories were irreparably damaged.

Because of that, he couldn't clearly remember what kind of ending he, the hero, and the Fire Demon Lord met in the end.

'but... ... '

At least I know this fact for sure. If we leave them alone like this, the 'Hero' and the 'Fire Demon Lord' will become established as obstacles that will constantly threaten the safety of Romaine in the future.

'So even if we can't put an end to it right away, we have to eliminate them little by little and steadily from now on... ... '

Romaine, who had been deep in thought, suddenly noticed the old man staring at him in silence, and took a deep breath.

The gaze of an absolute being who can instantly crush a human soul. That scary gaze is scanning you down as if you are observing yourself!

"... ... !"

It was clear that he had lost consciousness for a moment due to the shock he received in the imperial capital. How can you just pretend to listen to a question from a high-ranking demon king and then be lost in your own thoughts!

"... So, I apologize, Mr. Pajong. It's no big deal. "I was just trying to eliminate the political enemies of the prince I serve from afar."

Romain spoke quickly.

"It is nothing more than a trivial human matter, and it is not something that the great Lord of Disease needs to be concerned about."

Incomplete memories and the existence of a nemesis who could threaten one's safety at any time.

It would have been difficult for a high-ranking demon king to hastily reveal these great weaknesses. It's obvious that the moment he shows the slightest opportunity, he'll snatch him up, tear him to pieces, and immediately join the real puppeteer's side.

"silence? A prince you serve? "What, is that a strong guy?"

"It's not that strong, so I just tried to use it from afar."

"okay? "Then why did you fail?"

"I am truly ashamed. But in the end, the only trick this lowly doll could pull off to avoid the eyes of the Holy Emperor was such a clumsy flame barrier. "I wasn't able to prepare properly because I was worried about what he thought."

"Hmm..."

It wasn't a completely understandable explanation, but fortunately, the sowing didn't seem to care much.

"Yeah, your trivial circumstances are none of my business. But the more I think about it, the less funny it seems! Isn't it like a doll

playing with a doll? "Kill, kill, kill!"

"... .."

It was a rude remark that offended everyone, but who would dare criticize that high-ranking demon king?

Instead, Romain collected himself and decided to seek the advice of the Absolute on the matter at hand.

"Sowing. Actually, there is something I would like to discuss with you."

About the fairy craze that is sweeping the streets of Bertrand.

* * *

"okay. A fairy? In the Holy Empire, which has been clinging to poor scriptures for the past thousand years? "Well, after living so long, all sorts of things happen."

After listening to Romain's explanation, the old man looked into space with a strange expression.

"The opposition from the Orthodox Church must have been formidable, right? Anyway, this sounds like a lot of fun! "I wish I could see that strange sight with my own eyes!"

Of course, it was an impossible wish. As long as the Holy Emperor's [Grace] surrounds the Imperial Capital, there is no way the devil would dare approach there.

"Anyway, it's not a bad story for us, doll. The weaker humans' mental defenses against [evil] become, the easier it will be for the church under my command to encroach on the continent! "Wouldn't the invasion accelerate further?"

The blind faith enforced by the collective consciousness has a much greater impact on the soul's unconscious defenses than expected.

This will be an even more important issue, especially from the perspective of high-ranking demon kings who must prioritize

dimensional mental invasion due to the constraints of causality.

But now, the guardian of Delcross is completely ignoring that advantage, and is breaking down the vigilance of humans by bringing beings, one by one, into the range of awareness where even the boundaries between good and evil are unclear.

That was why Romain was confused. It wasn't enough to strengthen our guard in preparation for a full-scale invasion in the future, so you took it upon yourself to weaken the human defenses!

"... So then, what purpose does the guardian of Delcross do such a thing?"

"Well, doll. "How can I know his complex nature?"

The old man scratched the empty top of his head with a sullen expression.

"But, isn't it obvious? He's probably trying to do the same thing you did. "By using the collective consciousness of the humans of the ecliptic, we are working to broadly overlay a new 'image' of 'fairies' in this dimension."

"Are you saying that it makes us give up the defenses that blind faith in the Lord gives us and accept the uncertain existence of a 'fairy'? Why? "There is no real benefit at all, is there?"

"Well, fairies are their own fairies."

Pa-jong, who responded like that, suddenly burst into unpleasant laughter as if something was on his mind.

"But doll, do you know what? When the Guardian of Delcross first took power, he went on a rampage with the intention of eradicating all the devils on the continent. He was so obsessed with catching and killing demons that he used any tool he could get his hands on."

There have even been numerous instances where the Holy Emperor himself invaded the demon world. How can a human being, even a representative of God, do something so crazy!

The embarrassment felt by the high-ranking demon kings at the time was indescribable.

"He even has a fairly powerful demon under his command! "I was so surprised when I first saw him."

At those words, Romain looked at the seedlings in shock.

"... devil... yo. this? Is that really true?"

"That's right. Why would this body talk nonsense to you?"

The old man, who had been observing Romaine's stiff expression with amusement, continued.

"So who knows? Maybe-"

The old man's mischievous eyes became uncharacteristically deep.

"Once again, we don't know if an even more powerful force than before has come to Delcross's guardians."

* * *

"This is lemon pie."

[wow! It's lemon pie!]

"These are bear meat cutlets."

[Wow! It's my favorite bear meat!]

Every time Seongjin throws finely chopped food onto the glass bowl, fluttering red flames burn them away.

Sir Robert, who had been quietly watching the little boy from the side, adjusted his flat glasses and made a serious face.

"That person is the 'Fire Fairy' who is becoming a hot topic these days. "It feels like a fairy's flame is touching your hand. Does it feel hot or something?"

"Uh, it's okay. "Sir Robert."

Seongjin was originally not harmed by the devil's flame. Although the feeling that she was very hot was conveyed intact.

But recently, the temperature I could feel was noticeably lower than before. This is because the Demon King constantly tried to control the heat.

-My wonderful glass plate!

Because it had been incorporeal for a while, the Demon King had a hard time coordinating the suddenly acquired flame body with the external environment. Thanks to this, he ended up putting a lot of expensive dishes out of use for a while.

But in the end, it was a problem that only time would solve.

Now, he has found the right temperature that burns food quickly and smells good, while keeping the dishes intact at the same time.

So now, I am sitting in a polyhedral glass bowl made with great passion and passion by craftsmen, and comfortably receiving food from Seongjin.

"Ahh! Hot! "Blisters on my fingers!"

So, this means that it was the devil's intention. Things like the situation where Lord Haven, who gently touches a flame, gets burned and jumps around awkwardly.

"Then why are you trying to touch him without permission?"

"yes? But low! "Princess Amelia and the other knights were all fine, weren't they?"

Sir Haven put his burned finger in his mouth and cried.

"You are so great! "It seems like the Fire Fairy only hates me!"

"That's because you always do something rude. "Stop talking nonsense and go to Dr. Ninias and get treatment, Lord Haven."

Just like that, an unusually peaceful afternoon passed by.

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406. Head Tower (4)

After the Emperor returned to government affairs, the palace seemed to quickly regain peace.

But that was only the surface. Like lava that might erupt again at any time, intense suspicion and confusion were still seething beneath the cooling rock.

First of all, the high-ranking priests of the Holy Assembly.

Are they whisperings of subtle evil? Ah, Lord! I'm afraid it may actually be literal! - At the sound of the deceptive voice, I felt the defenses of faith that I had maintained throughout my life shake completely.

So what should you do? I can only close my eyes and ears, which have become insensitive to good and evil, and pray ceaselessly for the Lord to quickly take away this harsh ordeal.

Such internal turmoil and tension, which were different from what it seemed on the outside, could be seen frequently even outside the imperial palace recently. An example of this is the 'Monkey Watchtower', an intelligence organization that closely assists the imperial family.

Number 21, who returned after a brief report to Seonghwang for the first time in a long time, noticed that the atmosphere in the basement of the bar, which was usually engulfed in secret silence, was excessively tense.

"... "Why is the atmosphere here like this?"

Then No. 19, who had become noticeably pale after half a day,

silently gapes at him.

'I don't know! Please save me!'

just as expected. At the center of the raging air, there were veteran intelligence agents whom No. 19 could not dare to touch.

"Senior No. 9 and... Senior No. 13?"

In fact, the two, who had seen each other for the first time in a long time, were not very close friends from the beginning, as far as No. 21 knew.

But now, both of them are glaring at each other with grimly distorted faces, as if something is going wrong in their judgment.

Since the main job of informants is physically demanding work, it is not uncommon for friction to arise from time to time.

The problem is that these two people, who are barely awake, are fighting over each other, with the unfortunate No. 19 in between them.

"That's funny. It's been so long since I served my master, and I feel like I've already become a loyal subject of the Lord of War. What do you think of this? "It's number 19."

Number 9, who has a petite physique, asks, placing his arm affectionately on Number 19's shoulder, which is not that big as expected. His pronunciation has seriously deteriorated due to years of fighting among Barça's tribe, and his speaking style is particularly light and feels like he is being rude.

Number 19 trembled in front of his distant senior, unable to say anything.

"Even if the period of service is long, the trust relationship will not be proportional to it. Doesn't the owner's trust in the source of information depend on how closely he keeps it close to him? "Answer me, number 19."

No. 13, who is neatly tall, glares at No. 19 with a cold expression.

Even so, I was doubly scared to see my normally shrewd senior with a straight face.

No. 19 now looked like he was going to cry.

'... aha!'

Number 21 was able to roughly guess the details of the argument.

'It's a problem with the monster task force that's going on a business trip this time.'

When I heard it, Senior No. 13 said he was following Prince Mores this time too.

However, for some reason, No. 9, who had faithfully served Prince Owen on the southern front for the past several years, was ordered to remain here. As he continues to stay in the ecliptic, he's been given a mission to find someone?

It was probably like a thunderbolt for No. 9, who was particularly proud of his skills.

'but...'

Anyway, aren't those two people too insensitive? In fact, No. 19 over there has been serving Prince Logan for the longest time, but he has never been able to keep up with the punitive force.

"what? Have I said everything now? No. 19, did you clearly hear what that baseless bastard from Barça was saying?"

Number 9 finally couldn't get over his anger and lost his temper.

A junior informant with whom he does not have a very good relationship is serving an unlikable prince who once tormented his master. So, I can't help but be very nervous about their every move.

"Heh! I really don't know who is using the Barça hillbilly accent right now. Hey, are you listening, number 19?"

Of course, the number 13 opposing it was also formidable. To those

who looked down on her because she was from Barcelona, she was a tough senior who always proudly proved herself with her skills.

Puzzle!

Dangerous sparks flew from the gazes of the two. Only the shy No. 19 lets out a silent scream amidst the bloody war of nerves.

'Please, someone get me out of here!'

It was right then.

bang! Bang bang! Quang!

There was the sound of someone banging on the flue connected to the upper floor. It was Breman, the head of the Monkey Watchtower and an executive of the assassination organization 'Hand of Oberon'.

At highest intensity, four times.

Considering past experience, that signal is Breman's ultimatum. In other words, it means, 'If you don't do something, we will close the store and go down immediately!'

"... .."

The heightened tension disappeared without a trace. Not only No. 9 but also No. 21, all of them there were riders who had gone through Breman's rigorous training.

"Well, I'm going! 'I have important instructions from Prince Logan!'

Number 19 looks visibly relieved and begins to hurriedly gather documents.

Number 21, who had been thinking of taking a break here for a while, also changed his mind and turned around. She's going to stay here and get into trouble again.

"... 'Then, I have something to prepare, so let's stop.'"

As I calmly moved up to No. 13, soon only No. 9, dejected, was left in

the large basement.

"Tsk!"

Number 9 flopped down in his seat and pouted inwardly.

I was conscious that I had behaved in an indecent manner in front of my juniors. But lately, I've been really upset.

"Prince Owen is also very kind. All right, here... ... Looking for a person like that, what on earth could he be..."

"... huh?"

"yes?"

But something unexpected happened. Numbers 13 and 19, who had already gone out into the hallway, looked back at number 9 from beyond the door at the same time.

"Sir, who are you looking for now... ... ?"

"..."

"... hmm? iced coffee."

Number 9 was a little embarrassed by the unexpected attention.

"This is the person Prince Owen has been looking for for a while, but he probably isn't from Delcross. Do you guys know what region this is called? It was a bit of a strange pronunciation, so this, hand... jin?"

Let's say the name clearly like that-

"Oh, that's... ... !"

"What?!"

Surprisingly, an awkward light of realization flashes across the faces of both No. 13 and No. 19.

Number 9 was confused. Doesn't it seem like everyone knows this name?

"You guys really know? Lee Son, Jin Eul?"

"No, I mean... .."

A little while later, the truth that No. 9 heard from them was unexpected.

"That's a difficult name to pronounce. "It's probably a nickname for you."

"nickname? "By the way, who is that?"

Then number 19 answered quickly.

"This is Prince Mores. "I don't know why, but at some point, His Majesty Logan started calling Prince Mores that when they were alone together."

Number 9's eyes widened at the unexpected information.

"What?!"

Lee Son-jin, is that Prince Mores?

* * *

While preparing for a long business trip, Seongjin learned many things from Sir Robert.

Was he ignorant of his knowledge as a Holy Knight? Of course, Edith taught him the trick of conquest instead of Seongjin, as well as about the classification and characteristics of demon species that he had vaguely known about until now.

Then, as a matter of common sense, I learned a little about the reality of the sacred barrier where paladins break their cranes.

"This is all geometry, right?"

Seongjin clicked his tongue as he looked through a textbook filled with complex shapes.

The person who compiled the foundations of the current sacred

barrier is said to be Granius, a famous theologian during the Five Great Emperors.

Until then, the barriers created by priests were said to have been limited to blindly pouring in divine power to create a large cross-sectional curtain in front.

However, after he appeared, it became possible to create customized barriers depending on the characteristics of the demon species.

With fewer people and in a more efficient manner.

'It is a three-dimensional object whose shape, slope, and height vary greatly depending on the number of people striking the barrier, the angle of the formation, and the object to be covered...'

The barrier thus completed was either a polygonal sphere or a polygonal pyramid.

Either way, it doesn't seem easy. Do you understand why paladins are so passionate about practicing sacred barriers?

"Fortunately, our exorcists are in a better situation. In most cases, there are at most two people working together. However, the situation is very different in the case of the Lilium Detachment, which carries out subjugation throughout the continent."

You have to use various barriers against all kinds of sea creatures and demons. So, the person who becomes the main axis of the barrier is bound to be good at geometry and mathematics?

It was a moment when not only the Lilium detachment but also Logan, who was leading them and shooting them, was seen again.

'I just thought it was Logan's slandered fan club.'

Sir Robert also carefully taught Seongjin about the tools used for exorcism.

Of course, most of them were uninteresting and he passed them by with one ear, but there were occasionally items that Seongjin thought could be quite useful.

For example, there were small tokens showing that they had been consecrated for a month.

These tokens were small awl-shaped tools with the god's pattern engraved on them, and were objects that could be thrown or driven into them with a hammer.

"The power of each is weak, but if you insert several secret tokens in succession, you can instantly achieve a light purification or barrier effect."

While carefully listening to Sir Robert's explanation, Seongjin picked up a bundle of tokens.

Crash!

After throwing a few as a test, the tokens formed a neat semicircle and stuck on the wall, just as Seongjin had intended. Sir Robert, who was watching from behind, let out a soft exclamation.

"That's great, sir! Have you ever learned sword-fighting techniques separately?"

"hmm? What is that... .."

In fact, Seongjin is a promising assassin. He was already growing by learning tips from elite agent Dasha.

Of course, I couldn't tell Sir Robert that fact straight away.

'Anyway, if it's this simple to use, I guess I could use it for something useful, right?'

While Seongjin was leaving, he received a set of secret tickets from Sir Robert and took them with him.

"ah! Come to think of it, I haven't shown you the most important tool yet."

Sir Robert, calling for attention, hastily took out a small item from his bag. It was an object smaller than a child's fist, and it looked like a top with needles attached to the left and right.

"This is called a gyrocompass."

"Gyro compass?"

"yes. A device used to track demon energy. "It is an important object that serves as a guide for exorcists who must track down demons alone."

He carefully placed the top on the table and continued his explanation.

"It is said that those with strong divine power can sense even the weakest demonic energy. However, for exorcists like me who have weak divine power, there is no other tool as useful as this. If you just place it on the floor like this, it will tell you the direction in which the demon energy is strongest around you... .."

But Sir Robert could not finish his explanation. The needle of the gyrocompass, which was spinning, immediately turned and pointed towards Seongjin.

Whirling!

"... .."

"... .."

There was an awkward silence in the room for a moment.

407. Head Tower (5)

Grrrr...

Even as the outer top spins, the inner needle stands upright and asserts itself. Embarrassingly, while aiming straight at the prince of the Seonghwang family.

Sir Robert, who was staring blankly at the needle, was startled for a moment and threw the gyro into his bag.

"Big. Why is this..."

At first impression, Sir Robert seemed particularly hard and dry. But he suddenly became visibly embarrassed and started to panic.

"Well, I'm going to show you a trivial item... I'm sorry, my dear. Maybe it's broken... No, I think it was contaminated. Recently, I have neglected the consecration..."

Oh, it's okay, Sir Robert. There is no need to try to cover up a situation that is clearly visible.

"I will properly complain to the equipment department as well. As the workday got longer, these guys all lost their discipline..."

Don't even think about criticizing this strict department for no reason. You and I both know that there is no problem with the gyro compass.

"Perhaps an injustice, a blessing from the fairies... Maybe that's why. "They say it's 'the ordeal of misunderstanding,' and indeed, it is not an easy test for an apostle of the Lord."

"..."

Seongjin did not respond in any other way but examined Sir Robert carefully.

Now that I think about it, this friend must feel a foreign energy right next to me. Is that okay?

'Even Francis, who doesn't have particularly strong divine powers, has been flinching every time he sees me lately.'

But Seongjin soon found out the answer. This is because Sir Robert has been making these suggestions one after another.

"Lowering. If you cannot use a gyrocompass, you will have no choice but to detect demonic energy purely through divine power. "At this point, how about inviting another paladin to the monster task force?"

"... Another paladin?"

"yes. Looking at the people you have organized this time, aren't there any Paladins except for you and me?"

Of course, it would be a bit unfair to call Seongjin a proper 'paladin', so the only person who can actually use divine power is Sir Robert.

"But somehow, my meager divine power is specialized for [annihilation]. "That's why I had no choice but to become more skilled than others at using exorcism tools."

The same goes for someone who doesn't have bad eyesight but wears consecrated glasses. Since the ability to detect demonic energy is so weak, it must be assisted with specially treated detection glasses?

"Right."

no wonder. I wondered why this friend was granted permission to enter Jinju Palace so easily.

"There is an exorcist in my class who recently returned from deployment. Tracking her down She is a very talented friend. How about bringing her along?"

"Hmm, well?"

Seongjin shrugged his shoulders.

Wouldn't that be necessary? Even without the help of other paladins, I already know how to track down the Penitent Church. The person who was the parish priest there not long ago is now a member of my family.

Rather, if you hire someone who has no connection to the monster task force, the source of the information may be questioned for no reason.

Or they might rush in and say they'll exterminate this side. It is said that the more divine power you have, the stronger the negative feeling you get from Seongjin.

"For now, it goes on like this."

What we're looking for is Giacomo Milo, and not the devil who made a contract with him, right?

"It's about searching for dark cults hiding underground. "I don't think it's a bad idea to move secretly with a small number of people."

After Seongjin said that, Sir Robert no longer recommended reinforcements. He just let out a small sigh of concern with a slightly dull face.

"I don't know how helpful I can be in tracking down the devil contractor, even though I have poor senses. "It's a shame that among exorcists, we have the weakest divine power."

"are you okay. "Because performance is more important than that."

Seongjin remembered that his history of subjugating demons, which was listed on his transfer report, was very impressive.

"Also, look at Sir Leandros. "That nobleman with no divine power is also serving as the leader of the Holy Knights, right?"

"That's right."

"But isn't he the one who achieves the most significant achievements

among the exorcists?"

Sir Leandros is the only one among the leaders of the Five Holy Knights who has no divine power. How great is the ability to destroy evil that someone like that can take over the position of leader?

As I thought about it, this question naturally followed.

"But how on earth does Sir Leandros go around suppressing demons alone? He wouldn't be able to sense demon energy due to his lack of divine power. "Does he use various tracking tools like you?"

It's hard to imagine that heavy-looking man walking around carrying an exorcism tool like Sir Robert.

"well."

Sir Robert adjusted his eyeglasses on the bridge of his nose and thought for a moment.

"I've never traveled abroad with him, so I don't know if he actually uses exorcism tools when dealing with demons. "It just seems like there are very few items requested from the equipment department."

"Then how?"

"But I have a little guess. "Captain Leandros is the owner of a precious relic that has been passed down to the Knights for generations."

"... Relic?"

"Yes, the twin curved swords 'Sanghyeon' and 'Hahyeon', which are recorded in the scriptures as being wielded by Saint Terbachia himself."

Sang-hyeon and Ha-hyeon,

They are one of the few inorganic relics that exist on the continent. I also remember vaguely hearing about Seongjin during his induction ceremony.

They were so powerful that no demon at that time could withstand

even two attacks from a saint.

As a result, it eventually became something of a symbol of the Knights of St. Terbachia. The intersecting silver hooks, which are the emblem of the Knights Templar, actually symbolize a pair of shotels rather than hooks.

"The power of the twin curved swords is not limited to [Destruction]. Rumor has it that when a devil appears nearby, it sounds a long sword call to warn its owner."

Twin Shotels handed down from generation to generation to the leader of the Knights of St. Terbachia. Thanks to those legendary weapons, Sir Leandros was able to rise to the rank of the strongest Holy Knight Commander despite having no divine power.

And a long time ago, when the Imperial Capital was almost overrun by demons, he became one of the people who cut down the most demons by the Holy Emperor's side.

"The Sanghyeon and Hahyeon are the second highest-ranking weapons among existing relics. "Quality is the strength of the weapon, so Leader Leandros always has the world's second strongest tool of 'destruction' at his side."

"hmm? second?"

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

"Then what about the first one? Who writes that? "If Sang-hyeon and Ha-hyeon are that strong, wouldn't the first weapon also be very useful in eradicating demons?"

Then Sir Robert looked at Seongjin again, as if he were puzzled.

"... yes?"

"huh? why? what?"

"No, that... .."

Sir Robert, who had a bewildered expression on his face, slowly

shifted his gaze downward. Seongjin soon knew where his gaze was directed.

"Nutcracker?"

"... "You really didn't know?"

Nutcracker.

A strong sword that has not left a single scratch even after breaking thousands of heads.

-Now play with that instead of the wooden sword. No matter what pranks you play, it won't break.

This is what Seonghwang said directly when he handed the weapon to Seongjin.

'If you think about it, is it natural?'

It is a beloved sword that the representative of God carried with him for half his life. If we consider its status as a standard of preciousness, the nutcracker would probably be worthy of being praised as an eternal treasure.

"Ho... .."

Now I am completely familiar with the handle of the nutcracker. Seongjin touched it gently for a moment, and for the first time in a long time, a satisfied smile appeared on his lips.

okay. Is that so?

'Wouldn't it be good to see this as my father's implicit permission to do whatever I want?'

The strongest relic on the continent is in Seongjin's hands. Although one may be uncomfortable with the energy he radiates, who would dare to interfere with his movements?

Moreover, no matter how you kill a high-ranking demon, you won't be able to be suspicious. If you are the owner of the Nutcracker, the

most powerful relic, then of course you are likely to perform one or two such miracles!

'good. It worked really well! There have been quite a few things that have been bothering me recently. Now all you have to do is go to them one by one and break their heads with peace of mind!'

But it was right then.

Sir Robert, who had so far maintained his composure even in the face of Seongjin's energy, suddenly turned pale and retreated in surprise!

'huh? 'Why is that friend acting like that all of a sudden?'

Then the Demon King, who had been sitting quietly on the glass bowl until then, sent a deep sigh and a thought to Seongjin.

[...] Seongjin Lee. How many times have I told you to please stop smiling like that, huh?]

* * *

"... hmm?"

Pa-jong suddenly felt a strange chill and raised his head.

"what? The weather hasn't gotten that cold..."

No, even if the temperature had really dropped, it would have been strange. There is no way that he, a high-ranking demon lord, would feel cold even if there is only a slight temperature difference.

Pajong, who was puzzled for a moment, soon came to a reasonable conclusion.

"Doll! It looks like this bowl is reaching the end of its lifespan. "Aren't there other dishes that are more proper?"

Then Romain, who was in the middle of dressing up as a woman, stopped what he was doing and answered obediently.

"There is one more brother of Pajong whom we captured together

while preparing the body. "I will leave it here, so please use it as you wish, Lord of Disease."

"okay? Thank you for that... .."

Pajong, who had been replying indifferently, suddenly frowned.

"wait for a sec. After all, aren't all the brothers in the field my servants? Should I be angry that you took what was mine without permission, or should I be happy that you gave it back to me?"

"At that time, there was no other way to obtain the vessel, great monarch. "Please forgive my rudeness."

"Well, really? "If that's the case."

Pajong asked, scratching his now empty head.

"But doll, where are you going? "Why are you all of a sudden packing up everything?"

In fact, Romain was crumpling all the belongings he had temporarily stored in the cave - at best, it was only sewing tools and a few hand puppets - and crumpling them into his backpack.

"Hasn't all the plans you've prepared so far gone to waste? We'll have to find another way. "From now on, I want to go to Cyprus, Mr. Sowing."

"In Cyprus? Why are you there all of a sudden?"

"Now that there is nothing left in the ecliptic, we are trying to retrieve even the things that were placed there a long time ago."

In Cyprus, there were several objects left that Romain had prepared in the past - strictly speaking, when he was working as a puppeteer.

Now that most of the plans they had prepared were useless, they might become the last battle against the Holy Emperor.

And above all, there is a borderline race lurking in the waters of Cyprus. By now, their leader would have been reduced to nothing

more than a trivial person, so if he did well, he might be able to easily steal the [Tribal Key] from him.

"Originally, I was planning to head there a long time ago. "There were some setbacks, so it was a little late."

If only Prince Leonard had been able to lure the princess in time as he had boasted.

If the gates had opened simultaneously all over the ecliptic as planned.

And if the [Puppet Master] hadn't suddenly run away for some reason and ran to the last doll he left behind in Cyprus.

However, Romain has now lost everything and must compete with the puppet master who was his past self to win all the arrangements.

"If all goes well, I will bring you good news soon, Lord of Disease. I hope to see you next time in Asean with the Lord of Hunger."

Romain bowed politely and slowly walked out of the cave.

"... .."

Pa Jong looked at that figure and thought for a moment.

'Are you really going away? It's annoying, should I kill him now?'

But I soon changed my mind.

I said that the doll was not the body anyway. Even if you kill it now, its real body will survive safely somewhere and you will be extremely wary of [Sowing] from now on.

He possessed the lost technology of Ionia. The ability to write [code] yourself is not a big deal when you look at it, but depending on the situation, it can sometimes lead to very annoying results.

'And Greed said so too. That guy knows the hidden entrance to the [Labyrinth].'

So, shall we watch a little more?

After making that decision, Pa-jong went into the corner of the cave and took a close look at the new body that the doll had left behind. He was a truly unsightly looking man, with a thin physique and a bushy beard due to not being able to take care of his body recently.

'Clemens...'

Pajong was able to find out the man's history with just a quick glance.

Since he is Pa Jong's brother who originally pledged to take him into his arms, he can peek into and manipulate his memories at will.

He was another brother of Pajong who had hidden in the Imperial Capital a long time ago along with the vessel he is currently using.

After being unluckily captured by a doll, I lost my senses and continued to follow them. Now, even after washing my eyes, I could no longer see the faithfulness I once had.

It was a little tight, but it got there. I quickly lost interest in sowing.

'This and that are all insignificant. I've been spending a lot of mana recently, so I guess I'll just go back to the underground church and rest in peace for a while.'

After making up his mind, Pajong left the old man's body without any regrets.

dump!

Then, the old man's body, which lost control, dies and falls to the floor.

The old man's soul has long since been destroyed by a high-ranking demon lord. As the demonic energy that protected his body disappeared, the dark spots that had been spread here and there began to rapidly expand. It was an erosion phenomenon caused by magic energy.

Pass...

After a while, the old man's body disappeared without a trace, leaving only the dirty priest's clothes behind.

"..."

Then, a single tear slowly flowed from the eyes of Clemens, who was still standing blankly.

408

408. Head Tower (6)

How much time has passed?

Clemens, who had been swaying slightly while standing, soon staggered to his feet and groaned.

"eww..."

Muscles and joints that have become stiff from not moving for a long time are screaming. Nevertheless, amidst the dull pain, his mind became clearer.

The person who had been controlling Clemens until now suddenly released his mental control and left. [Planting], who had taken over his ownership, seemed to be not satisfied with something, so he left him unattended and disappeared somewhere.

Thanks to this, Clemens, who had regained his sanity for the first time in recent years, looked at the broken remains of the old man for a long time with empty eyes. Traces of a colleague who once secretly hid in the Inquisition and cried and laughed together while waiting for the great harvest.

"Brother..."

Eventually, a cracked voice came out from the dry vocal cords.

"The [task] we had devoted so much time to was actually just an illusion created by someone..."

A lot of information that I had been just accepting in a dazed mind, little by little, begins to be reorganized in my head, forming a clear meaning. And the conclusion drawn from it is a terrible truth that is

-Wow! This is too dangerous!

-be careful! If you make a mistake, you will be caught!

-Hurry and run away!

-Hurry quickly!

Who on earth were they?

Did the mind suppressed by strong control simply create a vain delusion?

Or did another incarnation of the main god extend a hand to him in place of Sobong, which was a false salvation?

'Perhaps, the [repentance] they talked about may also be another axis of evil, just like sowing.'

It was something he couldn't understand now.

'but... ..'

Even if that were really the case, what does it all matter? Now, the meaningless instructions that remain in his mind have become the only driving force behind Clemens, who has lost everything.

In this way, Clemens tried tirelessly to squeeze out even a single drop of strength remaining in his body.

However, the limitations of a body that has been neglected for a long time are very clear.

Slurp!

In the end, Clemens fainted from exhaustion before even getting halfway down the mountain.

"... .."

Perhaps Clemens, who had fallen, was doomed to become food for wild animals. That is, if a group of paladins searching the suburbs hadn't found him at that moment.

"... It's here!"

"Really, just like Rebekah said, someone has collapsed!"

"I can sense traces of demonic energy in this person! Fortunately, there hasn't been any erosion yet, but it's dangerous if we don't clean it up right away!"

The Holy Knights soon took turns pouring out divine power toward Clemens.

It was no coincidence that they came here. After the giant demon species appeared in the suburbs, the search for 'devil seeds' was still in full swing.

"Thank you for your search. "First we have to save him."

Soon after, after some time, the person leading them appeared at the foot of the mountain.

"Rebekah!"

"He is an important reference. "We must keep him alive and hand him over to the Heresy Tribunal."

The person called 'Rebekah' looked like a boy who had not yet reached the age of maturity.

However, none of the Holy Knights took his instructions lightly or ignored them. Because that boy was the most responsible person for finding a large number of 'devil seeds' buried deep in the ground.

'It's really amazing. Where on earth did Rebekah come from?'

'The rumor is that he belongs to that secret intelligence organization, Arrange?'

'what? Was that a real department? Even so, how can a child like that?'

'Shh! Lower your voice. 'Maybe he's listening to our whole conversation!'

And not long after that, another boy came running out of breath, following Rebekah.

"Asley! Gasp! "Aren't you walking too fast?"

The boy's name was Jonathan MacAlpin. Originally, he was a student at the Theological Academy and should have been busy with final exams by now.

However, since the aftereffects of the Gray Plague became known, he has been under strict surveillance by Arranger under the pretext of probation. With his classmate Asley Becher, who was bedridden with the same symptoms.

"Ugh! I'm out of breath! You man! "I told you to wait a moment!"

Even after joining his group, Jonathan had a hard time catching his breath for a long time. Although he has gained a lot of weight since immediately after suffering from the Gray Plague, he still has not regained his former physical strength.

Rebekah, who was looking at him with cold eyes, answered in a cold voice.

"I'm sure you've told me this many times already, Jonathan. "My name is Liv, not Astley."

"What is he saying now? Astley. "You are my classmate, Astley Bettcher."

"Astley's consciousness no longer exists. "I am just borrowing his body for a while to protect him, who is now an empty vessel."

"What nonsense are you talking about? What happened to your hair? I feel like a completely different person these days. "Is that also an aftereffect of the Gray Plague?"

"... .."

I can't speak at all.

Rebekah shook her head and turned around. He wondered how long

he would have to keep Jonathan by his side, who had almost no aftereffects.

"Huh? Hey Astley! Are you going down as soon as you arrive? Now that we're up, let's take a look at the scenery... .."

"... .."

"... Is he really leaving? hey! "Hold on there for a moment!"

* * *

Rebekah made two mistakes that she regretted for the rest of her life.

One is that, in opposition to the majority opinion of escaping to the normal world, he led part of his clan to the Delcross dimension.

Rather than being trapped in the body of a homunculus and living like an ordinary, inferior human being, I was determined to die as a noble Kornsim, even if it meant dying. As a result, he really lost most of his clan.

Another is that, due to his own mistake, he handed over the Oracle, his clan's treasure, into the hands of the Empire.

'Bethsheba... ..'

It was probably unavoidable. At the time, no one in the Kornsim clan expected her to be an [Oracle].

That's because there was no one who could properly understand her mind, which was completely separated from the mind of the clan.

'It was difficult to see Bethsheba as a normal member of Kornsheim in the first place.'

As a child, she was involved in an accident that a clan that could predict the future should have avoided, and suffered serious head injuries.

As a result, she developed a severe mental defect and was unanimously banished from the clan's mental link.

It may have been essential to offer Bethsheba, who was beautiful in appearance, to the 16th Emperor as a token of peace.

Not only was he completely separated from his clan, but he was the only pure-blooded Kornsim who could easily deal with the inferior humans of the Delcross dimension.

Rebekah realized her big mistake when she first saw the third prince of the empire born to Bethsheba. The essence of the clan they believed had been completely lost was shining vividly in the young prince's eyes.

Now, Rebekah can be sure.

'Bethsheba awakened as an oracle a long time ago. Maybe it was all her own calculation that she didn't avoid that accident, that she created a mental defect, and that she was expelled from her clan's connections.

And she succeeded in stealing the precious essence of the clan from the tribe!

'But why?'

Why did Bethsheba let go of her glorious position as an [Oracle] and push her own fate down such a rough and thorny path?

Now that she was dead, no one could know.

Anyway, bygones are bygones. As the leader of the few remaining clans, Rebekah had the duty to find the next oracle and return it to the Kornsim clan.

'The next Oracle will have already appeared in the world.'

Rebekah was sure.

This could be guessed by looking at the actions of Seonghwang, the current Oracle. He was trying not to go against cause and effect as much as possible, and was moving as if the water was flowing.

It's as if they don't want to mess with someone's firm will in the

slightest.

'Perhaps they are trying to avoid direct conflict of perceptions.'

Normally, the next Oracle is not born until the previous Oracle dies.

Of course, this does not mean that there was no time when the two coexisted. Although it is rare, in that case, one person ended their life by suicide.

'but... ..'

Nevertheless, Rebekah already knew of a precedent in which two oracles successfully coexisted for a long time.

So, who will be the next [Oracle] he is looking for?

* * *

"Why are you doing that? "What makes you uncomfortable, sir?"

Sir Robert, who had been fiddling with his ears since a while ago, had managed to notice that Seongjin's concentration was broken, and asked.

"No, Sir Robert. "My ears have been itching since a while ago."

"If you're having a hard time, how about taking a break for a while?"

"Uh, it's okay. "The story you're telling me about 'The Devil's Curse' is very interesting, isn't it?"

While Seongjin was taking exorcist classes, preparations for the business trip were progressing steadily.

After the competition between Lord Kurt and Lord Maria, which was a close battle until the end, the final number of resident knights was completely decided.

"Hot hot hot!"

With black bruises around his eyes, Sir Kurt bursts into excited laughter.

This was a decision made after a friendly exchange of fractures during a sparring match with Sir Maria, followed by a heavy drinking match.

"Lowering! I won't be able to feel safe if you send that untrustworthy guy away. "I will follow you too!"

"No, Sir Maria. "One of the senior knights should remain at Jinju Palace and manage the other knights."

"Yes, Sir Maria. I will have a lot of fun experiences and come back safely, so in the meantime, please take care of your home. Let's buy a bottle of good alcohol to commemorate! Hot hot hot!"

Sir Kurt was just excited, not knowing what hardships would unfold in the future.

It seemed like everything was properly prepared.

Except for one guy who has been particularly annoying to Seongjin recently.

"what? Owen. "What happened this time?"

How many times has it already been today? Seongjin glared at the guy who peeked his head through the door again.

Then, Owen seemed uncharacteristically hesitant and spoke cautiously.

"Hey, Mores... .."

"huh?"

"... .."

"what? why? what?"

Then the guy twitched his mouth for a moment, then shook his head with a sullen expression.

"No, nothing."

"What? hey! "Why are you doing this so early?"

"Um, sorry. Well then, good luck."

When Owen turns around like that, the drooping chicken feathers look particularly pitiful.

what? No matter how you look at it, it's nothing, right?

That bastard, why are you acting like that these days?

409

409. Head Tower (7)

As time passed day by day, the day arrived when Seongjin had to leave the imperial capital.

However, even though the morning of departure was bright, the air in Jinju Palace was as calm as usual.

'Is it because I went there once before? I feel like everyone is going to do that on this business trip.'

It seemed like Seongjin was the only one who felt strangely agitated, as if it was anticipation or anxiety. He thought, trying to ignore that uncomfortable feeling.

'okay. I'm not even visiting Oji, so what's the big deal? I'll finish it quickly and come back soon!'

Meanwhile, Seongjin had one more audience with Seonghwang. Of course, since there was a record, Seongjin tried his best to reassure Seonghwang during the conversation.

"Nothing will really happen this time. As I said before, I obtained some quality information about Giacomo Milo's hideout. "If we successfully infiltrate, it will be easy to apprehend him."

"infiltration."

When Seonghwang pinpointed a word that bothered him, Seongjin was a little embarrassed and rolled his eyes.

"Uh, infiltration... Yeah, that means... .."

"... .."

"just... A little trick... Let's do the same thing, that's what it means!
"Even if you blindly go looking for them with a bunch of knights, they won't just hand over Giacomo Milo's recruits."

Seongjin, who had said that far, closed his eyes tightly.

Err, I don't know. First of all, let's talk about it briefly!

Wouldn't it be better to say something in advance and get scolded rather than having an accident and getting caught later?

"All we can do is raid one of their small branch organizations. Of course, Lord Massaine won't allow it, so it's a bit of a problem for him to sneak out of the group and attempt Auror concealment. But how could it not work? "My informant Dasha will also follow."

"... .."

"This is nothing, father. What's more important is what comes next! Once I've captured Giacomo Milo, I'd like to visit some native northern nobles on my way back. "It seems like Branch Manager Schmidt is having a lot of trouble these days because they are interfering with our business in little ways."

"okay."

Fortunately, Seonghwang no longer asked for a detailed explanation of the 'infiltration'. Instead, I tilted my head and asked:

"However, the northern indigenous forces are not so formidable. "I think your group is too small to put pressure on with all your might."

"hmm... .."

Seonghwang's point was valid.

The only members of the monster task force are Seongjin and Sir Robert.

Even if five or six more resident knights, including Sir Masaine and Commander Bruno, followed, it would be difficult to regard them as a proper military group.

If you think about it, there were fewer people than the first business trip with the Wolf Knights.

'But if you think about performing the duties of an exorcist, the number is excessive.'

We need to seize the opportunity to secretly infiltrate the lower level organization of the Penitent Church. So, for the prince's business trip, the number of people was reduced as much as possible.

'Besides, I wonder what will happen to the northern part... ..'

Of course, since it was a completely unfounded premonition, Seongjin had no choice but to say this to Seonghwang again.

"We will be careful not to hastily provoke the northern powers. I will never do anything as dangerous as before. It's true."

"... .."

Judging from the way his gaze was returning, Seonghwang didn't seem to believe Seongjin's words very much. But despite this, his face looked surprisingly peaceful.

'I sent Lord Sharon to Logan and Sisley, so I thought you might be a little worried this time... ..'

It was truly unexpected.

Anyway, Seongjin continued to tell more trivial stories, and then said goodbye to Seonghwang a little early.

"Then I'll be back, father. There will be a government meeting that morning as well, so it might be difficult to come to say hello right before departure. 'I've entrusted the lunch box delivery to Katrina, so don't skip meals while I'm away."

Seonghwang then gave me a subtle look for a moment, and instead of greeting me, he left an incomprehensible request.

"Mores."

"yes?"

"For you without divine power to function as an exorcist, the role of the prepared exorcism tools will be more important than anything else. So, please take good care of the luggage you brought with you so as not to lose it."

"... ..?"

Seongjin looked puzzled for a moment, but then nodded obediently.

Yeah, whatever. Of course, tools are important.

* * *

The morning of the day of finally departure.

When Seongjin came out after finishing his morning exercise with light meditation, Amelia, who had come out early to see him off, approached him with a smile.

"Are you feeling okay? "It's been a while since I woke up from the hospital, so please don't overexert yourself and come home safely, Mores."

This time, Amelia prepared a thoughtful gift for Seongjin.

"Sister, this is... ..?"

"Aren't you a proper exorcist now? "I prepared it to help you carry exorcism tools."

What she carefully handed to Seongjin was a small bag with a strong belt. This bag is made of black leather with gorgeous silver thread embroidery and looks very luxurious.

"... "You didn't do this embroidery, did you?"

From the straight pattern of the main deity engraved in the center of the bag to the scripture text embroidered in stylish cursive.

"This is definitely not your skill."

Seongjin was a little relieved. If I had tried to do all of this on my own, my sister's fingers wouldn't have left needle marks by now.

Then Amelia laughs and replies.

"Hehe, did you get caught? I wanted to embroider it myself, but I felt like if I touched it, the beautiful bag would be ruined. "Still, I wrote the text myself."

After all, my sister is the best calligrapher in the Holy Empire!

Seongjin put in some exorcism tools in front of Amelia and proudly hung the bag on his waist.

Now that I'm equipped like this, I look like a pretty decent exorcist, right?

"It goes well with the knights' uniform. thank you "As expected, your aesthetic sense is excellent."

Then the devil twirled above Seongjin's head and snickered.

[Isn't it because it's all black? What sense is there? It seems like he can't use his four feet if he's just black.]

... shut up!

While Seongjin growled, Amelia took light steps and approached Owen, who was standing next to him.

"And this is for Brother Owen."

Owen, who had been shyly acting the other way until then, looked confused when Amelia suddenly brought him a gift.

What he received was also a bag similar in shape to Seongjin's. It is a luxury item with a passage from a military poem engraved on smooth, durable brown leather.

"Well, they're doing this to me too...""

When Owen, who was staring blankly at the bag, made a tearful

expression, Amelia smiled sadly at him.

"I'm sorry for not taking care of you sooner. In the past, when my brother suddenly went to the front line, I was just a child who was immature at everything. So I didn't know how to soothe my anxious feelings or how to pray for my brother's safety."

"Amelia... .."

"But now I'm different too. "I learned what I could do for my precious family, and I learned to trust and wait for them after doing everything I could."

When Owen sniffled and couldn't say anything, Amelia smiled while gently holding his hand.

"I will pray every day, so please come back safely with Mores, brother."

Seongjin thought.

"It's an angel! After all, our sister Amelia is an angel who came down to brighten the underworld!"

Amelia even prepared a gift for Red. It was an empty lamp with a small plate inside.

"Because I can't carry the fairy's plate with me on my travels. "I created a small space where the fire fairy can rest."

Seongjin, who accepted the pretty lamp, was a little impressed.

If it looks like this, even if the devil is inside, it can be disguised as just an ordinary lantern, right?

[Wow!]

Although it was natural, the reaction of the demon king who was involved was truly violent.

[what? What is this? Is it so pretty?]

He was bustling around the lamp and making a fuss. As he is a person who likes flashy things, he seems to have quickly fallen in love with the old-fashioned decorations of the lamp.

[That guy always wears black taryeong, but he has better taste than I thought, right?]

Seongjin firmly hung the small lamp next to the saddle.

Then, the demon lord flies over as if he had been waiting and quickly lands inside the lamp.

[Heeheehee!]

Amelia looked at that figure in wonder.

"How? I'm so glad. "It looks like the fire fairy likes the gift, too?"

Seongjin sighed slightly.

Demon King, I think you're lucky that no one else can hear your foolish laughter. Because it seems like you still have the image of a mysterious fairy.

After saying goodbye, it was time for Seongjin to finally get on the horse.

"... Are you really planning to go horseback riding, sir?"

Lord Masain, who returned from fixing the condition of the resident knights and carriage, asked with surprised eyes.

"huh? uh. "Just until we leave the ecliptic."

Once he was out of the Emperor's favor, he planned to stay comfortably in the carriage as before.

But now that you've built up recognition as a prince, shouldn't you at least look good in front of the imperial subjects?

"But you... .. ?"

"Why, Sir Martha?"

"No, I mean... .."

For some reason, Masain trailed off and began to look closely at his surroundings. From the resident drivers checking the harness and equipment to the workers bustling about moving the luggage onto the wagon.

"... What is this again? "Is there any luggage that hasn't been moved yet?"

"ah! That was handed over from the administration this morning. "Seeing as it says to handle it with care, it is probably an exorcism tool that is as fragile as holy water."

"Seongsu-woo? no way? "The long thing looks exactly like a coffin to me?"

"Shh! What ominous sound is that? now! "This is the last time, so let's hurry up and get it over with."

"Let's go to sleep, hurry..." ... !"

But the dog he is looking for is nowhere to be seen. Lord Masaine asked again with a slightly serious look on his face.

"Now that I think about it, I don't think I've seen your wolfdog at all recently."

"uh? Ah, Max."

Seongjin scratched his cheek.

"Max went to have fun for a while. "I thought you wanted to run errands and see your friend?"

"... yes? errand... .."

"don't worry. He will come back whenever he feels like it. "Because you can find where I am no matter how far away it is."

"... ..?"

Masain's questions seemed to be increasing, but there was no time to answer them anymore. If I wanted to get to Regina by today, I had to hurry up from now on.

Wow-

As soon as the main gate of the imperial palace opened, fierce cheers immediately surrounded Seongjin and his group.

"Your Majesty Mores!"

"Savior of Bathurst Spirit!"

"Look over there! "I heard you were blessed by an ancient fairy, and there really is a small fire fairy hovering by your side!"

The subjects of the imperial capital wholeheartedly welcomed the fire fairy and prayed for Seongjin's safe return. It seems that at some point everyone became familiar with the existence of 'fairies'.

"... .."

Seongjin, who was momentarily taken aback by the unexpected reaction, straightened his back and rode on amidst cheers.

At least for now, he hoped that he would be seen as a proud member of the Holy Family in their eyes.

* * *

Wow~

A faint wolf howl could be heard from somewhere.

"It's a strange thing. "Wild wolves probably don't live around here."

Ambrosius smiled softly at the siblings, who were pricking up their ears with round eyes.

"Do not worry. Two minutes down. "Wild animals do not dare to enter the cities of Cyprus."

Logan and Sisley were currently heading to the mouth of the Breeze

River on a boat with Ambrose.

"Okay, now we're there."

How long did it flow along with the current? When the tall gray tower opposite his lighthouse came into view, Ambrose raised his hand in pride.

"Master Logan, Master Sisley. "That building is the 'Tower of the Head' in Ambrosia, the most famous historic site in Cyprus."

410

410. Head Tower (8)

Originally, the Holy Empire's punitive force should have been out to the distant ocean by now. As soon as we arrived in Cyprus, we were scheduled to join the navy there and set sail immediately.

But for a moment, I was anxious about not being able to send a punitive force right away...

Unlike the first day, the council members began to continue to delay departure. The reason was that serious safety concerns were raised regarding the secret weapon, [Ancient Fire], which was scheduled to be the center of the operation.

First of all, the ships owned by the Cyprus Navy are made entirely of wood, and there are no suitable islands in the distant ocean to which they can urgently take refuge.

However, let's say one of the ships catches fire due to poor management. Due to the nature of the [ancient fire] that spreads rapidly even on the water, it was obvious that other ships around would also be caught up in the fire.

It would not be enough to drown the large army that had been amassed in the deep sea; if one made a mistake, one would also lose the precious prince and princess of the Holy Imperial Family.

If this actually happens, let alone the loss of the Navy itself, there will never again be a diplomatic problem as serious as this.

"General Lysander. "Isn't the problem itself of leading the Navy and using chemical attacks that spread easily in water in the first place?"

Logan asked, trying to suppress his nervousness. Even at this

moment, when the council's debate continues sluggishly, the suffering of Cypriot citizens and Ortona refugees continues to grow day by day.

Then, Lysander, who was asked the question, responded with a slightly confused look.

"Other than that, there is no other effective way to deal with the sea monsters, sir."

Lysander of Helios.

He was the commander-in-chief of the Cyprus Navy, and was a veteran with experience of encountering and subduing sea monsters several times.

"I can tell you that their skin is tougher than that of any other whale in the world, and their fins that scuff the gunwales are enough to sink a fishing boat with a single blow. "It's impossible to inflict proper damage with just spears and harpoons."

"... .."

"Fortunately, they are more vulnerable to fire than our military ships."

But there was another reason why Logan was really impatient. In his view, the controversy over this [ancient fire] is only superficial.

Logan's impressions from observing all of the council meetings so far were as follows.

'It looks good. So, it was very unsightly for them to take possession of the ancient method of making fire and set it up on their own.'

'So what are you going to do? A fight between factions that show off their guts by saying, 'Are you saying you won't use our secret weapon now?'

And now the debate is slowly turning into 'For safety's sake, share ancient fire recipes with the world!' Or give us something instead.

'Who are you forcing this on now? If the activities at the top end

decline and the fishing industry stops, who do you think will dry out and die first? uh?' It is showing signs of turning into a confrontation between factions.

This was a problem that resulted from the unique nature of Cyprus as a 'confederation of cities' united solely for profit, rather than as a unified country.

Rather than dwelling on immediate fishing losses, it will be beneficial for your city in the long run to take advantage of the current situation and gain a relative advantage over other cities.

Naturally, the council members who represent them are bound to be more intent on taking away the handful of land under their feet rather than on the enemies outside the fence.

Logan's complexion, which had been silently observing the unfolding situation, became paler day by day.

"Brother..."

Sisley looked up at Logan with a worried face. Because I knew very well how much he tried to suppress his impatience even while leading his punitive force to Cyprus.

But fortunately, Logan managed to maintain his composure in the situation.

"... I have suggested several times so far to hurry up, but there is no good reason to completely persuade them. "It is probably natural to ensure the safety of firearms before setting sail."

Kuuk.

The hand holding Arjuna's handle takes strength.

"But looking at the way things are going, it seems like the voices of those centered around Helios are still louder. If we leave it like this, there is a high possibility that we will sail smoothly with Elder Chryses at the center. "If we, as outsiders, try to urge them, we may end up delaying their decision due to unnecessary caution and hostility."

Logan has long experience leading vocal Republican personnel and actually taking charge of the front lines.

So I knew it well. Let them talk about whatever they want, and it is much better to solve real problems.

"Lord Valerie."

"Yes, sir?"

"Could you change the order of the church audit that was scheduled? Originally, we were planning to proceed step by step from Helios towards the northwest cities, but I think it would be better to disperse the personnel and audit several cities simultaneously."

Logan decided to divert the attention of the council members who were busy fighting.

'you. The plan was to create a sense of crisis, saying, "If you don't do it properly and finish it, you won't be given time to properly prepare for the Heresy Tribunal's audit."

"Of course, it will be difficult to conduct a high-intensity audit right away with dispersed personnel. So, just set the mood for now. "After we set sail, I will not stop you even if you gather again and dismantle each and every pillar of their church into powder."

Then Sir Valerie asked back with a very embarrassed expression.

"Why are you telling me that, sir? "There is a separate person responsible for this audit."

"... .."

Logan looked at Sir Valerie blankly.

Although he is always teased by Lee Seong-jin for being a pushover, he is not completely oblivious. Every time I listen to the argument between his brother and Sir Valerie, there is bound to be something that comes to my mind.

-Reported to the Inquisition, Sir Valery. What was going around in

eastern Anatolia was simply a plague. Don't just send inquisitors to capture sick people.

-No, why are you telling me that, sir?

-Well, maybe you have a lot of influence in the Inquisition?

-... On what basis do you say that? I am only a junior inquisitor. I am definitely not the person you think I am!

Logan, who is sensitive to emotional changes in Auror, could not help but notice that the red-haired Inquisitor's disgusted reply was a lie.

'okay. Sir Valery has more influence within the Knights of St. Marsyas than I thought.'

And Logan's judgment was appropriate. The very next day after making that request, the priests and inquisitors who had gathered in Helios to give thanks began to disperse to various cities.

"Thank you, Sir Valerie."

"So you misunderstand, sir. "I have no idea about this."

lie.

Logan didn't comment on the matter any further, but simply patted the sulking Inquisitor on the shoulder.

This may be all that Logan can do as an outsider. The next thing to do is to do his 'personal' relief work with as much patience as possible until the council members' feet fall on fire.

In this process, Logan's increased 'pocket money' was used quite usefully.

"Lord, thank you so much."

"You said you were from Delcross? There are still people like you in the Empire... .."

"... "Thank you for your help."

Ortona's refugees, who received simple groceries, thanked Logan with extremely awkward expressions.

That wasn't all. Sisley came with several priests and personally rolled up his sleeves. It was the time of a saint who had been doing volunteer work for a long time.

"Perhaps if we bring the paladins of the punitive force, we will be able to heal more people, brother."

"That must be difficult, Sisley. What moves the paladins is a clear military action. "No matter how much of a relief effort it is for the citizens, if you don't do it carefully, you will eventually face backlash from the council."

As he wandered around the city, Logan was sometimes able to pick up information like this.

"Hey, how long do we have to wait for the boat to float? "It's difficult to even get a meal now, so how about we head north?"

"North? "What do you do there?"

"Didn't you hear the rumor? I heard that if you go to the north, a certain merchant will arrange a job for you. "They don't discriminate against Ortona refugees and the wages aren't bad, so I think people are flocking to the north quite a bit recently."

"huh? What is there to pay so many people? "Which top is it?"

"These days, the famous 'Bertrand & Lee' is hiring people. I found out that it was because of a project to repair a large mine shaft. That's not the end. "I heard they even promised to use the workers as miners once the tunnel repairs were completed?"

"Miner... .."

"If you don't want to go there, a new large lumber yard upstream in the northwest is also fine."

Every time he heard such stories, Logan couldn't help but think of Mores, who confidently boasted in front of him.

-okay? This 'Bertrán & Lee' becomes a logistics transport passage connecting the northernmost tip of Ortona and the Imperial Capital!

-Northern Ortona?

-okay! Starting with 'Bertrán & Lee', we will gradually make Ortona's economy self-reliant!

At the time, the guy was explaining so passionately that I could only half-heartedly respond. I was more concerned about whether he could go that far.

'Yes, Mores. Maybe it really will turn out as you say.'

Of course, it was still difficult to be optimistic like this. Haven't Logan experienced too many despairing times to just have hope?

It was around that time that council member Ambrose proposed this.

"Looking at the atmosphere, it looks like the punitive force will set sail safely in a few days. Before that, would you like to tour Cyprus with me and see the sights?"

* * *

Ambrose of Helios.

The son of Chryses, a powerful figure in Cyprus, and the youngest member of the council. He is better known to the world as the 'Prince of Cyprus'.

After being caught up in an unexpected fire that happened not long ago, he showed some strange behavior.

- As an aside, I would like to express my thanks to both of you. If it weren't for you, would I have survived until now? So, will you please stay at my father's mansion this evening? I hope you give me a chance to repay this favor in some small way.

The justification seemed plausible. However, his father might not know, but isn't this a suggestion that a critically ill patient with burns all over his body would make?

There was another strange thing.

In fact, he invited Logan and Sisley, but when the discussion fell through, he did not return to the mansion and continued to stay in the council building.

"Why doesn't he go back home? Chryses of Helios is the most powerful person in Cyprus. "I'm sure his house has better medicine and better doctors than here."

Seeing him undergoing arduous treatment in an uncomfortable location, Sisley expressed strong doubts.

"Perhaps it means that his mansion is not very safe."

Logan's answer was bitter. Quite a long time ago now. Because I was reminded of the relationship between King Ortona and his close friend Prince Benicio before they completely separated.

"There are cases in the world where parents and children are the biggest political enemies, Sisley."

"... Yes, I see."

Sisley's face also darkens. This is because she recalled the contents of the [Delcross Chronicles], in which she ends up dying at the hands of the Holy Emperor.

Then, Ambrose, who had recovered to some extent, made a suggestion. He asked if I would like to tour Cyprus with him.

As expected, it was an unexpected proposal, but Logan thought it was a good opportunity.

There were limits to personal relief work, and it was not possible to wander around Cyprus alone as a prince of a foreign country.

'In that case, it would be better to go with Councilor Ambrose and learn more about the situation of the Ortona refugees in Cyprus.'

Sisley also readily agreed.

Of course, a useless insectivore ran amok nearby.

[No, descendant! What have you been listening to me until now? How many times have I told you not to face that insidious person if possible? ... !]

Logan easily ignored his words.

Even if Ambrosius had other plans, how could he, who had barely woken up from his illness, pull off such a trick in front of the Sword Master?

In this way, Logan and Sisley, along with Ambrose, took a small cruise ship and sailed down the Breeze River to its mouth.

"Okay, now we're there. Mr. Logan, Mr. Sisley. "That building is the 'Tower of the Head' in Ambrosia, the most famous historic site in Cyprus."

Ambrose smiled, pointing to the large gray tower.

Although he still had bandages wrapped around his body and had a limp on one leg, he was playing the role of an excellent guide for his siblings today.

The place he chose as the last famous place was the gray, gloomy 'Muri Tower'.

"There is a ghost story that in ancient times, prisoners' heads were really piled up. But now it is nothing more than an old and insignificant relic."

Ambrosius added an explanation casually, but Logan frowned as he sensed a trace of subtle emotion in his remarks.

truth... And lies? What on earth?

That was it! Sisley, who had been staring at the gray tower from a distance, suddenly began to tremble as if he was startled by something.

"Brother!"

As Logan, who was startled, helped her up, Sisley grabbed his sleeve with a white face.

"There, there's a head..." ... !"

411

411. Head Tower (9)

Intense precognition often comes when the mind is at its most defenseless.

The reason why most of them take the form of precognitive dreams is that the time when people are asleep means that human mental boundaries are weakened.

When such a broken spirit suddenly encounters a powerful symbol of disaster -

Foresight quickly penetrates the mind like a secretly spreading fog, and soon completely engulfs one's vision.

* * *

Nodding.

Sisley was half asleep.

For a moment, the girl pricked up her ears to the sound of a wolf howling from afar, but then lowered her eyes as if not to offend the council member who had taken it upon herself to guide her.

Perhaps it was because they were a little tired after several days of intense relief work. At first, the gentle scenery flowing along the slow flow of the river did not seem very inspiring to the young girl.

How long had it been since I was leaning against the boat in such a dazed mood? Sisley felt the calm waters of the Breeze River suddenly roiling violently.

"... .. ?"

What is this?

Sisley looked around in confusion. He had been bored by the peaceful scenery just a moment ago, but the boat he was on suddenly found itself in the middle of a storm.

The waves hit the boat violently. It was an ugly sight, as if a small cruise ship could capsize at once.

The riverbank on the other side was not safe either. Above the rapidly rising river, trees caught in the strong wind are shaking as if they will be uprooted and blown away at any moment. It felt as if all the anger in the world was rushing into this place at once.

Rumble! bang!

Huge dark clouds swirled in the black sky, scattering ominous thunderstorms.

and-

At the center of all the disasters was Ambrosia's [Tower].

"... ..!"

The tower that raised its head towards the sky alone in a hellish landscape seemed like a symbol representing all the despair and death that this storm would bring.

'There's something over there...' 'There's something scary!'

There is no doubt. It was clear that there was something evil and terrible in that tower. Otherwise, how could it be possible to evoke such ominous foreboding and fear just by looking at it for a moment?

Wiggle-

At that time, the shape of the head tower that had been standing still began to slightly twitch.

No, maybe what I thought I was standing quietly until now was just an illusion. If you think about it carefully, wasn't that tower always

crying loudly toward the sky?

The sound of the wind whipping around as if it were tearing apart is actually a desperate scream from the tower.

'Head.'

okay. If you look closely, each stone that makes up that sparse wall is a severed human head. Hundreds of heads piled high together, covered in red blood, let out a loud sound toward the sky.

Ah-ah-ah-ah-!

Sisley trembled.

How can I express all these unrealistic scenes in just one word?

"excuse me... .."

The girl let out a helpless breath and spoke.

"The head over there... ..!"

"... what?"

"Brother! Over there, the heads are screaming terrifyingly... ..!"

"Sisle!"

Logan, who realized that his sister's condition was unusual, grabbed the girl's shoulders and shook her violently.

"Why are you doing this all of a sudden? Come to your senses, Sisley!"

Flash.

Only then did Sisley come to his senses and look around.

"... ah?"

The son-in-law quickly calmed down.

The cool breeze from the river tickles my hair, and the sunset sky is clear without a single cloud.

There was no strong storm or strange, screaming tower. All that remains is the tension still constricting my body and the cold sweat seeping out profusely.

'It was a precognitive dream!'

Sisley could feel it intuitively.

A feeling that always comes after having a precognitive dream. This deep anxiety and fear.

'Besides, it's not that far into the future!'

The closer the event seen in the dream, and the greater the impact it had on Sisley himself, the more intense the precognitive dream would leave behind memories and emotions.

What's more, it's a nightmare that comes vividly even though I keep my eyes open.

Sisley stood up, struggling to strengthen his weak fists. I could tell what was at the center of this precognitive dream without having to look back closely.

"Head tower."

"huh?"

"I want to see that tower a little closer."

Logan was taken aback by the sudden words and looked at Sisley's condition.

Fortunately, my younger brother seemed to be in good spirits. Her body was still trembling occasionally, but the girl's eyes looking back at Ambrose were clear and straight.

"Please, Ambrose. "Can we go up the hill where the tower is?"

Upon hearing that request, Ambrose showed a subtle smile -

Wooooooo-

In the distance, a long wolf howl was heard again.

* * *

[Ambrosia's Head Tower] is a building that is quite worthy of being called a famous landmark.

Although it is quite noticeable as it stands alone on a hill, its actual height is less than three stories and it is poorly maintained.

"It's an old building."

Logan evaluated the tower in one word, which looked more unsightly as he got closer.

The pagoda, made up of stones of different sizes and shapes intertwined irregularly, was piled up in a mess with no particular style, making it impossible to guess when the pagoda was made.

In addition, the mud spread between the coarse stones had cracks here and there, making it look precarious as if it would collapse at any moment if the wind blew.

"haha. Compared to its reputation, it is a tower with nothing special. Did you say he was a Sorbonne teacher? "Thanks to the opera written by that playwright, the number of visitors to the Tower of Heads has increased significantly recently."

Slowly guiding his still uncomfortable body, Ambrosius continued to give friendly explanations to the siblings.

"In the past, the famous places in Cyprus were the council building and the civic square. But suddenly one performance started to become popular, and now this 'head tower' has become the most famous place representing Cyprus."

"okay."

Logan responded briefly and asked a question with some hesitation.

"But like that story, there really is... "Do you have anything?"

As in [Ambrosia's Head Tower], the question was whether there really was a severed human head in the tower.

Just because of Sisley's appearance earlier, Logan avoided mentioning 'head' directly. Fortunately, Ambrose seemed to understand his question correctly.

"well. That tower doesn't even have a decent entrance inside. "It's nothing more than a pile of empty stones."

"then..."

"Just a few years ago, part of the tower collapsed during a major typhoon. According to the workers who were mobilized for repairs at the time, they did not see anything like a human skull inside the actual tower."

With those words, they walked towards the tower in silence for a while.

Some time passed while we were climbing the hill, and now the sun had completely set and darkness was falling around us.

"Well, isn't that usually the way of mouth is?"

Ambrose stopped walking for a moment and continued his explanation, taking a deep breath as if it was difficult.

"The Ambrosia in the story is an ancient person who died before the empire was founded. However, it was during the reign of His Majesty the Fourth Emperor that the tower began to be properly recorded."

"Does that mean that the current tower is not the tower in the story?"

"yes. At least no one here thinks that Ambrosia built it herself."

Ambrosia of Eleusis.

It is said that she was the princess of Eleusis, an ancient city-state that is now extinct.

According to the story, at the time, Eleusis was in the midst of a war with Helios, where Ambrosia's lover died miserably.

Dongfeng, don't say that you pity him without thinking. I will call his name Brilliant Glory.

Ambrosia, deeply saddened, began to build a tower by collecting the dead heads of her compatriots one by one, starting with her lover's head. On this high hill that overlooks Helios at a glance.

And it is said that the tower eventually became a huge curse, ruthlessly sweeping away the enemy soldiers of Helios.

"But it was Eleusis that was actually destroyed in that war. Helios is one of the few cities that has survived unscathed from ancient times. "What clearer evidence can there be than this to prove that the story is entirely fiction?"

While talking like that, they finally reached the top of the hill. Beneath the tower that stands alone on the loose, desolate land where weeds have not grown properly.

"Well, how are you? Mr. Logan, Mr. Sisley. That is the famous Tower of Ambrosia. "It's so shabby that it's embarrassing to introduce it."

"... .."

Logan quietly looked up at the gray tower.

Is it because it's dark everywhere? Each of the stones that make up the tower is extremely shabby, as if it were someone's tombstone.

'They said it was just an empty stone tower.'

Even with Logan's keen senses, he could not detect any magical energy or curse energy.

but-

"Then what was that? That vague sense of truth and lies mixed together that I sometimes felt in Ambrose's words..."

It was a time when Logan was feeling strangely uncomfortable.

"Brother Logan."

Sisley, who had been silent the entire time, began to walk with a somewhat dazed look on his face.

"Sisley?"

"I also think this tower is Ambrosia's head tower."

"... what?"

Unlike Logan, who was embarrassed, Ambrosius' eyes, looking at Sisley's actions, flashed with a strong expression.

"Are you okay? Sisley. "What on earth are you talking about earlier?"

However, despite Logan's question, the girl slowly walked towards the tower and muttered as if she was possessed by something.

"This tower probably contains a strong curse."

"A curse..."

"I saw it clearly, brother. Because it was a sign of a curse that would plunge Cyprus into disaster. It must be down there-"

At that time, Ambrose cut the girl off as if he had been waiting and asked,

"Can you find it?"

Then he hurried over to Sisley and asked again. He walked so fast that it was hard to believe he had any aftereffects from his injury.

"Would Sisley know? "Which was the cornerstone that was first placed on this land by the person who built the tower a long time ago?"

"Maybe I can tell. That's over there..."

Even though he was staring at the whole scene, Logan could hardly understand what was going on.

However, the Sword Master's sensitive instincts whisper that Sisley's actions must be stopped immediately.

"Wait, Sisley!"

Logan, who was hurriedly running ahead of Ambrosius, saw an unconcealable joy on his face as he reflexively caught a glimpse of him.

"... ... ?!"

It was right then.

Cough!

Suddenly, the black shadow of an animal leapt up before their eyes.

It was the shadow of a gigantic wolf that is rarely seen around here.

"... ... !"

Before I could even be surprised by his sudden appearance-

Crack!

The beast hit the ground in an instant and rushed straight towards Sisley and Ambrosius.

Blame, blame, blame!

"Uh, it's dangerous! Councilor!"

"Hurry this way!"

The soldiers waiting behind to protect them are startled and pull out their swords.

But they couldn't rush straight towards the dangerous beast. Because

the prince of Delcross quickly blocked their path.

"for a moment! It's okay, just stop there!"

For a moment, everyone could not understand the prince's actions. Now that wild beast is running straight towards her saint, what kind of carefree... .. !

"Everyone, lower your weapons. Can't you clearly see the royal family's emblem over there?"

Due to the prince's repeated actions, the soldiers were finally able to clearly see the wolf's appearance.

"... .. ?"

But, just as he said, isn't it true that the wolf is wearing the brilliant imperial insignia wrapped around its neck like a cloak?

As the surprised soldiers stopped in their tracks, Logan lowered his hand that was touching Arjuna and let out a small sigh. The owner of the wolf dog probably placed it around for the safety of the dog that was wandering around alone.

As expected, Logan, who often used this method for his Rottweiler Roxana, was able to immediately identify the wolf as soon as he saw it.

"As you can all see, that dog is the property of the Delcross royal family. "It's not dangerous, so you can let your guard down."

OK-

Wow!

As if responding to his words, the wolf barked briefly at Logan. He then quickly walks up to Sisley and quickly grabs the girl's collar.

Hot!

"uh?"

Sisley suddenly came to a halt and turned his head towards the dog, which was hanging out with its collar in its mouth.

"... Max?"

Softly-

The wolf dog's tail wags as if it is happy. Of course, he was still pulling hard on her collar with his snout.

"Max! "Are you really Max?"

The little saint's face slowly brightens with a smile. Before she knew it, the fog that had settled in her mind had disappeared without a trace.

When the girl lightly stroked the wolfdog's head as if she couldn't believe it, the dog let go of the girl's collar and responded vigorously.

Wow!

Of course, his body still subtly blocks the gap between Sisley and the head tower.

At that moment, Logan saw a strange yet familiar silver-gray glow flash through the wolfdog's eyes.

* * *

"... under! Lowering!"

"huh?"

"Why are you dozing off with your eyes open? "Are you meditating right now?"

"uh... ... ?"

At Masain's call, Seongjin woke up and blinked. It seems that as soon as she left the imperial capital, she settled into her carriage and dozed off.

'No, that's not all. What was I doing? Clearly doing something

important...'!

I tried rubbing my eyes a few times with my hand, but my mind didn't seem to clear at all, as if there was fog.

When Seongjin couldn't come to his senses and kept making a blank expression, Lord Masain smiled as if he felt pity.

"Are you very tired? I'd like to tell you to sleep some more, but you really need to wake up now. Lowering. "The carriage has arrived in Regina."

"Regina..."

Only then did Seongjin blink and look back at the carriage window.

Indeed, the dazzling scenery of the city, brightening the darkness like daylight, is gradually getting closer.

It was Regina, a sleepy city where logistics from all over the continent gathered.

412

412. Seongjin Lee's Exploration Journal (1)

Even after arriving at the accommodation, Seongjin's dazed state continued. Like narcolepsy, you blink out of consciousness, but when you open your eyes, the surrounding scenery has changed at some point.

"You, you, you!"

Next to him, Edith repeatedly calls out to Seongjin and tries to wake him up.

[Lee Seong-jin, why are you doing this? Lee Seong-ji!]

"Lowering. "I will take you to your room right away."

Occasionally, the voices of the Demon King and Lord Masain could be heard.

'Everyone will be surprised. Hurry up and tell me it's okay... ..'

But unfortunately, I didn't have the spirit to move my mouth properly.

'It's still too early to feel safe. little bit more.'

As I was walking unsteadily with a clouded mind, I felt someone next to me grab my arm and support me. Of course, Seongjin was in no state to distinguish whether that person was Sir Martha or Edith.

I wonder if he was lucky that he didn't drop the devil's lamp he was holding on the floor.

'It's not over. I'm not sure what it is, but it's definitely something I need to do... 'Because there's still some left.'

But it will be soon.

While repeating thoughts that even he didn't know the meaning of, Seongjin walked unsteadily, following the guidance of Lord Martha and Edith.

... Papa pa paak!

Again, my blurred vision is filled with piles of dirt being dug up here and there. At first glance, it seemed like the front paws of a dog were diligently digging into the ground.

good. Good job, Max. Because it's right there... ..

"... Mores?"

But just then, there was someone who suddenly interrupted Seongjin's concentration.

It was Owen who went in first, found a place to stay, and came out.

"what? what's the matter?"

The guy approached with great strides and shook Seongjin's shoulder violently, instantly breaking his concentration.

"why are you like this? Are you okay? "Where does it hurt again?"

"uh. Noisy... "You idiot."

Seongjin frowned and waved his hand. I still have to concentrate, so please don't talk to me next to me.

"hey! If you're in pain, just say it hurts! "Don't feel frustrated and do it alone!"

"Don't make a fuss."

Seongjin frowned and held out one hand towards him. It was a method she used effectively in the past whenever Owen whined in annoyance.

"what... .. !"

At that moment, Owen was overly startled and took a step back, but Seongjin didn't have the presence of mind to pay close attention to his condition right now.

It's almost over now. Because it's all over...

"Let's talk tomorrow. Because it's nothing. "Go and sleep."

How are you? Here's a cute hoof skin to suit your taste. So, calm down and listen to me quietly. Don't forget to wear a sleep mask when you sleep.

When Owen suddenly became quiet, Seongjin's mind quickly drifted away from reality again.

Whistling- Whistling-

The scenery in front of me changes here and there.

Seongjin, who was diligently running somewhere with something in his mind, finally found the reliable new model he was looking for.

-... Max! It disappeared somewhere again and now... ... !

When the Holy Knight of White Conquest called him from afar, Seongjin responded loudly, wagging his tail.

Wow!

'... 'Keng?'

what. Why is my voice like this?

The moment you realize a strong sense of discomfort, your mind suddenly wakes up and returns to reality.

Blink.

Seongjin, who had been blinking his eyes as he stood there blankly, looked around carefully with his clear vision.

Then, I came face to face with Owen's frozen face, Sir Martha's worried face, and Edith's fierce face, one after another.

"what... .. ?!"

He also realized that he was holding his palm forward for no reason.

'wait for a sec. 'What am I doing now?'

Seongjin quickly retrieved his arm and opened his mouth as if nothing had happened.

"What's wrong with everyone? I'm okay. "Let's go back to the dorm."

"... Lowering!"

"iced coffee... .. "

However, unlike the two who sighed in relief, Owen still looked like he was greatly shocked by something.

what? This annoying guy.

"what? why? what?"

"... Yes?"

"Why are you doing that there?"

Then Owen flinched in surprise. He let out the breath he had been holding and let out a strange scream.

"Huh?!"

Then, without even having a chance to say anything more, Seongjin slowly took a step back and walked away!

"huh? Ah, nothing. nothing."

"You... now?" "

"Well, I guess you're tired. Take a rest! I'll see you tomorrow!"

Owen, who half-heartedly said goodbye to the evening, turned around and hurled himself out across the hallway.

"... ... ?"

Seongjin, who couldn't figure out what was going on, furrowed his eyebrows.

What on earth? Why is he acting like that all of a sudden?

Meanwhile. Owen, who was so embarrassed by her that he fled to his room, mumbled helplessly while frantically combing through her messy hair.

"... I couldn't believe it... "Is it really true?"

* * *

A few days ago from now.

When he first told his maid about the business trip, Owen had a lighthearted attitude. Her thoughts were, 'She has nothing to do, so it would be nice if she could help Mores and do quests as well.'

"yes? "You're going on a trip with Prince Mores?"

Carrie, the dedicated maid, also seemed to be secretly welcoming.

"No, it's not a trip, it's just a business trip."

"Whether it's a trip or a business trip, isn't that what it is? "What's important is that we go together for everything."

The old maid hummed and snorted.

"I knew it would be like this someday. I thought that our generous Mr. Owen would quickly reconcile with his younger brother. So, when are you leaving?"

"hmm? ah. Probably in a few days..."

"Then I have a lot of things to prepare! "First of all, I guess I'll have to make a few more new shirts for our eccentric Owen."

"Stop it, Carrie. "Didn't you make enough new clothes a while ago?"

Owen responded by roughly taking off his clothes, and Carrie quickly approached to serve him.

and then-

Fluffy!

When the bright red pendant hanging from the collar of his shirt falls down and reflects the light, he flinches back in surprise.

"... .."

Owen glanced sideways at Carrie, who was stiff.

If you think about it, she was always like that. Even though she waited on Owen warmly by his side, didn't she tactfully avoid his hand when her pendant came out?

Naturally, I had no choice but to ask this.

"Carry. "Does Carrie know about this necklace?"

Then the old maid quickly relaxed her expression and answered.

"Isn't that obvious? "Even though I was like this, in my prime, I was one of the senior maids who only served the empress ladies."

"Right."

Was it said that she was the dedicated maid of honor for Empress Bethsheba? She is a mysterious woman who No. 9 once called a 'psychopath', and who left Owen this strange terminal note.

"That necklace is definitely a relic of Bethsheba."

"... .."

"Many people misunderstand him. But the Bethsheba this person saw was not an ordinary person."

It had already been more than 20 years since the Empress left, but the beautiful and elegant woman still remained vivid in Carrie's memories.

-Be careful not to touch it.

When one of the maids who had arbitrarily touched the empress's belongings collapsed with foam at the mouth, he looked down at her and warned her in a cold voice.

-Once you get caught up in a huge cause and effect that you cannot handle, there is no turning back.

Carrie didn't dare doubt her words at all. So even on this day when she served Owen, she was careful not to accidentally touch her necklace.

"It is the pride of my life to have had that great person by my side, even if just for a moment."

Carrie's eyes, looking at Owen, were filled with faint sadness.

"And then to help his grandson. What greater honor could there be than this as a servant of the imperial palace?"

"Carrie, I... .."

He is not your father's biological son.

Owen, who was about to respond like that, suddenly became speechless and closed his mouth.

However, the maid who had been taking care of Owen for a long time seemed to understand clearly what he was unable to say and swallow.

"Whatever you're worried about, it's different from what you think. Bethsheba's lost necklace has safely returned to Owen. "That is definitely not a coincidence."

"... .."

"And even though you carry that mysterious object with you every day, aren't you still fine, unlike the others? "What could be more proof of Owen's extraordinariness and that he is Bethsheba's honorable grandson?"

Owen silently fingered the bright red pendant. A gem that emits a magical red light under the hazy moonlight.

It is a mysterious terminal that gives Owen a quest and helps him access the Pangea Chronicle.

'Bethsheba is the queen...'

Naturally, this question arose.

What on earth was the Empress Dowager, who was said to be the original owner of this, doing?

* * *

It was that night that I received an unexpected report from No. 9.

"what? Sonjin Lee? "That's Mores' nickname?"

"Yes, I say so, sir."

Owen couldn't help but be confused.

'Why does that kid have that nickname? There is some correlation between Mores and Lee Son-jin.'

Owen, lost in thought for a moment, looked down at No. 9, who was flushed with anticipation.

"So number 9. What you want to say is that Lee Son-jin is the 'newbie Lee Seong-jin'? "Is that possible?"

Then No. 9's eyes widened. Because he was relieved that he had completed his mission easily.

"Then isn't it?"

"Maybe not? "Is the pronunciation slightly different?"

"yes?"

"different."

"... yes?"

When I first taught him, he seemed to be able to follow along easily, but it seemed that number 9 was confused about the pronunciation of his name.

'Well, it's not unreasonable. No matter how much you think about it, it's not a Delcross-style name.'

When Owen first heard that name, didn't he think there were all kinds of names like that in the world?

Nevertheless, the reason why he still remembers the correct pronunciation was because Lee Seong-jin's name was accurately conveyed to him as a thought several times. Because I always had to use thoughts when talking to silent villains.

'Thoughts accurately convey the essence. So I joined that group... Well, I guess I know the name of that strange group.'

However, even if Mores was truly a newbie, as far as Owen knew, the situations the two faced were completely different.

"Newbie said he was living in the imperial capital, going through all sorts of hardships. She could never be Mores."

Owen recalled the day he first met the newbie. The baby goat showed its petal-like hooves and spoke sadly? Perhaps it was Owen's distorted memory.

-What should I say? The neighborhood I lived in was originally a bit rough.

The little goat friend neatly slaughtered the players and explained his situation to Owen.

-Everyone there had to learn these skills to survive. I'm happy if I look skilled in your eyes. That would be perfect proof that I survived alone until now.

Owen firmly believed the baby goat's words. Otherwise, there would be no way to explain the unusually skilled killing skills of a young

friend.

But isn't Mores living comfortably in the imperial palace, under the care of his father?

"You have to keep the possibility open. At this point, how about investigating further with Prince Mores? To do that, I will first follow you... .."

"But that can't be possible."

Owen declared.

"Besides, if it's Mores, wouldn't I be able to watch from the side in the future? So, No. 9, please remain in the ecliptic and continue to explore newbies."

"but... .."

"Now, let's memorize the name properly. What if I get confused about something important? Now, try pronouncing it properly again. "Lee Seong Jin."

"Sane... jin."

"okay. That's it, number 9!"

"... .."

Number 9 eventually returned to the monkey watchtower with a droopy expression. In that way, the events of that night seemed to pass over as a simple incident.

However, the human heart is truly something that one does not know. As he stayed close to Mores every day for the quest, Owen couldn't help but become more and more concerned about No. 9's words.

'Why on earth does Logan call that guy Lee Son-jin? Originally, the two of you weren't close enough to exchange nicknames, right? I don't think Amelia, who is close to Mores, doesn't know much... ..'

However, if you asked me directly, it was quite shocking.

Whatever nicknames you and Logan call each other, why on earth is Owen curious about that?

'... Oh, I'm going crazy!'

Before leaving the imperial capital like that. Even during his final audience with the Holy Emperor, Owen was so frustrated that he could not concentrate on the conversation.

Then Seonghwang let out a small sigh and muttered.

"Being the eldest child who has to lead the other children, I am so clueless... .."

"yes? father. "Did you just order something from Soja?"

"No, no. Have a safe trip, Owen."

"... ..?"

413. Seongjin Lee's Exploration Journal (2)

While I was doing this, the day of departure arrived.

"Thank you for the gift, sister. mind... The fire fairy is also very happy. "I will treasure it during my visit."

Holding in his hand the small lamp given to him by Amelia, Mores walks around with an uncharacteristically bright face.

Owen thought as he looked at the scene.

'Yes, Mores is not a newbie. He's always been a somewhat calm and dignified guy, right? 'It wasn't easy to let go in front of people like that.'

Leaving the imperial palace, Mores straightens his back and skillfully steers his horse. Unusually for her, she seemed 'calm and dignified.'

Then Owen thought again.

'Yeah, no matter how much I think about it, that guy isn't that cute newbie. Because he was a mountain goat that looked extremely cute even when he was slaughtering players with his sword.'

Above all, if Mores was truly a newbie, there was no way he would have pretended not to know Owen even after meeting him. The various hardships she went through together with Lee Seong-jin must have had that much weight.

As Owen thought about that, he suddenly felt a strange sense of discomfort.

'... wait for a sec. But when have I ever told a newbie my name?'

I did introduce myself at first. 'Owen Lockwood'. But in Delcross, isn't Owen officially 'Owen Klein', the first prince of the empire?

'no! Still, there's no way Mores wouldn't know. He knows my real name, right? So, from a long time ago, you've been calling me Lockwood... ... !'

hmm? But didn't Mores say that he has no memories of the past now?

'... uh? 'Huh?'

Owen, remembering this unexpected possibility, broke into a profuse cold sweat on his horse.

'Now that you think about it, the newbie said that the graphics were broken at that time and he couldn't see anything. So he was using a cheap kid's skin... ... !'

If that's the case, there's a chance that even if a newbie sees me, he won't recognize me right away... ... ?

'... no way!'

Owen was deeply confused and hesitated for a while. What awakened his spirit was the loud cheers of his subjects that he heard as soon as he entered the imperial road.

"Your Majesty Mores!"

"Savior of Bathurst Spirit!"

"Look over there! "I heard you were blessed by an ancient fairy, and there really is a small fire fairy hovering by your side!"

Mores, engulfed in cheers, looked every bit like a prince.

A flawless outfit of conquest, and a strong prayer that secretly flows out despite being well-prepared. The light golden hair that I see every day shines with a brilliant platinum color, as if wearing a sacred halo.

"..."

Owen, who had been distracted by Mores' appearance for a moment, suddenly realized that his subjects were also passionately chanting his name.

"Your Majesty Owen!"

"The undefeated knight protecting the southern front!"

Maybe I was caught up in the atmosphere, and I even heard compliments like this on rare occasions.

"Wow, you're really clear! "It seems like the divine light of the Lord is shining from the two princes!"

"Why not! "You are worthy of being a member of the Holy Family who is loved by the Lord!"

"Isn't it truly reassuring to have people like that protecting our empire?"

Yes, so as not to tarnish the reputation of the Seonghwang family in the slightest.

Owen immediately shook off his random thoughts and straightened his posture. At least in the eyes of his subjects, he hoped that he would be seen as a proud and resolute prince like Mores.

So he was unaware that this conversation was taking place right behind him.

"hmm? Mr. coachman. Did you just see it? "The box in the luggage compartment over there was shaking."

"What?"

"Plus, there's a strange light coming out of it."

"Oh my, Miss Edith! Don't say anything scary! "It already looks like a coffin, and it gives me the creeps every time I see it!"

"But, it really moved...""

* * *

After spending a long time traveling around the southern front, Owen was accustomed to moving alone.

So, unlike Mores, she was not accompanied by a dedicated maid. She was too old for Carrie to accompany her on a long trip.

The only party he had no choice but to bring was Bartoza, who had run away from the old fox of Karazhan. This is the friend who is carrying a huge burden behind you and is constantly crying.

"omg! Huh! Owen of Delcross! "Could you please go a little slower?"

"It's not something I can do as I please, Bartoza."

"Why is that so? "Aren't you the eldest son of the Delcross tribe?"

"The person responsible for this matter is, after all, my younger brother. "He said we should arrive in Regina sometime today."

After responding like that, Owen slowed down his speech little by little and approached Bartoza's side.

"I said that was impossible. "Why do you insist on bringing it with you?"

Not only that, but Bartoza was carrying a seemingly heavy warhammer on his back. It was a trophy that Owen once obtained after killing the Purma tribal leader.

"Huh! Huh! This weapon symbolizes the legitimacy of our tribe! "This body, which will one day become the tribal leader, must be cherished!"

"Then wouldn't it have been better if you had quietly remained in the imperial capital with that?"

"No, Owen! "Are you going to throw me into the hands of cruel imperialists who can't even communicate with me and turn a blind eye?"

What on earth are you going to do?

"Then just try a little harder."

"Wow! "It can't be!"

Completely frustrated, Bartoza ended up dragging his precious warhammer to the ground and began pouring out his laments.

"I knew well that the people of my empire were different from the outside and the inside, but I didn't know that even you, the son of the tribal leader, would be like that! He is, after all, a Del Cross Inn... The chief isn't like that... How did this body... This is all from that guy... I swear by the spirits of my ancestors... If not... this... one... same... ...
."

"Hey, hey..."

As he began to speak faster and faster, Owen was quite embarrassed.

The language of the Purma tribe has many similarities to that of the Volanta tribe, so simple communication has been possible until now. However, it was difficult for even Owen to properly understand the rapid muttering of the dialect.

"Say it to the sky... Rise from the ground... forever... Forgive me... ...
."

"Bartoza? "What are you saying now?"

Judging by the man's expression, which was distorted with anger, it certainly did not mean anything good.

This was when Owen was wondering what to do with this guy.

"stop! "Let's rest for a while."

Mores, who was ahead, suddenly declared.

"... yes?"

"But you. If I stop now, my schedule..."

"It's okay to have an early lunch at this point."

Since it was unplanned, everyone looked confused. However, the party soon obediently began preparing for a rest as the prince had commanded.

Meanwhile, Mores turned his horse and slowly approached Owen.

Many sides, many sides.

"Sigh... ..!"

Perhaps because he sensed something unusual, Bartoza suddenly closed his mouth.

That's how Owen saw it too. Mores' expression is unusual, as his already fierce eyes have become very sharp.

"Owen."

Owen stuttered without even realizing it, hearing a voice that was as cold as frost.

"Yes?"

"Tell that guy. Put your luggage in my wagon and shut your mouth right now."

At first glance, Mores seemed to be speaking to Owen. But his cold gaze was clearly directed at Bartóza's frightened face.

"And I tell you not to keep your mouth shut until this is over. "If I hear you cursing Delcross or the Seonghwang family with an old spell one more time, tell them that I will cut off their head and lighten their weight."

what? Old witchcraft?

When Owen turns around in confusion, Bartozha, who is very intimidated, hurriedly avoids his gaze. I don't know how Mores noticed the Barça dialect, which he didn't know, but it seems true that he was really trying to do something bad.

"You bastard, speak the truth. Did you really curse the Holy Emperor family?"

"Huh? How did you do that... ..!"

"... "Was it real?"

Before I got angry, I felt ridiculous. What kind of bullshit is this in an enemy land where there are no compatriots?

"Bartoza. Don't do something stupid like that again. "My younger brother told me to never use my mouth carelessly in front of him from now on."

"that... ! How did he understand the old magic?"

"It's not a matter of whether someone understands or not. Do you understand? "If you do something like that one more time, I won't leave you alone before my younger brother comes forward."

Even while the conversation was going on, Mores was standing still and glaring at Bartóza. From the looks of it, it seems like he really understands their conversation.

After saying that he was going to cut off his head and seeing that Bartóza's complexion turned blue, Mores finally turned his head and left.

"Lowering. How about a meal... .."

"I have no idea, Edith. "Isn't it too early to have lunch in the first place?"

"yes? But just now you clearly... ..!"

Pretending only to listen to the maid's words, Mores got off the horse and locked herself inside the carriage. As she declared when leaving, she seems to be planning to travel by carriage from now on, now that she has left the ecliptic.

His personal maid looked embarrassed for a moment. However, as if this wasn't the first time this has happened, she soon shrugs her

shoulders, picks up Mores's words, and disappears.

'Mores...'

Owen was lost in thought as he took in the series of scenes. It may not be as bad as Bartóza, but what just happened came as quite a shock to him.

'It was only for a moment, but that guy Mores really looked like my father.'

It seems familiar, yet unfamiliar.

After returning home and working together every day, Owen thought he was getting to know Mores to some degree.

But putting aside whether or not he is really a newbie, the more I look at him, the more I feel like I don't know him anymore.

'Besides, Mores, how on earth does he understand Barça?'

At that very moment, he heard Lord Masain and his resident knights calling him from afar.

"Your Majesty Owen!"

"Come here and eat!"

"Ah, yes!"

Well, we'll still be together for a while. I'll ask later when I get a chance.

Having made up his mind, Owen pointed the carriage to Bartóza, who was still trembling with fear.

"What are you doing? "Why don't you leave your luggage behind?"

* * *

Suddenly. Suddenly...

'The second son of the Delcross tribe leader... 'Did you say that?'

Dragging his legs, which still lacked strength, Bartóza struggled to drag the warhammer.

'I can't believe it! 'What kind of person is it that can radiate such inhuman energy at such a young age?'

Although he is now branded as a symbol of a traitor throughout Barça, Bartoja was originally a competitor for the position of Chieftain of Purma. He is a strong warrior who has not only traveled through countless battlefields, but is also capable of surviving for a long time without even blinking an eye.

To think that he felt fear prickling his bones just by looking at the young boy's gaze for a moment.

'I swear I wasn't this nervous even in front of that cruel tribal leader, Wakana Tusai.'

My heart felt frozen and my vision suddenly became blurry. If I had received that attention just a little longer, I might have collapsed on the floor ungainly.

The pressure was something beyond simple fear. Would it be similar to this if it was a shock that shook the entire soul?

'afraid. I am truly afraid! I never want to make eye contact with that boy again.'

So from now on, I will try to keep my mouth shut as much as possible so as not to offend him. Bartoza decided to do so.

Dude...

Bartoza finally reached the carriage and fell into a deep sleep as he looked at the luggage compartment filled to the brim with luggage.

Where on earth should I put this heavy burden?

Then, in a corner of the luggage compartment, a long box that looked perfect for placing a hammer caught my eye.

"hmm..."

Bartoza thought for a moment, but no matter how much he looked, there seemed to be no other viable alternative.

So he mustered the last of his strength and lifted the warhammer onto the box.

"Youngcha!"

Coo!

As the heavy hammer falls, the box shakes precariously as if it will break at any moment. However, seeing that it is not broken or cracked, fortunately, it appears to be stronger than it looks.

'It's appropriate.'

Still, Bartoza, who felt uneasy, picked up the twine nearby and tied his precious warhammer into the box. Even if the carriage shakes violently, the box will not easily fall off.

'good. I feel a bit relieved now.'

Finally free from this heavy burden!

Bartóza left the carriage with a slightly relaxed step. So after a while, he didn't even notice the slight movement of the box.

"What? Coachman! "Did you hear it clearly this time?"

"What do you mean again?"

"I just heard the sound of something tapping inside that box..."

"Huh? Miss Edith! Please stop!"

414. Seongjin Lee's Exploration Journal (3)

The number of people that Mores assembled this time was smaller than expected.

In addition to his close associates, Masain and Director Bruno, there are four resident knights at Jinju Palace. Lord Liber, the exorcist. And a dedicated maid and a coachman.

Adding Owen and Bartoza to the mix, the team is a small group of only about ten people.

'Thank goodness my father gave me permission for this business trip.'

Now that Ortona has fallen, it is safe to say that the northern part of the country is almost a lawless area. Therefore, not only the upper corps that travel between fiefdoms, but also nobles who rarely travel to the north usually carry escort troops that can easily fit a platoon.

But what kind of confidence does Mores have?

'Of course, he doesn't have that much skill either.'

Mores, who regained his Aura, was an Aura user so strong that even Owen, who had been fighting on the southern front for several years, was surprised.

Owen is gaining a reputation as 'undefeated' by quickly learning Aurors with the help of the status window and occasionally using items or skills. However, even he sometimes gets the feeling that it is not easy in front of Mores.

'It may not be that easy. 'Maybe that guy is stronger than me?'

This is true even if you look at the events of the day when he was

summoned to the Holy Assembly. It was clear that the momentum that immediately put pressure on the Holy Knights at the conference venue was a level that was difficult for Owen, as well as many of his higher-ranking knights, to easily imitate.

What on earth happened while he was leaving the imperial palace, so that Mores, who was not even a handful of Aurors, rose to such a level?

-What should I say? The neighborhood I lived in was originally a bit rough.

Suddenly, the image of a baby goat talking forlornly passed through his mind, but Owen shook his head to shake off the afterimage.

'Well, Mores is your father's son. Logan, like his father, has a reputation as a swordsman genius, right? 'No matter what, there are similarities between families.'

For a moment, Owen thought that he was the only one who was left behind because he was not related by blood, but he began to worry about the circumstances in which that bastard Mores had no choice but to become so strong.

When I heard it, he said he was already close to the 8th floor. It's not like I'm getting help from the status window like Owen, but based on common sense, is that a level that can be reached with ordinary effort? Unless you are extremely desperate...

'wait for a sec! There's really no way for Mores to get help from the status window... 'Is it?'

Guest ID users with milestones can easily solidify their position and gain power through the status window.

So, it's only one possibility, but what if Mores is really a newbie?

'If you complete the quests as quickly as possible and gain a few useful skills like me, it's not impossible to reach the 8th level as an Auror within a few years!'

Of course, there is a condition that the progress must be much faster

than Owen, who was obsessed with quests every day for his family.

'No way, is it really Mores...?'

Then again, an afterimage of a small mountain goat flashed in my mind as if I had been waiting for it.

-All the colleagues I was with died. In the end, I am the only one who survived.

A voice that rang out bitterly, and a small hoof stuck out defenselessly.

No, but it can't be. Mores may have never left the imperial palace, but he could not have gone through a crisis to the extent of losing all his colleagues...

"Lowering. "What are you thinking about?"

Owen suddenly came to his senses at the sound of Sir Martha's voice.

When I looked around, I saw that everyone had already finished eating, and I was sitting blankly in front of the campfire, holding a bowl of stew.

"Do you have no appetite? "I'm very worried because both of you seem to be lacking energy today."

Then the elderly knight next to him stroked his handsome mustache and opened his mouth.

"If it's your Majesty Mores, don't worry too much, Sir Masaine. "I will bring you some warm Melbourne and a light snack right now."

"Oh, would you please? Thank you always, Director Bruno."

"you're welcome. "It is my life's mission to provide you with all of your refreshments."

Owen looked blankly at the man who was saying strange things with a polite expression.

I said it was Manager Bruno. I heard that he was a Dekaron Knight who even served as a knight commander in the past. Why is his life's mission 'serving the prince's refreshments'?

However, the behavior of Edith, Mores' personal maid, was even more scandalous. He rummaged through his luggage, took out tea leaves and a kettle, and handed them over to the leader with a shameless look!

"Oh my! "I will take care of that, so please be careful not to disturb the tea leaves at all, Miss Edith."

"yes. "I understand, Captain."

why? Riding a car is the job of a dedicated maid, right?

'for a moment. Come to think of it... ... '

When I think back, it was the same when preparing meals. Only the resident knights were busy, but the dedicated maid was leisurely cleaning up fallen leaves around the bonfire.

I don't know what the maid followed her for.

'But it doesn't seem like he's diligently serving his master. Why does Mores keep such a maid by her side?

In the midst of the confusion, a faint humming sound is heard from beyond. It was an aria that Director Bruno was humming softly while brewing tea leaves. It was as if every action of serving the prince brought great joy to him.

Naturally, this question arose. What on earth does Mores mean to General Manager Bruno?

"..."

Owen put the cooled stew into his mouth with a shocked expression.

Once again, he thought that he really didn't know anything about Mores.

* * *

Ever since he fell out of the Emperor's favor, there has been a strange sense of tension among the resident knights.

Owen, who had already noticed the change, openly asked them the reason while they were eating together.

Originally, he got along well with the soldiers on the southern front, so it was easy for him to become friendly with the resident cavalry.

"What's going on? "It seems like everyone has been glancing at that article for a while now."

What Owen was pointing at was a young junior knight. A young man with a long scar on his forehead who looks a bit mean-spirited.

"ah. "Have you noticed this, Your Majesty?"

The person in charge of this was Sir Kurt, a senior knight in charge. He glanced sideways at the young knight with a sly smile.

"That friend's name is Kalmen. "Actually, I was waiting to see when that guy would explode."

"explosion?"

"yes. Even though Lord Calmen looks fine on the outside, doesn't he have some flaws in his personality? Let me tell you about that friend's brilliant record... .."

"Mr. Lee! Is everyone going to be like this!?"

Sir Calmen, unable to bear it any longer, jumps up from his seat. It looks like he is very angry at the criticism of his colleagues that lasted for several hours.

Of course, regardless of his feelings, the resident knights who found an excuse to make fun of him were merciless.

"Whahaha! Well then! "Have you seen it now, sir?"

"You win, Lord Claudia. "That guy just clearly said 'Mr. Lee!'"

It is Sir Vincent, a mid-level knight, who takes out the coin. Considering the name was popular in the North and the accent with which he spoke, it was assumed that he was probably from the Sigismund region or nearby areas.

"I told you so, Sir Vincent. "With that personality, an explosion takes less than half a day."

The person who excitedly receives the money is Sir Claudia. He is a cheerful-looking knight with a round face covered in freckles.

"... "It wasn't like that."

And, finally, Lord Calmen. Even otherwise, his blunt face has darkened considerably.

It's truly pitiful that he didn't realize that the more he rebelled, the more amused his fellow knights became.

"No, I heard it clearly! "Lord Calmen, I just tried to swear at you very harshly!"

"Don't make assumptions! I just sighed a little hard... ..!"

"What on earth were you planning to say? "Are you going to come close to committing lese majeste again today?"

"no! "Absolutely not!"

Hustle and bustle. It was a truly uncivilized atmosphere, unbecoming of a knight of the imperial palace. Of course, Owen liked the atmosphere here more than the disciplined knights of the main palace.

"why? "What did that friend do before?"

"Oh, my dear! Would you like to take a listen? Well, a while ago, I was on my way to Sigismund Territory with the Wolf Knights. Oh my god, this guy is so fearless... .."

"madam! Sir Claudius!"

Fortunately, there was a friend among the group who was holding his weight properly. It was Sir Robert, who had just joined the monster task force.

"... .."

He looked pitifully at the resident knights as if they were immature squires, and then began unpacking his luggage and taking out a few miscellaneous items.

"I have something to share with you during this interlude. "In a few days we will fall from the grace of the ecliptic and enter a lawless zone, a land where devil worshipers run rampant."

What he distributed to everyone were simple exorcism items. Things like weapons that can be easily used without knowing how to use them in detail, or small self-defense devices.

"Is this holy water? How do you use it?"

"Just carrying it on your body or keeping it in your mouth protects your soul. Or you could spray it directly on the devil."

"Sir Robert. "What about this wonderful picture here?"

"It is a self-defense belt engraved with Granius' protection techniques. Keep it under your clothes, Sir Claudia."

As he was carefully examining the items that Sir Robert had brought out, Owen caught the eye of several top-like objects spinning around without direction.

"What are these used for? "It looks like a toy?"

"Ah, my dear. "I guess I won't be able to use them all."

Lord Rohmer answered Owen's question as if he were embarrassed.

"It's called a gyrocompass that searches for magic. "I picked up a few new ones just in case, but for some reason, they all seem to be useless

for this trip."

"hmm."

However, Manager Bruno, who was staring at the gyrocompass, secretly put the small top in his pocket.

"... "Captain?"

As Sir Robert looked at him in surprise, Director Bruno cleared his throat with a slightly red face.

"Big. "Isn't there such a thing as an accidental situation?"

"... .."

Everyone wondered.

What on earth could possibly happen that would require you to use a toy top?

"But is it okay for us to have these? "As far as I know, the quantity of consecrated exorcism items is strictly limited by the Holy Church so that only qualified people can possess them."

Sir Masain asked carefully. A strict heresy court would be able to accuse someone of apostasy simply by possessing exorcism items without permission.

Then Sir Robert slightly shakes his head.

"Don't worry about that. This has already been approved by the Holy Assembly. "Prince Mores has repeatedly asked me to prepare for the safety of the party before departure."

... Mores?

Owen reflexively looked back at the carriage where Mores was resting. At the same time, he realized that the resident knights nearby were also looking in the same direction as him.

The eyes of those who had been lightly flirting just a moment ago

suddenly had a glimmer of faithful trust in them.

"... .."

At that moment, Owen felt as if he had glimpsed another side of Mores that he didn't know about. What on earth does Mores mean to these people?

-Lee Seong-jin will always be my friend! So believe it! A warrior's guts never lie!

Suddenly, an image of a ranger with a tear-filled face appeared in his mind.

Surprisingly, Owen knew a little friend who elicited a similar reaction in others.

-We will not forget our leader, who always shined in moments of crisis. Pureblood Mashnamu, this Hatasu Titi will always remember you.

A guy who was able to elicit true trust from a shield warrior who was always serious but didn't trust people very much, even if it was a lie.

okay. Just like Seongjin Lee, who led the guest ID users.

'... 'No, what am I thinking!'

Owen shook off the mess from his head.

It's probably because of No. 9's erroneous reporting. From that day on, as I thought of Mores as a newbie, I began to see more and more of a newbie in this guy with whom I had no contact.

From then on, Owen tried to think of other things in his head. Once he began to doubt, he felt that he was moving further and further away from rational judgment.

Thanks to this, when he arrived in Regina that evening, Owen was able to completely erase all thoughts of Newbie from his mind.

It was when I arrived at the accommodation that something strange

happened.

"what? what's the matter?"

Mores, who had been stuck in the carriage all day, seemed to be feeling uncomfortable and kept wandering around even after arriving at his lodgings.

Not long after waking up from the hospital bed. Naturally, I couldn't help but be worried.

"why are you like this? Are you okay? "Where else does it hurt?"

However, after worrying as much as I could, the answer I got back was not worth it.

"uh. Noisy... "You idiot."

This bastard! Do you think everything this brother says is just funny?

"hey! If something hurts, it's better to say it hurts! "Don't feel frustrated and do it alone!"

"Don't make a fuss."

It was right then.

Mores frowned and held out his hand.

Coo!

For a moment, Owen felt a shock that made his heart sink.

"what... ... !"

This time, he wasn't mistaken. Mores is really just like the newbie did, calmly showing his small palm towards him!

"Let's talk tomorrow. Because it's nothing. "Go and sleep."

Mores continued to say something more, but Owen, who was already in shock, could not hear anything.

That Mores is really that newbie?

really?

"Huh?!"

Owen hurriedly took a step back, clutching his fading mind.

"Well, I guess you're tired. Take a rest! I'll see you tomorrow!"

Owen, who gave a cursory greeting, turned around and rushed out of the room.

And the deep confusion and self-destruction that followed made me tear out my already free-spirited hair.

"... I couldn't believe it... "Is it really true?"

What now? After all, is there no other way than to ask Mores directly? But how? What should I say?

That night, Owen was so disturbed by various thoughts that he couldn't sleep at all.

And the next day.

Owen, who headed to the restaurant with a blank face, came face to face with Mores, who was sipping a post-meal Melbourne drink in a classy manner.

"Why does your face look like that? Are you going to go to bed at that age? "He's so sensitive in a strange way."

"... .."

I've always thought about it before, but Mores was a guy who only said stupid things.

415. Seongjin Lee's Exploration Journal (4)

The hotel where the group stays is the largest inn in Regina.

Naturally, the restaurant was crowded with people coming for breakfast, and among them, Mores was the one who stood out.

His face, which was as sullen as always, seemed to be engulfed in a particularly secret charisma today. The exorcist's uniform, which is not uncommon in Regina, is also worn on Mores' body, so it seems more luxurious for no reason.

'... 'Mores is really a nanny.'

As Owen sits down with that thought in mind, Mores scolds him as if he had been waiting for him.

"You're late. If you can't sleep, you should at least eat quickly. "It's not enough to cover your bed, so you're not planning on complaining about food, are you?"

As soon as his mouth opened, I felt the people around him pricking their ears in this direction, pretending that they were not eating.

The fact that he commanded everyone's attention just by sitting and sipping tea was truly an incredible presence.

Moreover, by Mores' side, there was a small firework that lit up his head wherever he went.

"Wow. That is the fairy of rumors... .."

"Shh! I can hear you. "Please lower your voice."

The red flames moved around Mores with a lively movement,

occasionally devouring the refreshments he threw at them. Its fully tamed appearance looks more like a pet bird raised by the animal than an ancient fairy.

Owen thought.

'Now that I think about it, wasn't there a time when a newbie was like that too? There was a time when a small spark suddenly ignited in the restaurant where our party was gathered. It was just that small in size, but the flame was so powerful that one of the legs of the group caught in it disappeared in an instant.'

At that time, Sir Kurt approached the two men, bowed lightly, and then asked.

"Lowering. "Are you staying in Regina today as planned?"

"Yes, Sir Kurt. "I have various errands to attend to, so you can take the resident knights for a tour of the city."

"Please tell me your destination and I will accompany you."

"Uh, it's okay. Lord Masaine will always be with you. "There will be a lot of camping days ahead, so I hope everyone enjoys what they can while they're in Regina."

"Yes, I understand. Thank you, my Majesty."

Sir Kurt politely bows and leaves. He seems quite used to taking instructions from Mores.

"Oh, and Sir Robert?"

"Yes, sir."

"When you have time, please stop by the church in the suburbs."

Regina's church is a place that exorcists and inquisitors traveling through the North must pass through at least once. Naturally, it would become a place where the information they had gathered was gathered together.

"Anyway, I was about to tell you something from my side. "What would you like to focus on?"

"First of all, I wonder what the atmosphere is like in the Marquis de Benso. "I would also like to know the overall trends regarding the penitent denomination."

"Yes, I understand."

Sir Liber also naturally bows and leaves.

Looking at the scene, Owen thought again.

'Come to think of it, newbies used to do that too. Without anyone realizing it, I would suddenly become the leader of everyone and give out orders as if it were natural. 'Even now, it's amazing to think about how confident and intimidating that little guy was.'

If we were to be honest, Mores was really the general manager of this group. It was his natural position to command everyone, but Owen easily put that fact out of his mind.

'Are you really saying that Mores is Lee Seong-jin?'

Why didn't I realize it until now? The more I look, the more I see that Mores is similar to a newbie.

The human heart was so treacherous. Until yesterday, I had tried my best to deny it, but now that I have acknowledged the possibility, even though it is difficult, doesn't it seem like I can see Lee Seong-jin in all of Mores' actions, as if it were a lie?

"Oh, and Owen."

"... huh?"

Because I was deep in thought, my answer was a beat late. Then Mores, having finished giving rough instructions to his men, enters Horrock and Melborn.

"You should come to the logistics relay station with me today."

"Logistics relay station?"

"okay. Do you have some money to spare? "There's a really good investment product out there. Why don't we do business together?"

"... business?"

"uh. I can assure you that this is a business where you can easily make twice or even three times the amount invested. "If you give me permission, Branch Manager Schmidt will give you the contract right away."

Mores explained the general situation to Owen, who just blinked dumbly. Currently, he runs a small and medium-sized business called 'Bertrán & Lee' and is working hard to develop a northern distribution network from the ground up.

The outlook was bright. However, since it is still a time when more initial funds are needed than profits, they are looking for new investors with enough money to spare.

"Logan has already invested most of his pocket money at the top. "He can be said to be the highest representative of the top, both in name and reality, with the largest stake."

Owen, who was spooning cooled stew into his mouth, wrinkled his nose inadvertently.

Not only is he the best representative of the top, but he is also the best player in Delcross in name and reality. Logan is the representative, so is the top really good?

Mores, who noticed Owen's confused expression, quickly added an explanation.

"Of course, I also have a fairly large stake. And although it is a relatively small amount, Amelia and Sisley have already invested some of their pocket money."

"... Amelia and her youngest?"

"okay. Have you ever seen your sister do something stupid?"

Well, Amelia can be trusted. Owen then nodded.

"Sounds pretty good. But I don't have any money? As you know, I haven't really had a chance to save money because I've been stuck on the southern front."

Then Mores made a very puzzled expression.

"What are you talking about? "I heard that every month, every bit of your pocket money is being deposited in Hayden Bank."

"... Pin money?"

"okay. Since you never used it, interest continued to accrue for several years. "Now it has become an amount that cannot be ignored."

Oh, I see. Now that I think about it, he seems to have heard from the chamberlain that his father gave him a lot of money every month. I had so little to write about that I completely forgot about it until now.

"... .."

Owen stopped eating and became absorbed in a strange feeling. He foolishly thought that all he had in his hands was what he had collected from the [Pangaea Chronicle]. So he went to great lengths to solve the problem by earning cash through gifts or anything else.

'But now that I think about it, I've never once felt like I needed money in the past few years.'

This means that even on the battlefield, they were relatively wealthy. This part gives you an idea of how many benefits he enjoyed as the prince of the empire.

'And whether I forgot or ignored the existence of that money, my father just silently continued to support me. 'He probably thought it was my due.

Suddenly, Owen realized that, unlike before, he was thinking these thoughts with a much more relaxed mind.

okay. Owen no longer considers the things given to him as undeserved. This is because they know that simply enjoying what they have in their grasp is the full reward for the love and consideration given to them.

And he does not consider pouring all of those precious gifts to his family to be in vain. After all, isn't everything you do for your family?

So he responded lightly to Mores.

"Right. I have a lot of money. Then, there is no need to explain in detail about investments and profits that I cannot understand.

"Anyway, Mores, you're saying you need money now?"

"what... .. ?"

"Okay, how much can I give you? All I have to do is go to the logistics relay station with you like this and sign the contract, right?"

Then Mores suddenly frowned and glared at Owen. It looks like he doesn't really like his answer.

"... "Have you never heard somewhere that you shouldn't sign something carelessly?"

"huh? well... .. ."

Feeling a vague sense of déjà vu, Owen tilted his head to one side for a moment.

"Is that so? I don't remember very well. why? "Why should I do that?"

Then whee-!

Mores, who was quickly raising his arm as if trying to figure out what he was going to do, suddenly stopped moving and clenched his fist!

"Ah, you idiot!"

Owen was quite taken aback by the sudden personal attack.

"what? what's the problem! "Why are you calling a normal person an idiot?"

"Who in this world just gives money after being told to invest? Don't you want to find out properly? Didn't I already tell you to keep your head straight? uh?"

Owen was dumbfounded.

"What, is that why you're angry? I just can't figure it out! Then don't ask for money in the first place!"

"You man, you don't understand at all! The problem isn't that I asked for money, the problem is that you just gave it to me without even thinking about it! "Don't you know that yet?"

"No, what kind of nonsense is that... ..!"

Owen, who had been getting angry and not giving up, felt as if he had been hit in the back of the head by a sudden realization.

what? Take a look at this.

If you look at the way he suddenly gets irritated even if he does everything he asks, doesn't Mores look a lot like a newbie?

* * *

The early morning sunlight falls on disheveled silver hair as a faint halo of light.

As time passed, the sunlight began to move, gently caressing the little girl's white cheeks and the pink eye patch around her neck.

Then, with difficulty, she crawls to the feet of the Sword Master, who had spent the night wide awake by the girl's side.

"... .."

Logan sat motionless until daybreak. One of his hands was holding Arjuna's handle, and the other was holding a flat stone.

How much time has passed like that?

smart.

"Lowering. Sir Otto would like to see you for a moment."

With a small knock, a young Inquisitor entered the room. It was Sir Boris, who had been in charge of escorting Sisley recently.

"They say there's something they need to report urgently to the council. "I will now guard the saint's side, so please don't worry and go."

"... .."

Logan looked at the Inquisitor's seemingly innocent face. There will still be no change in the fact that he is also a member of the Heresy Tribunal with whom he does not communicate well.

But Sir Boris's recent attitude toward Sisley has always struck me as deeply sincere. So Logan was able to get up from his seat obediently.

"Well, take care of Sisley, Sir Boris."

Even so, Logan stood by Sisley's side for a moment, and only after reaffirming that his sleeping brother's Auror state was extremely calm did he finally leave the room.

"Sir, it looks like the council will finally make a decision."

As soon as Sir Otto bowed to Logan, he opened his mouth urgently.

"What do you mean by decision?"

"It's departure. "It is said that General Lysander, the commander-in-chief, has just ordered the summons of all troops."

"... Right."

It was worth moving Sir Valerie to hasten the church audit.

Logan took a long stride and began a quick discussion with Sir Otto.

"The organization of each knight corps will be as discussed before. "It would be a good idea to divide Liliium into three teams accordingly."

"What about [ancient fire] stability issues?"

"It seems General Lysander plans to load them in the center of the formation. "Our punitive force will be mainly stationed on the outskirts, so we probably won't have to deal with those difficult chemical weapons directly."

Just like that, they were crossing the council courtyard. Logan's sensitive senses detected an unusual disturbance in the air in the distance.

"... Lowering?"

When the prince suddenly stops walking, Sir Otto turns around as if wondering. But Logan gave him a small wave of his hand and then quietly focused his senses somewhere else.

Just outside the council building, under the high wall overlooking the beach.

"... .."

Several workers had gathered there and were in the process of dumping stones they had carried in sacks onto the floor.

Rumbling... ..

"What are all these?"

"Ah, this is what Councilor Ambrose told me to do. "It looks like they are suddenly carrying out repair work on the head tower."

"Renovation work? Why all of a sudden?"

"The story about the tower that brings the curse of the sea breeze is famous these days, isn't it? So, before the punitive force sets sail, the tower is neatly reorganized and priests are called in to consecrate it."

Ambrose.

When his name came out, Logan's face turned cold.

"Right. But why are all the dismantled stones brought here?"

"Well, what did you say? He instructed us to first bring all the stones from the lower southeast corner of the tower. "Did you say it is worth preserving as historical material?"

"It's no big deal. "If you preserve it, you preserve everything, so what's the point of focusing only on the southeastern part?"

Logan, who was quietly listening to their conversation, unconsciously fumbled around the inside of his uniform coat.

Hidden inside it was a flat rock that Mores' wolf dog had picked up last night.

* * *

The devil Glumgos, or rather Branch Manager Schmidt, was dumbfounded as soon as he met the prince and his party who had been waiting for him. He was so surprised that he didn't even have the presence of mind to show proper courtesy.

It was because of the unusual flame hovering above Prince Mores' head.

"Well, what is 'it'...' ... ?"

Then, red flames began circling around Director Schmidt as if threatening. It was clear that there was a strong protest against the reference to 'it'.

"That being said, please show proper manners, Branch Manager. "She is an ancient fairy who shared her trials and blessings with me."

"... Ancient... fairy?"

In response to Prince Mores' reply, Branch Manager Schmidt gaped dumbly, unable to continue speaking.

No, you must be joking, right? By all accounts, isn't that a great

demon with magical energy?

But why is the devil wearing a sacred barrier and flying around unharmed in front of people's eyes?

416

416. Seongjin Lee's Exploration Journal (5)

The flame felt very foreign to Schmidt.

When you see demonic energy creeping up, its source is undoubtedly the soul of a demon. But there was something strange about the way it wore its true form.

'I don't see the devil's direct contract target nearby!'

There are two main ways demons appear in other dimensions.

One is to descend by borrowing the body of a contracted person, and the other is to appear directly by consuming a huge amount of causality.

However, to be considered as being mediated by the contractor, the flame took the form of too pure energy. It means that it is truly a burning flame itself.

This would mean that he was emitting magical energy strong enough to clearly materialize his energy, but upon closer inspection, it didn't seem like that was necessarily the case.

In fact, the amount of demonic energy it gave off was very insignificant.

'no way... Did a slightly different law, perhaps the law of the normal world, intervene in the process of materialization?'

It felt as if something had been blocked by a veil, as if the cause and effect necessary for existence had been strangely avoided.

But Schmidt's thoughts did not continue there. That tiny firework started screaming at him.

[Such a rude bastard! How dare you, without even knowing the subject, refer to this great Demon King as 'this'?!]

A guy who is less than a handful of distance away, where on earth does that confidence come from?

It seems that Schmidt's thoughts were clearly revealed in his facial expression. The flames were now spewing out sparks and the body was shaking.

[Hey, look at that cheeky expression! Why can't we be polite? I can't even take care of myself, so I make a list of my compatriots and sell them for half a penny!]

Schmidt came to his senses at that shout.

for a moment! That evil... No, how does a 'fairy' know about the 'list of contracts'?

"... Lowering?"

The only person who can explain this whole situation is Prince Mores. But Schmidt, who looked back at the prince, was even more embarrassed.

I was so distracted by the strange flame that I didn't notice it until now, but the demonic power that Prince Mores was emitting from earlier was no less strange.

It's so hard to wonder how a human body can withstand such a high concentration of demonic energy.

'I felt my demonic energy was weak before, but it wasn't like this... ...
!'

Of course, Schmidt has also recently heard several incredible rumors.

They say that Prince Mores is an apostle who underwent trials from the main god, or rather, that he actually received the blessings of an ancient fairy.

but-

'Anyway, you did something like that in the imperial capital and stayed safe? 'How on earth?'

Unlike Schmidt, who was shocked, Prince Mores was overly relaxed. He glanced around at the cabinet on one side of his office and, with a casual attitude, took out a plate that had been on display. It was a precious Breton porcelain plate with gold lacquered edges.

"This is good. "Would you like to sit here for a moment?"

As soon as the prince's words left his mouth-

[Hehehe.]

The suspicious flame seemed to be waiting and landed on the plate.

It felt like seeing a well-trained pet. For someone who was talking so loudly about being a demon lord and all, he was truly insignificant.

"Lowering..."

"Don't say anything, branch manager."

"Yes, sir..."

"It's my business. So let's not worry any more and just do our own thing."

No, it wouldn't be easy even if I told you not to worry...

As Schmidt squinted at the flame nestled comfortably on the plate, it shouted triumphantly at Schmidt again.

[Wahahahah! I really like this plate! Isn't it a truly beautiful object worthy of the great Demon Lord? It just worked out, Banpoon! As a sign of respect and obedience, I gladly allow you to offer this plate as an offering to the great Demon King!]

Schmidt's brow furrowed.

You can't just beat something that small.

* * *

Owen, along with Masain, was treated respectfully as an honored guest of the Merchant Association.

No sooner had the branch manager sat down than he was personally guided by, but his secretary quickly brought in hot tea and refreshments. It is no different from the treatment received by Mores.

'I said Schmidt. I thought it had a stubborn and bleak look, but there is a part of it that is more affectionate than it looks.'

Owen thought as he munched on a cookie.

He is not the Emperor's biological son, and Sir Masain is completely removed from the right to succeed to the throne. Both of them were in a position where it was easy for them to be looked down on by merchants who usually pursued practical interests.

'... Or is this all thanks to Mores?'

Owen stared at Mores, who was engrossed in the story.

Conversing without hesitation with Branch Manager Schmidt - "He just pretends not to know, Branch Manager." "Yes, sir. that... No, the fairy is clearly referring to herself... .." "Uh-huh! "You must have heard wrong." Looking at Mores, it seemed like the two people had always been quite close friends.

'Well, so you're going to take charge of Mores' business and manage it, right?'

In fact, if you look at the inside story, it may be because the two also belong to the 'Children of Seonghwang' that demons are most afraid of being associated with. Of course, there was no way for the current Owen to know that fact.

"Here, we have selected businesses that are suitable for you to invest in. Please review it slowly."

As Mores said, the branch manager immediately brought Owen a well-organized folder.

A map of the continent with detailed roads, and various business

plans grouped by field.

'hmm. Anyway, I don't know much... ... '

Owen picked up the dense pile of documents and immediately felt a strong temptation to close them back. However, I don't know how he knew what was going on in his head, but the look in his eyes as he looked back at Mores was extremely harsh.

"..."

Owen had no choice but to try to force his eyes to see the letters in the documents. Looking at it, it seems like Mores will ask about the details later.

As I was grumbling for a while, Masain, who was no better than me, was next to me and gave me some advice.

"How about here, in the copper mine? "It is said that the repairs to the mine shaft have made considerable progress, so wouldn't we be able to expect fairly high profits from next year?"

"oh! "Do you know business well?"

As Owen smiled, Masain smiled.

"Actually, I don't know much. Isn't the salmon business, which was expected to be the least profitable of Mr. Mores's plans, already on track? "Then what more can I say about the prospects of other businesses that were expected to be good from the beginning?"

"Well, I see."

This means that no matter what you choose, you will get more than your fair share.

'good. Let's leave the details aside and just keep a general idea of the types.'

Owen felt much more at ease, and instead of struggling with his files, he listened to the conversation taking place next to him.

At the moment, Mores was in the middle of listening to the branch manager's business report.

"Repair of the copper mine is progressing steadily. "I thought people might avoid the place because it had been abandoned for a long time, but since the compensation was generous, people ended up gathering."

"Right."

"The operation of the logging farm is already going smoothly. We are already selling some wood to a Cyprus shipyard, and we plan to expand supply to the entire north as soon as a land route is secured. "We will be able to hire additional refugees."

"good. In any case, don't spare money on hiring and compensation. "We have already reduced a lot of costs by securing low-temperature carriages."

Mores seemed like a seasoned businessman when he responded like that. The more you look at him, the more new things he reveals to you.

"Did you say that several villages have emerged around the business site? "How are we maintaining security?"

"We have deployed sufficient security personnel at the business site. "I heard that in the case of villages, the refugees who settled there formed their own vigilante groups."

Then, Mores tilted his head to one side for a moment and then gave additional instructions.

"Then, set up small sales offices run by the merchants in those villages. First, sell daily necessities cheaply and repair appliances as cheaply as possible. "We are dominating the village market."

"... yes?"

"Oh, don't forget to deploy additional security personnel to guard the sales office."

Then, Branch Manager Schmidt looked dumbfounded.

"No, sir. Are you saying there is a market to occupy in that shantytown? It's just a waste of security manpower... .."

"... .."

"Oh, no way! Because of the safety of the village... ..?"

However, upon receiving Mores' bored gaze, he soon sighs and lowers his head.

"yes. Well sir. We will carry out the ceremony as instructed. Why are you so anxious about not being able to provide food to refugees in the North?"

Hmm, I'm not sure, but it's something serious.

As I was blankly watching Mores work, Masain looked back at Owen and smiled proudly.

-How is it? Hasn't our young man grown up so proudly?

An expression that reveals such thoughts without filtering.

Owen felt a little strange. Even before he left for the southern front, Sir Martha would always stare endlessly at the Pearl Palace from afar.

"... hmm?"

Charakcharak.

At that time, Mores, who was flipping through the report without hesitation, suddenly furrowed his eyebrows.

"But the branch manager."

"Yes, sir."

"Why is the import of grain from the South still sluggish? "Didn't we expect that out of all the businesses we started, we would be the first to make a profit?"

Then, Branch Manager Schmidt looked embarrassed.

"The response from the lords who sought cooperation is not very friendly. "Why are you saying that if we don't double the current magic tax, we will never give you a way?"

Owen asked, looking back at Masain.

"older brother. "What on earth is magic tax?"

"We are imposing a tax on the number of horses pulling the carriage. I don't know much, but I heard that merchants traveling to and from the North pay the magic tax levied separately for each territory."

"Oh, I see."

There are all kinds of strange taxes.

In any case, it seemed certain that the 'horsepower tax' would have a negative impact on Mores' business. Because the guy's face suddenly turned bloodthirsty.

"why? Didn't they already say they would pay more horsepower tax than the market price? Moreover, in the long run, it is a structure that greatly benefits their territory, right?"

"I don't know why, sir."

Schmidt answered as if he were embarrassed.

Castile, Milo, Benso, Cavour, and D'Aciano.

The five of them are nobles of the old royalist faction who currently reign like kings throughout the northern region. Perhaps because they smelled something profitable, they all gave a cold answer to Schmidt's proposal.

But Mores, who had been lost in thought for a moment, opened his mouth softly.

"... "Didn't the Marquis d'Arciano lead that atmosphere?"

Then, Branch Manager Schmidt looked at Mores as if he was surprised.

"Yes, that's right, sir. The Marquis d'Aciano's attitude is too strong. But how did you know that?"

"okay. Right."

Mores' eyes darken.

At that moment, Owen unconsciously corrected his posture due to the eerie energy of the guy he was seeing for the first time.

'That guy...'

I knew it intuitively. That Mores was really angry.

The funny thing is, even though Owen had been fighting with Mores so much, he didn't know what it was like when the guy was really angry.

"I guess I'll have to change my schedule."

Mores' cool gray eyes shed an eerie silver light.

"After all business trips are over, I think I should stop by Dacia Noryeong."

417

417. Seongjin Lee's Exploration Journal (6)

Horsepower tax.

The origin of this historic tax dates back to the 5th era of prosperity.

Even after the founding of the Holy Empire Delcross, there was no other country on the continent with a strong centralized system. In other words, it was a time when the power of local lords was sky-high.

At that time, the lord was truly an omnipotent being next to the god. To them, the concept of 'social contract' was nothing more than the nonsense of philosophers who had no idea about the world.

Everything in the territory belongs to the lord, and all power is also in the lord's hands. Therefore, checking what they had and imposing ingenious taxes on it was a natural routine, like a businessman writing ledgers and counting money.

Lords devised various ways to raise taxes to increase their wealth. Typical examples were fishing tax, hunting tax, reservoir tax, and river inflow tax. If you want to hunt and farm on your land, isn't it natural to pay a reasonable fee?

Also, some lords came up with the groundbreaking idea of imposing more taxes on those who had more. So they started imposing taxes on things that were considered 'luxury' goods.

These are things like the 'stove tax' in the North, where taxes are levied by counting the number of stoves, and the 'window tax' in the South, where taxes are calculated based on the number of windows.

However, even to such lords, merchants were very ambiguous beings.

Not only are they not Young Ji-min, but the items they sell are also not theirs. Therefore, there was no clear justification or standard for imposing taxes.

-Anyway, shouldn't they collect the amount of money they profit from my land?

So, at first, the lords collected a 'carriage tax' that set a tax per carriage. The idea was that it wouldn't be fair for a guy who sells a lot of stuff to walk a lot.

However, soon after the trend of levying the carriage tax spread across the continent, merchants blinded by profit began doing scandalous things. Aren't they starting to build bigger and bigger wagons to try to reduce reasonable taxes?

-Such terrible things...

So, the next thing that started to be implemented was the 'wagon weight tax'. The principle was simple. The question is, shouldn't taxes be levied based on the amount of goods loaded?

The problem is that the measurements were not uniform for each territory, and pulling out each item and measuring its weight was quite a daunting task.

-Master! There is a ridiculous shortage of collectors!

-The goods were damaged while being weighed, so the merchants demanded compensation in front of the castle gate!

Then, the lords calculated the floor area of the carriage and began levying a 'carriage area tax.' Although it was inconvenient for the collectors to have to carry a tape measure around with them, it goes without saying that the work became much easier compared to the hard work of measuring weight.

However, as soon as the 'wagon area tax' was properly established, merchants once again caused problems. Those idiots who don't know what to do have now created a deformed carriage with high pavement and reduced floor space as much as possible.

Tax revenues show no signs of increasing, and carriages with unstable turning radius frequently cause rollover accidents.

At this point, the lords also threw up their hands and feet. Consistency is a thing, so I just decided to walk the way I wanted to.

-The wagon is too high. This time, you have to pay a 'weight tax'.

-yes? But Mr. Collector. Didn't the 'area tax' apply until recently?

-What kind of complaining about being full? Don't you know that the neighboring territory charges both a carriage tax and a weight tax? I am grateful to our lord for his deep generosity toward merchants.

For hundreds of years, taxes were levied heavily, or even double or triple. One person who expressed strong disapproval of this complicated tax system was Granius, who was traveling across the entire continent and writing [Exploration of the Mysterious Continent].

He used to travel mainly along the merchant fleet that moved from territory to territory, but he was repeatedly caught by this tax and eventually exploded.

-You idiots! Regardless of whether the load is large or heavy, or the number of carriages increases, isn't everything that pulls it a horse anyway? Then it's easy to just pay taxes according to the number of horses you need!

-Well, such a simple method... ... ?!

Thus, the tax that gradually began to be unified during the reign of the five great emperors was the 'horsepower tax.'

Because it can accurately reflect not only the load capacity but also the amount of vegetation consumed by the horses on the estate, it received great attention from the feudal lords at the time and has continued to this day.

And now, there was someone who reminded us of the original purpose of the historic magic tax. It was the Marquis of Berseus d'Arciano, who was demanding that he spit out as much money as he

earned.

-Your business will definitely generate profits that are more than twice that of the existing business. So, of course, pay the magic tax twice as well. If you don't listen to this, there will be no more dialogue with the North.

Also, here was someone who fundamentally questioned the deep-rooted justification for the magic tax. It was Prince Mores who maintained the attitude, 'I cannot give even a penny to a man who covets my money.'

"The problem in the first place was that I was trying to pay the absurd horsepower tax. "If you try to use trickery to make it easier, problems like this end up happening."

In response to Mores' grumbling, Branch Manager Schmidt, as well as Owen and Masain, who were listening to their conversation, exchanged puzzled glances.

Why is paying the magic tax properly a trick?

"After all, work must proceed as expected."

"... If you do it, it will deteriorate. "What does that mean?"

When the branch leader asked the question carefully, one corner of Mores' mouth rose playfully.

"It means that we will no longer be fooled by those who abandon God for personal gain. How dare you impose taxes on the servant of the Lord, who carries out the Lord's work in the Lord's land?"

"... .."

"So, even though it may be a bit troublesome, I will strictly consider their mistakes and guide them to the proper path of faith. "That is the norm."

Schmidt was momentarily speechless and gaped.

Well, from the Orthodox Church's point of view, that may be the

correct opinion. That could be possible... ..

"But you. A nobleman's fiefdom is his land that he manages. Whether it is a toll tax or a horse power tax, it is natural to pay a price appropriate for that right... .."

"If you do it, you'll be the branch manager. "What about the bandits who settle down in the unclaimed mountains and manage the roads?"

"... yes? "A bandit, huh?"

"okay. "If they say they will properly manage the passageway and charge money for it, will you willingly pay them?"

... No, isn't that really far-fetched?

At that moment, everyone in the office thought so, but Mores' attitude was nothing short of confident.

"Take note, Director Schmidt. After the fall of Ortona, the lords who rule there are no longer subject to official diplomacy by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From the empire's perspective, this means that they are not much different from bandits who simply took over unclaimed land and people at will. "No credit, no trust."

"that-"

"The same goes for horsepower tax. The reason we gave up the money was not because they had the right to do so. "It is simply so that the land that has suffered for a long time due to civil war will not be trampled by force again."

widely.

After speaking up to that point, Mores closed the folder and looked down at the branch manager arrogantly.

"So, please politely convey our position to the Marquis d'Arciano again. Never forget that everything on the land, even a handful of soil or a blade of grass, belongs to the Lord. "Tell the people of the Lord who come and go there to stop stealing."

It was not a comment that could be made politely at all. Isn't this just asking for a fight?

"Do you understand? From now on, there will no longer be a 'horsepower tax' on our top's expenses."

"... .."

"Why is your face like that? Be happy, branch manager. "Hasn't the budget for the northern reconstruction project been reduced dramatically?"

I can't stop you.

In the end, dejected, Branch Manager Schmidt lowered his head. I have no doubt that the large-scale business plan covering the entire northern region will now come to naught.

"I understand, sir. Then, I will send the answer to the five lords as soon as possible."

But when Mores heard those words, he suddenly tilted his head and responded.

"huh? Why are you sending it to all five? "We just have to fight one guy."

"... yes?"

"The only thing I was talking about was Dashiano, right? "One example is enough."

For a moment, a cold silence fell in the office.

example.

Even the clueless Owen couldn't have known what Prince Mores' remark meant.

"Don't worry, Director Schmidt. Because I won't make a big deal out of it. "I'm only going to hit one guy."

As the words were added as if nothing had happened, Owen suddenly felt a chill.

* * *

From then on, Mores' work went smoothly.

After quickly discussing the past inspection as well as future plans, he asked Branch Manager Schmidt for a new residence where he could secure a private space. Somehow, it seemed like he was going to postpone his business trip and stay in Regina for a while.

'What else are you going to do here?'

Such questions rose up to his throat, but Schmidt could not bring himself to ask the prince openly.

Mores stood up and finally asked Owen the question he had been waiting for.

"Okay, Owen. "Have you read the plan?"

"Yes? "Yes, of course."

Owen, who caught a glimpse of Masaine, added:

"I thought the copper mine looked good? So, I'm thinking about investing some money here... .."

"Hmm, okay. "It's good there too."

Mores answered obediently, but judging by the way he furrowed his eyebrows, it seemed like he didn't really like the answer.

"But instead of that, why don't you just invest in the grain business?

"There are no results yet, but now that the horsepower tax is completely gone, the sales profit is expected to return as profit."

'No, if you were going to decide anyway, why did you ask me to read it?'

Of course, I really had no intention of questioning it like that.

Susssseu.

Owen quietly signed his name. For some reason, I felt a sense of crisis that it would be better for Mores' personal situation not to stretch himself at the moment.

'Something is different from usual. 'Mores, this bastard, is somehow unusually scary.'

It was late afternoon and the whole schedule was finally over. As he left the office for the last time, Mores looked back at the branch manager.

"Ah, but Branch Manager Schmidt?"

"Yes, sir?"

"If it's okay with you, I'd like to take this plate with me."

"... .."

How safe would you be to say no?

* * *

When Mores announced that he would be staying in Regina for a few more days, the reactions of the group varied greatly.

"That's great!" Even so, I wasn't able to get a proper look around because Claudia was dragging the restaurant here and there. "I thought I was just going to explode and die."

"Don't be so weak, Sir Kurt. There are still a lot of places left to visit, right? "But aren't you going with me?"

In response to Sir Claudia's innocent question, Mores gently pulled the hem of Owen's clothes in front of her.

"You can go with Owen, Sir Claudia. Is this guy also new to Regina? "Please guide her well."

"... .."

Is it because of my mood? At that moment, Owen had a strong feeling that Mores was somehow trying to separate him from her.

"Good. "In order to properly gather the information you requested, I was thinking that I would need to spend a few more days meeting the exorcists at the church."

When Sir Robert responded that way, the party's approximate schedule seemed to have been decided. I guess it's Lord Calmen, but he just blinks next to me and seems to have no thoughts.

"good. Then, I will be going to Branch Manager Schmidt's villa for a few days from today. "I have a lot to talk about business with him."

It is a decision that cannot be understood by common sense, to separate most of the escort personnel and go somewhere else.

Owen certainly wasn't the only one who found this strange.

"Then then. "Can't we just follow your side?"

That was when Sir Claudia asked that question.

For a moment, Owen witnessed the sight of Masaine and Director Bruno exchanging meaningful glances.

'... what?'

It was such a fleeting moment that Masain, not Mores, answered the question without even having time to wonder.

"I will be by your side, so don't worry about it. "You just need some private time, so you can relax here for the time being."

Owen felt strange here too.

This guy is not the type of person to do this. He released the resident knights from their duties and said he would take charge of Mores' security on his own?

"By the way, sir. I have something to report to you. Something has been strange for a while. There was a constant banging noise coming

from our carriage... .."

"okay? Then it would be best for you to stay at the lodgings, Edith. Don't bother following me, just keep an eye on the carriage as you go. okay?"

"no... ..?"

In that way, Mores separated from his group and left the lodgings with Lord Masaine.

'Oh, I care! Apparently, that guy, Mores, is doing something strange!'

That night. Owen couldn't sleep easily because he felt uneasy. But suddenly, a small text window popped up in front of his eyes.

[Surprising quest? History is made at night! new!]

418

418. Seongjin Lee's Exploration Journal (7)

In a dark room where not even the moonlight shines.

A bright quest window suddenly appears, flashing in the air and revealing a strong presence.

[Surprising quest? History is made at night! new!]

[Quest Grade: E]

[Most people think that after a busy day, it is time to relax and prepare for tomorrow. But did you know? That wise and diligent people never rest even at this moment when everyone else is asleep? The passion of such a small number of people may be the true driving force that creates the world's great history.]

[Reward: 150 P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

The first thing that came to Owen's mind at that moment was the question of compensation.

'what? Why did Sang Chang-chang set the cash so generously?'

The next thought that occurred to me was that I had no idea what the quest was asking of me.

'What does this have to do with me? What is the driving force of history?'

Owen closed his mouth and glared at the sparkling window.

I thought that, like most of the recent quests, this too might be

related to Mores. Sang Sang-chang often used strangely vague expressions about this guy.

'Anyway, what on earth are you asking me to do?'

It was time for Owen to read the window over and over again and think about its contents.

ping!

With a small sound effect, a faint light suddenly pours in from afar.

I looked out the window without thinking, and sure enough, there was a thin pillar of light rising across the night sky in the distance. That is the destination the quest requires.

'... What I'm saying is, go there first.'

Owen jumped up from his seat.

'I couldn't sleep at the moment, but it worked out well. I should spend my time doing quests.'

But that was when Owen was about to leave the door, carrying a hatchet.

Grumpy!

Once again, a small window appears and blocks his view.

[It is recommended to activate the following skills to proceed with the quest.]

['Auror Concealment' activated - 2P cache consumed per minute]

[For the event only, skill proficiency is applied to S rank, the maximum proficiency. Would you like to activate the skill?]

[Activation / Activation]

Owen blinked.

'what. There is only one choice anyway, right? For some reason, I

said the reward was high compared to the grade!

If this happens, you will have to receive cash to use your skills, but you will lose money.

'It's shameful, Mr. Sang Tae-chang.'

However, it was rare for the status window to force the use of a skill. This means that you absolutely need this skill to complete the quest now.

Owen sighed and pressed the option.

[*Activate* / Activate]

Slurp-

Soon, Owen's presence completely disappears. It was a clever auror concealment appropriate for S-rank proficiency.

While Owen quietly left the dormitory, most of the group fell into a deep sleep without noticing anything.

Only Director Bruno got up from his bed for a moment and looked out the window with slightly worried eyes.

* * *

Tick tock.

[00:57:22]

Cache is consumed quickly along with the timer.

[Cumulative consumption? 116P Cache]

Fortunately, Owen arrived at his destination a little early and tried to cancel the skill before the reward cash was completely used up.

However, the status window was completely static and only displayed a timer without showing any new options.

Tick tock.

[01:00:01]

'... Looks like I still need to use my skills.'

Owen eventually gave up on canceling the skill and stood at the designated location, quietly waiting for his moment.

[01:05:18]

The place he arrived was a quiet alley on the outskirts of Regina. Unlike the downtown area, which is as bright as daylight, this deserted place does not receive a single ray of moonlight, making it look overly gloomy.

[Cumulative consumption? 138P cache]

'I don't think there will be anything left if I receive compensation for this?'

It was around this time that I started to worry that the cash I was slowly depleting might be exceeding the reward. Owen's eyes widened when he noticed a small light flickering in the distance.

'... huh?'

When I looked closely, I saw that it was a red light coming from a lamp.

Next, the silhouettes of three people walking while relying on that small light come into view.

'What about them?'

The distance was quite far, but Owen, who had strengthened his eyes as much as possible with his Aura, was soon able to recognize the figure of the person walking in front.

A slightly smaller body compared to the other two, and delicate features that are faintly revealed in the red light.

It was Mores.

'That's right! It was all a lie when you said you were going to rest at the villa. 'I had some urgent business to do, so I decided to separate my group and move.'

Then, it was obvious who the sturdy man right behind him was. It must be Masain's older brother who never leaves Mores' side.

The other person was a stranger, but judging by her new appearance, she seemed to be a tall woman.

Owen was troubled as he stared at the three people slowly approaching him.

'ruler. Thanks to Sang Chang-chang, I somehow managed to follow you here, but what happens now? He has already decided to leave me alone, but if I tell him to go with me now, I wonder if Mores will listen... ... '

It was right then. Another small notification window suddenly popped up in front of Owen's eyes.

[The event ends, and the skill will be automatically canceled after a while.]

[Countdown to skill end begins.]

... what?

[5]

'Now, wait a minute, Sang Tae-chang! If I unlock the skill now... ... !'

Huh?

This was when Owen, who was embarrassed, was struggling. Mores, who was in front of her, must have sensed something and suddenly stopped walking and looked around her.

[4]

"Lowering? "Why are you doing this all of a sudden?"

I can hear Brother Masain's voice.

"Someone is lurking nearby, killing all signs, Sir Masain."

"yes?"

[3]

Mores, who was looking around like that, soon looked straight at where Owen was standing.

gulp.

Owen swallowed dryly due to the tightening tension.

'I'm sure you didn't notice this, right?'

No matter how much I thought about it, it was impossible. Obviously, the S-rank 'Auror Concealment' skill hasn't been unlocked yet.

[2]

Sreung!

Oh my, wasn't that a mistake after all? The sound of a sword being drawn without hesitation can be heard.

While Owen was surprised, Mores held a nutcracker in one hand and a red lamp in the other and immediately started running towards him.

"Lowering!"

"Lowering?!"

[One]

The other two people were startled and ran after him, but by then Mores was already close to Owen.

Light blonde hair dirty with dust and a youthful face covered in soot suddenly rush before my eyes.

Perhaps he was trying to disguise himself as someone from the slums. However, Mores' face had an innate elegance that could not be hidden with soot alone.

And the inorganic murderous intent without any sense of hostility is visible on that familiar face.

Owen was completely frozen, helplessly taking in the unrealistic sight.

[0]

At that moment, the count in the status window ended.

Pot!

When Owen's presence was released from the skill, Mores stopped in place with wide eyes.

"... "Owen?"

By far, the boy had the most surprised expression on his face that Owen had ever seen in a while.

"what? You suddenly came out of nowhere without even a trace... Besides, how did you find out about this place?"

Even as he asked, Mores' sword stopped almost in front of Owen's nose.

Owen, facing the terrifying blade with a stern face, realized. If Sang Tae-chang had released his skill a little later, that sword would have pierced his torso without hesitation.

* * *

"I almost got into big trouble. When His Majesty Mores suddenly rushed out, I was so anxious... .."

Masain, wearing a mat, shakes his head. He was currently wearing shabby clothes that did not match his gorgeous blonde hair at all.

"I meet the noble prince of the empire."

Beside him, a woman with dark skin like Barshain lowered her head. Judging by the way she was sleeping, it seemed like she was Mores's informant.

"... .."

And standing between them was the sullen-faced Mores. Judging by the fact that he was wearing a tattered cloak, it seemed like he was trying to roughly disguise himself as someone from this area. Of course, in Owen's opinion, it wasn't a very successful disguise.

"Anyway, you. "How on earth did you come to know about this place?"

To Masain's question, Owen answered as much as possible, trying not to arouse suspicion. Because he couldn't answer that he came to do a quest.

"that is... It happened by chance, brother Masain. "I couldn't sleep and was walking down the street when I saw the fairy's red light from a distance."

"hmm... . "By chance."

this. Rather, I think it stimulated Masain's suspicions even more.

"But you. When did you learn Auror Concealment? "Neither I nor my skilled informant could notice my hiding place at all."

It was simply an event driven by the status window. But he couldn't explain it straight away either, so Owen racked his brain to make it look as awkward as possible.

"As I was practicing random things in the South, I was able to naturally conceal myself as an Auror. But we haven't fully mastered it yet, so it's not always possible."

"hmm. okay."

this. I guess the answer would have been worse than keeping my

mouth shut. The light of doubt deepened.

However, I wonder how Owen's words were received, and suddenly Mores' informant slightly stumbled on the spot. She looked as if she had been greatly traumatized.

"Unbelievable! Are you saying that even if you don't learn it properly, you can conceal your Aura if you have talent? Is that it? "This dirty world where geniuses do everything!"

I could faintly hear her muttering, and it seemed like she had momentarily forgotten that she was in front of the royal family. It appears that the psychological damage was considerable.

However, contrary to the two people's reactions, their manager, Mores, did not seem to be curious about anything about Owen. He simply confirmed his intention succinctly.

"So, are you going with me?"

"... Yes."

"Okay, then."

In response to Owen's reply, Mores responded briefly and turned around.

"Now that we've met, follow me. By the way, don't forget to apply soot to your face."

Because of this, it was Owen who was rather embarrassed.

'Is that the end? 'Is that all you want to know?'

Cheekcheek.

Owen's expression shows complex emotions as he looks at the boy walking ahead of him.

An attitude that makes you feel like you already know everything without having to listen to detailed explanations. As expected, doesn't it remind you of the young goat that confidently led the party

members without being shaken by any situation?

-I'll give you a detailed explanation later, so for now, let's go through the dungeon first. Because I'm still in the time challenge.

When I think about it, the newbie at that time also acted as if he already knew a lot about Owen without having to explain anything. So, he approached Owen in a strange manner and readily gave him his precious heart of ice.

-I don't need it, but Owen, don't you need it? You said you were meeting a goddess?

Where is that? Didn't he come out of nowhere and get a limited edition rabbit eyepatch that Owen needed, and proudly hand it to him?

-Newbie, how did you do this... ..

-Oh, there is a way.

okay. The more I think about it, the more it seems strange that I didn't think deeply about the identity of the newbie at the time.

- Now that you think about it, it's really strange? Why does the more I look at you, the more I feel something familiar?

Owen felt so familiar from the newbie!

'No matter how much you think about it, there is only one answer. As expected, Mores... ..!'

That was when Owen thought about it. Moving forward without hesitation, Mores arrived in front of a shabby building and opened her mouth.

"Owen."

"... huh?"

Owen, who had been thinking about something else, answered a beat late, and Mores turned around and made a request in a soft voice.

"Remember well. From now on, you are Warszawa."

"... Huh?"

"You just went into exile in the empire for religious reasons. That's why I don't know how to say a word of the imperial language yet. So from now on, no matter what I ask you, you will answer everything in Barsha. okay?"

"... .. ?"

"okay?"

"Yes."

In response to Mores' resolute attitude, Owen nodded without thinking.

But if Owen had known in advance what would happen next, he would never have answered so easily.

Mores entered the building with great strides and immediately came face to face with a grim-looking gatekeeper. And then you talk to him calmly.

"I'm here to deliver something. "A person who will take refuge in an underground cult."

For a moment, Owen couldn't believe his ears.

'huh? 'Underground cult?'

Hey, wait a minute! Isn't that the power of heresy? Is that something you would proudly say as a prince of the Holy Empire?

But it didn't end there.

Mores casually added a statement that could have been outrageous, saying that if the Inquisition had found out, he would immediately refer it to the Inquisition. And that while pointing straight at Owen.

"We are planning to use the free underpass to the north. I intend to

welcome this heretic from Varsha as a penitent brother. So, hurry up and call your superiors."

... what?

Mores, wait a minute! What?!

419

419. Freedom Underpass (1)

Freedom Underpass.

Seongjin first learned of the existence of the secret organization through Belinda's soul.

The Freedom Underpass was not actually an underground road. It's just a slang that arose naturally because many of those who used this place committed themselves to underground cults.

[It is said that the person who first created this organization was a wealthy Ortonain. It is said that they attempted to rescue those seeking freedom of thought from imperial oppression to their country.]

The history of the Holy Empire spans over a thousand years. Therefore, no matter how many or how few, there will always be people who want to escape from religious oppression or harsh religious trials.

The Freedom Underground provided them with a small amount of food, a stable escape route, and even a new identity if necessary. Since it is operated with a thorough point organization, it is unlikely to be discovered, and even if caught, it can be easily terminated.

As a result, contrary to the initial intention, eventually all kinds of miscellaneous criminals flocked to the area.

[Serious criminals who have no hope of remaining in the Empire mainly gather in the Freedom Underpass.]

Then several years ago.

As the Holy Emperor unified the religious denominations by force, some changes occurred in the nature of this 'freedom underground'.

Underground religious denominations that had been completely expelled from the Imperial Capital began to actively utilize the escape routes of the Free Underground to preserve their power.

In the southern and western regions, [sowing] denominations-

And in the northern area, the [Repentance] Church expanded throughout Ortona.

"So, Giacomo Milo did not hide in the underground cult, but used this northern escape route?"

[Yes, my lord.]

Although the Free Underground is operated with the help of an underground religious denomination, it is difficult to say that it completely falls under the domain of the religious denomination.

So, this is the perfect organization for Giacomo Milo, who had a somewhat strained relationship with the Penitent Church due to the Demon Counter Incident, to hide in.

"hmm."

Seongjin wiped the corners of his mouth and thought for a moment.

"It's been quite a while since Giacomo Milo disappeared. "Why didn't he try to run far west or south?"

Seongjin's question presupposes that Giacomo Milo is in the north. However, neither Seongjin nor Belinda had any doubts about it.

[His entire base is in the North. It would have been difficult to easily abandon it.]

"The upper part was thoroughly confiscated, but there's still some left."

That was good news. I need to secretly steal it and invest it in my

business.

When Seongjin unconsciously raised the corner of his mouth, the demon king was startled and disgusted.

[It came out again! An expression like a long-term trading broker handing over that contract!]

shut up! Where do you think all those expensive dishes you're sitting on come from? huh?

[Hidden property is also property, but Giacomo Milo has no contact with the [Sowing] Church. It wouldn't have been easy to make new contact with them and plan something while being wanted. Moreover, his family, Count Milo, was originally... ..]

Belinda's spirit, which was eagerly explaining, hesitated for a moment and then closed its mouth as if something was bothering it.

"why? What?"

[...] Sorry, Master of Soul. This is information I have never known before, and it seems that I am subject to strong restrictions on revealing it.]

"... .."

okay. Now that I think about it, you did say something like 'restrictions'.

[Please rest assured. I can tell. The master will surely arrive at the necessary truth himself in the near future.]

Anyway, based on the information she provided, Seongjin made a solid business trip plan.

First of all, under the pretext of searching for Giacomo Milo, the initial plan was to attack the offending Penitent Church. Then, the activities of the Penitential Church will be diminished, at least temporarily, and even Giacomo Milo will not be able to escape from the free underpass hastily.

Milo Sangjangju is an excuse to go wild. The Penitential Church has long been a thorn in the side of Seongjin.

If they establish a pseudo-cult in a place where the social foundation has already collapsed, won't the people's livelihood in the North continue to be ruined? If left as is, it would definitely become a major obstacle to Bertrand & Lee's ability to expand its power and rebuild the economy in the future.

furthermore-

'It seems that Logan's reincarnation is deeply intertwined with these Penitent Churches.'

Although he was unable to consult with the person involved, it is a point that Seongjin has been paying constant attention to.

Logan also said that before. He has never heard of another person being reincarnated, and he is not sure why he was the only one who did so.

Seongjin had a intuition that the Penitent Church was deeply involved in this. Didn't Belinda say something like this to Seongjin once?

-He is a 'penitential offering' carefully selected by the Archbishop of Penitence to be offered only to the Lord!

However, when I asked Belinda again when she became a member of the family, this time I got this answer.

[Well, I am truly sorry for not being able to help you, Master of Soul. But I have no doubt that you will soon reach the truth alone...]

"Uh, okay. it's okay."

Of course, part of me had a premonition that it would be okay. I also think that there must be a reason why his father has left Logan alone so far.

But since it was a family affair, there was no harm in being overly cautious. How can we be optimistic that something implemented

with the wrong purpose would have been accomplished through the right process?

'So let's first defeat the Penitent Church. If you hit him as hard as you can, something will come out about Logan.'

For that reason, Seongjin initially planned to go on a rampage and then capture Giacomo Milo at the right time.

And after he had defeated the Penitent Church to his satisfaction, he thought of taking a tour of the north and trying to discipline the lords who were interfering with the project.

However, when he arrived in Regina and received the report from Branch Manager Schmidt, Seongjin had no choice but to painfully realize that his thoughts had gone too far back.

The attitude of the northern native lords is more stubborn than expected, and they are collaborating among themselves to systematically sabotage the project!

This sabotage will probably last for quite some time. In that case, there might have been some among them who were deliberately inciting everyone.

-Yes, that's right, sir. The Marquis d'Aciano's attitude is very strong. But how did you know that?

Before hearing Branch Manager Schmidt's answer, Seongjin's mind was already spinning rapidly.

Yes, there is a debt that must be repaid to the Marquis d'Arciano anyway.

He must avenge Louise (though he is still alive), pay for destroying Sigismund (although Seongjin has nothing to do with Sigismund), and most of all, pay for coveting (not coveting) Max in front of me. Shouldn't we have to pay for it!

'Then wouldn't it be okay to change the order a little?'

To properly wreak havoc, you need a little more detailed preparation.

However, it would be difficult if securing a new recruit for Giacomo Milo were delayed too much due to being busy with other things.

So Seongjin obediently asked Branch Manager Schmidt to give up one of his villas. Then, as soon as Sir Massain arrived there, he gave this command again:

"Actually, I plan on leaving here for a while, Branch Manager. "This is something that must be done in secret, so the branch manager will take care of it so that my absence is not known to the outside world."

Suddenly, the face of Branch Manager Schmidt, who was busy with his employees preparing to welcome the royal family's guests, suddenly became pale.

"No, you prepared so loudly to welcome guests, but how can you pretend to be here without the employees knowing?"

"Isn't that up to you? "If anything, just call Meemee and hypnotize people."

"yes? Such unreasonableness... ..!"

"Anyway, I trust your abilities. "I believe it, branch manager."

"Hey, you! "Hey, wait a minute!"

Seongjin thought as he walked briskly, leaving behind the branch manager who was desperately clinging to him.

'First of all, I'll have to take Dasha with me. Because there is no talent like him in stealth. Since we've come this far, we can't separate Lord Masain, so we'll go together... ..'

As Seongjin was making plans, Owen's face suddenly flashed through his mind.

For some reason, it was a car that I thought would be perfect to take him with me. It's good to disguise yourself as Varsha instead of Busy Dasha, and even if an accident happens, you'll still be able to do your part.

but-

'... Let's quit. He seems to have already been steeped in pagan customs, so it would be difficult if someone even recognized him.'

A prince who is in league with the pagans and the dark church. If that fact becomes known, the already rock-bottom reputation of the crusade may be ruined.

'And since this is probably his first time in Regina, I tell him to take his time and go sightseeing. 'She's been suffering on the battlefield all this time.'

Seongjin, who was thinking like that, stopped walking and tilted his head.

But I feel like something is a little lacking. What did I miss...

'Well, it will work out somehow.'

Okay then, for now. Should we start by talking to Lord Masain?

* * *

"... "Infiltration."

"huh."

"They disguise themselves as poor people and hide as criminals' escape routes."

"that's right. That's right!"

"I guessed that you had some ulterior motive for separating the group, but... "Why?"

It was natural for Masain to be puzzled. Isn't it true that a team of people was originally set up to search for Giacomo Milo?

But why would the prince do such a thing on his own, without the group's knowledge and without their help?

"Tsk tsk. Sir Masain. I only know one, but I don't know the other two.

"The point of this trip is not arresting Giacomo Milo."

"... sure?"

"There is meaning in causing chaos here and there under the pretext of looking for that guy. To do that, we have to first steal him away and hide him in a place no one knows about. That way, he is not restricted by deadlines and can hunt for mice as he pleases."

"... .."

"So, not only other people, but even our group must not know that we have secured Giacomo Milo's new recruit. "That way, everything becomes natural."

Masain looked into empty space for a moment and then sighed softly.

"I didn't understand it, but I understood it anyway. "Why are you telling me all that?"

"Um, that's it... .."

Seongjin raised his head and looked at the loyal knight.

"Because if I don't say something, Sir Martha will definitely be angry?"

"... So, you thought I wouldn't be angry if you told me the plan in advance?"

"Well, I'll be angry, but at least I'll have an excuse that I did my job, right? "Anyway, the cause is important."

chin!

Masain touches the back of his neck and closes his eyes.

"If you do it, you will be degraded. "What if I interfere with your plans by stopping you?"

"what? "You can't do that, right?"

Seongjin smiled brightly and answered confidently.

"If I sneak out anyway, you'll never find me."

"... ... !"

Puzzle.

hmm? I had the illusion that I could hear the sound of teeth grinding...

Whoa, calm down, Sir Martha! Take some of the strength out of that fist!

In this way, Seongjin waited for Dasha to arrive and started dressing up as poor people with Lord Masain.

Fortunately, by that time, Sir Martha's anger had calmed down quite a bit. Of course, he poured out his dissatisfaction with Dasha's every move.

"How can you give me such shabby clothes...""

"What kind of blasphemous thing did you do to your face...""

"Now that I think about it, I taught you that trivial trick...""

My dear, please save me!

Dasha, who was applying soot, gave him a pleading look, but Seongjin, who was numb, had no choice but to quietly avoid her gaze.

In the meantime, there was a brief scuffle with the devil.

[no! Why do I have to go into this shabby lamp, leaving behind the pretty lamp I received as a gift?]

"Then there's nothing we can do. "I have no choice but to leave it behind."

[What? but... ... !]

"Go ahead and choose. "I don't have time anymore."

[...] Sniff!]

Ugh, I miss my flawless 24-sided flame crystal every day!

The Demon King whined profusely, but did not resist any longer and calmly entered the lamp.

Seongjin, who had completed all the preparations, escaped from Schmidt's villa by taking advantage of Schmidt's trick of putting the employees to sleep.

and-

"... "Owen?"

In an unexpected place, I came face to face with Owen's stiff face.

"what? You suddenly came out of nowhere without even a trace... Besides, how did you find out about this place?"

420. Freedom Underpass (2)

When Seongjin first discovered Owen hiding in the dark, he sensed a strong sense of strangeness from him.

'... Auror concealment? no.'

I could tell right away that this was not an ordinary 'Auror concealment'.

Rather than erasing the presence by finely adjusting the aura emission, it feels like a veil has been put on so that the aura activity itself cannot be recognized.

A fundamental interference with the laws of the world that distorts the senses and breaks down the boundaries of perception, making it impossible for ordinary people to even glimpse the essence... ..

"... ..!"

Seongjin's vigilance was close to instinct. It's not mine, nor is it my father's, but is it the will of a third party who suddenly entered this world?

Before he could clearly perceive the situation, Seongjin's hand was already touching the handle of the nutcracker.

I didn't try to understand it any further. This is because I subconsciously felt that the more I learned about it, the less influence I had on it.

Whick!

But that was when Seongjin thrust his sword into the center of the sense of heterogeneity. The veil disappeared from sight as suddenly

as it had appeared.

Next, the tip of the nutcracker's blade was a pendant that glowed the color of deep blood even in the dark.

"... "Owen?"

Seongjin recognized the milestone and the opponent at the same time, and immediately retrieved the nutcracker. His mind spins rapidly.

-Is this really it? Is that [signpost] created by Oracle and reflecting the spirit of Oracle?

When I first saw the milestone, I remembered Dexter screaming with extreme excitement.

-So, the principle of this engine editor is based on this [milestone]!

Dexter said at the time: [Homunculus Engine Source Editor] is modeled after the way the Oracle's advanced mental world affects the real world.

'So, the veil of concealment I just saw was a phenomenon caused by the laws of the normal world interfering with this world?'

The powerful will that intervened with a clear purpose that I felt in that split second.

'As expected, the will of the deceased grandmother remains in the milestone in some form. And I ordered Owen to-'

But Seongjin's thoughts stopped there. This is because Owen, who revealed her appearance, was looking at Seongjin with a vain expression, as if the sky had collapsed for some reason. The guy's condition was too serious for her to say she was just surprised.

'Why is this guy so listless after coming this far?'

Now that I think about it, I think the way they respond to attacks is a bit strange.

Seongjin, who played the game together, knew Owen's strength well. He was a flying guy who slaughtered players with only a small one-handed axe.

What is it like in reality? Because he took the lead in breaking the pot of the mighty Barça warriors, he was already nicknamed [Invincible] on the front lines, right?

So no matter how fast I rushed in, I would have had enough time to defend myself.

"Hey, are you sure... .."

Isn't that status window controlling your mental state? Seongjin tried to ask that.

But that soon became impossible. This is because Masain and Dasha ran towards them in a huff.

"Hey!"

"Who is there..." Owen, you? "How on earth do you think this is?"

* * *

"But you. When did you learn Auror Concealment?"

Masain interrogates Owen with a suspicious look.

But Seongjin knew. The fact that what Owen showed earlier was not proper Auror concealment.

As expected, Owen hesitated and answered.

"... "I haven't fully mastered it yet, so it's not possible every time."

I guess so. That was clearly the law of the normal world, because it was like the intervention of the side status window.

If so, it would mean that Owen is currently diligently carrying out the quest given by the status window. Seongjin thought that without any more useless waste of time, she should clean up this place.

"So, are you going with me?"

Then Owen, who was unusually shy, answered with a slightly relieved expression.

"... Yes."

"Okay, then."

Seongjin nodded and turned around. It was to hide my inner displeasure.

'You let him rest for as long as he could, and then you dragged someone here because you couldn't take care of him?'

Well, anyway, that's Grandmother's will. Apart from her instinctive antipathy, there was as yet no feeling that her guidance would be greatly detrimental to Owen.

then-

'Now that this has happened, I guess I should put it to good use. 'I already wanted to give Dasha something else to do.'

So, contrary to his initial plan, Seongjin decided to disguise Owen as Barshain instead of Dasha.

"Remember well. From now on, you are Warszawa."

"... Huh?"

Seongjin, who repeatedly warned the man who was lost in his thoughts as he walked towards the meeting place that he knew in advance, took a long stride.

The expression clearly expressed on the faces of Masain and Dasha who were following behind, 'How can you know about a place like this?' Trying to ignore the question, pretending not to know.

According to the information Belinda provided, there were scattered locations in Regina where one could use the free underpass.

Seongjin arrived at a shabby building said to be most frequently used by the Penitent Church and spoke to the doorkeeper with a calm face.

"I'm here to deliver something. "A person who will take refuge in an underground cult."

Then the old gatekeeper sitting at the entrance looked Seongjin up and down as if assessing him and asked back bluntly:

"delivery? "Where are we going?"

"We are planning to use the free underpass to the north. I intend to welcome this heretic from Varsha as a penitent brother. So, hurry up and call your superiors."

Then the gatekeeper moved slowly and blocked the door directly.

"Wait a minute. There are a lot of faces I've never seen in this area, and among them, a kid is the leader? "Something seems suspicious."

"... .."

"Hey, kid. "What on earth happened to the middle book, and did the guy who delivered it come here himself?"

Then Seongjin looked a little annoyed and glared at him.

"Bethelah. Who are you treating as criminals now? "They say faithful underground sect brothers use the road, so why do they need a middleman?"

There were stories I had already heard from Belinda. In fact, there are no intermediaries that lead you here for a certain fee.

But that's only the case with criminals. It is said that the situation is a little different for believers of underground religious denominations who are directly involved in running the organization.

"Hmm."

I guess it wasn't a wrong answer.

Still, as if something was suspicious, the gatekeeper mumbled in his seat and refused to open the way.

"But kid. Are you really a penitent brother? Even so, there are no signs of penance in any of them... "Your skin is so clean too?"

"So you're going to leave a mark in a place that looks stupid? It's not like they're openly advertising it to the Inquisitors. "Stop making nonsense and open the way quickly."

"Oh, just wait a moment. That guy doesn't look like he's in Barcelona either? "He's just a little tanned, but no matter how you look at him, he's from the Empire."

Seongjin sighed and repeated the holy name.

"Bethelah. This guy is from a Missouri tribe. Missouri has had a lot of mixed blood with Anatolian people since ancient times. I understand everything. People who don't know much may be confused."

"No, even if I said that-"

The gatekeeper's eyes narrow. Since the baby's answer was so smooth, it seemed like his suspicions were deepening.

"How can I believe that? What if that guy is an Inquisitor pretending to be Varshain? If you are confident, prove it."

"What do you mean, how do you prove it?"

"You say it's Barcelona? Then, tell me to at least speak Barça."

"Can you understand if I do it?"

"That's not something the kid should worry about."

Look at this kid. Are you being stricter than I thought?

So Seongjin turned to Owen and ordered.

"Did you hear? He said he couldn't trust that guy. "Hurry up and say something in Barsha."

For a moment, Owen trembled. Maybe it's because I never expected to hear proper Bolantan here.

Fortunately, he didn't make the mistake of looking back at Seongjin with wide eyes.

"100 million! that... ..!"

Owen, who almost blurted out the imperial language without thinking, finally bit his tongue and changed his words.

"hey! What are you talking about? "How are you going to deal with lies like that later?"

But Seongjin's attitude was relaxed.

"You were the one who intervened without proper preparation, right? Look at how you look now and tell me. "How are you going to explain those chicken feathers in your hair?"

"Then you could just say you came from a region near the southern front."

"are you okay. trust me. "It's easier to pretend to be a pagan later."

No matter how disorganized a branch organization is, there are minimum principles of behavior. If he feels that it is a burdensome matter to handle alone, the gatekeeper will eventually pretend that he cannot win and call his superior.

"In addition, there will be close surveillance of the Jayu Underpass for some time to come. Don't you think you should insist in advance that you are a heretic, so that in case of an emergency, you can communicate without them knowing?"

After explaining up to that point, Seongjin looked back at the gatekeeper.

"Did you hear? After explaining the situation well, this friend gets angry? "If you don't take refuge in [Confession] right away, they will ask about your parents' well-being soon."

"... "You don't look very angry, do you?"

Then Owen, who was watching everyone's movements, suddenly showed his teeth and made a strange expression.

It was disastrously poor acting. Well, it was such an awkward and unfamiliar expression that it seemed to have actually made the gatekeeper very nervous.

"But why are you suddenly asking about my parents?"

... hmm. I guess pad lip doesn't work in this world.

"It's an old Barça etiquette. Say hello to those who are hostile to you with force."

Then the old gatekeeper frowned.

"Don't be foolish, kid. "My parents have already passed away a long time ago."

"Well. Then I must ask how you are doing. "I might meet my son in the other world soon. How much pain must it hurt my parents?"

"... .."

"Bethelah."

The gatekeeper looks at Seongjin with a puzzled expression as he reverently makes the sign of the cross. Because his attitude was so confident, it was difficult to get angry. However, if they threaten to chase them away, the prayers of their group are not easy.

Fortunately, the gatekeeper was old and had a lot of experience dealing with the truth.

The best way to deal with troublesome friends is to hand over responsibility to a superior.

"Well, anyway, your treatment is up to the higher-ups. "Go in."

Once we got past the gatekeeper, everything was smooth sailing.

Once inside, they were guided by a short woman who came to meet them and went out the back door of the building. Then he followed her through her winding alleys and finally arrived in front of a shabby wagon loaded with her hay.

"... .."

The woman bowed her head and disappeared without a word.

'... Lowering?'

Masain looked back in confusion, but before he knew it, Seongjin was getting into the carriage as if it was natural.

"... ..!"

Afterwards, Owen and Martha settle down among the hay, and soon the coachman starts the carriage without saying a word.

Taktaktak.

As the carriage began to move, Owen and Martha rolled their eyes, not knowing what to do. In that heavy silence, they were slowly leaving Regina.

'Dasha is catching up well.'

Not far away, I sense her following me using Auror cloaking.

Seongjin felt a little relieved and hugged the small lamp where the Demon King was sitting.

[Where are we going now, Seongjin Lee?]

"Yes, I'm going to the middle intersection of the Freedom Underpass. "Seeing as they skipped meeting their superiors at the starting point, I guess they're going to hand us over to a higher level right away."

[Will it take long? Isn't it dangerous there?]

"What's the risk? If you have to, you can just jump off the ramp. "You can set the carriage on fire with your own strength and run away

together."

Then the Demon King flickered his flame as if he was satisfied.

[Ugh! Right. Is it finally time to unleash my power on the world? Now everyone will recognize the greatness of this body!]

Even so, it only became a portable lighter for short-distance navigation.

Seongjin felt somewhat sad and carefully touched the lamp. However, the hushed conversation seemed to sound like Seongjin's muttering to himself to the coachman in front of him.

"Hey guys, don't you know that I'm secretly leaving the city right now? Please be quiet. "What on earth has that young guy been mumbling about since a while ago?"

In response to the coachman's nervousness, Seongjin raised his head and answered him.

"Oh, don't worry about me. My head goes crazy due to fever, so sometimes I say nonsense. "It's just that he's a little noisy, but he's not particularly harmful."

"Ah, I see. My head hurts from the fever... .."

The coachman, who had been replying indifferently, looked back at Seongjin with a strange expression.

"No, but is that what the person in question is going to say now?"

However, Seongjin's attitude was shameless.

"Well, since it's my job, of course I know best. That's why you answer kindly. "What's the problem?"

"... ..?"

"Or do you want my friends to gossip about me? "Wow, you have a really bad personality."

The coachman turned his head again with a puzzled expression.

Is that so? Was I bad?

421. Freedom Underpass (3)

As we leave Regina, the proper road is cut off, and soon a desolate wasteland unfolds before our eyes. The hay wagon ran non-stop through that dark, rough field.

Rattling.

Every time the carriage shook, a thick dust billowed up from the dry ground.

"The top is not the main route. "I can't see a single signpost, so I don't know if the coachman really knows the way."

Masain is wary of his surroundings and whispers softly.

Just as he said, as soon as we left the sleepless city, people disappeared like a lie. The places where small villages once stood have been demolished, leaving no traces of houses, and the land where a road once would have been laid out is now a tangled mess of rough grass and gravel.

"You don't have to be so nervous, Sir Martha."

"But isn't the North already a lawless zone? In this defenseless state, I am passing through a road that is wide open in all directions. "How can we not be on guard?"

"hmm."

Seongjin hugged the moderately heated devil's lamp and adjusted his posture.

"Lord Masaine. Hey, do you see the mark engraved on the corner of the carriage? "There will be four small dots in the shape of a

triangle."

Masain looked back to where Seongjin was pointing. When I looked for a while with my aura to sharpen my eyes, I could vaguely see some graffiti that resembled a triangle with a dot in the center.

"It just looks like a stain. Does that make sense?"

"Not at all. "As long as it's there, it means we're safe."

"... Why is that so?"

"It's because this carriage is a sign that it belongs to the Freedom Underpass. "The bandits know full well that trying to loot isn't very fun."

Unlike the upper level, the carriages in the free underpass do not carry valuable items. The only things they 'deliver' are felons who can't find a place in the Empire, or fanatics from underground cults. So no matter which side was touched, it was not good for the bandits.

Masain was roughly satisfied with the explanation, but somehow another question seemed to arise.

"But you. How on earth did you do that... .."

Masain tried to ask a question. Well, it looked like he wanted to ask me something from earlier.

However, when Seongjin turned his gaze and looked into the distance, he also realized the silent rejection expressed by the prince and silently kept his mouth shut.

[I'm bored, Seongjin Lee. Can I take a little walk around the area?]

"Stop it, devil. "If you suddenly start flying through the air, what will that coachman think of you?"

[Can't we just burn the whole carriage?]

"no."

[Tch!]

The night passed very slowly.

Meanwhile, Seongjin looked up at the starless cloudy night sky, and sometimes talked to the devil in silence.

The coachman, who had repeatedly called him annoying, didn't even look back after arguing with Seongjin several more times. This is probably because she painfully realized that opening her mouth would only make the wrong person and gain nothing.

Then, around dawn, they arrived at a small hut standing in the middle of the wasteland.

"Howdy!"

At that moment, a middle-aged woman who was sitting in front of the door burning a pipe, when she saw the carriage, raised her hat and greeted me. The foul smell of smoke from afar stings her nose, as if she were smoking extremely poor quality tobacco.

"hey. Why did you come this far? "The 'hay' delivery is from Rubel."

Then the coachman jumped off the coach seat and spat on the floor.

"Ah, this delivery is a 'special delivery'. "Take over the luggage like this and transport it to Verdron."

"Special delivery? "Yeah?"

The woman glanced at Seongjin and his group for a moment with puzzled eyes. Looking closely, she was clearly an unusual person who could not be hidden by shabby clothes and soot.

"It's rare. "I was wondering if I would take a break today, but it turned out to be all right."

That was the end of the conversation. The driver disappeared into the cabin, leaving the hay wagon alone.

Meanwhile, a woman came pulling another carriage. It is a small

wagon filled with oak barrels.

"Did you hear? 'Hurry and load your 'baggage' this way."

After hearing those words, Seongjin quickly got up from his seat and moved to the carriage. As Owen and Martha Yin moved to sit next to her, a small spark appeared in the eyes of the woman who was watching her.

"Hoo."

She climbed onto the carriage seat with light movements and spoke to Seongjin in a slightly cheerful voice.

"It looks quite familiar to using the underpass, doesn't it? But no matter how much I think about it, it's strange because it's my first time seeing this face. Kid. Do you by any chance know what 'express delivery' is?"

Unlike the previous coachman who completely ignored the 'baggage', there was a slight sense of composure in the woman's attitude. Seongjin, who was quietly assessing her level of power, responded.

"know. 'It's a good thing if you can get there quickly without any intermediate stops."

"Haha, yes. 'Then you understand that packages that are delivered exceptionally quickly usually never leave the world, right?"

I flinch.

As Owen and Masain tensed at her non-threatening threat, Seongjin's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Well, at least you know this one. 'We'll probably be facing some pretty high-ranking middle managers, and there's a good chance they'll be the first to tell us that they've broken the 'delivery' rule."

"... .."

"Bethelah. 'Do you know that middle-level officials who are fired from the Freedom Underpass usually never leave the world?"

"... "Oh my, I was just trying to scare you a little, but I didn't get my money's worth."

The woman shrugged and took the reins.

"Then shall we start express delivery? "Hey!"

Rattling rattling.

As the carriage begins to move, the empty oak barrels that were loaded on it bounce helplessly. Seongjin roughly pushed them aside and spoke to the two who were very nervous.

"It looks like this coachman will go all the way to Verdron without stopping. It will take well over half a day to arrive, so both of you, at least get some sleep."

"... .."

Owen and Martha seemed to have a lot to say. However, Seongjin was the first to close her eyes as he held her devil lamp, and reluctantly they each settled down comfortably between the oak barrels.

And so, in silence again, the group began to be quietly 'delivered' for a while. It was around that time that the text window he had been waiting for appeared before Owen's eyes.

Grumpy!

[Surprising Quest - History is made at night! (complete)]

* * *

The air at dawn on an autumn day was very cold.

Nodding.

Seongjin, who had been dozing for a while leaning against the warmth of the demon king's lamp, opened his eyes to the sight of Owen, who was rolling his eyes busily.

"... Why are you looking around so much? "If I can't sleep, I close my eyes."

Seongjin's voice was as small as a whisper. This is a measure that takes into account the person who 'delivers' them. Unlike her previous coach, that woman had quite useful Auror activity.

"huh? Oh, just... .."

Owen must have been aware of that as well, as he glanced sideways at the coachman's seat and responded quietly.

"I was looking for your informant somewhere. No matter how much I look, I can't seem to find any sign of him. Is this okay? "Are you sure you're following along well now?"

"Dasha?"

Seongjin got excited for a moment and looked for signs of Dasha. Strictly speaking, it was not a presence, but rather a detection of the absence of an unnatural aura flow.

Seongjin, who soon identified her location, leaned against the oak barrel and spoke.

"don't worry. Dasha is the most elite agent. She has mastered Auror concealment to an almost perfect level. "It's rather strange that you can find it so easily."

"I see. Auror concealment... .."

What was he thinking? Owen's expression suddenly became gloomy.

"Now that I think about it, I have something to confess to you. new... Mores. Actually, what I showed you earlier was not proper Auror concealment. "I don't know how I succeeded, and I can never be sure when I'll be able to do it again."

This is a fact you already know. However, Seongjin listened to him silently without showing any signs of expression.

"So what if, what if. "If I have any part to play in your revised plans,

I'm sorry, but you'd better not think I can do the same trick again."

You felt like you had no energy, but were you still worrying about that? Seongjin tilted her head and responded.

"are you okay. "I didn't really expect that from you."

"Yeah, really?"

Owen's eyebrows visibly drooped. Hey, wait a minute. Why is your expression getting worse?

"So, anyway, you are the cultist at the center of this 'delivery', right?
"It means there is no need to hide your presence."

Seongjin quickly added before he became even more gloomy.

"Furthermore, Auror concealment does not suit your Auror operating style. "Perhaps it would be quicker for you to become a Dekaron Knight than to learn proper Auror concealment?"

"Dekaron Knight?"

"okay. Looking at your auror activity, haven't you probably accumulated about 9 floors? So, if you just practice a little more, it will be easy."

Then Owen stared at Seongjin for a moment. It was as if he was trying to gauge whether or not the words were empty.

"why?"

"No, my Auror level is the 9th floor. But being a Dekaron Knight, that's not something that just anyone can do. new... Mores, do you really think I can become a Dekaron Knight someday?"

Seongjin raised his eyebrows. What, why is this pale young guy so unenthusiastic?

"So, you weren't planning on doing it?"

"No, it's not as easy as you think... .."

"Why not? Dude, why do you keep saying such weak words when it's not enough even if you erase all your random thoughts and work harder? Now that you've become somewhat stronger, do you think you can start being lazy?"

Take an example from Logan. He already became a Dekaron Knight a long time ago, but he still devotes himself to training with the Liliun Knights every day!

Owen, who had been dazed for a moment by Seongjin's nagging, laughed lightly.

"... haha."

But there is no sound in the laughter either. Somehow, wasn't it just an illusion that I thought things were a little strange earlier?

When Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows and examined Owen, he smiled bitterly and rested his chin on his knees.

"It's laziness... Maybe you're right. I've always thought this might be appropriate. "It can be quite useful on the front lines, but it is not too noticeable."

"Why is that appropriate?"

In response to Seongjin's question, Owen hesitates for a moment and looks back at Masain sitting across from him.

After confirming that he had closed his eyes and was breathing evenly, Owen answered quietly. The language spoken here was Warsaw, which no one could understand except Seongjin.

"Even if that were possible, what good would there be for the Empire if I became a Dekaron Knight?"

"... ... !"

From that single word, Seongjin was able to infer quite a few things about Owen. The reason why Owen seemed particularly gloomy. And the real reason why I didn't dare to avoid Seongjin's attack earlier.

Perhaps, when Seongjin's sword came rushing in front of him, Owen may have thought he saw a foreshadowing of a fierce battle for the throne that might take place in the distant future.

Owen was struggling to grasp with both hands the unexpected happiness that had suddenly come into his life, lest it be taken away.

But despite such desperate efforts, I also know very well that that happiness will disappear completely with just the slightest crack.

"... "Owen."

I'm in a situation where I can't help but always have a little anxiety in my heart. Seongjin was able to understand Owen's feelings more accurately than anyone else in the world.

"I think you're misunderstanding something. "I didn't mean to attack you earlier."

"Yeah, I know. "You didn't know my identity because I was hiding as an Auror."

"That's not what I meant. "What I was trying to get rid of was the medium of strong heterogeneity at the center of that trivial concealment phenomenon."

"huh? medium... ... ?"

Owen made a puzzled face. No, how on earth should I explain this?

"hmm."

Seongjin, who was pondering, briefly caught sight of Lord Masain.

The image of a loyal knight pretending to sleep and listening to Seongjin's words while holding the golden Misra in one hand.

Naturally, the word Barsha comes out of Seongjin's mouth.

"Well, at least know this one thing. "Nothing you worry about will happen in the future, Owen."

Why? At least for now, I thought I didn't want Masain to hear this answer.

"If they are truly family, no matter what happens, they will never point their swords at each other."

As Seongjin said that, he touched the corner of his mouth with some subtle sentiment.

Even though I had already spoken it out, the small sound of that answer still seemed to be lingering around my mouth.

* * *

On the other hand, there was someone that Seongjin and Owen had completely forgotten about until then. The Barça warrior was in great shock when he realized that Owen had disappeared from his dorm.

"Ugh... . "The Delcross people are such faithless people!"

Purma's Bartoja.

He crawled under the imperial carriage, biting his dirty fingernails. His instinct was to hide himself as much as possible from the sight of the imperial people.

"Owen! The eldest son of the Delcross tribe! "Where on earth did you go, leaving Bartoza alone in a limb?"

As if responding, a box at the back of the carriage shook slightly. It was a movement so subtle that even Bartóza, who was right below, did not notice.

... Shake!

422. Freedom Underpass (4)

Bruno Green.

He was confident that his ability to handle the situation was not that bad.

Although he retired due to an unfortunate accident, he was once the only commoner knight commander and had a record of tirelessly assisting the Emperor.

This time too, Bruno comforted the resident knights left in Regina with his gentle charisma.

"Why is everyone so upset?"

"Captain! No matter how much I think about it, it's strange. There's no way a diligent person like our Majesty Mores would have left us to rest alone! "Maybe our presence was a big inconvenience to you while you were working?"

When Sir Claudia cried, Director Bruno firmly shook his head.

"Didn't you hear what His Majesty Mores said? "Didn't you tell me to ask publicly about Giacomo Milo while touring Regina for a while?"

"But he must have already disappeared deep into the Dark Church. "No matter how much we search here, will anything change?"

"Lord Claudia. You didn't ask me to find him. He just told me to inquire."

Then the quick-witted Sir Kurt immediately understood the meaning of those words.

"ah! "While you are doing something behind the scenes, on the surface I am telling you to spread the word that we are diligently searching Regina!"

"okay. That's it. "It's something that couldn't be accomplished except by us, your close associates."

Bruno also had to look after Edith, who had been showing too much attention to the carriage recently.

The prince's maid, who had a somewhat blind side, kept her eyes wide open, ready to stay up all night, saying that today she would reveal the identity of the sound.

"Miss Edith. It's late. "Stop watching the empty carriage, and now go to your room and get some rest."

"But Captain Bruno. This is your name. "His Majesty Mores told me to go back and forth and keep an eye on the carriage."

"But that doesn't mean you should abandon all your work and just watch the carriage all day, right?"

Then the maid blinked her round eyes and looked up at the leader.

"But there is nothing else to do. "I don't usually prepare meals, I don't prepare refreshments, and the person I need to attend isn't even here right now."

... I had forgotten for a moment that this maid was, like herself, a great thief of my Majesty's wages.

In the end, the leader sighed and handed her a blanket and some warm Melbourne tea.

"Then do whatever you want. Instead, why don't you wear something like this so you don't get cold?"

It was the same when 1st Prince Owen secretly left the dormitory.

"We're in big trouble, Captain! "No matter how hard I search the lodgings, I can't find Owen!"

Of course, the former Dekaron Knight realized this fact a long time ago, but instead of stopping the prince, he cracked down on the group to prevent further confusion.

"It's okay, Sir Kurt. "Before you left last night, you told me your destination."

This was information that was repeatedly confirmed through the thoughts of Rebekah, the leader of Arenja.

"Prince Owen is now with Prince Mores."

And finally, Bruno had to try to ignore the familiar and nostalgic presence he sometimes felt in the carriage.

'I want to take it out right now. however... ... !'

It was truly pitiful to knock on the lid every chance he got, but Bruno was no longer allowed to have even the slightest contact with Seonghwang.

Even though he healed me with miraculous power, how could I so recklessly abandon the will of someone who is still careful not to make eye contact with me?

So he had a hard time suppressing the urge to open the box right away.

'Keuheuk! All of this is my negligence. Please forgive me for my incompetence, Your Majesty!'

But even Bruno had no choice but to lose his composure when Sir Claudia made this report the next morning.

"Captain, we're in big trouble! The imperial carriage has disappeared! I think Barshain, who was brought by Prince Owen, ran away with the carriage! Shall we pursue now?"

"... what?"

He must have been managing the carriage at the inn, but how on earth could he?

While Bruno was greatly embarrassed, Sir Kurt came running into the lodgings one after another.

"We must hurry, Captain. "The guards said he may have already left Regina."

"No, why didn't the guards stop it sooner...?" ... ?"

"At first, I tried to stop them too. But he said he couldn't communicate with Barshain at all. However, to stop it with force, Barshain's power was too strong to be ignored... ... !"

Moreover, the explanation was that since he was also a member of the prince's party, he could not bear to use a strong hand.

Tiing-

Bruno staggered to his feet, clutching his dizzy head.

"are you okay. I'll go. It might not be too late. "Get ready to speak right now-"

But before he could finish his sentence, Sir Calmen came rushing in and shouted!

"We're in big trouble, Master! Edith... ... !"

"Why her again?"

"I guess he was sleeping in the carriage the whole time. "Many people witnessed a young maid being thrown violently from a runaway carriage!"

I fell from a carriage running at full power and was thrown defenseless on the street?

It was the worst. I should have stopped her a long time ago before her accident happened!

"So, how injured is Miss Edith now? "Is he alive?"

"But he looked fine. "In fact, I heard that he was so excited that he

even ran after the carriage for a while."

"... what?"

"And then I had an accident. Well, the story goes that he stole the horse from a passing mercenary, got on it, and disappeared along with the carriage! "Now that mercenary has come to the front of the dorm and is protesting fiercely!"

"... ..!"

I felt dizzy. Where on earth should I start and how far should I use my hands?

Then suddenly, Bruno's thoughts wandered to the precious luggage that was lying in the back of the carriage. His face turned pale in an instant.

"Your Majesty... ..!"

* * *

Bartoza ran like crazy through the streets of Regina.

"Aaaah! Get out of the way! "Everyone get out of the way!"

"Ahh!"

"what? "I guess the coachman is crazy!"

"Avoid everyone!"

No one could stop the runaway carriage. Ironically, the thing he was driving was a carriage with the emblem of the majestic imperial palace engraved on it.

Thanks to this, the carriage, which was not stopped by anyone, had already crossed the outskirts of Regina and crossed the desolate plain.

'Owen of Delcross eventually abandoned me! Now there is nowhere, nowhere in the world, for this Bartoza to entrust himself to!'

Although he was sad and panicked, Bartoza instinctively drove the

carriage northwest of Regina. This is because he decided that he should get as far away from the ecliptic as possible from the way he came.

And at that time, someone rode quickly after him.

"Hey, stop! "Quickly stop your carriage!"

Edith was suddenly thrown out of the carriage, but belatedly snatched the mercenary's horse and chased after her.

Of course, Bartoza couldn't understand what she was saying and fell into an even more panicked state.

"Wow! Don't come, woman! "Don't come this way!"

"What on earth are you talking about? Anyway, stop now! "It contains a lot of your important items!"

"Ah, Owen! You who betrayed faith! Why did you abandon this Bartoza! "Owen!"

As the driver loses his composure and swings the reins around, the horses pulling the carriage also fall into a state of panic and let out scream-like cries.

Heeheeheeheehee!

Meanwhile, the surrounding scenery was changing little by little. I thought I could see a sparse field of grass, and before I knew it, the carriage was entering a gentle mountain road.

At the point where the road started to slope and the speed of the carriage finally slowed down a bit.

Paaa-!

Edith jumped up from the galloping horse and barely succeeded in grabbing one corner of the carriage.

"Ugh! "Stop it quickly!"

Then, Bartozaga glanced back and was frightened when he saw Edith clinging to the carriage and making a fuss.

"Aaaah! Get away! Get away, woman!"

Rattle, rattle!

Due to his poor steering skills, the carriage cannot maintain its balance and sways precariously from side to side.

"profit!"

The long skirt hits the wind and creates strong resistance.

Edith, who had been hanging on with both hands for a while and gritting her teeth, managed to support herself by fastening one foot to the wall of the carriage. Her eyes, which were usually fierce, were now burning with strong fighting spirit.

'He told me to keep an eye on the carriage! I'm already showing off because I'm not doing anything, so if I lose even this, what kind of respect will I have to look at you from now on?'

Of course, seeing her like that made Bartoza even more frightened.

'That woman was definitely a warrior protecting the tribe leader's second son! Like Alicia by Owen's side, that woman must be a seasoned warrior!'

If that's the case, then they should aim for my life for stealing my master's belongings!

"Ugh! no!"

Bartosa was very nervous and put pressure on the reins-

Shake!

The carriage shakes violently, and Edith's body floats into the air.

"Ugh!"

However, she did not let go of the carriage in the end and slowly

began to climb towards the roof of the carriage with her eyes burning.

"Aaaah! Don't come! Do not come!"

However, Edith, who moved patiently despite Bartóza's reckless driving, finally reached the coachman's seat.

Then, Bartóza let go of the reins and started swinging the ax at her indiscriminately.

Boom! humming!

"Go away!"

"When you say something nice, give me the reins right away!"

"Die!"

"profit! This bastard until the end... ..!"

But just then, Edith's eyes widened as she happened to spot something ahead.

... omg?

"Uh huh? Look ahead! "Look ahead!"

"Go away, woman! "I'm telling you not to come!"

"Hey! Cliff! There's a cliff right in front of you! Take hold of the reins! hurry!"

"Aaaah! "Leave me alone!"

"hey! Now is the time... ..!"

Despite Edith's desperate efforts, the distant cliff quickly approached her eyes. By the time Bartozza realized the situation, it was already much too late.

Huh-!

The carriage shot into the air at incredible speed. Then, for an instant, it stopped as if it had lost gravity, and plummeted down the cliff.

"Aaaah!"

"Kwaaaaa!"

* * *

"... uh?"

Seongjin raised his head and looked at the distant southwest sky.

"what's the matter? new... What? "For what?"

Owen must have sensed something unusual, and was persistently asking questions. Seongjin frowned for a moment and then slowly shook her head.

"no. nothing... .."

Even Seongjin himself, who answered that way, wasn't entirely sure.

what? Is it really nothing?

Why does my heart suddenly feel so pounding and my feet feel empty?

"... Lowering."

At that moment, Masain opened his eyes and quietly warned.

"There are people following us from earlier."

"huh."

Seongjin nodded, unfazed. In fact, this is because I sensed their presence much earlier than Masain.

As we got closer to our next destination, Verdron, the quiet surroundings began to gradually change. Half-destroyed houses and messily broken household appliances could be seen here and there,

and before they knew it, they could sense the presence of several 'Aurors hiding behind them'.

Judging from what Masain noticed later, they have quite good skills.

'Dasha should follow us safely... ... !'

After confirming that she was much further away than before, Seongjin reassured Masain.

"Don't worry, Lord Masaine. "We just skip the middleman and get to the upper management a little faster."

To some extent, Seongjin's strategy may have worked.

A bit of clumsy makeup. A suspicious Barshaine who suddenly wants to take refuge in penance. And if you look closely, you will see that the Devil's Lamp is nothing out of the ordinary.

Enough bait was thrown. If the Freedom Underpass is spreading its information network across most of the northern region as Belinda said, it will definitely respond to Seongjin's moves in some way.

Of course, if I could pass through without incident like other fanatics, that would have been fine.

-This delivery is a 'special delivery'. Take over the luggage like this and transport it to Verdron.

Fortunately, they seemed to respond quite appropriately. The only thing that was a little surprising was that they reacted faster and more sensitively than Seongjin expected.

Who would have thought that they would rush to the core base in one day, barely passing through any stopovers.

"But everything has to be within the expected range."

"... Is that so?"

"huh."

How do you know that?

Masain didn't ask that question. Instead, he corrected Misra and only sharpened his prayers.

However, when they arrived at the ruins of Verdron and the 'special delivery' was finally completed -

"Did you encounter any inconveniences on the way here?"

Even Seongjin couldn't have predicted this. That a greater figure than expected would come out to greet them in person.

"It is truly an honor that a precious person personally uses the Jayu Underpass. "I am the general manager of this insignificant free underpass-"

The man who spoke up to that point looked at Seongjin with a strange smile on his face.

"No, would it be more appropriate to introduce our precious benefactor as the head of the [Blue Republican Revolutionary Front]?"

423

423. Transaction (1)

The carriage that Seongjin and his party rode ran non-stop since dawn, reaching a ruined village around noon. Perhaps this is the 'Verdron' mentioned by the coachmen.

"... "It doesn't seem like a properly inhabited place."

Masain said with concern as he looked at the desolate village landscape.

There were certainly no buildings left intact in the surrounding area. Broken bricks are piled up on roofless houses, and broken oak barrels are rolling around on weedy roads.

Only the vast scale of the ruins gives us an idea of the prosperity and glory this place once had.

"Imperial people don't know. The alcohol made in this town was so amazing..."

The coachman, who had remained silent until now, exhaled a puff of tobacco smoke and muttered.

The wagon she drove ran through the ruins and finally stopped in front of a large barn. Fortunately, it was the only building in the village that still had what could be called a roof.

Creak.

When I opened the crumbling door and went inside, I saw an elderly man standing under the sunlight that was barely seeping through the sparse roof.

"It is truly an honor that a precious person personally uses the Jayu

Underpass."

A polite greeting with a sociable smile.

Seongjin could sense that he was the one who ordered this entire journey. Just by looking at it, I felt like I could eat it anywhere.

Looking at his graying hair, the long scar across his cheek, and his rough, wrinkled skin, I thought he had gone through some pretty tough times.

Nevertheless, he had a somewhat light atmosphere that contrasted with his appearance. Although his clothes were neat, he looked free-spirited, and his bright eyes sparkled with a cheerful spirit that did not suit his age.

And he introduced himself to Seongjin and his group as the 'general manager of the Freedom Underpass' and the 'head of the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front.'

"My name is Giovanni. "It's nice to meet you here."

alias.

Seongjin, who somehow had this thought, looked for signs of assassins lurking around him without much response.

'Four, five... No, six in total?'

An unfamiliar sign of 'Auror Concealment' surrounding the barn.

Dasha doesn't even make a faint trace, as if she doesn't even dare to come near her.

"Lowering..."

With the assassins concentrated in one place, Owen and Martha could not have been unaware of their presence. The two people stood next to Seongjin, very nervous.

"I guess the atmosphere is a bit strange. What are you going to do now? new... Mores."

After briefly giving a glance to Owen, who was whispering as if he was anxious, Seongjin looked at Giovanni, who had a quite relaxed attitude.

'With this level of preparation, did you expect that you would be able to protect yourself enough in case of an emergency?'

Unfortunately, he made the mistake of not taking Seongjin's power into account. Of course, if the conversation ends well, you will never realize your mistake.

"General manager? stripe? "You?"

Seongjin, who did not feel any need for introduction, asked Giovanni.

Of course, he also didn't seem to particularly expect a self-introduction from Seongjin. This probably means that they already know their identities and have no intention of hiding it at all.

"yes. That's right."

"No matter how 'special delivery' it is, I didn't expect the person in charge of the Jayu Underpass to come to meet me."

Then Giovanni gently curled his mouth and smiled quite favorably.

"When you visited the entrance to the Freedom Underpass, one of my talented subordinates happened to be there inspecting it. I also happened to be in this area. Thanks to you, this event miraculously came to fruition. "I can only say that we were both lucky."

At that moment, the image of a woman passed through Seongjin's mind. She was a small woman who took over the 'baggage' from the gatekeeper and led them to the hay wagon without saying a word.

Could it be her? The author's subordinate?

"... Honestly, I didn't expect it. "I'm a little embarrassed because my plans are so different."

"I apologize for that. Well, whatever the process was, what does it matter now? "It's important that we turn this chance meeting into

something more meaningful."

"... ..,"

As expected, he is someone who gives off a strange feeling.

Just by looking at the outside, you can feel the ravages of time, but his words and actions are like those of a young man, and his voice is as clean as a young man. There is a strange elegance to his behavior that doesn't match his shabby outfit.

"If you are in charge, is this the headquarters of the Freedom Underpass?"

"It would be a bit unfair to call it a headquarters. Freedom Underpass is not an organization focused on one specific location. "It is nothing more than a loose web that immature people who dream of freedom of thought have voluntarily helped each other and woven little by little."

"Still, there is a hierarchy, so there must be people in charge like you."

"haha. Although I am the general manager, my job is insignificant. "It's just about coordinating external forces and organizations or taking care of financing."

... Isn't that the real power of the organization? Why is this kid pretending to be nothing?

Perhaps noticing Seongjin's grim expression, he awkwardly added an explanation.

"But I have to admit that this is one of the quite important bases in the Freedom Underpass. There are good roads in all directions. Do you know that Verdrón was once the largest brewing village in Ortona?"

"That's a fact I didn't know."

Seongjin answered roughly and thought for a moment.

Do you really want to go on about the fallen brewery and say it's all the Empire's fault?

'He uses impeccable imperial language, but the author is probably Ortonain.'

Giovanni has already guessed the identity of the group, and refers to Seongjin as a 'precious person.' Nevertheless, he insists on using the title 'you' rather than an honorific title.

then-

'He may have been on the side of the Republic during the Ortona Civil War, or he may have had a deep antipathy towards the Empire even if he didn't show it.'

Nevertheless, he went to the front of Seong Jin in person, going so far as to reveal his relationship with the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front. In other words, the author has a clear business with Seongjin right now, and it is most likely related to the 'Blue Republican Revolutionary Front.'

'Well, let's hear it from myself.'

Seongjin decided not to waste any more time.

"Enough small talk, let's get to the point, Giovanni. "There must be a reason why you brought us here right away, right?"

"Yes, it is."

Giovanni stopped laughing and nodded seriously.

"I won't talk around it. "I want to know the purpose of someone like you visiting this free underpass that only those who have been abandoned by the Empire visit."

"why? "If you knew, would you help me?"

"If it is to avoid organizational chaos, depending on the purpose... ...
."

"Then I will gladly accept the help. We are trying to apprehend Giacomo Milo, who has been hiding here. Other than that, there is no other reason, and I have no intention of interfering with the operation of the Freedom Underpass. "You probably already guessed it, right?"

"... .."

Giovanni looked a little shaken. I guess he didn't know that Seongjin would come out so bluntly without even the slightest investigation.

"More than that, what I'm curious about from you is something a little different. Why did you tell us that you were the leader of the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front? "What does that have to do with this?"

"It didn't mean anything. I just mentioned this in advance because the activities of the two organizations can never be separated. As you may have guessed, most of the members of the Freedom Underpass are members of the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front. In the first place, the origin of the Freedom Underpass was to help those who sought refuge in the Republic in pursuit of freedom of thought... .."

Seongjin glared harshly at him without answering, and he eventually sighed softly.

"okay. Let me be honest. In fact, it would be more correct to say that I am now standing here as the 'head of the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front.'"

Blue Republican Revolutionary Front. A transfer group that Seongjin has been supporting for several years with funds from an unknown source and in a way that he is not aware of.

Dasha started investigating a long time ago, but found nothing concrete so far, so she thought it was strange. It turned out that they were a group that mainly operated secretly in the northern part of the country through the Freedom Underpass.

"So, I've been meaning to ask you this for a long time. "How on earth did you know about our organization and decide to donate such a

large amount of money?"

Until a few years ago, the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front was a very small organization.

Although they were reaching out to the imperial capital to recruit members and raise funds, it was not easy for them to survive in the imperial capital where all kinds of subversive organizations were already operating in secret.

But a few years ago, large sums of money suddenly started coming in without any conditions. Based on these funds, the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front gradually restored the network of free underground passages and was eventually reborn as a strong organization capable of dealing directly with the Church of Penitence.

'hmm. I thought they were the ones destroying the North along with the Penitent Church, so I tried to kill them all when I had the chance...'

Ironically, the support money sponsored by Seongjin, or Mores, was the cause of revitalizing the Jayu Underpass again.

"At first, I thought it was just a coincidence that you decided to support our organization. Even after the fall of the country, people who missed Ortona's ideas and innovations created organizations that followed them."

Among young people in the capital, investing in or supporting these organizations is sometimes considered a kind of romance.

So, even if an immature prince jumped on that bandwagon, it wouldn't be considered too strange.

"But as I've been watching your recent actions, I've come to think that it wasn't just a coincidence that you chose our organization."

"Recent actions?"

"Bertrán & Lee."

At that moment, Giovanni's eyes took on an unusually sharp glow.

"Most people think that the top is nothing more than the business affairs of a wealthy prince. But anyone who knows anything about commerce would definitely have realized this. "All the projects you are conducting are actually aimed at encouraging refugees to settle down."

Giovanni, who had said that much, asked again with a slightly serious expression.

"That's exactly what I want to know. Aren't you the prince of the empire? But why would you help people who have nothing to do with it?"

But Seongjin did not answer his question. This is because for a moment, Giovanni was distracted by the strange sense of discomfort he was feeling.

"Let me ask you one thing too. So, are you saying that you don't really like where we are right now? Rather than harming the organization you run, I think you are on the same page. "It's definitely going to be a big help to refugees, right?"

"I don't mean I don't like it. Everything you do has a huge impact throughout Ortona. So, I must first know your intentions clearly-"

"No, that's not it."

Seongjin shook his head and interrupted Giovanni.

"You've been angry with me since a while ago. "Why on earth?"

"... yes?"

Giovanni asked in confusion. But when Seongjin spoke next, the expression completely disappeared from his face.

"Bertrán & Lee."

"... ..!"

"As soon as the story about our boss came out, your mood suddenly worsened. it is not so?"

Language is only the surface.

The tone of voice of the person saying that, the direction of gaze, the subtle facial expressions that appear for a moment and then disappear in an instant, and even the slightly agitated movements of the auror.

For Seongjin, who has an extremely sensitive sense of energy, no one can completely hide his true feelings that are revealed unconsciously. Especially in the case of ordinary people like Giovanni who have not entered Auror training.

"It's better not to try to hide it. "It's all visible on your face."

Giovanni was silent for a moment at Seongjin's point.

"... There was definitely that problem too. Yes, it is."

After some silence passed.

Finally, Giovanni opened his mouth, and for a moment, a fierce hostility that had been hidden deep in his subconscious flashed in Giovanni's eyes.

"Actually, that's what I was most curious about about you. "The business you run, why is its name [Bertrán]?"

* * *

Bertran is not a very rare surname on the continent. Did you say that the same castle exists in Brittany and southern Anatolia?

For example, we can choose Alain Bertrand, a famous actor from Brittany. It is said that he, who enjoyed great popularity in the Imperial Capital hundreds of years ago, built a large theater on one side of the Imperial Capital in his later years. And the name of the street where he mainly worked became Bertrand Street.

However, when it comes to the most famous Bertran on the

continent, we have no choice but to choose him. The last sword of the East, General Gael Bertran.

Fortunately, Seongjin had something to say about that.

"That's because our Logan is a big fan of General Bertran."

"... yes?"

It seems like it was an unexpected answer. Giovanni's expressionless expression cracks, and a look of embarrassment is revealed.

"As you know, the top representative of Bertran & Lee is Logan. But Logan considers General Gael Bertran his idol."

"... .."

"In fact, the reason our merchants are carrying out the Ortona economic revival project is because of him. "He's completely crazy about Ortona."

"... .."

"Are you sure?"

Seongjin was confident. No matter what anyone said, he had the means to completely prove what he said.

"Logan really knows nothing about General Gael Bertrand. His family relationships, his relationships, his childhood... . "You even know what he liked for late-night snacks when he was alive, right?"

Where is that? He is also proficient in the Ortona language, and uses Auror exercises and sword techniques only in the Ortona style. And he wields Gael Bertran's beloved sword as skillfully as Gael Bertran.

If this guy isn't a huge fan of the general, what's the point?

"If I get the chance, I hope to be able to create a place with Logan with you someday. From the looks of it, you also greatly admire General Gael Bertran, and perhaps when you two meet, you can spend a very meaningful time talking about the same interests."

For some reason, I can feel Owen and Masaine's shocked looks in the back of my head.

what? why? what?

Oh, it's real? If you don't believe me, you can ask Logan directly later!

424. Transaction (2)

Seongjin had thought that way before.

In order for Logan to stand proudly in front of the Ortonans one day, something special will have to be done.

-I was just running away. I was afraid of the cold stares I would receive from them, so even though I knew the shortcut, I couldn't enter.

Logan once said that.

It would be a natural concern. This guy is not a proud general who fought for his country until the end, but the prince of the empire that destroyed Ortona.

'Originally, I would like to forget about my difficult past life and live a new life as a prince of the Holy Emperor, but... ... '

Perhaps with Logan's personality, such a thing would never be possible.

Besides, Seongjin has already heard it. On that evening when heavy rain poured down, Logan, drenched in rain, poured out his sincerity with great difficulty.

-I thought I could handle any stigma, but in reality, I was not prepared to properly face any of my colleagues from my past life.

It's a bit annoying, but in other words, it means that Logan wants to stand by his friends from his past life, even if it means receiving a lot of stigma.

So Seongjin thought.

'okay? Aren't you ready to face it properly? Okay, then I'll force you to prepare!'

So what I came up with was the so-called 'Unite Daedong through Soccer' operation.

This strategy was inspired by the experience of a co-worker who was a fan of a famous soccer team, who went to the team's hometown on vacation and received a great welcome.

My boss, who was a typical old man, had his face relaxed as if he had just been to heaven. Since ancient times, in the world of die-hard fans, there are no races or borders.

'That's why I'm insisting that I'm the general's biggest fan!'

Anyone from Ortona, especially someone with ties to the old republican government, can't help but like our Logan, or rather Gael Bertran!

'How could you be so mean to someone who has the same idol as you?'

Whether or not Logan will welcome that measure is a separate issue. What can I do? That innocent brat has no choice anyway.

Of course, I had no idea that I would meet the remnants of the old republican government so soon and test the strategy of 'uniting the great East through soccer.'

"... yes? yes?"

Look at that. After all, it works.

Look at Giovanni's dumbfounded expression! This genius and groundbreaking strategy will instantly banish any antipathy toward the empire from your mind!

Whiiing-

A heavy silence falls for a moment in the barn, where the chilly late fall wind blows. The only thing that moves is the devil's lamp that

occasionally flickers a dull light.

[Hey, Seongjin Lee. I think you've had a serious negative impact on his first impression... ..]

shut up! No way!

* * *

Anyway, they successfully (?) brightened the mood and were able to change the topic to 'Giacomo Milo' in earnest.

"As you might have guessed, we currently have a new recruit for Giacomo Milo."

Giovanni calmly admitted. Fortunately, he didn't seem to have any intention of making an issue of 'Bertrán & Lee' anymore.

"According to Freedom Underground's policy, we cannot directly arrest him and hand him over to the Empire. "It could easily provoke strong opposition from comrades."

Giovanni added that since it is operated based on individual values and beliefs, situations in which the legitimacy of the organization is questioned by the majority of members must be avoided.

"But it will be possible to safely guide your group to Giacomo Milo's base."

"Well, how about it? Your policy is to protect as much as possible those who have entrusted themselves to escape the Empire? And yet you obediently lead us to him?"

"It is an essential choice to protect more people."

Giovanni, who responded to Seongjin like that, smiled a slightly bitter smile.

"Of course, I know full well that it is hypocrisy and contradiction. However, the power of an empire is like a natural disaster that cannot be dealt with by manpower. "Isn't the outcome already determined anyway?"

"... .."

"In the end, no matter how hard we sacrifice our lives to stop him, you will search through the Freedom Underpass and eventually find him."

That's right.

To tell the truth, while I was giving up, I even thought about turning over a lot of the Jayu Underpass.

"In the meantime, the network of the Freedom Underpass will be completely paralyzed, and there may be a huge loss of life. As for Giacomo Milo, the longer it is delayed, the less likely he will be able to catch it."

Of course, Jayu Underground is not an easy organization either. We have sufficient force to successfully exclude intruders with nefarious intentions.

If the person who touched the entrance was just an inquisitor or an exorcist, they might have tried to kill the person with a single sword and destroy the evidence.

'But the other person happens to be a prince whom the Holy Emperor cherishes... .. !'

The reason why various enemy groups criticizing the empire have safely set foot on the continent until now is not due to anything other than the mercy of the current Emperor.

But what would happen if, for some reason, he finally decided to abolish the free underpass?

'We'll probably end up like the Church of Rest.'

Giovanni had witnessed how thoroughly the Church of Rest, once prevalent in the imperial capital and the Regina area, had collapsed at the hands of the Holy Emperor.

"We are just trying to prepare for the coming flood by building a small dam to divert the water. Even if one or two houses are washed

away, it is a much better business than if the entire village is submerged."

"okay... .."

Seongjin found his decision a bit surprising. Although he had only just met Giovanni, his first impression was that he was quite an idealist.

This is true even if you just look at the organization he leads. Isn't the 'Blue Republican Revolutionary Front' full of republican romance?

However, unable to ignore the experience accumulated over time, it seems that the old idealist ended up making a compromise with reality.

"We make a deal. "I will guide you to the location of Giacomo Milo right now."

"Speaking of a deal, what are the conditions?"

"Please do not cause any damage to the base as much as possible, and do not harm your comrades. Don't even try to find out about other nearby bases. That is our condition for assistance."

"hmm."

Seongjin stared at Giovanni for a moment and then nodded.

"okay. I will try my best to avoid causing any harm to you. I won't even attempt to delve into the organization's inner workings. "You can just run the Free Underpass without any problems as always."

"Thank you for your understanding-"

"Oh, by the way."

Towards Giovanni, who seemed relieved, Seongjin added with a serious look on his face.

"Now I think about it like this. Wouldn't it have been quicker for you to just throw Giacomo Milo out of the free underpass? "If he had been

left somewhere conspicuous, we would have tracked him down."

I flinch.

Giovanni reacted without realizing it and smiled somewhat awkwardly.

"haha. As I said before, it is difficult due to the organization's policy. An organization united by beliefs will quickly disintegrate the moment it abandons those beliefs. We are open to all who seek freedom-"

"By the time you guide us to Giacomo Milo, you have already gone beyond belief. In that case, wouldn't it be better to deal with him secretly from the gang members? From the looks of it, it looks like he has several proper assassins with him."

"... .."

"I have no intention of using my own hands. "It doesn't matter as long as we can retrieve his body later."

Giovanni's face visibly hardens. In response, Seongjin raised the corners of his mouth with a confident expression.

"Where is that? You guys have already exposed me to two bases. And now he plans to lead me to the third base. "Why on earth do you want to take that kind of damage?"

"... .."

"So instead of pretending to help, let's be more honest."

At that moment, Giovanni saw the young prince's eyes shining strangely brightly. The sight of pale gray eyes with a cold yet sharp glow, as if they were swords reflecting sunlight.

"Wouldn't it be like giving you a big help by cutting out a troublesome problem without causing any harm?"

"... So what do you want to say?"

Seongjin smiled brightly at him, who was unable to hide his look of disappointment.

"Uh, so that's what I want to say. "Let's make a deal."

"... "What are the conditions?"

"Why don't we really sit down with Logan sometime? "How can I contact you again later?"

"... .."

* * *

The prince and his party left in a small wagon, just as they had arrived. This is another 'express' wagon filled with empty wooden boxes.

Now they will run for one more full day and arrive at the 'Furiano' branch where Giacomo Milo is located at dawn tomorrow.

Come closer. Come closer.

Giovanni, who had been staring at the receding carriage for a moment, asked the woman in the stealth suit who was coming up behind him.

"... What do you think of that prince? "Chief Greta."

Giovanni's announcement of himself as the head of the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front was quite an impulsive act.

First of all, I had a great intention to catch the young boy off guard. Since he was the one who revealed the precious name that had been buried in his heart for a long time, it is also true that he felt angry for a while.

However, after a short conversation with the prince, all that was left to him was a strange sense of heterogeneity and puzzlement.

"Have you noticed anything strange about the prince?"

The woman called Greta seemed to think deeply about his question for a moment.

"He certainly seemed strangely calm for his age. "I came in because I had a self-indulgent and picky personality, so I was a little surprised to see him carrying on a conversation in an easy-going manner."

"is it?"

"yes. hemp cloth... "It seemed like I could communicate well with Giovanni."

"Without any obstruction... "It looked like that too."

Giovanni let out a laugh.

"That's not it, Greta. "Prince Mores was a somewhat strange boy."

"... .."

Greta looked up at him with a question in mind, but Giovanni was already lost in his own thoughts.

okay. The more I thought about the conversation with the young prince, the more strange it became.

'He didn't want to ask me anything where questions should have been raised.'

It turned out that the subversive organization he was sponsoring was actually taking control of the North. If you do that, you might dig into the situation in more detail by asking various questions.

But the prince didn't seem to have the slightest curiosity about the organization.

The same goes for Giacomo Milo.

Although it was clear that he sensed something strange, he did not particularly try to obtain more information. I couldn't figure out what kind of guts it was.

'Besides, he didn't even try to explore me through conversation. He didn't seem to be very careful, but he didn't give out information clumsily or be easily swayed by me.'

No matter how much he reflected on the conversation with him, Giovanni could not follow the flow of his thoughts.

For example, there were many parts of the conversation with the prince that lacked proper context. I couldn't tell if he was just guessing and throwing it away, or if he just had a good feel for it.

Then, there were times when I suddenly left the conversation. So, as I adjusted the rhythm to that, before I knew it, I was getting closer to the core of the story.

For example, it felt like this. It's as if the conversation is just being roughly dragged along towards a decided outcome...

'... No, how could that possibly be the case? 'Maybe I was oversensitive about Gael's problem.'

Giovanni smiled bitterly, recalling the face he missed and could no longer see.

As a child, he was always confident. His voice was charming, and his speech was always fluent. He had a strong power to attract people wherever he went.

Didn't everyone in the academy look fascinated every time he gave a childish speech about the ideal republic?

'But Gael was different from others.'

When I made a flashy speech as if I was bragging in my youth, my friend who was listening quietly would always respond like this.

-I am not sure whether the value of the republic is worth all these sacrifices. However, I can become the sword that realizes the will of the prince who is certain of this.

At the time, I felt a little disappointed with my friend who did not respond as enthusiastically as others. Perhaps because he was young,

he did not fully understand the weight of his friend's words.

And in the end, his close friend kept his promise to become a sword.

When he bewitched people like a wizard from an old story and finally rushed towards catastrophe, Chinwoo carried out his will by scattering thousands of blood with his proud sword.

I took on the sacrifice alone that I wasn't sure if it was worth making, and silently walked down the path of blood. Even Giovanni himself, the person who pushed everyone into civil war, constantly doubted and doubted the path.

Without any doubt, and without the slightest resentment.

'It's really strange, Gael. As I look at the prince of that empire, I keep thinking of your childhood. I'm sorry to bring up your hateful enemy, but those who are more outstanding than others seem to be different from an early age.'

Giovanni stared with a lonely expression at the horizon of the wasteland, where the carriage had already disappeared.

* * *

Rattling rattling.

Seongjin was lost in thought as he let himself be swayed by the rough shaking of the wagon.

Perhaps it was because of my mood, but I felt uneasy due to a vague premonition from earlier.

"... "Are you dissatisfied with the results, sir?"

Sure enough, Masain, who had been watching Seongjin closely from earlier, asked carefully.

"huh? Uh, no. why?"

"just... "For some reason, you don't seem to be in a very good mood."

Did that make a mark?

Seongjin scratched his cheek awkwardly.

"Uh, it's no big deal. "I feel like I haven't told Giovanni enough about Logan."

Then, as if they had heard something unexpected, Owen and Masain's eyes widened at the same time.

"Logan? suddenly?"

"... "Is it you, Logan?"

"okay."

Seongjin hugged the devil's lamp and adjusted his posture to sit comfortably.

"I plan to introduce Giovanni to Logan later. Anyway, I hope they get along well... .."

And Giovanni must one day become a bridge between the people of Logan and Ortona.

"But I guess I didn't completely change the perception of Logan. "That continues to bother me."

But Owen, who heard those words, asked back with a puzzled expression.

"Are you having strange concerns? "Isn't that Logan's job to take care of?"

"... huh?"

"So it's entirely up to Logan how he gets along with that guy named Giovanni, right? Why is that new... Mores, are you trying to prepare in advance?"

uh? is it?

Seongjin blinked his eyes blankly for a moment.

"Ah, yes. "It really is."

Owen was right. He can't control such trivial things all at once.

'But I can't shake the feeling that something is lacking.'

Strangely enough, I've been feeling anxious a lot lately.

At first, I sent Logan and Sisley off with the assurance that everything was okay, but later I became anxious and sent Max back to Cyprus.

'I feel like everything is becoming more and more creaky, slightly, little by little, differently from the original plan.'

Somehow, while repeating such groundless thoughts, Seongjin looked anxiously towards the distant southwest sky.

425. Transaction (3)

"Ugh... .."

Bartoza opened his bleary eyes and looked around.

As soon as my mind became a little clearer, the pain was so intense that I felt like passing out. But he could sense that if he gave up like this, his life would really be dead.

'I am... okay. I fell off a cliff... ..'

It was dark around here, so I thought it was night. But when I look up, I can see distant cliffs and blue sky between tall conifers.

'I was lucky.'

No matter how much he protected himself with the tribe's vision, he was so high that it was surprising how he was still alive.

Looking around, I see the ruins of a wrecked carriage and the horribly mangled corpses of horses underneath. Naturally, my thoughts turned to the woman I had fallen with.

'... What happened to that scary woman? 'Is she dead?

Seeing as how calm my son-in-law is, it may be so. Although the appearance has become ridiculous, it seems that he has unintentionally escaped the fierce pursuit.

"Off... .."

Bartóza wriggled his limbs and tried to raise himself. But he soon lay back down, screaming from the new pain that surged like a tidal wave.

"Ugh!"

I didn't realize it because there was no part of my body that didn't hurt, but when I looked closely, I saw that my left arm was completely broken and bent. Fortunately, she seemed to have escaped amputation, but her two bloody legs were clearly not in good condition.

Even though his life was saved by saving his life, this is also like a flame in the wind.

'... 'I'd rather run away alone!'

Belated regret flooded me.

A symbol of the power of the Purma tribe. Tribal leader's weapon. If only it weren't for the greed to pull it all together!

As I rolled my eyes in dejection, the warhammer in question happened to be not far from him.

Despite the impact of the fall, fortunately the weapon appeared to be intact, but the box it was placed in was completely shattered and some of its contents, such as clothes, were spilling out. The knot that Bartóza had carefully tied was also completely broken.

'... huh?'

But then something strange caught Bartoza's eyes.

what? Why is there so much blood on the box? And what is sticking out from under the red-stained hem...

'... hand?'

Bartóza blinked foolishly.

No, it can't be? There was only that scary woman in the carriage, and there was definitely no sign of anyone else.

But no matter how much you wash your eyes and look at them, those are clearly the hands of a pale, tired person!

'Could it be that the people of the empire don't offer ancestral rites to the dead? Instead of honoring the deceased with reverence, you put them in a box and carry them around like a piece of luggage?'

What kind of horrible people are these people who don't know manners!

But something really scary happened next. The hand that I thought was a dead body suddenly began to move slowly!

Wiggle.

'... ... !'

And soon, before Bartoza's eyes, a terrible scene that he feared he would see again in his dreams began to unfold.

Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle.

Creak, creak. Crunch, crunch, crunch!

"Heeeeeeeek!"

* * *

Ssssss...

The trees make a gloomy friction sound in the cold wind.

Below that lonely canyon, the scene of a terrible crash.

There, a person, or rather a monster resurrected from a corpse, was standing up, covered in blood. Surrounded by a bright light that hurts my eyes.

Hwaaaaa...

How much time has passed? The light surrounding the monster slowly fades.

Rattling.

After correcting the misaligned cervical vertebrae, the tall, tall

Shinhyeong stood tall in front of Bartozha.

Although it was wrapped in flowing priestly clothing, Bartoza could see that the monster had the appearance of a proper human. The sight of the long, blood-soaked clothes fluttering around reminded me of the cursed shaman from old folk tales.

In any case, that ominous monster was something terrible that should never belong to this world. That much was certain.

"Hey... .."

As Bartóza was overcome with extreme fear-

Creak.

The monster's head moved slightly.

Although the face was not visible because it was covered by a thick hood, it somehow felt as if the monster's gaze was aimed straight at Bartoza.

A cool chill flowing through my entire body. This may not just be due to the recent excessive drop in temperature.

"Ugh... Hmm... Buy, save... .."

Bartóza trembled and let out a suppressed moan.

But something surprising happened one after another. The terrifying monster suddenly spoke in clear Barsha.

"Stop making a fuss and shut your mouth. "It's very noisy."

"Uh-huh?!"

"If you lie there quietly, I will treat you later."

"Hic? "Huh?"

Then the monster turned away from Bartoja and headed somewhere at a precarious pace.

To a place where carriage messages are scattered, and another faint presence is felt.

"Ugh... .."

The woman who fell together was closer than I thought. On the outside, she didn't seem to have any major damage, but the angles of her upper and lower body were strangely twisted, so it seemed like her spine had been seriously injured. Unlike Bartozha, she was unlucky.

It seems completely wrong for the field to breathe out every now and then and come back to life.

Paaaaa-!

I saw it.

The strange light from earlier seemed to spread again, and the woman suddenly opened her eyes!

"... Ah?"

She opened her eyes wide and looked up at the suspicious monster.

"Hey, who are you?"

"... It's a healing priest passing by. "It looks like there was a pretty big accident, so I stopped by to check on it."

If Bartozha had been able to understand the imperial language, there would have been a lot of things to counter with that answer.

It's a lie! He was hiding in the carriage from the beginning! Do you think it makes sense for him to go through this remote forest barefoot in the first place?

But unfortunately, Edith was not a person who thought much.

"accident... Oh, I see! I fell off that cliff. "I thought I was really going to die this time, but I got lucky!"

Edith jumped up from her seat with a lively attitude, without any injuries whatsoever.

"Thank you for your attention, priest! Oh, maybe your name is... ... ?"

"... "It's called Bart."

"yes. Priest Bart. thank you. Thanks to you, my life was saved! How should I repay this favor..."

Then, Edith belatedly noticed that the priest's tight robes were soaked in blood.

"Oh, but priest. Were you hurt too? These blood stains..."

"This is what happened while I was treating you. "I'm fine, so you don't have to worry."

"Ah yes. okay! Because of me, the beautiful priest's uniform got ruined. I'm really sorry."

As expected, if Bartóza had understood their conversation, he would have been shocked again at this point.

You stupid woman! Do you think that all that blood is just an amount you can bury by treating someone nearby? The blood you shed wasn't even that much to begin with!

"Anyway, we're in big trouble. "The carriage was completely destroyed, and all the horses were dead."

Edith looked around with a worried expression.

"Besides, I have no idea where this place is. I guess I'll have to go back to Regina first..."

Then the mysterious priest answered politely.

"It would be impossible to go to Regina. "There is no shortcut that takes you right back to the top of the cliff."

"then..."

"Instead, if you take a detour through the canyon and walk for a few days, you will reach the central territories of Ortona. "I will guide you to the nearest village."

"Oh really? I was wondering what to do now... Thank you so much, Father Bart! "Then I'll pack my bags, so please wait a moment!"

Edith began rummaging through the remains of the carriage with a brisk pace. Most of the items on board were destroyed, but we had to keep what we could.

"Should I leave your clothes bag for now? I guess I'll just have to take some precious trinkets. Ah, Red's plate collection! I can't use this because it's completely broken..."

Meanwhile, Priest Bart finally turned his head and hurriedly approached Bartoza.

"eww..."

cried poor Barshain, who had suffered so much mental suffering in such a short period of time, in terror.

"Da, don't come closer! "What are you?"

Then a calm answer came back from the monster.

"He is a priest of the empire. "He's just an ordinary healing priest."

"Normal, that's nonsense! Boo, I definitely saw that your neck was broken. How on earth did you move like that? ... !"

"This is also the grace of the Lord. If you had suffered greatly, would you have a new faith even now? "You noisy heathen."

A normal healing priest? That could never happen, Bartoza thought.

He also encountered a group of priests several times during the war with the empire. There were some who showed amazing healing abilities, but even so, there were scenes like bringing a person with a broken neck back to life... ... !

chuck.

Just then, the hand of the monster claiming to be a priest lightly touched his shoulder.

"Why are you doing this? "Please let me go!"

In response to Bartóza's screaming question, the monster slightly tilted its head as if puzzled.

"You are saying strange things. "Do you want to die like this?"

"what... "What on earth do you want from me?"

"I don't really want anything from you. All you have to do is help me and her maid and head to her nearby village."

"Well, if you do that... So you're saving me? Like ancient demons, asking for my soul in exchange for a deal..."

"... transaction?"

The monster briefly questioned, then slowly nodded.

"okay. I guess this can also be seen as a kind of transaction. "As it was a great inconvenience to me, from now on I will have to serve you with all my heart as my own hands and feet."

As soon as those words fell-

Hahahaha!

A horribly bright light surrounded Bartoza's entire body.

* * *

Drudge, clatter.

The sound of a heavy blunt object being dragged on the ground constantly disturbs my ears.

"Go straight down that stream. "It would be best not to rest even for a moment until evening."

And above his head, a terrible monster gives instructions he cannot refuse. Bartoja really wished that this was all a dream.

As expected, Bartoja was carrying a bloody monster on his back along with freshly slaughtered horse meat.

'It's too light to be a human. As expected, this monster is an evil spirit!'

Moreover, this monster does not show any of the vitality that a human should feel - what is called 'auror activity' in the Imperial language.

As soon as the thought reached this point, Bartoja was overcome with a sense of fear.

'Ah, Bartoja, Bartoja! Just crouch quietly and grow your power within the tribe! 'Your foolish choice ultimately led you to your own death!'

The problem was that the imperial woman knew nothing. There are more than one strange thing, but this fierce woman just chatters with the monster with an innocent face.

"Priest Bart. "But how can you speak Warsaw so well, priest?"

"I was once a member of the Southern Missionary Corps. "I learned it then."

"So you must have been at the front line? "You are truly amazing!"

In my heart, I wanted to hand over this burdensome burden to that stupid woman right away.

But that couldn't be possible because she already had other important burdens. Bartoja was dragging the warhammer, which he had been struggling with so hard, with a nonchalant expression on his face.

Deukdeukdeuk!

The more I looked at it, the more formidable it was.

"... "Yes, you guys are here."

However, if I were to pick the thing that scared me the most while carrying this monster, it would be the low muttering that came out of its mouth.

The monster was staring into empty space, spewing out words that Bartóza could not understand.

"Don't be in a hurry, Herna. As you can see, I am safe."

"This is nothing, Kadesh. "You weren't hurt, so please call Regina and reassure everyone."

Bartóza was now increasingly afraid.

Is this monster now talking to other evil spirits? Are you really going to curse me and make me die?

It was right then.

I flinch.

I felt the monster suddenly stiffen, as if surprised by something.

"... Mores."

Then he remained silent for a while, making Bartóza even more frightened.

"... That's rare. You came this far..."

After a while, the monster finally let out a small sigh and spoke.

"Don't be too angry. "I'm so sorry."

"okay. It was my fault. I just couldn't let you go without any preparation..."

"No, it's not like that. I don't blame you for tearing Sir Sharon away..."

"It's just...""

Then there is another long, long silence. The monster's increasingly

gloomy appearance, as if it were being scolded by another evil spirit, was vividly conveyed through Bartoza's back.

'What a terrible evil spirit must have come to silence this terrible monster!'

Bartoza was now so frightened that his teeth were chattering.

Ah, I'm afraid. I am so afraid!

"... okay."

And at the end of that silence, the monster lightly vibrated its body as if it was laughing.

"Okay. Don't you know it too? "I can go find you on my own."

It was such a soft laugh that it was hard to believe that it came from the mouth of an evil monster, to the point where Bartóza, who was momentarily surprised, listened in a daze.

426. Transaction (4)

"... father... .."

Hearing a low muttering sound, Owen turned to look at the boy sitting next to him.

Mores had been dozing off while hugging the lamp, and his eyebrows were slightly furrowed as if he was dreaming.

'Isn't the bed comfortable?'

As Owen moved aside the rolling luggage at his feet, the boy opened his mouth once again.

"... So brave... recognize... If you avoid... .."

... Should I wake him up?

As he was thinking about it, Masain opened his mouth as if he guessed what he was thinking.

"it's okay. "You're just talking in your sleep."

"Are you talking in your sleep? "Aren't you having a nightmare?"

"That won't be it. Because you do that every time. This is my first time seeing you talk in your sleep while taking a nap. "I don't often take naps in the first place."

This doesn't happen once or twice.

Owen, feeling a little relieved, took off his old cloak and draped it over his shoulders, and Mores muttered again like a sigh.

"So, just a little... This guy..."

* * *

While Edith and Bartóza were walking endlessly along the valley, the sun had already set and a dark evening had arrived.

Hmm hmmm, hmmm~

Edith, who has become more energetic thanks to her divine power, occasionally hums a song.

However, in the case of Bartoza, the situation was a little different, as he glanced at Edith with sorrowful eyes and was breaking into a cold sweat.

'excuse me... Woman, you're in big trouble! 'Ichi hasn't been breathing since a while ago!'

However, since I don't know the imperial language, there is no way to convey the message.

Bartoza gritted his teeth and carefully felt the monster he was carrying. I was already scared because I had no energy at all, but now my pulse and breathing were completely gone!

'... After all, this person is an evil spirit from the other world!'

Nevertheless, the only reason why Bartozza did not stop walking was because of the monster's last words.

-I have an audience so I'll come by for a moment. Walk along the waterway without stopping. When the sun sets, you will meet the person who came to meet you.

Should I run away now? Bartoza thought seriously.

'But isn't it a monster that comes back to life even if its neck is broken? They will chase me to the end of the world...'

Fortunately, Bartoza's agony did not last long. Before the sun completely set, they were able to spot a wagon covered with fresh

packaging and a small bonfire burning in front of it.

"ah! "Priest Bart said there would be a group nearby, and he was right!"

Edith smiled happily and approached the bonfire.

The person guarding the fire was a young man who looked somewhat tired. He was wearing shabby clothes that only farmers would wear, but judging from his sharp eyes and the long scar around his mouth, he did not look like a person who was peacefully farming.

As soon as he saw Edith and the others - to be exact, the bloody priest who was being carried by Bartoza - he stood up in shock.

"... Peha?!"

Then, in the blink of an eye, he approached Bartoja and was almost taking the priest's body from him.

"What the hell is all this blood... ..!"

"Look, Father Bart said it was okay. He said he got blood on us while trying to treat us... .."

As Edith spoke carefully, the man looked at her with a bewildered expression.

"... yes?"

At that moment, Bartoza felt a strange sense of kinship with the man. Even though he couldn't understand my language, I felt like he understood what was being said between them.

"... Please come this way first."

After glancing at the priest and confirming that there was no major problem, the man took them to the wagon with a genuine expression.

"As you may have heard from the priest, from now on I will guide you to a nearby village."

An attitude as if he knew everything about their situation.

Normally, I would have thought it was strange. It was their first time meeting each other, and the priest who was supposed to be the link between them was in deep sleep and was silent.

But fortunately, one of them had no idea, and the other was completely speechless.

"First, load the items you brought onto this wagon."

"ah? yes. "Then, at the risk of being rude, I will leave this here for a while."

Coo!

As Edith put down the warhammer roughly, the man again cast a strange look at her.

"But... Didn't Father Bart say something? "I already don't have enough hands, so why on earth did you bring that useless baggage?"

"This is not useless. "It's an important item."

"Aren't you from the Empire? But no matter how you look at that weapon, it looks like it belongs to Barça."

Of course, this warhammer is not Prince Mores' burden. but-

"My Majesty, I don't think he would be too concerned if I lost one or two of his belongings due to unavoidable circumstances. "But this weapon is not yours, but Prince Owen's."

So Prince Mores would want this to be given priority over other things, Edith was truly thinking.

"... .."

Of course, this may not be the attitude of a typical user.

The man thought for a moment. This woman says she doesn't know if she's thoughtful or if she's thoughtless.

"By the way, who are you?"

"... Please call me number 21."

The man, who introduced himself with an odd name in response to a question that was much too late, carefully placed Priest Bart's body on a bed provided on one side of the wagon.

"Is the priest sleeping? "Why don't you wake up?"

"It is not that easy to come here again. "Perhaps you won't come back after the political meeting tomorrow morning."

"yes?"

A maid who doesn't understand, and Barshain who doesn't know the imperial language at all. Number 21 somehow felt a headache.

"First, you guys take a wash in the stream."

No matter how much the North has become a lawless area, it cannot continue to wander around covered in blood.

Number 21 handed them some clothes to change into. These were shabby clothes that ordinary people would wear.

"When you're done, you can dry yourself by the fire. lung... "After I take care of the priest, I will give you a quick bite to eat."

Some time passed, and the three people sat together in front of the bonfire.

There was a small pot of stew bubbling over the fire, and as the delicious smell of food spread, even Bartóza, who had been terrified, visibly calmed down.

"Oh right! "Let's bake this quickly before it goes bad."

Edith, who was eating, seemed to have remembered it later and presented a suspicious package. Her number 21 looked at her in surprise as she noticed that her package was soaked in her blood.

"... "What is this?"

"It's horse meat."

word?

Number 21, who was dazed for a moment, was finally able to realize the correlation between the carriage crash and horse meat.

"Aren't horses the property of the imperial family? Is it okay for you to slaughter something like that as you please?"

"These horses are precious, so we should at least take care of their meat. I was dropped in a remote place, but I don't know when I'll find food again. "If I had left it as is, wild animals would have eaten it anyway."

That's true though.

After studying Edith's fierce face for a moment, No. 21 came to a conclusion. It seems like this woman is rather thoughtless.

When No. 21 nodded hesitantly, Edith rolled up her sleeves and put the horse meat on the fire. Soon, the delicious smell of cooking meat began to waft around the bonfire.

'There is nothing suspicious anywhere.'

I can feel strangely active aura activity from Edith as she cooks, but that's it. Isn't she the one for whom Her Majesty has already vouched for her identity?

No. 21 put the meat she offered him into his mouth without any hesitation. And then-

Startle.

Almost as soon as my taste buds detected the taste, I spit out the meat onto the floor.

"Oh, why are you doing that?"

"... Why do you write like this? "What on earth did you do to the meat when you slaughtered it?"

"Use it?"

At those words, Edith carefully takes a bite of a piece of meat and frowns.

"Hmm, I'm disappointed? Isn't it because it's a warhorse with a good pedigree? "I guess the meat is tough because there's a lot of muscle."

"No, this isn't tough, it's weird... as if it's covered in bile.""

"I didn't rupture my gallbladder! "It's probably a variety that doesn't taste very good."

"Just in case, I am here to help you. Could it be that it was poisoned..."

"No, it's poison! "Why are you saying such things to me?"

Although they argued for a while, it was just a light incident for the two. However, Barshain, who spat out terribly bitter meat, was once again in great anxiety as he did not know what was going on.

'Evil Empires! In the end, you're trying to quietly poison me by pretending to give me food!"

It was obvious that he would stay up all night like this.

That someone would be satisfied with that little bullying.

* * *

Growling.

Seongjin opened his eyes, feeling severe hunger.

"hungry..."

If you think about it, you haven't eaten anything all day.

Masain then handed him a small piece of beef jerky as if he had been

waiting for him. It was emergency food given to me by Dasha.

"Are you awake, sir? While you were sleeping, the coachman changed once more."

After Seongjin accepts the beef jerky, he next offers a small canteen.

"I tried to talk to him, but he didn't answer at all. "It looks like they have no intention of stopping the carriage until they reach their destination."

"Well, I guess so. "Because that is the delivery method of the Freedom Underpass."

Seongjin took a sip of water, then cut the beef jerky in half and threw one of them into the devil's lamp.

Grumble!

Red flames fly and eat up the last of the emergency food. Owen looked at the scene for a moment and grumbled.

"Are you giving it away to a fairy again? "People your age need to eat well to grow well."

"It's noisy, you idiot. "Anyway, do you have anything to eat?"

"No, how did you know I would come this far and prepare for something like that in advance... .. ?"

Owen, who was replying bluntly, suddenly seems to have remembered something and his eyes widen.

"what... ? Just wait a moment. "If it's simple food, I think I might have a way."

Then Owen closed his eyes, clutching the bright red pendant hanging around his neck.

"Mr. Sang Chang-chang. "It's a little early, but please, please!"

Everyone is watching his antics -

Dororong.

Strangely enough, as soon as he finished speaking, Owen lowered his head and fell into a deep sleep!

"... ..?"

Masain looked back at Seongjin in a bit of confusion as the guy who had been fine until just a moment ago seemed to have suddenly lost consciousness. Because she didn't seem to be in a normal state.

"What on earth is going on? "If you see that your auror activity is okay, it doesn't mean there's a problem with your body."

Of course, Seongjin was able to notice right away.

This guy is thinking of going to Pangea Chronicle for a while.

'But will Sangtae Chang, who has a bad personality, let him go easily?'

Fortunately, it seemed that the status window had no intention of being grumpy. It wasn't long before Owen opened his eyes safely. She then becomes very bright and rummages through her pockets.

"Come on, let's eat this first!"

In his outstretched hand, there were several fish cakes that Seongjin was already familiar with.

"... "What is that?"

When Masain asked, very wary of seeing food for the first time in his life, Owen answered with a smile.

"yes. "Here's some food, brother."

Seongjin also got those fish cakes before. It was given to you if you did the grocery store daily quest in the green zone.

The price is cheap, but the difficulty is easy and the taste is not bad, so even silent villains sometimes complete the quest as a snack.

Of course, for Masain who did not know that background, it would have been an extremely suspicious food.

"Speaking of food, it doesn't look like real food... Lowering?!"

He was surprised when he saw Seongjin take the fish cake without saying a word.

"Want some. hungry."

"Well, then! "If you're being rude, I'll eat it first!"

Masain closed his eyes tightly and swallowed a piece of fish cake. Then his eyes widen and he looks back at Seongjin.

Look. I heard this is delicious.

I didn't forget to put one in the lamp, and the demon king also seemed satisfied and ate the fish cake.

[What's this? It tastes like something new?]

Even while I was briefly satisfying my urgent hunger, the carriage continued to run without stopping, shaking.

"But Owen. "Do you have any bread?"

"huh? bread?"

Owen, who was momentarily confused by Seongjin's unexpected request, soon became bright as if he remembered something.

Yes, let's not forget about the part-time job at the church next to the grocery store. The bread there was pretty good too.

"hang on!"

Owen held the milestone again and fell into a deep sleep. Then, after quite some time, she opens her eyes with a triumphant look on her face.

"Here, I brought you some more bread and fish cakes! new... Mores, do you like this?"

Seongjin quickly accepted the food. Only Martha was rubbing her eyes and looking at Owen and her food with a bewildered expression.

"No, sir. "Where on earth do all these come from?"

"It's okay, Sir Martha. "Let's eat first and see."

Yum Yum.

"But Owen, there's nothing to drink...""

"huh? ah! Now that I think about it, the general store dinner quest... !
"Just wait a moment!"

While we were picking up and eating the food that Owen had procured all night long-

Seongjin and his group arrived at the final destination of the 'special delivery'. It was Furiano, the second largest refugee camp in Ortona.

427. Transaction (5)

It was inevitable that Furiano would become a huge refugee camp.

This area, located in central Ortona, is far away from the western mountain range, so marine animals rarely appear. The surrounding area was nothing but dry wasteland, so it was not an attractive land for cultivation even for the nearby lords.

However, the most important factor among them would probably be that Furiano was 'moderately' destroyed by the civil war.

To the extent that the Yeongju family gave up on rebuilding and fled, there were no infrastructure facilities left in good condition on the ground in Puriano.

On the other hand, there are still sewage facilities underground that are not completely destroyed. Thanks to this, even if a large number of people gather together and emit pollutants for several years, major diseases do not spread and the odor is maintained at a tolerable level.

"And the vast sewers of Furiano make a suitable hiding place. "It is no exaggeration to say that the most disgusting criminals are all hiding here in the underground sewers."

The man who took Seongjin's group by 'special delivery' said as he led the way.

He was a middle-aged man with a bushy beard, and he seemed to be a middle manager in his own right in the Liberty Underground, where the hierarchy was ambiguous.

"The people hiding underground here are not ordinary refugees or common criminals. They are serious criminals who must avoid the

eyes of the Inquisitors. No wonder Giovanni is troubled by them."

The guide, who was continuing his explanation, stopped in front of an old tent standing between two broken walls. Then he started banging on the tent and getting irritated.

"hey! How many times have I said this! I'm telling you not to keep pitching tents between passages! "What if I block people's paths?"

Then the refugee jumped out of the tent and took it away with a dissatisfied expression.

Toad-duk-duk.

Soon the obstacles disappear, revealing a narrow and dirty alley.

"This is the shortcut."

As I followed him through the winding alley, a wide square appeared in front of me. It is a cluttered place filled with dirty tents.

"How far did I go? Oh yeah. Some of those who have gone into hiding are heretics, such as alchemists or magicians, while the rest are all evil devil worshipers. They are out of sight... hey! Don't look around too much. "People may misunderstand that you are starting a fight."

Owen suddenly receives attention and turns his head in surprise.

Then Masain, who had been following quietly until then, opened his mouth to the guide for the first time.

"But is there any point in avoiding eye contact with us? "People are already looking this way."

As he pointed out, Seongjin and his group were attracting people's attention as soon as they entered the refugee camp.

People who brushed grass and mud to dry, and people who knocked out laundry near a dirty water fountain. The moment everyone spots Seongjin and his group, they stop what they are doing and fix their gaze.

"The atmosphere is a bit... .."

It was no wonder that Owen was whispering with a tired face. The sight of skinny people covered in soot with expressionless faces and flashing eyes was, at first glance, bizarre.

The guide glanced around and spat on the floor.

"That's because you are so different from ordinary refugees. No matter how dusty it is, the stains are too good! Come on, don't create any unnecessary discomfort and hurry up!"

He quickly passed through the square where people were gathered, and finally took Seongjin and his group to the entrance of a smelly sewer.

"Well, we've arrived. "The person you are looking for is probably in here."

"for a moment. Should we go in there ourselves?"

Masain asked in confusion. As expected, the man who guided the group had already taken a few steps back, holding his nose.

"Aren't you already finished talking with Giovanni? "We do not take direct action against those who have taken refuge in our base."

"No, anyway... ..!"

While they were arguing, Seongjin looked at the sewer in silence.

"hmm."

Drip, drip, drip.

At the dirty entrance where sewage was dripping down, there were a lot of stems that couldn't be distinguished as plants or debris.

Aside from the disgusting and humid air, the wet and slippery dirt stuck to the wall creates such discomfort that it is hard to even imagine what its composition is.

but-

"Time is running out. For some time now, I've been feeling like something's been a little off."

In that case, we have no choice but to hurry.

"The sewers built throughout Furiano would definitely be as complicated as a spider's web. There needs to be someone to guide the way, or at least a map that shows the internal structure... .."

"This is ridiculous. Are you looking for an intact map in a ruined refugee camp?"

"Then at least a torch... .."

"Sir Martha."

Seongjin held up a small, blinking lamp to Lord Masaine, who was bickering tirelessly with the guide.

"are you okay. Because we have this guy."

Then, the demon king acts proudly for the first time in a long time.

[Ahem! Leave it to this great devil!]

Seongjin triumphantly tapped the blinking lampshade -

"Come on, let's go."

After saying a short word, he walked straight into the sewer.

"Uh, you?!"

Masain, who was startled, was about to stop him.

Tuk.

Owen tapped his shoulder and said something unintelligible in a bright voice.

"You'll be fine without a guide or map, brother. new... Still, Mores is

really good at finding his way around a dungeon, right?"

... yes?

* * *

"How long on earth do I have to wait?"

At that time, in a deep hiding place in the sewers.

Giacomo Milo, whom Seongjin and his party were looking for, was urgently searching for someone in the dark.

"There is a limit to human patience, wizard."

Giacomo Milo's current state was beyond words. Dirty features, messy hair, and sunken eyelids.

Looking at that figure, no one would guess that he was once the owner of a fairly prosperous merchant in the north.

"It's okay to be somewhat imperfect. Hurry and give me that elixir...
... !"

Then the person called the wizard slowly stands up. Although she was completely wrapped in black robes from head to toe, her strangely lithe body gave the impression of a noble lady.

"It is not time yet. "Please wait."

The wizard walked slowly and passed Giacomo Milo. Then, he stands in front of several rat cages placed on one wall.

Snap! Squeak!

Surprisingly, half-decomposed rats were moving around there. Although their hearts have already stopped for a long time, they are biting each other and gnawing at us persistently as if they are still alive.

Crackle, crackle.

"Hehe."

It was a terrible and disgusting sight, but the wizard fondled the dirty cage as he would a cute pet.

"As you can see, the completion of the elixir is not far away. Just have to wait a little longer... .."

"Isn't that enough already? That level of perfection alone would be a great disaster for the humans of the ecliptic!"

"It is not wise to hastily seek revenge, Giacomo Milo. Do you want to move clumsily and lose everything you have left?"

At those words, a spark flew out of Giacomo Milo's eyes.

"Don't be ridiculous! "I have nothing more to lose!"

"... .."

The wizard closed his mouth and looked at his bloodshot eyes for a moment.

'okay. The author has already lost the top position he had built his entire life. Even if he thinks he has lost everything, there is nothing he can do.

But in the wizard's view, Giacomo still had something left to lose. And the devil who made a contract with him knows that very well.

The reason why someone who still has something left behaves in such a self-destructive way. It might be... ..

'Are these the words of a devil contractor that cannot be helped? Since it has become difficult to realize the wish originally contracted, the devil is trying to steal the soul by encouraging the contractee to break the contract.'

After closely examining his noticeably darkened complexion, the wizard was able to confirm once again that it was evidence of slow erosion.

'It won't be long anyway. It will be difficult to hold out until the elixir is completed.'

But it probably isn't any of your business.

A contract with the devil is ultimately a matter for the parties involved. Even if the impulse is excessively encouraged, the root of it is the will of the evildoer. If you do this, you have no choice but to respect it.

'I have to get what I can right now.'

The wizard made up his mind and took out a small reagent bottle from his pocket. It was an ominous object filled with a thick black substance.

"Here it is. So what is the price of this elixir?"

Giacomo Milo then also handed the wizard a small booklet. It was an old magic book he had stolen when he ran away from his family.

"Dacianus's secretary as promised. Rumors say it contains the secret of immortality."

As the wizard silently accepted the booklet, Giacomo Milo snatched it as if taking a bottle containing an elixir. As soon as he saw the black liquid flowing inside, a faint light of relief came over his face.

"I'm saying this because it's a done deal, but even I can't guarantee the authenticity of that secretary."

"I know that. "Most of the old books collected by nobles are the work of fraudsters."

"Then why did you ask for that?"

Then the magician twitched the corners of his mouth that were exposed under the hood. It was a smile that seemed too bitter and painful to be called a smile.

"Well, what can I do? "Those who know the deep mysteries of the world have no choice but to rely on these things."

If you knew that an infinitely more painful life and an even more terrible afterlife await you.

* * *

"omg! omg!"

Giacomo Milo, who finally got what he wanted, ran frantically through the sewers. Because we had to take this to the imperial capital and spread it as soon as possible.

Of course, the person carrying this will not be safe either. But now none of that mattered. Because what drives him now is nothing other than his fierce revenge on the world.

-Remember, Giacomo Milo. That elixir is nothing more than a trick to deceive 'rest'.

My breath reaches my chin. In my dazed mind due to lack of oxygen, the wizard's last words of advice passed by.

-So, you have to be careful so you don't run into 'him'. Such tricks would be of no use in front of the true master of death.

The true master of death. There was no way to guess who it meant.

but-

'Even if I make a mistake, I don't encounter him. I do not enter the ecliptic directly! First, we will unleash this deadly plague on the outskirts of Regina, infect enough people, and finally have it sweep across the imperial capital in an instant!'

But just like everything else has been like so far. The world was not on his side again.

Blink, blink.

The moment Giacomo Milo discovered a small red light shining in the pitch-black darkness, he realized that something was definitely wrong.

[this! Hurry and avoid, Giacomo! That is the one prepared!]

His demon, Salos, cries out in his mind. But soon the sound slowly

faded away from my ears.

"hey."

And finally, a tall boy appeared before his eyes.

"It's not as good as I remember, but I think it's you who I'm looking for."

The boy's narrowed eyes suddenly flashed a strange red light.

"how is it? "If we have time, can we talk for a moment?"

428. Secretary of the Immortal (1)

'How does one who is prepared?'

Giacomo Milo was literally on the verge of losing his mind.

'How can you be here without a single bodyguard, acting so shabby!' dump!

Giacomo Milo, completely caught off guard, falls to the floor in a daze. Then Seongjin looked down at him with a 'friendly' smile of his own.

"You are ready for conversation. "I think we'll talk quickly."

Unfortunately, that smile sent Giacomo Milo into a state of complete panic.

'Ah, it's over now! 'The one who is prepared will eventually kill me here!'

Giacomo grabbed the precious black elixir with trembling hands.

I finally got this! I thought I could finally get revenge on those who brought down me and my top!

'Salos! Why is there no response from Salos at such an important time?'

As the contractor's emotions intensified-

Slurp.

For a moment, a faint black fog seemed to rise from Giacomo Milo's

shadow.

[Be careful, Seongjin Lee! That guy is leaking a little bit of magical energy right now.]

The Demon King blinked his lamp and warned.

[You said that guy was a devil contractor, right? That's definitely a sign of a broken contract. It seems the devil has decided to give up on the author!]

"okay? "What happens if I give up?"

[As it is not the fault of humans, the soul is not immediately taken to the demon world. but-]

The Demon King continued his explanation quickly.

[The devil who made a contract with him also no longer has the obligation to protect the contracted person from demonic energy. The moment the devil completely disconnects, that person will probably die right away.]

Giacomo Milo has already been sentenced to death. So whether I die here or get executed in the imperial capital, it won't be that big of a problem.

However, it seemed that the story was a little different in the case of the devil who had made a contract with him.

[The devil who arbitrarily breaks the contract will indeed have to pay a huge price. The punishment is so heavy that it feels like nothing is wrong with adding a few more crimes.]

And in such a crisis, the devil almost always tried to cause an accident. The devil is not the devil for nothing.

[Ignoring the rules of the dimension, turning a blind eye to cause and effect, they use the bodies of sacrificed human beings as a channel to release as much demonic power as possible onto the earth. That alone would cause the human world to fall into great confusion.]

In other words, the current Giacomo Milo is a magic time bomb that may explode at any moment.

There was a reason why Giovanni, the leader of the Free Underpass, was reluctant to touch the guy directly.

"Then what if I kill that guy here first?"

"Ugh... ..!"

Giacomo Milo's complexion turns pale.

[The souls of humans who fail to fulfill the contract will be taken to the demon world. And that body will disappear, causing rapid erosion. A considerable amount of demon energy was left here. You may be fine, but probably the people around you will be affected to some extent?]

And humans suffer from even weak magical energy and end up dying. The Demon King added that.

"Right."

Seongjin was lost in thought while rubbing his chin.

'This is causing a bit of trouble.'

Either way, it means that the refugee camp is exposed to demonic energy.

The situation was a little different from the case where a large demon species appeared in Bathurst Territory. At that time, there was almost no casualties even when a huge dinosaur wreaked havoc.

But what about the underpass here? If you go up just a few meters, isn't it a tent village with countless refugees crowded together?

From now on, it is nearly impossible to quickly mobilize priests or paladins to purify demon energy. Even if it were possible, a terrible hell would have already unfolded in the refugee camp in the meantime.

'This means that we must keep Giacomo Milo alive until we can eventually move to a safe place.'

In addition, we need to calm down the demon that made a contract with him. Don't get scared and break the contract arbitrarily.

Having made up his mind, Seongjin slowly took a step towards Giacomo Milo.

"Stop worrying. "I have no intention of harming you right now."

It was addressed to both Giacomo Milo and the devil who had made a contract with him. A truly leisurely attitude that does not show the slightest hint of inner turmoil.

However, unlike the confident expression of a reaper holding a sickle to the neck of the dead, Seongjin was nervously watching for signs around him.

'I don't think the situation here will end quickly. Sir Martha and Owen will do well.'

* * *

In fact, there were some twists and turns that led Seongjin to face Giacomo Milo alone.

So, a little while ago-

"... .. ?"

While walking through the complex sewer system, Seongjin raised his head as he felt his concentration strangely becoming dispersed.

And I stared at the front of that pitch-black tunnel, where nothing could be seen even if I were just a few steps away from the Demon King's lamp.

'... What is this? 'I feel a little confused somehow?'

Slurp, rippling... ..

Listening to the gentle sounds of the sewage flow through one ear, Seongjin sharpened his senses towards the front.

'okay. I know the way to go. I wasn't confused even at the crossroads. But now, for some reason, I feel like the path may not be what I expected.'

It was when Seongjin was tilting his head at that strange premonition.

[Lee Seong-jin, look at that! There's something strange over there!]

The Demon King must have discovered something, and suddenly flew up from the lamp as a captive. Then it started circling down the canal where the sewage was flowing.

[Look at this guy! It's obviously dead, but it's still moving!]

In the place where the Demon King illuminated, there was, indeed, the corpse of a rat that had been cut in half.

"... .. ?"

But that's not the end. Horribly, the heavily decayed rat was still twitching its front paws intermittently.

Wiggle. Wiggle.

Masain then looked over Seongjin's shoulder and looked at the scene below the canal and took a deep breath.

"... Lord! "Is this some kind of evil trick?"

It's a trick of wrongdoing. It was certainly a sight that could not be explained by common sense. It is difficult to regard it as normal postmortem muscle cramps because the rat's body was already half-decomposed and almost all of its bones were exposed.

And around that time, Seongjin was able to realize part of the cause of the discomfort he felt in this sewer.

'Are there no living rats nearby?'

I said earlier that I could only hear the quiet sound of running water, but there was no sign of the rats that would normally be found in a sewer.

'Isn't this just a sewer? 'What's going on in this space where even rats can't set foot?'

While Seongjin was thinking about something else for a moment, the Demon King was bustling around the corpse and shouted again.

[But look at this here too, Seongjin Lee! Although it has faded a lot, I can feel faint traces of the normal world here!]

Seongjin, who was concentrating his eyes, happened to notice a faint fragment of the broken text.

?TY□E_m_und□□d_no297□402?

?err! Unable to confirm appropriate object!?

?err! ge□Ah!\$2└─Could not□confirm the server.?

?err... ... ?

Well then. If there is a phenomenon that cannot be explained by common sense, it is most likely the result of the laws of the normal world interfering.

However, this is not a law that operates normally, but is badly broken and broken into pieces and has a serious error...

'... Oh, I feel bad.'

Seongjin stopped thinking and quickly turned his head away from the corpse.

For some reason, as I continued to look at that, a strangely unpleasant feeling arose in me. It feels like something is going to burst out of me at any moment.

"It feels uncomfortable to just leave it like that. "I don't want to see it, so burn it."

Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows and gave instructions, and the Demon King responded cheerfully.

[huh! okay!]

He seems very happy to be able to prove his usefulness after a long time.

Grumble!

The rat's body was instantly engulfed in fierce flames. Seongjin, who glanced at the burning corpse, quickened his pace again when the demon king returned to the lamp.

'As expected, I don't like this or that. It's been a long time since I've had this kind of vague premonition.'

It was truly strange. The place I need to go is so clear, but why do I keep getting this undesirable feeling?

But soon, Seongjin was able to find the answer to his discomfort on his own. At some point, his sensitive senses began to detect the two people's presence at the same time.

'Ah, there were two goals!'

At first glance, both appear to be ordinary people with low Aura activity.

There was no doubt that one of them was Giacomo Milo. Although the auror activity was slightly weaker than before, Seongjin still remembered the presence of Milo Sang-ju, which he detected from afar when the demon beast appeared.

The problem was on the other side.

Looking at the auror activity, it doesn't seem like he has particularly strong force, but strangely, I feel like my nerves are constantly focused on that person.

'Who on earth is that?'

Judging by the fact that they are together, he probably has a close relationship with Giacomo Milo.

The only people he will meet here in the Freedom Underground are the remnants of the Penitent Church.

'Somehow I have a feeling that won't be the case.'

Anyway, I hope I can catch both. Seongjin thought so and hurried his steps.

"... ..!"

However, without any reward for his impatience, Seongjin soon felt that his targets were splitting up and splitting into two.

It was a disaster.

'You can't miss it like this! Even if I have to split my group, I have to go after them both.'

Apparently, the person I am concerned about is not Giacomo Milo, but someone else. That's why Seongjin wanted to chase the guy himself.

'But Giacomo Milo is a devil contractor. I think I shouldn't let them encounter two people who are not resistant to demonic energy.'

However, sending only two people there was a bit of a problem. I feel like I don't have enough power to finish the job neatly.

If he had gotten Dasha's help, or at least had been able to approach the clan as an Auror himself, the outcome would have been very different!

'Originally, I was planning to bring Max here.'

It was truly embarrassing. Why has nothing been going as planned these days?

"Lowering. "The presence split into two."

At that time, Masain also seemed to have faintly sensed the presence of people ahead.

Seeing him closely guarding his surroundings, Seongjin finally made up his mind. Maybe he was deciding the future outcome.

'I can't help it.'

And almost at the same time -

"Huh?"

Owen, who was following behind, was startled and stopped.

"Wait a minute, isn't that too unexpected? Why is there an emergency quest at a time like this?"

When Seongjin and Masain turn around, they see Owen staring into space with an absurd expression.

"What's going on?"

Masain asked worriedly. It's not that he wasn't, because he didn't look sane staring into empty space.

but-

'That's the status window...'

Seongjin's eyes now saw a faint fog-like shape floating in front of Owen.

I couldn't read the contents clearly, but it was clear. That must be Sang Sang-chang, who has a bad personality.

"Lowering..."

Once again, Masain notices a strange blinking light in Seongjin's eyes and looks at Seongjin with a slightly anxious face.

Seongjin, who waved his hand to reassure him, asked Owen in an awkward manner.

"why? "What on earth does the quest say?"

"hmm? Uh, so you're looking for some important document? Let's see... . A lord in the central region got his hands on a precious document that had been kept for a long time... .."

Owen, who was explaining step by step, suddenly looks back at Seongjin in astonishment.

"... what? you?"

"huh?"

"No, I mean. You just said... .."

I would never have thought that Seongjin would directly mention the quest.

But Seongjin was shameless.

what? why? what?

When I met his gaze sullenly, Owen hesitated and rolled his eyes here and there.

okay. Mores, you also knew? He knew what I was doing and came to see me. And you knew that I already knew your identity, and you even knew that I vaguely knew that fact.

So now that I know what you know that I know what you know, you who know that... ..

Owen's confused pupils cause a strong earthquake. Seongjin eventually sighed softly.

'This guy can't come to his senses at such an important moment.'

Since the time was right, Seongjin reacted quickly.

He decided to do what his heart told him to do, to be in the most appropriate position, without worrying about what anyone else thought.

Whick!

Sigh!

The tremendous sound of the impact echoes through the quiet underground tunnel.

Masain's eyes widen and-

"Ahh!"

Owen, who had suddenly been hit hard on the forehead, held his forehead with a somewhat shocked expression.

"no! Why are you hitting me all of a sudden? "It hurts!"

"I don't have time to be like this right now. "Will you come to your senses quickly?"

"Yes?"

"Go quickly. "Don't you need to hurry to do the quest?"

"Uh, huh? Yes!"

Owen nodded without thinking, his face suddenly brightening.

"okay!"

And then he began to run hurriedly through the sewer.

'Well, I don't have the devil's lamp or torch, but that guy's eyesight will be enough even in the dark.'

Seongjin looked at that for a moment, then turned his head and stared straight at Masain.

"Sir Martha."

"... Yes, lower,"

Sure enough, Lord Martha's face had already darkened, as if anticipating his next words. Now he too has completely grown

accustomed to Seongjin's unexpected behavior.

And the order that was finally given.

"Go and help Owen. "If you don't come with me, he'll have a hard time on his own."

"... .."

Masain seemed fiercely conflicted for a moment. However, it was only a fleeting moment, and soon a firm determination appeared on the face of the loyal knight.

"Yes, sir. "No matter what you command, I will follow your wishes."

429. Secretary of the Immortal (2)

ping-!

A small pillar of light rises before my eyes. This is the destination indicated by Sang Tae-chang.

Owen ran towards the light with great excitement.

'As expected, Mores was Seongjin Lee! Mores was the newbie!'

Such a heartless child! If you knew, you would have told me a long time ago. Why have you been pretending not to know until now?

At that time, Masain followed at high speed from behind.

"... "Brother Masain?"

"I don't know what's going on, but I'll help you, sir!"

"... .."

The feeling of excitement for a moment subsided, and my mind gradually became clearer.

It's probably not my brother's voluntary help. It must have been something that Mores ordered.

'Now that I think about it, maybe the quest came out at this timing...
... .'

Wasn't the change based on Mores' judgment? Owen vaguely thought something like that.

There is no specific basis. But somehow, I can't shake the feeling that

Sang Sang-chang continues to chase Mores and cater to his intentions.

[Emergency quest? Find and obtain important documents! new!]

[Quest Grade: A]

[Obtain a valuable document that a central lord kept for a long time. That document was once designated as a banned book under the pretext of deceiving people. Although it has been completely ignored even by the author's descendants, it actually contains a precious truth that wizards have been searching for for a long time. Perhaps with the discovery of that document, we may be able to expect unexpected additional effects.]

[Reward: 500P Cash]

[*This product is available in the Pangea Chronicle store window.]

'For someone like Sang Tae-chang, the compensation is very generous, isn't it?'

Thinking that he might have to be a little nervous, Owen pulled out the one-handed ax from his belt.

Squeak-! Snap!

As I got closer to my destination, I heard unexpected sounds.

'... mouse?'

It seemed like all the rats that seemed to have dried up in the underpass were all gathered here.

The odor also got worse. The smell of something rotting mixed with the already damp air, filling the space.

"... ..!"

We eventually arrived at a fairly large space where waterways intersect. Owen and Masain fell into a deep sleep at the sight that unfolded before their eyes.

"This is it..."

This was the evil wizard's laboratory.

On one side, there is an old bookshelf filled with books and documents, and on the other side, there are large and small cages containing various animals.

On a wall full of dirty foreign substances, a dense magic circle painted with an unknown paint can be seen. At a glance, it was clear that it was evidence of evil heresy or devil worship.

And in the center, there was a person wearing a black robe.

"... intruder?"

When he spotted the two people, he was shocked and shouted.

It was impossible to see his expression because his face was completely covered with a hood, but there was a hint of embarrassment in his voice that could not be hidden.

"How on earth did you guys get here without incident? "There must have been many traps in preparation for an invasion."

"trap?"

At that moment, the image of Mores occasionally taking a detour on a straight road flashed through Owen's mind.

ah! Did you avoid all the traps?

'No problem! 'Because he's a newbie!'

When I was conquering 'The Orc King's Maze', my skill at avoiding traps and alarms like a ghost didn't go anywhere.

Owen, who felt proud for a moment, suddenly came to his senses when he heard Masaine's shout.

"Lowering! "Everything in that cage is dead!"

Masain's complexion turned pale.

"They even apply that evil trick to people... ..!"

'person?'

Owen's startled gaze landed on a large cage inside. There were animals trapped there that were unusually large compared to the others.

Crackle, crackle.

The sight of him losing his wits and biting at the bars makes him look like an animal. Upon closer inspection, they were clearly human shapes with intact limbs.

"... ..!"

Owen and Masaine realized at the same time.

I wonder why that wizard decided to settle down under the refugee camp despite such harsh conditions... ..!

"Whoa... .."

The black-robed wizard took a step back and let out a sigh.

"I thought I was barely seeing results, but in the end, I ended up wasting precious samples like this. one-"

Flash!

An eerie eye glow shined through the dark robes.

"If I see this, I can't let you live anymore!"

At the same time-

Taang!

Numerous cages opened at once, and half-rotten animals poured out towards the two people at once.

* * *

"Stop worrying. "I have no intention of harming you right now."

At the same time, Seongjin was comforting Giacomo Milo, who was trembling with fear. To be exact, he sided with the devil who made a deal with him.

The consequences of arbitrarily breaking the contract were so frightening that he did not hesitate to commit another crime in desperation.

In other words, the devil probably wants humans to take responsibility for the collapse.

'I've only just found him, but he suddenly throws away his contract and tries to run away. 'What on earth is that devil so scared of?'

In any case, if you give even the slightest possibility, the devil will try to keep the contract. So Seongjin decided to capture the devil and cautiously took a step closer.

"I promise. We'll protect your contract. You don't have to do anything. "I'm not going to kill your contractor right here and now."

But the devil still had no answer. Only Giacomo Milo rolled his frightened eyes here and there.

"Well, don't lie!"

Finally, Giacomo opened his mouth in a trembling voice.

"Protecting the contract, that's all a lie, isn't it?"

"No, I'm not really going to kill you here."

"It's all a play on words! The death sentence has already been handed down to me! So, doesn't that mean you can lure me to a deserted place and have someone else take my life at any time? "Do you think I'll be fooled?!"

hmm. That's right. How can I persuade this guy who is already destined for a miserable end?

When Seongjin did not specifically deny it, Giacomo Milo's expression became distorted. He shouted in a voice full of evil.

"Salos! Are you listening? Hurry and protect me! "If you will do that, I will give myself to you right now!"

[...]]

"So, according to our agreement, give us the strength to defeat the enemy before us! Neglecting the contractor's risk would also be a serious breach of contract!"

Then the devil, who had been holding his breath until now, reluctantly responded.

[Gacomo...]

"Salos!"

[Look at this. It's not the time to talk about contracts right now. What are you going to do now that I have your body? To descend directly before the representative of the great monarchs, are you now telling me to disappear without a trace?]

Ah, yes.

Even with the opportunity to take over the contractor's body right now, there was no reason for the devil to hesitate.

The fear became so visible that even if I were to be accused of breaking the contract, I would consider abandoning the contractor and running away.

"The one who is prepared..."

Giacomo looked up in confusion at the boy in front of him. Despite his shabby appearance, this person revealed a presence that was heavier than anyone he had ever seen.

[I will ask you just one question.]

While Giacomo's mind was shaking, Salos borrowed his body and

opened his mouth.

[Will you really keep our contract? Are you saying that you won't chase me all the way to the demon world just because I offended you?]

... what? What kind of bullshit is that?

"You're chasing me to the demon world, what can I do?"

As Seongjin tilted his head, Giacomo Milo, no, the devil, looked somewhat uncomfortable and drooled.

[That's right, you are prepared... Huh...]

The devil hesitated for a moment, but as if he had made up his mind, he began to beg Seongjin in a panic.

[Anyway, please, please make a promise! I don't dare expect it to be stipulated in a contract! Can't you just tell me that you won't make an issue of this?]

When the devil came out in a lower posture than expected, Seongjin thought for a moment.

what? At this point, wouldn't it have been okay if they just broke the contract and let him run away? I think that guy would have just quietly retreated without making a fuss that would release his demon energy out of anger.

"... "If you promise?"

[If only you would do that! Then, I will keep the contract and never go against your will from now on!]

"... Salos?!"

Giacomo Milo suddenly came to his senses at the sudden change in the devil's attitude.

"What does that mean? "Do you believe that?"

[Giacomo. First of all, the current situation does not seem to be a big crisis for you. So, even if I don't step forward, it's not a violation of the contract. furthermore...]

"Don't talk nonsense! In any case, the one who is prepared will bring me out and make me suffer his punishment! As a result, isn't it clear that they are trying to take my life?"

[that...]

Still, when the devil showed no sign of moving, Giacomo shouted in a desperate voice.

"great! If you don't help me, I'll kill myself right here! "Isn't there a reason why he tried to coax me instead of cutting me right away?"

Even though I was cornered, it was a fairly sharp decision.

"Now, how about this? "I have a secret weapon that can make even rotten corpses walk!"

Giacomo grabbed the black elixir tightly and growled at Seongjin.

"What do you think will happen if I die like this and my body erodes? The empire will face the fear of spreading demonic energy without stopping forever! "That wouldn't be a bad way to get revenge on the world!"

Seongjin's gaze rested on Giacomo Milo's hand for a moment.

Indeed, were all the rotten, moving rats also this author's work? That means there was a part of me that believed in it.

But you also have to make threats while looking at the other person.

"Don't do anything useless. "If you have a priest or a paladin, it will be easy to purify just you."

"There is no hope of finding a decent priest or paladin here at the base of the Free Underpass-"

"why? There's one right here too. "After all, I'm an exorcist, so I'm a

paladin, right?"

"... "What?"

A slightly irreverent light appeared in Giacomo's eyes, which were overcome by evil.

'you? Exorcist? 'Where are you selling drugs now?' These eyes clearly reveal this meaning.

"Hmm, I don't believe you. Should I show proof?"

Seongjin took out the bottle of holy water he had kept in his arms. And in my other hand, I even pulled out a flying ticket. These are all items received from Sir Robert.

Do not let go of exorcism tools under any circumstances. Isn't this truly the attitude of a prepared exorcist?

"I just need to be careful because there are too many people nearby. I heard that the magic energy scattered by the dead due to erosion is not as big as I thought. If you create a simple barrier with these tools, you will be able to hold out long enough until you can call a priest to purify you."

Of course it was a bluff. It was impossible to guarantee how effective the barrier would be against a moving target.

Additionally, if you arbitrarily call another Paladin to the Free Underpass base, that day will be the end of your relationship with the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front.

"No way..."

But for Giacomo Milo, who knew nothing, those words were enough.

As his demon continued to confirm the sacred energy contained in the tools, Giacomo seemed to be intrigued.

"... Unbelievable!"

He cried out in utter despair.

"Why do you mean I have to die? "I haven't committed such a big sin!"

"I made a pact with the devil and harmed people for personal gain. "Do you need any more reasons?"

"A contract with the devil? That's what it is! If you want to survive as a merchant, if you want to withstand the evil forces of other competitors, there is no way to do it without becoming a devil contractor yourself! "Can you really say it's all my fault?"

Giacomo Milo suddenly raised his head and looked straight at Seongjin. His face, distorted with fear and despair, was seething with a mixture of inherent anger and twisted joy.

"I didn't make a big mess of the continent! "It's not like I was just recklessly killing people like everyone else!"

"Because of you, many people fell victim to the Demon Tree."

"That is a false accusation! It was the Dark Church's fault that summoned the Demon Beast! Rather, I, who lost everything, am the biggest victim of that incident! But why do I have to take all the responsibility?"

Hehehehe!

Hot tears well up from Giacomo Milo's eyes.

"The same goes for Sigismund's medicine cart! I just sold things that made money! The Penitent forces that control the North wanted to sell it, and the Sigismund Territory family hoped to buy it! "What choice do I have as a merchant between them?"

"... .."

Seongjin became a little bored.

okay. I can't say that there are no circumstances that need to be taken into account. But what on earth are you asking me to do? My father wouldn't know this, but I am not the one who judges human sins during my lifetime.

That was when I thought about it.

Bleep-

Suddenly, I heard a high-pitched ringing sound and felt like my vision was blurring.

And then, without even a moment to wonder, a vivid scene unfolds before my eyes.

Living corpses and terrified people. And I see burning buildings. It was a miserable scene, like hell, but if Seongjin's memory was correct, it was definitely Regina's street.

A near future that you will never return to, that you have passed by.

'Ah, yes!'

Seongjin suddenly realized.

'This isn't the end. This interest will continue to bring about a terrible future as long as he lives.'

Although it happened in a split second, Seongjin made a complete decision.

[Hey! Hey Giacomo! This is my final recognition as a contractor. Maybe this is a golden opportunity for you! So just listen to him and don't call me anymore... ..]

"Salos?"

For some reason, the demon suddenly screamed and completely disappeared beyond the demon world.

Giacomo stood up in embarrassment, but then froze. Silver eyes, shining brightly even in the dark, were looking down at him indifferently.

The air, which was already wet and heavy, pressed down on his body with even greater density.

"Enough with your complaints, just give the item away. And follow me quietly."

"... .."

Originally, it would have been right to refuse. This elixir is like his last resort.

But for some reason, Giacomo's body was already following the command before he even recognized it. Because there was no way for him to resist any more abstract words that seemed to be engraved directly into his soul.

"but... I, I... ..!"

"You still don't know?"

Seongjin calmly informed Sang Sang-ju, who was struggling in hopeless helplessness.

"I am giving you a chance, Milo Sanjangju."

"opportunity? "Oh, you can't believe that you will save me-"

"No, you will die."

A stern answer came back that crushed any faint hope.

"But if you stop what you're trying to do even now, I'll at least give your soul one chance."

It is quite harsh to hold someone responsible for something that has not yet happened.

So I'll give you a chance to make it up to me. So that even after death, the soul is not dragged into the demon world and does not fall into another place even more terrible than the demon world.

"... ..!"

It was a short answer, but Giacomo could vaguely feel the weight of those words as a devil contractor.

The reason why demonic contractors can run rampant on a continent where the faith of the main god is dominant. One of them was deep despair about the afterlife.

-There is no salvation from the Lord. After all, you humans will only suffer endlessly at the hands of high-ranking demon lords who are scarier than the demons of the demon world. So, shouldn't we enjoy power through our own power, even while we are alive?

Giacomo also remembered Salos' last words.

-Hey, Giacomo! This is my final recognition as a contractor. Maybe this is a golden opportunity for you!

He was once kicked out of his family and ran a small to mid-sized business without any foundation. He had an excellent ability to instinctively judge which side was beneficial.

"... "I will die quietly, where you want, when you want."

Giacomo, who had finally given up on revenge, held up the elixir with trembling hands and lowered his head. At first glance, it appeared to be an attitude of fervent worship of something.

"So, please give me a chance at salvation!"

430. Secretary of the Immortal (3)

The beginning must have been a simple idea.

If the mortgaged soul is bound to fall into the hands of the creditor upon death, wouldn't it be possible to obtain some grace period by binding the soul to the body?

It is probably impossible to make the body itself live forever. Even with the help of divine power, which is considered life force itself, the limits of life were clear.

Didn't all the previous emperors who were called representatives of the main god, and even the first emperor, who was said to be a demigod, only last for 300 years?

So thought those who knew the mysteries of the world.

If so, how about this? What if you could deceive the body, deceive the soul, and eventually even 'death' in a different world that escapes the laws of this world? What if you could avoid the eyes of cruel creditors for a while using a secret trick with a little expediency?

Wouldn't it be possible to prolong this miserable life just a little bit?

'It was a natural idea, but it was also a very dangerous idea.'

What happens when the soul cannot leave the dead body in time is more terrible than you can imagine.

Perhaps, if those who tested the secret art had spiritual eyes, they would have been able to witness their failure vividly on the spot.

The human essence that is slowly decaying along with the body, the miserable appearance of the soul.

'Your father once said that too, right? 'The soul is constantly influenced by the body.'

Therefore, the soul bound to the rotting body had no choice but to be ruined miserably.

With the decaying and collapsing skin, you lose your form, and with the melting brain fluid, you lose your senses.

Without knowing why their essence is being completely corroded, they simply scream in animal-like pain and fear for a long time.

Just like that.

[Ahh... fat... Off... I... why... Hehehe... ... !]

When Seongjin waves his hand, dark red flames transfer to the decayed organism that was sinking on one side of the waterway. It was the terrorization of Gehenna.

Grumble!

The fiercely burning fire instantly incinerated not only the shredded flesh but also the white bones.

At the same time, the soul that was crying in pain was engulfed in dark red flames and soon completely disappeared.

[Pick... Jjiji...]

The same goes for the unidentifiable foreign matter stuck to one side of the damp wall. With just a glance from Seongjin, they were instantly and cleanly set on fire.

Completely flawless combustion without even smoke.

[...] Nyao...]

[Grrrrr... Fuck!]

The more you walk, the more various souls bound to rotten flesh appear before your eyes.

Seongjin laughed.

'That's a good thing. Take a look at those things. 'How long have they been doing this?'

Suddenly, I had a strong urge to sweep the entire underground sewer with the fire of Gehenna.

But I'll have to endure it. If you do what you want, the entire Furiano will probably become a hell where no life can survive.

"So, just burn away cleanly."

Grumble!

"Stop spreading such trivial tricks and disappear like this."

Good luck!

"Here too."

Grumble!

"And here too."

Grrrrrrr...

In accordance with Seongjin's small gestures, the flames continued to spread and sweep through the dark sewer.

The sight of dark red fire demons dancing with demonic energy is at first glance a scene from hell.

However, contrary to its terrifying appearance, if we only look at the results, Gehenna's terrorization may have been closer to 'purification'.

Not only were they incinerating the corrupted things, but they were also burning away all the miserable souls whose fate had been decided.

"..."

Giacomo Milo, who followed Seongjin with a scared face, was

completely overwhelmed by the mysterious sight.

'this... The power of one who represents powerful monarchs!'

The momentum with which the hot flames spread was formidable. But strangely enough, the boy ahead and his own body are not invaded in the slightest.

Amid my despair, a new sense of relief arose.

'okay! At least my last choice wasn't wrong!'

When he gave up resistance and let go of everything, surprisingly, a new desire began to bloom in Giacomo's heart.

A heart that wants to abandon all desires and selfishness and fully accept only the grace of the Absolute.

The desire to accept one's own limitations and rely on the power of the perfect absolute being.

A desire to find inner peace and happiness through devotion and obedience to the Absolute.

An extremely pure and beautiful heart of faith that he could never have imagined sprouting in his own heart throughout his life... ..

"Bethelah... .."

Giacomo Milo chanted with a trembling voice. Unlike before, when he was in contact with the penitential sect and half-heartedly imitating it, it was truly a pious chant that came from the heart.

"I leave everything in your hands, so please let me be used in your plans... .."

The eyes were filled with red fire, and a strange joy glowed dangerously.

How long did we have to walk along the waterway with Giacomo, who was half-fed?

[...] jin...]

A small voice called Seongjin from somewhere.

'what?'

The thought came from directly below. As I slowly turn my gaze, I see a small lamp steadily blinking a faint light in the middle of the gushing flames of Gehenna.

[...] this... jin...]

I felt my high spirit subside a little.

Ah, I see. It seems like something is wrong with me. Somehow, for some time now, I've been feeling like something doesn't fit.

Is it okay if it stays like this? First of all, my father is not here.

[Lee Seong-jin.]

Originally, my father would have stopped me before this happened. I should have done that.

But I didn't bother to send Sir Sharon away. It was something that could not be helped. Because she had something more important to ask her.

[Lee Seong-jin. Seongjin Lee.]

Oh, I know, devil.

It'll be okay though. Because I know who I am now more than ever.

* * *

Kkkkkkkk! Growling!

Snap! Squeak!

Wow! Guwag!

The sight of rotten corpses flocking together was beyond disgusting

and downright terrifying.

Masain swung his arms widely and created a series of Aura explosions.

Pow! pop!

The swarm of rats that were running at the forefront turned into powder and flew out in all directions. The animals that were running after them were also pushed away, scattering their rotten flesh.

"... "Huh!"

In fact, considering the amount of aura consumed, aura explosion was not a very good option.

However, there is no other way because the opponents are corpses that inevitably crawl on the floor even if their bodies are cut in half. So rather than cutting them down one by one, it would be better to just blast them far away with an attack that can hit in a wide area.

Of course, apart from the remaining physical strength, the mental blow was not easy.

Guess...

Masain, who found the body of a child who had risen to his feet even after his brain had been shattered, was drooling with a pale face.

"oh my god. Lord... ... !"

Meanwhile, Owen was digging around among the corpses with light movements.

'Please hold on for a moment, Brother Masaine!'

Moving counterclockwise along the wall with the magic circle drawn, he swung his ax at the corpse of a sturdy man blocking his path.

Flutter!

A one-handed ax smashes his head in one fell swoop. Nevertheless,

his body did not fall down, and persistently stretched out its arms towards Owen.

puck!

Owen, who kicked the man in the chest and sent him flying far away, used the recoil to spin his body around and avoid the old woman's claws sticking out from behind.

Whick!

At the same time as I turned my body, I didn't forget to shake my arm vigorously to remove the flesh stuck to the axe.

Owen raised his arms high and swung the ax diagonally, chopping the woman running from the side into long pieces.

grasp!

In the cleanly cut section from one side of the neck to the side, white maggots popped out instead of red blood.

'... 'It's terrible!'

It was fortunate that Owen was quite familiar with such scenes. In Pangea Chronicle, there are quite a few dungeons filled with undead monsters.

Thanks to this, Owen was not buried in the devastation in front of him and was able to have the leisure to look back at the situation from a relatively distant perspective.

'The quest given by Sang Tae-chang wasn't about getting rid of the corpses!'

In that case, all he has to do is find that 'important document'.

Once you complete the quest, it might be better to quickly get out of here with Brother Masain.

Wow...

When the body of the man who had been pushed away lunged at him again, Owen swung his ax hard, this time aiming for his legs.

puck!

After kicking the guy again who stumbled sideways with his thigh bent, Owen diligently rolled his eyes and looked for Mr. Sang Chang-chang's mark.

'... 'There it is!'

sparkle!

On an old bookshelf on one side, an old book glowing faintly among the messy stacks of paper. That's definitely what it means when it's a precious old book.

Owen naturally turned his body and advanced toward the book, pretending to be wary of monsters.

Quaaaang!

Meanwhile, Masain was steadily reducing the number of corpses. The high-ranking knight auror, close to Dekaron Knight, had achieved the status of the relic Mithra and was demonstrating truly amazing destructive power.

Patter!

Rotten flesh is scattered everywhere like minced meat in a grinder.

The series of explosions shook the entire old sewer tunnel, throwing rainwater dust down on our heads.

"Your Majesty Owen! "It's dangerous if you go too far alone!"

At this point, the black-clothed wizard, who had not moved from his seat until then, also showed great agitation.

"... Unbelievable! "Where on earth do these people suddenly come from?"

The wizard, whose body was trembling, quickly turned around as if he had made up his mind. To be exact, towards the exact bookshelf that Owen is aiming for.

'this!'

If you think about it, it was a natural result.

This is the secret laboratory of an evil wizard. If the wizard had to abandon this place, what would the first thing the wizard take care of other than the research records so far?

Owen, anxious, quickly shouted.

"You vile apostate! "You are a shameless henchman of the devil!"

"... ... ?!"

Stop.

As Owen's cries echoed through the sewer, the wizard looked back at him in confusion. Unlike Masain, who is flashing auras, Owen's performance has been minimal so far, so he has not paid much attention to it.

However, he could not ignore the next words Owen shouted.

"I am the prince of the Holy Empire Delcross!"

"... "Prince?"

"Yes! As a proud member of the Seonghwang family, I will risk everything to take your head!"

Owen shouted with ferocious force and took steps straight towards the wizard. To the wizard's right, where the bookshelf was located, which he was cautiously approaching.

"Ugh!"

Seeing his unusual appearance, the wizard hesitated and could not get closer to the bookshelf.

Meanwhile, Owen quickly jumped over a corpse, then deliberately twisted the angle of the ax blade and violently exploded the head of the woman following him.

Whistling- Bwak!

The half-melted brain water scatters roughly with a foul odor.

"You, don't move, just stay there! "I will soon plunge my sacred axe into your cursed limbs!"

At first glance, rather than a prince, his behavior is closer to that of a Barca barbarian who loudly grabs at the front line.

However, that ignorant pressure showed some effect against the wizard. The wizard, tired of Owen's momentum, eventually gave up on his bookshelf and began to back away.

"Ugh... .."

At that moment, Owen suddenly turned away from the wizard and quickly launched himself towards the wall.

Taaat!

And swinging his hand like lightning between the corpses, he finally succeeded in snatching the shiny booklet from the bookshelf.

'... 'Gotcha!'

At the same time, a small window pops up in front of my eyes.

[Emergency quest? Find and obtain important documents! complete!]

'I did it!'

Owen rolled around on the floor with the book in his arms.

"Lowering!"

Kwaaang-!

An unusually large aura explosion blazes, wiping away all the corpses

remaining nearby.

When Owen suddenly threw himself to the floor, Masaine seemed very embarrassed.

"Lowering! Is there a problem! Are you okay?"

"Yes, brother! "It's no big deal!"

And the wizard who was looking at the scene-

"... Tsk!"

Perhaps because he thought he had no chance of winning, he eventually turned around and quickly left the lab. I thought this was a dead-end section of the sewer, but perhaps there was a secret passage reserved for wizards in case of emergency.

After seeing the pitch-black new figure disappear before his eyes, Owen slowly got up and followed his presence. Unfortunately, the wizard's presence quickly moved away, and soon he could no longer be detected.

At that moment, Owen felt something was strange.

'Sang Sang-chang. Why did you tell me to find this document instead of telling me to catch the wizard?'

It was a messy battle, but thanks to Masain's actions, the corpses quickly fell into an inactive state. If Owen had confronted him without paying attention to the documents from the beginning, he might have been able to catch the wizard in the nick of time.

Documents could also be collected slowly after all processing was completed. But why was it necessary to secure this document first?

But even though he had doubts for a moment, Owen soon understood the reason.

Grumble!

A strong fire suddenly began to swirl from one side of the sewer.

Hwareuk!

It was an ominous flame with a dark red glow. The flames quickly rushed into the sewer, covering the waterway and incinerating the shredded bodies. Even the flesh stuck to the wall and the complex magic circles were completely burned.

Grrrrrrrrrrrr!

The flame spread so quickly along the wall that, in the blink of an eye, it enveloped the wizard's bookshelf and documents and burned brightly.

'... omg?'

It happened so quickly that Owen could only stare dumbly at the flickering flames. If this had been a little late, he would have lost all his quest documents!

"... Lowering?!"

At that time, Masain's startled cry was heard from over there. Owen finally came to his senses and looked at the person who appeared with the flames.

A boy standing with dark red flames covering his entire body. It was none other than Mores.

He slowly turned his head when he heard Masain's voice calling him, then slowly tilted his head to look at him.

"Brother Masain."

"... ..!"

Owen was greatly embarrassed.

Why is that guy acting like that all of a sudden? Brother Masain? I guess there's something strange about this kid.

"what... It's a newbie. Are you okay?"

Then, this time, Mores just rolled his eyes and looked at Owen.

"okay. "You idiot."

"... .."

No, I think he manages to respond to being called a newbie.

No matter how you looked at it, the guy's expression was extremely unnatural. It's like someone who hasn't used their facial muscles for a long time and has forgotten how to move their facial muscles properly.

Owen asked, walking towards him with a worried look on his face.

"Hey, how did things go? Or did something big happen in the meantime?"

"... .."

"Why are you doing this all of a sudden? "Where are you hurting?"

Then, Mores looked at Owen with a somewhat blank expression, and said something unintelligible with a flash of reflected light.

"It's nothing special. Just because Masain and you are there in front of me, it's kind of amazing, isn't it? "I guess I'm still in a happy nightmare."

431

431. Secretary of the Immortal (4)

I know none of this is real.

Someone who particularly considers a life filled with fierce struggle knows very well that it is nothing more than a light illusion created out of generosity.

but-

[□□□.]

Amazingly, with that one voice, it was possible to add meaning to a battlefield that had always been lonely.

I could see it as a worthwhile fight to protect something precious.

[□□□.]

That's why I can't help but feel weak from the voice that still lingers in my head and calls my name.

That was why I ended up forgiving the annoying guy who I had vowed to thoroughly avenge, as if it were a lie.

A short time spent with an imperfect fantasy. Perhaps it was a rare day that could be called happiness.

So that time can also become a nightmare.

One day, when you open your eyes, you will realize that the voice that was always by your side no longer exists in reality.

* * *

"It's nothing special."

The boy answered calmly.

"Just because you and Masaine are right in front of me, it's kind of amazing, isn't it?"

I guess I'm still in a happy nightmare. After adding that, the boy slowly stretched out one hand towards the air.

OK-

Grumble!

As if the gesture was a signal, the flames that had spread in all directions quickly gathered around the boy.

The flames that instantly incinerated the wizard's workshop were now swirling wildly around the boy's body.

At first glance, a terrifying force that seemed as if it would swallow the boy whole.

However, to Owen, it felt like he was expressing his confused emotions to his son-in-law instead of an expressionless boy.

"Newbie, that fire... .."

"Oh, don't worry. It's not dangerous. "Because it's mine."

As he said, the boy seemed to have complete control over the fire. It is burning with the power to evaporate all the sewage water, but the proof is that not a single hair on the boy's body is damaged.

The fire did not get closer than a certain distance to Owen and Masain.

'but... ..'

Why? Still, Owen was overcome by the urge to get the boy away from that flame right away.

Fire has always been a threat. Wasn't the fire that consumed his

parents one day, and the fire that burned the world in his dreams one day, exactly like that?

'Wait a minute, dream?'

In an instant, a powerful realization struck Owen's mind.

Now that I think about it, I have seen this scene with my own eyes.

The scene of hell covered in dark red scars, and the sight of a boy calmly walking into it. The scene in that nightmare that I had forgotten for a while.

'It's also ominous. Newbies shouldn't be left like this!'

Owen, who vividly recalled the emotions of that time and his memories, became anxious. So he turned his head to find the person he could most rely on in the current situation.

"older brother. Brother Masain! I guess Mores... ..!"

But it was a strange thing.

Normally, the person who would have rushed to the spot the moment he discovered the boy's abnormality was now standing there as if frozen.

"... older brother?"

"... .."

Even though he called out to him, Masain remained stiff and stared blankly at the boy.

His heavily distorted face looked like he was greatly afraid of something, or hesitating intensely about something.

Rather, it was the boy who responded to Owen's call. He just rolled his eyes, glanced at Masain, and slightly twisted the corner of his mouth upward. It was the first time that a lifeless, sculpture-like face had created something that could be called an expression.

"Look at this. After all, it's a dream, right? Brother Masaine is still with me."

I flinch.

At that moment, Masain's pupils shake violently.

"Lowering. I am... .."

But the boy didn't listen to what he said, and turned his gaze again to look directly at Owen.

"And idiot. "You look fine too."

"... what?"

"Ever since you forcefully retreated to save Sisley, I knew you would end up like that. I should have listened to you a long time ago when I tried to stop you from doing that. Because of you, I miss my father so much... .."

The boy who had said that far let out a low laugh, hahaha.

"Uh, really, what is it? Is it taking us back to what we lost? "It's a really bad nightmare."

... nightmare!

At that moment, the boy's words awakened Owen's spirit.

'I don't know! I don't know why the newbie ended up in such a state... ..!'

At least he seemed to think this was a nightmare.

Then there is only one answer. I have to wake up from the nightmare.

And Owen knew at least one easy way to escape painful nightmares.

"Hey, would you like to look at this for a moment? "I'm a newbie."

Owen took out the eyepatch that he had carefully stored away in his

arms. Then he held it out and took a step toward the boy.

"Do you remember? "This is a valuable limited edition item."

"... .."

"It's a great thing that gets rid of bad dreams."

The boy closed his mouth and stared at the black eyepatch that Owen held out.

Jeez.

As Owen takes another step closer to the raging flames surrounding the boy -

Woe!

The flames split to the left and right to avoid him. Seeing that he obediently opens the way, at least it doesn't seem like he is rejecting him.

Owen, a little relieved, continued to walk towards the boy, trying not to rush.

"It also has high mental resistance. So no matter what, if you just use this, your current condition will be able to improve a little."

So Owen slowly walked through the fire and finally stopped right in front of the boy.

"But, this is something you originally got, right?"

"... .."

"So, you're a newbie. "I will return this to you now."

The boy did not block Owen's hand as he carefully put on the eye patch.

But Owen had no idea. As he looked at the blindfold approaching in front of his eyes, he realized that the boy had been thinking like this in a daze.

'But Owen. If possible, I don't want to wake up from this dream yet...
... .'

The boy's thoughts ended there.

Slurp-

As the pitch black cloth completely covered his eyes, the boy's mind quickly became pitch black.

* * *

... what?

Seongjin thought in a dazed state.

'what? 'What am I doing now?'

I looked around and saw that everything was engulfed in bright light. It shines so brightly that you can't even clearly see your own appearance, let alone the surrounding scenery.

Seongjin blinked for a moment and carefully traced the scattered memories.

'... that's right. I've been looking for the freedom underpass. I sent Owen and Sir Martha inside the sewer first, and tried to chase Giacomo Milo alone. however...'

Confusing.

'Why on earth did you suddenly fly to a place like this after being in the sewer?'

Just then, a familiar voice was heard from beside me.

[Son.]

uh?

[...] father?]

Seongjin was startled and looked around. However, Seongjin was

unable to identify the owner of the voice because he was blinded by the strong light.

[Father, how did this happen... .. !]

I was flustered and panicked, but fortunately the other person approached Seongjin first.

Tuk.

The familiar feeling of lightly tapping your head.

[It's okay now. You are very heartbroken.]

[Heartbroken, huh?]

When I asked a question without understanding, Seonghwang gently stroked my head.

Scrunch.

[Don't worry too much. They were not harmed by you. These were souls that couldn't be saved anyway, so you did a great thing for them just by alleviating their pain.]

... ah.

Seongjin then remembered the decisive moment when he lost his composure.

I mean, when I saw them in the sewer. Countless souls who were rotting away in terrible pain and are now broken beyond help.

[You don't seem to have felt it that way, but your terrorization must have been a great salvation for them. So don't be upset about that anymore.]

From the calm sound of Seonghwang's thoughts, Seongjin could easily sense signs of concern and comfort.

Seongjin was relieved without realizing it and smiled.

okay. Well then. I thought this guy would always be by my side.

So, now I'm really okay.

[...] Something is strange with me these days, father.]

Feeling relieved, Seongjin immediately told him what had been bothering him.

[These days, nothing seems to go as planned. No matter how careful I am, something always seems to be off. Why on earth am I doing this?]

Tuk.

The sensation of being lightly tapped on the head again.

This time, it feels like there is some rebuke in it.

[Isn't it time to slowly break away from each other? In your greed to interfere as much as possible with the causal chain, you have tried to erase your own memories over and over again.]

... Did you?

It seems like it was something like that.

[But son. No matter how hard you try to sort out unnecessary memories, human memories are not something that can be easily broken into pieces. There are times when things get tangled and twisted in unexpected places, and if even one small clue goes wrong, all your efforts go to waste.]

[okay.]

No matter how hard you try to control information, it will be impossible to completely close your eyes to all phenomena. In the end, all causes and memories are complexly intertwined.

[Besides, it might be because I disturbed you earlier.]

A soft sigh came from my ear.

[The conflict caused by the will of the Oracle has larger and deeper

ramifications than expected. Thanks to this, things aren't going as well for me these days either.]

A representative example would be Barca's barbarian warriors, who are difficult to control.

[Besides, haven't you been hanging out with Owen a lot lately?]

That's right.

We met often at the imperial palace, and accompanied him through the Freedom Underpass. To be exact, every time I let him go, he knew it was like a ghost and followed me.

[But why is Owen a problem?]

[Isn't it Oracle's legacy to guide Owen now? So no matter how careful they are not to interfere with each other, the two are bound to act as a big variable for each other. So your senses will be even more confused.]

Oh, I see.

Seongjin, who was nodding his head in understanding at the clear explanation, suddenly felt a strange sense of discomfort and called out to Seonghwang.

[excuse me... But, father?]

Then the answer comes back immediately.

[okay.]

[father.]

[Yes, son.]

[...]]

Only after calling him repeatedly did Seongjin realize the true nature of his discomfort.

wait for a sec.

Why doesn't my father call my name?

Why don't you call me Mores anymore?

Why do you want to surround yourself with strong light so that nothing can be seen?

Tuk.

Before I could deepen my doubts, my thoughts were interrupted again by a pounding sensation in my head.

[Son.]

Tuk. Tap, tap.

Seongjin felt his mind suddenly calming down as he felt the touch coming at regular intervals.

Yeah, it's okay. But my father still calls me son.

[There is not much time to talk. There's a lot of resistance, so now I think I'll have to go quickly.]

Resistance?

[I came to check on you in case something big happened, but didn't you already prepare everything?]

prepare?

As I was pondering his words in a daze, I felt Seonghwang gently stroking my head.

Scrunch.

[So don't be too anxious. As always, you will do well this time too. The reason I always look for you is not because you are unreliable. It's just because I don't want to leave you alone.]

The hand that was stroking the back of the head at first is now moving forward little by little through the top of the head.

Seongjin realized this intuitively.

[uh... So what comes next, right?]

[...]]

[...] I guess so.]

Then I felt a gentle vibration in the air. It was the light sound of lively laughter.

[okay. You know it very well.]

Sigh!

With the expected shock, Seongjin's mind was suddenly pushed back to reality.

432. Secretary of the Immortal (5)

Emotions do not occur independently without memory. Also, when memories exist, it is inevitable that emotions will arise, no matter how big or small.

In other words, the combination of memory and emotion is like a kind of basic unit that constitutes human consciousness.

And only when this is maintained intact can the human spirit be said to have continuity.

"... .."

Seongjin opened his eyes with a clear mind for the first time in a long time.

It has been a long time since the memories and emotions experienced by the soul were transferred intact to the body. So, Seongjin lay down on the floor with her and pondered over her memories from just a moment ago with a new feeling.

'father... The atmosphere was something different from usual. He answered my questions directly and in detail.

Although Seonghwang rarely speaks, he sometimes gives detailed explanations to Seongjin when circumstances allow.

A representative example would be the spectacular self-harm show I experienced while drinking medicinal tea the other day.

'And so do I. I was able to ask my father about something that had been bothering me recently without any hesitation.'

It was like that that day too.

On the day that Seongjin expressed the shameful anxiety he had been suppressing, Seonghwang asked him this.

-But have you thought about this? Why didn't you ask me this a long time ago?

This time, Seongjin openly confessed to him the feeling that something was constantly being twisted. Of course, that question presupposed the fact that he, the next generation oracle, was already unconsciously planning many things for the future.

So originally, voicing that question would have had a big impact on cause and effect.

-Then, why is it only now that I am finally able to say that question out loud?

So, how was it possible for something like that to happen this time?

The answer was also in my old memories. Because Seonghwang said this to Seongjin that day.

-That's because you have now, however clumsily, escaped the dimension of Delcross. You were probably instinctively aware of the conditions and restrictions to fully belong to one world.

Then there is only one conclusion.

'no way... Does this mean that the place I was with my father just now wasn't in the Delcross dimension?'

At first, Seongjin thought it was just Seonghwang's spirit staying by his side and talking to him.

But in reality, that wasn't it, was it that his soul left this place and flew somewhere far away?

When his rapidly spinning mind finished thinking about that, Seongjin suddenly realized that his vision was a little strange.

I obviously opened my eyes in a normal state...

'Why can't I see anything in front of me? Is it already night?'

Seongjin blinked his eyes.

"... uh?"

But Seongjin was taken aback for a moment before he realized that something thick was covering his vision.

When you tear off the clinging object with your hand, you can see the embroidery in the shape of a rabbit with its eyes peacefully closed.

'This... Limited edition eye patch?'

It was something I remembered. Isn't this something that was stolen from Justitia at a low price and given to Owen? Why are you using this?

"hmm..."

I frowned and searched for memories, but nothing came to mind.

I have a clear memory of meeting my father just now, but why did I not remember anything about how I ended up wearing the eyepatch?

'I even remember finding Giacomo Milo.'

Seongjin slowly got up and thought.

'But I don't know much about what happened after that. Did Owen successfully complete the quest? Did you catch any other suspicious activity in the sewer?'

I don't know when Seongjin came out of the sewer, but now he was lying alone in a small tent.

The setting sun, slowly spreading red, shines through the sparse gaps in the tent. This means that quite a long time has passed since the memory disappeared.

"..."

Additionally, on the floor of the tent, there was an old cloak, probably belonging to Lord Massain.

If that's the case, then it would mean that the two of them somehow managed to sort things out properly.

'But where are Owen and Sir Martha? 'Where did everyone go, leaving me here?'

This is quite an unexpected situation, considering Sir Masaine, who usually tries not to leave his side even for a moment. Did something happen to him?

As I was thinking about completely removing the blindfold from my neck, I suddenly heard a nerve-wracking cry next to me.

[Sniff...]

When I turn my head, I see a familiar lamp by my bedside.

'... Devil?'

For some reason, the demon lord was sitting on an old lamp, its red flame flickering faintly, and crying.

[Sniff! Seongjin Lee... Sniff, sniff.]

Seeing that pitiful sight, Seongjin felt dizzy for a moment.

what? Why is he doing that? I haven't heard him cry in a while since leaving the makeshift treatment room.

"Hey, devil?"

[...] Sniffing?]

The Demon King, who stopped crying at the sound of Seongjin's voice, asked with a flickering flame.

[this... Seongjin Lee?]

"uh."

[Lee Seong-jin...]

"Yes, that's right. "Why are you crying now?"

[...] ... !]

OK-

Faaah!

Suddenly, the devil came out of the lamp like lightning and latched onto Seongjin's head.

In an instant, Seongjin was transformed into a human candle with a wick of his hair as the flame blazed with vitality.

[Wow! Iseongjiyiin!]

Instead of tears, the Demon King drips boiling sparks.

Chick, crackle!

Seongjin thought as he heard the eerie sound of the cloak burning on the floor.

Oh, my head feels warm for the first time in a while?

[You man! Didn't you hear my voice? why! Why has there been no answer until now?]

"Well, was that so? "Didn't you hear me?"

[you stupid! That can't be possible! I kept calling your name without stopping! Ahhh!]

Seongjin was quite embarrassed by the outpouring of sad cries.

No, but I really didn't know. I just laid there for a while trying to sort out my memories, but he didn't seem to have any thoughts...

'-what?'

Suddenly, the black eye patch I was holding in my hand caught my

eye.

wait for a sec. Now that I think about it, was I writing this until just now?

[Lee Seong-jin, you idiot, idiot! Sea cucumber and sea anemone!]

that's right. This limited item probably had an S+ mental attack resistance option. In that case, it is not surprising that all nearby thoughts are blocked.

-There is not much time to talk. There's a lot of resistance, so I guess I'll have to go now.

Is this the resistance my father was talking about earlier?

[This is Planaria Euglena Paramecium!]

"Uh, sorry. Sorry."

Seongjin stopped thinking and quickly apologized to the devil.

Seeing that we are suddenly falling from coelastastic animals to single-celled organisms, if we continue like this, we will soon be on the same level as viruses with one piece of chromosome.

"It's my fault. "I definitely didn't do that on purpose."

[this... this... ... !]

"Really sorry. I'll buy you bear meat later. I'll buy you a lot of delicious food, so let go of your anger. huh?"

Although it was not my intention, it is true that I was ignoring the anxious calls of my family.

In a situation where it was impossible to communicate with anyone other than Seongjin, it was obvious how anxious he must have been because he didn't know what was going on.

Rustling.

Just then, as if a familiar figure was approaching, the tent entrance

opened wide.

"Mores. Now stand up... Ugh?"

Owen, who thoughtlessly popped his head into the tent, was startled when he saw Seongjin carrying a flaming demon king on top of his head.

"Are you okay, newbie? "My hair is on fire right now?!"

"hmm..."

Seongjin, who was at a loss for excuses, averted his gaze.

Well, it's okay. That's how it happened.

* * *

Seongjin was able to hear in detail from Owen about events that occurred beyond his memories.

From what I heard, it seems that while Owen and Sir Martha were in the midst of robbing the wizard's secret laboratory, he suddenly burst into the place, leading Giacomo Milo.

On top of that, he showed some signs of sleepwalking and excitedly swept the entire lab with his fiery aura?

"I should have known from the moment you played with fire in the imperial palace. You committed arson by talking in your sleep... . Newbie, what on earth are you doing that is so dangerous?"

Putting aside the whereabouts of the second-year middle school arsonist, it was a truly absurd explanation.

Seongjin was dumbfounded and asked back.

"Sleepwalking? I?"

"okay. I don't know, but newbie, I heard you dream and talk in your sleep every day? "Brother Masain said it would be okay, but if you're talking in your sleep, it won't be a very comfortable dream."

"So you put a sleeping mask on me?"

"huh. "I think you realize it's a nightmare too."

After responding like that, Owen sheepishly pulled one of the chicken feathers from his head.

"So, you're a newbie. From now on, always use it when you sleep.

"I'm going to give it to you right now."

"... .."

"No, to be exact, I'm giving it back. Originally, you gave it to me without anything in return, right?"

Seongjin's eyes naturally became fierce.

Is this kid out of his mind right now? He actually scrapes up all the cash he has for the things he needs, buys them for other people as gifts, and even gives me the last eyepatch he got by luck? This has to be more correct to come to my senses!

Hwiik-

He was about to raise his hand without thinking, but Owen, who didn't know how, quickly backed away and caught Seongjin's attention. Since she was repeatedly hit by chestnuts, she seems to have roughly learned at what timing the chestnuts will fly.

"Whoa, newbie, calm down! "I'm giving it to you because I have enough money."

"spare? Yeoyuwoo? "What kind of leisure do you have when you give away all your cash to others whenever you get the chance?"

"Ah, huh. But that's it... .."

But surprisingly, Owen, who was rummaging around in his arms, soon pulled out another similar eyepatch!

It was a limited edition rabbit eye patch in dark almond color, with an obnoxiously relaxed expression engraved on it.

"Voila! how is it? "Are you surprised?"

"... .."

"After I finished the quest, a special sale window suddenly opened in front of me. "I thought it was an opportunity, so I grabbed it!"

Owen put the eyepatch around his neck and stretched out his chest with a triumphant expression.

"Think about it, newbie. I got a limited edition item for only 500 cash! Thanks to this, I had to spend all the rewards from this quest, but considering the cost, isn't it really a profitable business? "What do you think? Isn't it awesome?"

"Okay, quest... .."

Seongjin put his hands behind his back, lost in thought.

Come to think of it, my father also said this earlier. What guides Owen now is a milestone, another Oracle's legacy.

"Then does this mean that it was my grandmother's will that gave me this eye patch?"

Considering that Owen was given a new eyepatch with good timing, I would say that this is highly likely.

'Why on earth?'

At first glance, this could be seen as an intention to prevent Seongjin from falling into an unstable state like before.

However, it is an item that blocks out all thoughts and is so strong that even my father feels resistance.

'... no.'

My father also said this.

-I came to check on you in case something big happened, but didn't you already prepare everything?

If that is true, it would mean that it was Seongjin's unconsciousness that actually prepared the eyepatch. Then, Seongjin was anticipating the quest that Sangtae Chang would prepare...

No, no. Perhaps it could be said that Owen's status window had figured out Seongjin's will in advance, and had subtly assisted him from the side...

'Oh, my. shit!'

I don't even know what I'm doing, but with one more variable that I can't understand, the situation becomes so confusing.

'As expected, I think it's better not to think too deeply about it just yet.'

After thinking for a moment, Seongjin made a decision in his heart.

However, as he was lost in thought while holding the demon king's lamp, which was still whimpering intermittently, Owen cautiously looked at Seongjin and said something unexpected.

"... Hey, but are you a newbie?"

"uh?"

"If it's okay, could you please meet Brother Masaine for a moment?"

"huh... ... ?"

Seongjin blinked.

Lord Masain? why?

* * *

As I left the tent and followed Owen, I saw Giacomo Milo calmly tied up near the entrance to the sewer.

He was completely covered in dirt from the sewer and soot from the fire, but even so, his darkening complexion could be seen at a glance.

Perhaps due to exposure to demonic energy for a long period of time,

erosion seemed to be occurring slowly even after the demon had left.

But he behaved in such a pitiful manner, and then he smiled at Seongjin, wondering why he was so happy.

"It was a purification, O Prepared One! My master! "I truly witnessed a moment when this world became beautiful!"

"... what?"

"Just as you purified the corrupted creatures, I have no doubt that you will one day save this rotten world with your divine fire!"

Looking at the dry eyes shining with light gives me goosebumps.

'This isn't good.'

I thought it would be nice to become moderately obedient, but I guess I went too far. For some reason, it was like seeing a second Belinda.

" "

And behind him, Lord Masain was seen clutching Mythra with a stiff face.

Considering his usual self, he might have scolded Giacomo Milo for talking wildly, but right now he just kept his mouth shut and looked at Seongjin with a heavy gaze.

Why is that guy like that?

"Sir Martha."

Let's call him and take a step closer -

I flinch.

Masain's pupils shook slightly.

Although it was a wave that seemed calm on the outside, Seongjin was somehow able to sense the intense swirl of emotions entangled within it.

"What the hell is going on? Why are you standing there like that? Even if you get hurt somewhere in the sewer... .."

But before Seongjin finished speaking-

Whoosh!

The knight's face becomes grotesquely distorted.

The whites of the eyes were bloodshot and red, and the face full of ridicule and sorrow were probably signs of the complete collapse of someone's world, which was barely holding on.

dump!

Eventually, the knight kneeled down helplessly in front of Seongjin, bowed his head and hit the floor! hit her head

"... "I'm sorry, sir."

Seongjin and Owen were greatly embarrassed by the sudden apology.

"older brother?!"

"huh? Sir Masain. what... ..?"

"sorry. sorry."

"no... .."

However, apologies that did not take the listeners in mind continued.

"I shouldn't have done that at that time. I shouldn't have done that to you... .."

thud.

The knight hit his forehead on the dirt floor and sobbed softly.

"sorry. sorry."

Thump, thump.

"sorry. I'm so sorry, sir..."

In the heavy silence -

Only Masain's repeated apologies hovered in the air.

433. Secretary of the Immortal (6)

Looking back, those were the most leisurely days of Masain's life.

"Brother Masain! "You're here?"

When he entered the Blue Rose Labyrinth in time for his shift, Mores, who had been waiting for him, came running towards him holding a toy wooden sword. As always, she wore a faded red cloth around her neck.

"Lowering! "If you run like that, you'll fall!"

Just before Mores, who was running, was hit by a toy and fell, Masain suddenly lifted him up and warned him.

Then the child burst into laughter and waved his arms, probably thinking that it was also a game.

"But what about Logan, brother?"

"Logan, he is in class right now."

"class?"

"Yes, you will probably be very busy until evening. "You recently started a new swordsmanship class."

Logan, who was the first prince at the time, had already distinguished himself in many ways. It was probably natural that the empress, whose momentum had gained momentum, began to focus more and more on his education.

On the other hand, Empress Elizabeth was strangely neglecting Mores.

Let alone caring about the child's education, she seemed reluctant to even meet him face to face. She occasionally went to her parents' home, the Principality of Asein, and was often away from the imperial palace for long periods of time.

The empress's attitude was such that even influential figures in the imperial capital were reluctant to send their children to be Prince Mores' half-brother. However, it is impossible for servants of very low status to join in with his intense play.

Although they said they took the time to make it a success, it was simply not enough for a child who was at the peak of his activity.

Thanks to this, Mores was gradually getting used to playing with toys alone in the playroom.

"... .."

Masain, who was worse off, ended up becoming a playmate under the pretense of being an escort during working hours.

The problem is that they are all actions that are far removed from the duties of a knight.

It's like that right now. What a messy game, like imagining an imaginary enemy and trying hard to hit a pillow together!

If the academy's dean, Armand, had found out that Mythra, a precious relic, was being used to dust off a mere pillow, he would have shed tears and hit the ground.

"Eight!"

Puk puk!

Mores, who had someone to play with, was excited and pounded the pillow.

"Don't bother the angel! "You wicked witch!"

"yes? Sir, what we are defeating now is not a devil but a witch?"

"huh!"

It was just an immature child's game, but it seemed to have its own specific setting.

"Hey! "Take my nutcracker!"

Masain, who was hitting a pillow with a beat next to him, looked puzzled again and asked.

"By the way, sir, did you give the wooden sword a name?"

"huh!"

"But isn't the nutcracker your Majesty's favorite sword? "If the names are the same, won't you get confused later?"

"hmm... ... ?"

Then, Mores looked worried for a moment, but then smiled brightly at Masain.

"I don't know. But, brother, it's still my black nutcracker!"

"Is that so?"

"huh!"

puck! Plop! puck!

Under the two men's heated attack, the high-quality duck down pillow from Rohan soon met a gruesome death. White feathers burst out from the cracked pillowcase and scatter in all directions like snow.

"..."

Masain became a little worried.

What on earth would the users who saw the messed up playroom think of me? The prince may not be able to help protect the royal family's health, but wouldn't he be in trouble for being an ugly member of the royal family who causes accidents?

but-

"Ahahahaha!"

When I saw Mores smiling brightly amidst the fluttering feathers, I wondered if it mattered what other people thought.

"Brother Masain! Now let's play training!"

Perhaps because he still had some energy left, Mores clashed wooden swords with Masain for a while.

widely! Crack!

There was no way that the wooden sword wielded with such short arms could pose a threat to Masain, the knight of the imperial palace.

However, the child's skill in occasionally stabbing unexpected blind spots was a bit harsher than it looked.

Although he is overshadowed by Prince Logan, who is always praised as a genius, perhaps Prince Mores is also a genius in his own way? Masain thought about it for a moment.

As the sun set and it became dusk, Mores put his wooden sword down on the floor, looking exhausted.

"You've finished training, now it's time to meditate!"

"haha..."

Still, the child lay down on the floor and said he wanted to meditate, wondering if he had picked anything up from somewhere. Of course, rolling around the playroom and sweeping up dust is not proper meditation.

After rolling around for a couple of laps, Mores stood up, shaking his messy hair.

"Are you finished with your meditation?"

"huh. But is Logan's class over by now?"

"Yes, probably."

"Then, brother! "Let's go see if Logan is okay in the Blue Rose Labyrinth now!"

Lately, the child has been asking about Prince Logan's well-being more often.

But until then, Masain was not considered a big deal. I thought to myself, since he was stuck with me so much, he might be quite lonely on his own.

* * *

Although the atmosphere within the imperial palace was so peaceful, the atmosphere on the continent was still chaotic.

These are demonic species that have brought their demonic power to the saints that have been around for over a thousand years. Those who had been secretly encroaching on the continent rose up like crazy when the young emperor began to expand his sphere of influence by force.

If we forget, an underground cult is causing trouble, and demonic contractors are running amok. Unspeakable and cruel acts of devil worship continued, and powerful devil species were summoned day after day along with large-scale human sacrifices.

So the suffering of the people caught up in it is indescribable -

It was around that time that a powerful first-class demon species appeared in the middle of Ortona, which was now a ruined country.

"Abama! There is no other way to help them other than the power of the Empire and Abamama's powerful divine power! Although they have escaped the embrace of the empire, it is clear that they are also the poor subjects of the Lord. So please look after their pitiful situation!"

Perhaps it was because of his innate righteous nature, Prince Logan even gave up eating and drinking and fervently complained to the Emperor.

"Logan... .."

All the great and minor officials admired the young prince's upright spirit.

However, in Masain's opinion, Seonghwang seemed very reluctant.

Not surprisingly, the surroundings of the empire had not yet been completely reorganized. At a time like this, how can someone who is the central point of the empire carelessly leave his position for the sake of another country?

"This is also for the people of Delcross, Abama! If that powerful demonic species continues to devour people without any hindrance, it will eventually grow into a serious threat to the empire!"

Prince Logan also had a point. Be it sooner or later, the devil will eventually move towards the ecliptic.

This wasn't the first time he had personally led the Holy Knights to subdue demons, so it wasn't such a bad idea to take action before the damage became too much.

"... .."

But even so, Seonghwang hesitated for a long time. For some reason, he had a strong premonition that he should not be away now.

However, soon after, Seonghwang had no choice but to decide to take over his own government. This is because Prince Logan, who was immersed in grief, tried to secretly pack his bags and escape, saying that he would fight for the suffering people, but was discovered by him.

"... "Son."

Seongwang sighed softly as he looked at the child being held in one hand and giggling.

"No matter how talented you are, you are still a child. "Even if you went to Ortona alone, what can you do for the people there now?"

"Hey, Abama..."

Seonghwang, who had been quietly staring at his son, who rarely showed a gloomy expression, finally nodded.

"okay. Don't worry too much, Logan. "I will go with you."

In this way, Seonghwang led one Holy Knight and one knightly corps and directly carried out the subjugation of the demon species.

In the end, this may have been the right choice. This is because Seonghwang, who went directly to the north, caught the demon species with almost no damage.

Considering the enormous number of people who are usually deployed to subdue large demon species, the success of this achievement is truly a miracle.

There was also additional income here.

First, the North's antipathy towards the empire has decreased slightly.

And secondly, it had the effect of temporarily quelling those who tried to take advantage of the chaotic situation to cause unrest.

'Is the prosperity of Delcross truly a monster?'

When you witness first-hand the incredible futility of killing a level 1 demon species with a single sword, no matter how intensely your will to fight may be, it will suddenly cool down.

Above all, in the process of moving north, Seonghwang also obtained unexpected information. The incredible information that Marie, his first lover who died, may have left his child behind.

"Lowering... No, Masain. Why on earth is that sea beast's horn...?"

"Oh, it's nothing, Captain. "I just have a request from His Majesty Mores."

"Mores... "What do you mean?"

And surprisingly, Masain was also included in this punitive force. This is because he was directly asked by Mores to always keep an eye on Logan, who may escape to Ortona again at any time.

-And brother. As you head north, look for a black rex there.

-... black... ? what?

-Rex. It's a black rex. Since you're flying through the sky, you have to be careful not to get caught by him!

Masain inadvertently laughed off Mores' request. Nowadays, a child's imagination can create even sea water that does not exist in their head. Doesn't a child's imagination always surprise people by exceeding expectations?

But I can't go back empty-handed like this and disappoint my child. So, instead of looking for Rex, Masain cut off some of the horns of sea beasts he caught on his way back and kept them.

'I must say I met him and he flew away. Do you think His Majesty Mores will like it at this level?'

However, what was waiting for Masain, who returned with the horn piece, was not Prince Mores, but the news of his sudden disappearance.

* * *

The imperial palace was instantly turned upside down.

How on earth is this happening? How could a precious prince disappear so easily in a border that is constantly running without water leaks?

-Have you heard the rumors? Empress Elizabeth, who always admired you, took her son personally...

-Shhh! Hey, please refrain from making baseless speculations!

-yes. That's not true. When I heard that, in fact, His Majesty Mores escaped on his own. He secretly bypassed his guards and leisurely

walked out of the mayor's labyrinth... ..

-No, what nonsense is that! How can a child defeat the palace guards by himself? Mores, you are only five years old!

-However, it is said that the knight who stood guard at the Blue Rose Labyrinth personally testified so.

Without a single clue left behind, the case seemed to fall into limbo.

However, when Seonghwang himself came forward, the matter was quickly resolved. Of course, the process was not very peaceful.

Seonghwang, who went down to the underground corridor with a cool spirit, found Prince Mores, who had quickly disappeared. And finally, he returned to the imperial palace, holding the child tightly in his arms.

"... ..!"

"... ..!"

But everyone who saw him had to swallow their screams all at once. This is because the hem of Seonghwang's white robes was soaked with soggy blood.

Clap!

With each step he takes, a long bloody path unfolds.

"your majesty... ..!"

Even Louis, the faithful chamberlain of the Holy Emperor, did not dare to approach him. This was because I had an instinctive sense of crisis that if I touched him even just a little bit now, everything would come to an end. The momentum that Seonghwang gave off was cold and brutal.

Masain also watched with bated breath among the crowd of people. A blood-soaked figure, a new form of a small child wrapped in black cloth, and the child's pale hands slightly sticking out.

and-

Chrrrrrrrr...

A strangely shaped red string crawling over it at high speed.

"... ... !"

Masain's fingertips became cold from tension.

It was the trace of a red curse left by the devil that he was afraid of seeing again, even in his dreams.

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That day.

The day when the red curse that had persistently chased from the capital covered the Gateway Fortress.

The sight of hell unfolding before Masain's eyes still remained vivid in his mind.

-Ma, Masain... . hurry... You should avoid...

The first to fall down, covered in blood, was Masain's maid. Since he was an ordinary person without any divine power, he would have been more vulnerable to curses than others.

-Ah, Masaine! Why are you the only one so fine? Please, please share the blessings of Seonghwangga with us!

The faithful priest who had been praying for the people just a moment ago suddenly turned around and grabbed Masain's collar the moment the curse encroached on him.

He criticized Masain again and again for monopolizing the God's grace, and finally fell to the floor, spewing out red blood.

-Please take care of me. The only legitimate successor to the throne is Masain.

Even the commander of the Knights of the Imperial Guard, who had been admonished, died in tears of blood, and finally there was no one left alive in the Gate Fortress except Masain.

Spurrrrrrrrr...

And the red curse letters that covered the bodies of the dead.

"... ... !"

But now, years later, the same letters were crawling across Mores' small hands. Like a swarm of persistent ants rushing towards their prey to disintegrate it.

Masain froze.

I can't get closer.

It was a precious child who had become her life's goal, but even though her heart seemed to be burning with worry about him, Masain could not take any steps towards the child.

'Mores... ... !'

In the end, Masain had no choice but to stand there and watch the Holy Emperor and Mores completely disappear towards the Blue Rose Labyrinth.

* * *

Terrifying rumors were going around people's mouths.

-Something that couldn't have happened happened. The Church of Rest has gone into hiding in the heavily guarded basement of the imperial palace.

-They took advantage of the lack of activity to commit large-scale human sacrifice, and ended up bringing something evil into this world.

People were very nervous as they heard disturbing news for the first time since the 17th King Seonhwang came to power.

However, as the Holy Emperor remained silent and the Orthodox Church did not make any noticeable movements, the rumors soon began to die down. There was also a reason why most people were skeptical.

Of course, the Heresy Tribunal, which had to directly take care of the site where the heretic rituals were performed - the black altar, the numerous corpses burned by erosion, and the supply and demand of those who died after being cut by the Holy Emperor - continued to look suspiciously toward the Blue Rose Labyrinth. I had no choice but to throw it.

There is no doubt. The fact that erosion occurred clearly meant that something with demonic energy had appeared in that location.

And Prince Mores was at the scene where the evil devil worship occurred.

"So, you should refrain from entering the Blue Rose Labyrinth for the time being, Masaine."

As Masain adjusts his outfit for conquest, Cardinal Benitus warns him in a sharp voice.

He was Masain's guardian until she graduated from the academy, and until recently, he was interfering in various ways by going back and forth between the guardian's residence.

Masain looked back at the wiry old man and sighed softly.

"That is impossible. Don't you know? "My current place of work is the Blue Rose Labyrinth."

"If you do this, you should change your workplace with another driver!"

"dismissal. I am just a knight now. "There is no way it would be possible to adjust the Royal Guard's schedule so suddenly and arbitrarily."

Then the old man roared loudly.

"Why not? "Aren't you the true eldest son of the Seonghwang family, more precious than anyone else?"

"... .."

Unable to respond due to the force being stronger than expected, the cardinal came toward Masain with great strides. It was a heavy step that did not suit his small physique.

"I will take full responsibility. So from now on, Masain, don't even think about setting foot there!"

"Your Excellency the Cardinal."

"Do you understand? Masain. "What was engulfing Prince Mores that day was, without a doubt, the demon energy of the demon species!"

Benitus is the head of the Inquisition. As he had been fighting the forces of evil for a long time, he knew demons and the works of heretics better than anyone else.

"I know the ecology of those evil things. The ritual they performed over Prince Mores was clearly a ritual of emptying vessels!"

"Emptying the bowl, what does that mean... .."

"It means that it was a ritual to descend the devil directly into the body!"

"... ..!"

As Masain's face turned pale, Benitus continued to pour out scary words with burning eyes.

"Plus, the large number of human sacrifices, it was definitely not a ritual prepared for one or two days. Perhaps Prince Mores may have been their target since birth! Masain. Have you ever heard the rumors about the reserved one spoken about in the underground church?"

"stop... .."

"Blessed by the devil's apostles, a vessel prepared for the wicked devil! That may be the true identity of Prince Mores! No, the advent ritual has already ended, so maybe it's not Prince Mores anymore-"

"Please stop!"

Masain screamed and held his head in both hands in great pain.

If I could deny it, I would have denied it many times. However, as Cardinal Benitus said, Massain witnessed with his own eyes the sight of something evil invading Mores' body.

So it was painful.

The fact that Mores, who was still only a child, experienced such a big thing, but that she was not by his side.

And even though it wasn't Mores' fault, I had an ominous feeling that I would never be able to completely shake off my feelings of fear toward my child again.

"... .."

After a moment of silence, Benitus added in a slightly softened voice.

"Masain. I know that you value your remaining relatives. However, that does not mean we should deny the clearly visible reality."

Wow.

The old man's dry hand grabbed Masain's collar like a rake.

"You really don't know? "If His Majesty the Holy Emperor had not stopped it that day, Prince Mores would certainly have become a conduit for bringing something evil and terrible into Delcross."

"... .."

"No, maybe it's not completely finished yet."

Benitus' eyes, as he stared into Masaine's eyes, sparkled with a strange light.

"Even now, I can still faintly sense dirty demonic energy in the Blue Rose Labyrinth. So how would you know? "I wonder if that evil still persists and is waiting for an opportunity inside Prince Mores' body!"

* * *

"... "Hwangbimama."

"... Masain."

In front of the Blue Rose Labyrinth, Masain met an unexpected person. Unable to overcome the uncomfortable gaze of those around her, it was Empress Lizabeth who reluctantly took a step forward to at least pretend to look at her child.

And behind her, there was an old man she had never seen before.

Nod.

The two people, who were originally awkward, showed proper courtesy and turned around.

"Why did I come to visit Queen Mother at such a chaotic time?"

As Masaine disappeared from sight, the old man, Senator Galen, whispered to the empress in a low voice.

"No, no."

"But mama. How can you stop your steps? "Aren't you here to see the prince?"

In response to the old man's question, the Empress looked a little shaken instead of answering.

"What on earth is making you so upset?"

"It just worked out. There was something I wanted to ask you a long time ago, Senator Galen. That kid... .."

After hesitating for a moment, Empress Lizabeth carefully brought out a long-standing question that had been buried deep in her heart.

"Is 'that' really the child I gave birth to?"

The doubts that had been buried in my heart like sharp thorns swelled and festered for a long time, until they finally reached the point where pus was dripping instead of blood.

So, you end up asking questions that you wouldn't normally have asked.

"You should know better, Senator Galen. "I was originally incapable of having children."

But after meeting Seonghwang, she started having Mores as if it was a lie.

I couldn't just be purely happy and say it was a miracle. After having her child, she blamed the various ominous omens that constantly disturbed her.

Due to the prolonged difficult labor, she could not even properly remember the moment the child was born.

"Hehe, did you think like that? Don't worry, trust me, Lizabeth. "The day Prince Mores was born, I was definitely by her side."

"... .."

"It was truly a grace from the Lord. Do you still not believe in that beautiful miracle? Lady Lizabeth."

Galen gently scolded her, deliberately calling her by a familiar name from when she was young.

"The Lord said that miracles would occur, such as sparks burning in the bitter cold and grass growing in the desert. In order to show this to the world, wouldn't it make sense to first prepare a cold, dry ground? Therefore, the lady's infertility was also something that the Lord personally worked on through His apostle."

"... So, Mores is the child given by the Lord?"

"Of course, lady. Prince Mores will definitely become the next successful person. In this way, he will be admired by everyone and will rule over everything in this world. Under his power, the apostles of Juju will finally regain their freedom."

Representative Galen smiled warmly and looked into the Empress's trembling eyes. A young girl who is always strong and strong on the

outside, but is weaker than anyone else on the inside.

"Do you understand? "Your child, Prince Mores, is such a person."

But Lizabeth was no longer listening to Galen's lengthy explanation. This is because among his words, there was one word that particularly caught my ear.

"kick... Success..."

A very clear and sweet word that is deeply embedded in my mind.

"okay. Mores, if only that child could become the next big star..."

A faint light of hope slowly appeared in Lizabeth's eyes as she repeated quietly.

"That could indeed be perfect evidence. Proof that I was not born into an evil family, but gave birth to a child from a true royal family!"

* * *

When Masain arrived at the playroom, Mores was not the only one there.

"It's dangerous, so don't go too high, Mores."

"huh!"

In the center of the room, large furniture and toy horses were piled neatly in a strangely stable structure.

It looks perfect for a child who likes high places to climb. The person who built that structure that reached the ceiling was most likely Prince Logan.

"..."

That was quite unusual, since usually Logan would nag Mores for leaving his toys all over the place rather than making a mess of the playroom like this.

I was just watching what my brother was doing, bewildered, when

Logan sensed his presence and turned his head.

"Ah, brother Masain! "You're here."

"Yes, but wasn't it time for class right now?"

"We decided to reduce classes for a while."

... By what means? I understand that despite the Emperor's repeated attempts to dissuade him, the Empress pushed for it quite forcefully.

Then Logan blushed a little embarrassed.

"It's a shame that at this age, I have been a bit angry in front of my mom."

While the Emperor was away from the palace due to his unreasonable request, a division broke out in Mores.

As Prince Logan, who has an upright nature, he cannot help but feel a great sense of responsibility for this.

"So, I told Mama Mama that I was worried about Mores and that I couldn't eat anything."

"... .."

Isn't that more like a half-threat than a threat? Masain thought so inwardly.

It was enough for the Empress to take a step back. I guess it's because I've already learned that when my son starts to worry about something, it can really stop him from eating or drinking for days.

"Ahahaha!"

Fortunately, Mores had regained his usual cheerful self. Perhaps because she got to play freely with Logan for the first time in a long time, the child was hanging from the structure and shaking her body in a particularly pleasant way.

-Even now, I can faintly sense dirty demonic energy in the Blue Rose

Labyrinth. So how would you know? I wonder if that evil still persists and is waiting for an opportunity inside the body of Prince Mores!

For a moment, Cardinal Benitus' warning flashed through her mind, but Martha quietly watched the child play, trying to erase the memory.

"Don't keep jumping, Mores. Dangerous."

"Ahaha! no!"

"hey!"

Masain slowly regained his peace of mind at the sight of him being noisy and happy like before.

The only strange thing is that sometimes Logan has a serious expression and pours divine power on Mores.

"what's the matter? Logan, I'm not hurt?"

"It's because you don't know much. "If I keep jumping from that high up, my legs will hurt later and I won't be able to sleep well, right?"

"hmm? okay?"

Logan seemed worried about something, or even wary.

But as always, Masain was unable to properly understand the deep thoughts of her precocious younger brother. He was just very concerned about Mores' work, he could only vaguely guess.

A seemingly very peaceful evening passed by.

"Mores, stop playing now and come down."

As it got dark outside the window, Logan said to Mores, holding on to the rocking horse.

"It's time to go to bed."

"no. I'm going to play more today! "You won't come to class tomorrow."

"are you okay. "I'll come tomorrow too."

"hmm..."

Then Mores seemed to think for a moment and then blinked innocently.

"But I can't sleep yet?"

"Then shall I take you for a ride in the hush car?"

"hmm..."

Mores, who tilted his head again, answered.

"huh! good!"

"OK got it. wait a minute."

After leaving the room, Logan looked back with concern for a moment. Because he was a little concerned about Mores, who was perched precariously in the middle of a tall structure.

But he soon glanced at Masain and thought.

'Well, it'll be okay. 'Because there's Masain too.'

When the two of them were left alone in the playroom, Masaine looked at Mores playing.

At that moment, the child was struggling to climb higher, moving his arms and legs.

"... Lowering."

"huh?"

"Why do you like high places so much?"

It was a question that came out inadvertently. It was a habit that Mores had shown since he was a baby, and it was a question he had never asked before because he didn't expect to get a proper answer if he asked the child.

But unexpectedly, Mores gave an answer obediently.

"I'm practicing."

"Practice, huh?"

"huh. That way, you will be able to do well even when you climb to much higher heights later!"

"... .."

It's practice for the future. I thought it was quite a surprising answer for a child.

"But you. Wouldn't that be enough for practice? It's no longer dangerous... "Wow!"

When the child suddenly lost his balance and stumbled, the startled Masain hurriedly rushed towards Mores and stretched out his arms.

It was right then. Through Mores's covered shirt, a quickly crawling red string was seen.

Spurrrrrrrrrr... ..

"... ..!"

Masain's body was rigid in place.

"uh?"

Mores passed between the awkwardly extended arms-
thud!

I fell to the floor and hit my head hard.

"... ..!"

"... .."

Mores did not cry as loudly as before. He just looked up at Masain with a slightly blank face, as if he was surprised by a situation that

couldn't normally exist.

The strangely calm eyes of a child.

The moment Masain faced those deep gray eyes, for some reason he felt his heart freeze.

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The child must have been greatly shocked. Perhaps she, who believed and followed him as her family, felt deeply betrayed by this. Masain thought so at first.

However, what he actually discovered in Mores' eyes was his own fear, foolishness, and incompetence that he had tried so hard to hide.

Masain was completely dismantled in that incomprehensible gaze.

I feel like an insignificant soul standing before the judgment seat of the Absolute.

The feeling of having one's weak essence completely exposed.

The feeling of falling into an endless abyss and ultimately being completely swallowed up in darkness... ..

"... .."

Blink.

That magical, strange time disappeared the moment the child blinked once.

Mores slowly got up from his seat on his own and immediately started fiddling with the toys on the floor without saying a word.

"... Lowering."

"huh? why?"

"... .."

Masain was left speechless by the casual question.

Fortunately, the awkward moment passed quickly. After a while, Logan returned to the playroom carrying some nice-smelling teacups.

His eyes widened when he found Mores sitting on the floor.

"Why are you doing this? Mores. Are you sick? "The aurors are very disturbed?"

He was so sharp that it was hard to believe that he had just turned six. Then Mores answered with a slightly sullen expression.

"no? It's not?"

"I don't think it's true, right? "You're obviously not feeling well somewhere right now."

Logan put down his teacup and hurriedly approached Mores. Then he began to carefully examine his brother's condition with his sharp eyes.

"what? You have a lump on your head. "What happened?"

"I don't know. "Nothing happened."

Masain sensed a slight tremor in that stubborn answer, and only then did she realize that the child was trying hard to suppress his agitated emotions.

'Lord, my God!'

It was absurd. Because I was wallowing in a pitiful sense of self-destruction, I was actually neglecting the hurt and shock my child must have suffered!

"... okay."

Did he feel a strange current flowing between the two? Without asking any more questions, Logan poured divine power into the back of Mores' head.

In that way, Mores went to bed after drinking hush-jang tea, looking quite fine on the outside. And as soon as he laid his head on his pillow he immediately vomited all his tea.

"Yuck!"

It was a concussion.

* * *

After that incident, Masain's face became increasingly darker.

I tried hard to act as if nothing had happened. However, even after that, red curse letters appeared on Mores' body from time to time, and Masain became increasingly afraid to approach her child.

It was clear that Mores had also noticed such changes in Massain. When he entered the Cheongjang Labyrinth, he greeted me with a bright face as usual, but he no longer hugged me warmly or clung to his arm without hesitation like before.

'Should I also apply for a change of work location?'

I was worried about that for a while.

It was never good for either of us to continue in this awkward situation.

What bothered Masain more than anything was the vague fear of what would happen if he failed to properly perform his escort duties when it was really needed.

But around that time, a big change occurred in Mores' life. Empress Lizabeth, who had been neglecting her child until now, suddenly began to come and go in her labyrinth.

-Momma, what is that? Please call me "eomamama" properly. hurry!

-Your child still isn't taking etiquette classes? What has the chamberlain been doing all this time?

-I heard that Logan has already been initiated into Auror? Mores, you

are also a child of a prosperous family, so you will definitely show excellent swordsmanship like Logan.

-What if you don't have divine power? Instead, I plan to focus more on studying theology.

Mores, whose class hours suddenly increased significantly, soon became much busier than Logan. Naturally, the time Masain spent face-to-face with Mores decreased.

'Mores... ..'

Masain was very worried about the child. Just by looking at him from afar, he could tell how difficult the child was struggling with the sudden lessons.

But Empress Lizabeth's interference did not end there.

"Did you hear? Well, the Empress requested Her Majesty Seonghwang to build a new villa. "A perfect villa just for Prince Mores!"

"yes? "No, Your Majesty granted that unreasonable request?"

"When has Your Majesty ever refused a request from the Empress or the Empress? In addition, Empress Lizabeth's parents are the great Asean Grand Dukes. "I heard that the amount the Grand Duke is investing is quite significant."

"Oh my! The Empress must be very uncomfortable. "I think we'll have to keep an eye on him for the time being."

It even began to happen that the Empress held Mores in the Ruby Palace for several days. So, naturally, Masain's escort work was bound to be greatly reduced.

"... .."

Now Masain's worries have entered a new phase. Because it was no longer the time to worry about their strained relationship.

'I can clearly see that Mores is suffering due to the empress's excessive interference, and I can't just sit back and watch it like this!'

So Masain visited Seonghwang's office. This is because he was confident that he could solve all these problems.

Above all, the ominous curse letters that invaded Mores' body.

"There is no curse that cannot be resolved, uncle. Didn't he wipe out the terrible curse written on me that day at the Gate Fortress?"

So there must be a good reason for leaving Mores alone.

With that in mind, Masain wandered around in front of the main palace. Of course, he did not give a formal message saying that he would have an audience right away, but after receiving Clanos' castle, he did not want to take any personal convenience as a member of the royal family.

"Masain?"

However, it was an unexpected person who discovered Masain.

"What are you doing here? Have you come to see His Majesty? "His Majesty is not in the office right now."

A woman with a gentle appearance, neatly dressed in the white and red uniform of the Holy Knights.

It was Katrina, also known as the strongest shield of the Holy Emperor.

* * *

Katrina Belpine.

Masain didn't know much about her.

He once served in the imperial guard as a rank knight. When the Holy Emperor was still young, he faithfully served by his side, and later, in a rare case of late manifestation of divine power, he joined the Knights of St. Aurelion.

And currently, he is receiving the trust of the Holy Emperor to the extent that he has taken on the position of Vice-Captain of the

Knights at a relatively young age.

"If you had given me a message in advance, Your Majesty would have been happy to take the time."

However, contrary to the public image of Sanghyeol, the woman I met in person was a gentle person with a very likable smile.

Katrina led the reluctant Masain to the small drawing room of the main palace. Then, the unexpected news I heard there was that the Holy Emperor had recently become more and more likely to stay alone somewhere and pray.

"Prayer? "Your Majesty?"

I couldn't help but wonder. Despite his nickname as God's representative, Masain knew better than anyone else that his uncle was not a very faithful Orthodox believer.

"Yes, I think he will probably be in the prayer room until late today as well. So, if it is okay with you, Masain, how about I listen to the matter first and convey it to Your Majesty?"

"... .."

Masain thought for a moment and looked at Katrina.

She was a woman with a strange aura. She is solemn but not stubborn, polite but not heavy. I feel like if I tell her anything, she will listen carefully, and somehow it feels like I am meeting Seonghwang himself.

"It's just a minor concern. Katrina, it's not something that needs to be shared separately, but... .."

"But you seem to be struggling very much with that."

Her eyes deepen as she stares at Masain.

"Okay, how about this? Sometimes, just sharing your worries with someone can make the burden on your heart much lighter. And, shamefully, I pride myself on being quite good at listening to people's

stories."

"No, it's not that much of a burden... .."

But surprisingly, after a while, Masaine found herself confiding her worries about Miju and Katrina.

"Is it about a separate palace? well. "How can I understand Your Majesty's deep intentions?"

Katrina continued speaking cautiously.

"From what I could see, His Majesty seemed to think that at least one more secluded villa was needed."

"You need more?"

There is already a Blue Rose Labyrinth for princes, so why on earth?

"... well. Do you know why? But there is always a reason for what you do. "We just don't understand what it means."

As if she were indeed Seonghwang's close associate, Katrina did not seem to have a single doubt about Seonghwang.

"then... . Then, Katrina, just in case... .."

With great difficulty, Masain brought out the most important matter.

"Perhaps you are still with Prince Mores... The curse left behind by the ruthless people from before... There are traces of... .."

Of course, I didn't expect to get a proper answer. But surprisingly, Katrina slowly nods at him!

"Yeah, I know."

"... yes?"

Masain actually became confused by her cool answer.

"Well, then why is your Majesty just letting that happen? "I heard that it is a very dangerous curse that can even damage the soul!"

okay. Didn't Cardinal Benitus say that too? It is a terrible curse that makes the existing personality empty in order to contain something evil in the body of the sacrifice.

However, when Masain asked urgently, Katrina asked an odd question.

"Masain. Masain, what do you think is the most important thing in helping someone recognize themselves as themselves?"

"yes? To recognize it as yourself, that means-"

"I think it's a person's memory or emotion."

Not long ago, Katrina heard Seonghwang mutter something that sounded like a lament.

-okay. Since he didn't want to get rid of his emotions, he ultimately chose to erase his memories.

She always helped Seonghwang carefully, and I was able to guess many facts from that single word.

The curse that makes a person's personality empty is not much different from the curse that erases all of a person's memories.

'And I guess that's really what His Majesty Mores wanted.'

okay. At least regarding the curse, it is undoubtedly true that the prince's will was reflected to some extent.

According to the investigation, Prince Mores clearly went to the scene of the ceremony of his own volition that day. So, even though he was able to succeed, he did not completely remove the curse. Because he is a person who is ready to grant whatever the children want.

"This is the conclusion I reached based on my limited insight."

Katrina continued speaking with a slightly confused look in her eyes.

"Perhaps Prince Mores knows something you don't want to know. So,

he wanted to forget everything, even if it meant using a curse."

"... ... !"

"It must have been Prince Mores's will to leave a curse. Of course, this is all just my poor guess..."

It was a completely unexpected answer.

"More, Mores..."

The curse, that's what Mores wanted for himself?

"Well, then... How should I treat him from now on... ... !"

Masain was so shocked that he stuttered.

"Well, what should I do now? Katrina! So does this mean that Mr. Mores will have to live with the Red Curse from now on?"

"Master Masaine."

"That can't be possible! That's not right! Living with the curse of a demon species on your body! If something like that happens... ... !"

Masain, who was talking frantically, was holding his head in great pain.

"Katrina! I, I am so afraid of that curse! So it can't go on like this! "I can no longer be by His Majesty Mores' side!"

"..."

"I swore to protect you for the rest of my life! But every time I encounter the traces of that curse, my whole body trembles uncontrollably! "How dare I call myself the knight who protects him!"

"..."

"I am not worthy of being a knight! Katrina, please answer! "Is there really no other way for me than to leave your side?"

Katrina looked silently at the overly agitated young knight. After a

while, when he seemed to calm down a little, she let out a small sigh and opened her mouth.

"How could someone as incompetent as me dare to discuss the qualifications of a knight?"

"... .."

"Masain. Do you know what? Although I have now earned the unrivaled title of His Majesty's 'shield', the truth is that I have never properly watched His Majesty. "I even gave him poison myself."

"... yes?"

At that incredible confession, Masain completely forgot about his worries for a moment.

what? poison?

As Masain's eyes widened, Katrina smiled bitterly.

"Of course, I swear to the Lord, it wasn't intentional."

That was quite a long time ago.

Katrina, who had just been appointed to the villa, was a child with a strong sense of justice. So she felt sorry for the young prince who almost always skipped her meals, so she committed the extraneous act of buying and carrying food from outside of her house.

The first few times there were no problems.

"... .."

At that time, the young Seonghwang looked at her with an inexplicable look, but he did not particularly try to ignore the guard knight's sincerity. Katrina seemed a little touched to see the sickly prince eating properly for the first time in a long time.

But that touching moment didn't last long.

"I never would have thought that the enemy would have bought up

all the restaurants in the imperial capital... .."

"... ..!"

That's not the only problem.

Although it was not intentional, it was an incident where a guard knight personally fed poisoned food to the prince. Nevertheless, no one in the imperial palace at the time raised an issue about it.

Thanks to this, Katrina was able to remain as the young Seonghwang's bodyguard, and for a while she struggled to find safer food.

However, after the prince was poisoned several times, Katrina eventually gave up on procuring food from outside.

"But do you know that? Masain. "Your Majesty never once held a grudge against me at that time."

"... .."

"And although I may have felt deep guilt and self-destruction, I also never left Your Majesty's side."

It cannot be denied that it was his fault for poisoning the prince several times. At that time, Katrina was so distressed that she wanted to quit her job as the prince's bodyguard right away. If he had been able to atone with his life, he would have gladly killed himself.

But Katrina was also well aware of this fact.

In this bloody imperial palace, the only person who can help the young prince is himself. He knew that once he left, there would no longer be anyone here to be on the prince's side.

That's how she endured a long and painful time.

"People are now calling me, despite my shortcomings, 'the strongest shield of the Holy Emperor.'"

Katrina smiled gently at Masain, who had a blank face.

"And now I know. "My existence meant more to His Majesty, who was young at the time, than I thought."

"Katrina... .."

"And perhaps it is the same for His Majesty Mores. Masaine is a truly humble knight who cannot be replaced by anyone in this world."

"... ..!"

436. Secretary of the Immortal (9)

That day, the short conversation with Katrina had great implications for Masain.

'Am I a moron! You're afraid of hurting my Majesty's feelings, so you have the ridiculous idea of completely abandoning your mission! 'What a meaningless worry this was!'

Staying by his side even though it may be a little awkward, and leaving far away to an unseen place. It is obvious which one will cause greater harm to the child.

Even so, the high-ranking priests' gaze toward Mores has become increasingly sinister recently. Therefore, at a time like this, Masain had to be a strong dam by Mores' side to block the waves. Just as Katrina steadfastly maintained her position even after making the terrible mistake of handing poison to the Holy Emperor.

Of course, I didn't dare expect to be like Katrina. He simply provides a little bit of strength to Mores when he needs him. That was all Masain wanted.

'For that to happen, I'll have to become stronger than I am now!'

Taking advantage of the slack in guard duty, Masain accelerated his training even more.

In order to calm down my shaky mind and not be distracted by miscellaneous thoughts-

Also, he hoped that the stronger his power would become, the more he would be able to find some peace of mind in the face of the demon species' curse.

'Of course, it is still difficult to completely hide the fear of the Red Curse. If so, it would be a good idea to prepare in advance so that you can reflexively help Haepo, at least when a crisis arises!'

So I started practicing booming in my spare time. If it were the most frequent crisis situation that Mores would face, nothing else would come to mind other than a fall accident.

"... "Masain, what kind of useless thing are you doing?"

As I was repeating the practice of throwing and catching training sand bags in the air, Francis, who happened to be passing by, clicked his tongue and asked.

He was a classmate of Masain's Academy and had recently joined the Knights of St. Aurelion, so he was often seen in the imperial palace.

"Even at the academy, you only chose the most foolish and ineffective training, but this time, what kind of ridiculous training are you doing on your own?"

"I'm practicing booming."

Although he was scolded quite rudely, Masain responded without hesitation. Francis did that for a day or two. Even when Masain had the right to succeed to the throne, his arrogance was beyond description.

"It just so happened that the training sandbags were exactly the same as Maures's weight. So, I'm going to practice taking the fall until I can move my body reflexively without thinking."

"... what?"

After hearing the absurd answer, Francis' eyes widened in an unusual way. Then he immediately snorted loudly.

"wait for a sec. I don't know what that boom is, but what's the use of getting used to the weight of sandbags? Prince Mores will continue to grow up anyway, right? "You can double your weight very quickly."

"Is that so?"

Masaine, caught off guard, looked back at Francis with a shocked expression. His eyes, which had been shaking aimlessly, soon hardened with the intense light of enlightenment.

"Right!"

At that time, Francis thought that Masain would realize his foolishness and quit training right away.

However, the next day, he visited the Royal Guard training site again, and this time he found Masain throwing and catching two bags of sand at once.

"... "Isn't this guy really stupid?"

As time passed, fortunately, the curse that invaded Mores' body gradually weakened.

The strings that were bright red suddenly changed to a faint light. The number of times letters surfaced on the skin began to decrease significantly.

The reason was unknown. Does the curse's effectiveness run out and disappear, or does the curse become weaker over time?

Anyway, Masain was internally relieved.

'If things continue like this, we can expect the curse to disappear completely soon.'

But at the same time, some unwelcome changes began to appear in Mores' behavior.

For example, at some point, Mores no longer wore a red cape.

"Sir, where did you put Rex today?"

When Masain became suspicious and carefully asked Mores-

"huh? Rex? What is it?"

"... ..!"

A very innocent question comes back.

When Masain faced the child's flawless eyes, he was speechless from shock.

'... How did this happen? Could it be that the curse is causing my memories to gradually disappear?'

Of course, I wasn't sure if it was really because of the curse.

The unique actions and words that Mores has shown so far have felt like they were based on a child's unique dreams or imagination rather than reality.

Perhaps, as time passed, the child began to distinguish between dreams and reality little by little.

Anyway, Masain felt strangely lonely, so he picked up the old tapestry that had been thrown in the corner of the room and stored it in his lodgings.

But the problem wasn't just the memories disappearing. As time passed, Mores' expression also gradually became depressed.

The child who woke up with a bright smile every day developed the habit of staring blankly out the window with an expressionless face.

Even when he met Logan or Marsain, he didn't seem as happy as before. Sometimes it seems like they are avoiding them, and sometimes they hide in remote places and sniffle alone!

"older brother. It seems that Lizabeth is too harsh on Mores. 'Shouldn't we tell Abama and get rid of all of Mores' classes right now?'"

At this point, Logan was also visibly nervous.

However, although he constantly hovered by Mores' side and tried to persuade him, he did not hastily try to interfere in the relationship between mother and son by borrowing the power of a third party. This is because he fully understood that all of these events were ultimately based on Mores' own will.

Right now, the child was struggling desperately, even with his young heart, to not lose the attention of Empress Elizabeth that he had regained.

"... .."

Masain also knew that fact well, so he was helpless.

So, when the sight became too painful to look at, he would occasionally take out the old tapestry he had stored away and make up his mind.

'The empress's tyranny is only the beginning. As long as the devil's curse continues, things will become more and more difficult for Mr. Mores to handle. But no matter what happens, I will stand by my side and protect him until the end.'

However, Masain at the time did not know anything.

No matter how many times I tried to pull myself together, any firm resolve or oath would be meaningless in the face of an unexpected event.

That fate sometimes boldly throws humans in front of an unbearable reality and watches with pleasure as even the roots of their will and beliefs are shaken to their core.

"... ..!"

No matter what terrible tricks the demon race carries out, I will not leave His Majesty Mores' side and protect him until the end.

That was the only premise that Masain had no doubt about for a long time.

But that day.

The day when a strong storm raged and we were unfortunately stranded at Grand Duke Asin's mansion.

Masain faced an unrealistic scene he had never imagined even in his dreams, and instantly lost his mental balance.

'That...' what?'

At that time, there was clearly Mores in front of him. No, the 'thing' that was Mores just now was standing there.

However, even if you look at it with your own eyes, you cannot easily understand what 'that' is. Reason and emotion clash violently, and the boundaries between reality and fantasy become complexly entangled.

The two hands holding Misra began to tremble mercilessly.

"Lowering... .."

The voice that came out like a moan could not reach the person calling and was scattered empty into the air.

Ah, what have I done so far? Who on earth were you trying to protect from 'what'?

[Ahahaha!]

In his confusion, a bright laughter that felt particularly familiar reached his ears. No, rather than hearing it in my ears, it was a strange sensation as if the sound was being hit directly into my head.

And in that dark backlight, there was a silver eye that gave off an unusually bright light.

[are you okay. Now, no matter what I do, it doesn't change. Because my brother is nothing.]

* * *

"That day I... "I betrayed your trust so easily!"

Masain knelt down and frantically confessed his mistakes.

"It's all my fault! If only I had stayed by your side until the end that day! I'm sure I could have prevented something like that from happening to you... .."

Seongjin, who was quietly listening to the rambling confession, made eye contact with Owen, who was as embarrassed as ever.

'Hey, what is Sir Martha talking about now? 'Do you know anything?'

'no? I don't know. 'Is this my first time seeing this too?'

'okay?'

hmm.

Seongjin became a little embarrassed. Masain had been apologizing for something gibberish since earlier, but the problem was that he had no idea what was going on.

'So what on earth did you do wrong to me? 'I don't remember anything anyway!'

However, there was no need to urge him to calm down and explain step by step. It's not that it wasn't, because Sir Martha seemed completely out of his mind right now.

It was unusual for Gyeong to be a warrior who rarely lost his composure despite Seongjin's considerable trouble.

"I tried to overcome it for so long, but it was no use! Dear, I... "As expected, he was a terrible coward!"

Meanwhile, Masain was completely buried in the fear that he had suppressed and ignored in his heart for a long time, and was not even aware of what he was saying.

I regret what happened that day. I still regret it terribly even now.

But despite this, Masain had no confidence that he would not make the same choice again when faced with the same situation.

-Look at this. After all, it's a dream, right? Brother Masain is still with me.

And the old fear that he might repeat the same mistake became a vivid reality and attacked him mercilessly when he stood in front of

Seongjin sighed slightly and walked towards Masain. I don't know what the problem is, but anyway, I can't leave that guy like that forever.

"Sir Martha."

A voice that sounds strangely calm.

Owen looked back at Seongjin without thinking and was a little embarrassed. This is because Seongjin's face, looking down at Masain, looked somewhat cold.

"I'm sorry, sir. Dear, I... .."

"Try to calm down. "Brother Masain."

Startle!

Masain was startled by the unexpected name and raised his head. Toward him, Seongjin twitched the corners of his mouth and smiled somewhat strangely.

"are you okay. Even if you put your mind to it now, nothing will change."

"... ..!"

"I think Sir Masaine is greatly mistaken, but his influence is not as great as he thinks compared to his self-consciousness. okay? "In the end, Sir Martha is nothing to me."

Masain's eyes were greatly shaken.

It was a statement that may sound cold at first glance. However, what is surprising is that Masain's eyes, which were listening to the voice, are slowly coming back into focus.

"I don't know why you regret it so much and blame me, but you probably wouldn't have changed anything at that time. So I couldn't have ruined anything. "I assure you, the mistake you made against me wasn't as big a deal as you thought, right?"

"Calm... .."

Masain asked with a trembling voice.

"Is that really so, Your Majesty?"

"okay."

Seongjin nodded without any hesitation.

okay. Don't be real. At least within the memories I have now.

437. Secretary of the Immortal (10)

The road back from Furiano to Regina was long and tedious.

Rattling rattling.

Seongjin, who was shaking his body to the irregular vibrations of the wagon, raised his head for a moment and looked up at the open night sky.

The stars were blinking especially heavily today, and it seemed as if they were going to roll down like tears from the sky at any moment.

"new... Mores. Aren't you hungry? "Try some of this."

Owen handed me a small fish cake. It looks like he took some time to access Pangea Chronicle.

"You man, stop calling people strange names. "I'd rather just call myself a newbie."

"huh? really?"

Owen's face was pale.

"But is it still okay? "I'm comfortable with that, but I think other people might think it's strange if they hear it."

"What do you think? "It sounds much weirder if you stutter a beat every time you call me."

"Is that so?"

Owen nodded in understanding, then glanced to the side and asked worriedly.

"But you're a newbie."

"huh?"

"Brother Masain, will you be okay?"

"... .."

Seongjin briefly glanced at Masain, who was leaning against the corner of the carriage.

He got on the cart with a dazed look on his face and hadn't woken up for several hours. He falls asleep alone, leaving the prince to be guarded, which is absolutely impossible considering Masain's usual personality.

"It was a bit strange earlier. Maybe the guy who ran away from the sewer played a dirty trick on his brother. "It would be best to call the healing priests as soon as we get back to Regina."

"hmm."

"You can still see it now. It seems like I'm having a nightmare. What should I do? Should I give this limited edition eyepatch to my brother too?"

As Owen said, Masaine's face was distorted, as if she was struggling with something even in her sleep.

But Seongjin thought for a moment and shook his head.

"no. "Leave the eyepatch alone."

Somehow I feel like this isn't just a nightmare. Moreover, now I have a feeling that it would be better not to defend against external mental interference.

"Well, don't worry. Lord Masaine will be fine when he wakes up after a nap."

"Is that so?"

"huh."

Seongjin calmly nodded, but his slightly nervous hands were fiddling with the devil's lamp without realizing it.

Why not? According to the Demon King, it appears that it was Seongjin himself who actually made Masain fall into a deep sleep.

-Forget everything and just sleep, Sir Masaine. When you open your eyes later, you will forget all the bad things that bothered you.

After getting on the carriage, Seongjin tried to appease Masain by emphasizing that several times. Then, for some reason, he actually closed his eyes and fell asleep.

No, is it really right to just appease?

Seongjin still wasn't sure. For some reason, the more I uttered each word to him, the more an uneasy feeling arose as if I was directly cursing a person.

And after a while, Seongjin was able to hear the answer from a third party.

[Wow, Seongjin Lee. This ignorant guy. Beating the soul itself with a curse and turning it into a groggy state. Thanks to this, it seems like the soul's collapse has somehow stopped.]

According to the Demon King's explanation, for some reason, Lord Masain's soul suddenly showed signs of rapid collapse.

And that period clearly coincides with the time when Seongjin suddenly showed symptoms similar to sleepwalking.

[Maybe that guy's soul wasn't that strong to begin with. That's why it gets damaged so easily even with a small impact. Even now, the image of my soul has become quite blurry, so I think it will probably take quite a long time to recover, right?]

Seongjin thought as he hugged the lamp.

Well, could that be considered a small shock? Moreover, I have a

him, he looks like a very carefree chicken-haired bastard.

'Why is Owen so fine?'

Then, while Owen swallows a mouthful of fishcake, he feels Seongjin's gaze and turns around blankly.

"huh? why?"

At the same time, a small pendant swayed from the guy's neck, emitting a bright red glow.

sparkle!

"... "No, nothing."

"It's nothing! What? huh? "You're curious!"

"... .."

"why? It's a newbie. say it! huh? huh?"

"... "It's noisy, you idiot."

Seongjin snapped and buried his face gloomily on the lamp.

I felt an unprecedented sense of helplessness. It feels like everything is going wrong. I feel like everything is a mess and it's all my fault.

Sir Masain is clearly aware that he has had some harmful influence on the Demon King. But no matter how much I think about it, I can't remember what it is, and I can't even figure out how to solve this situation.

'how... ..'

What on earth did I believe in and brought things to this point?

Softly-!

It was right then. Something like a soft breeze lightly brushed through my hair.

"... ... !"

Seongjin was caught by a strong sense of déjà vu and quickly raised his head. Then, I watched in disbelief as the lines of agony disappeared from Sir Martha's face in an instant, and a comfortable smile appeared on his face.

"uh..."

Masain wasn't the only one who changed.

The minor scratches on the group's mouth from rolling in the sewer disappeared, and even Giacomo Milo, who was suffering from erosion, looked much more at ease.

For a moment, I burst into tears and felt a surge of relief.

Well then! I knew this guy would be visiting soon!

After such a magical time, Masain opened his eyes as if he were just fine.

"... Lowering?"

"Lord Martha!"

"older brother!"

Masain blinked a couple of times and stood up, turning his shoulders as if his posture was uncomfortable. Then he looked around him with a slightly embarrassed expression.

"this. Did I forget to protect you and sleep alone? "How did this happen?"

"..."

Seongjin asked with a slightly anxious face.

"Lord Masaine. "Don't you remember anything that happened earlier?"

"yes? "What do you mean?"

Owen also joined in, looking puzzled.

"Besides, brother. It seemed like you were having nightmares ever since. Is that okay?"

"nightmare... .."

Masain then looked at the two people in turn with eyes filled with pure doubt. It was clear eyes that did not contain the slightest lie.

"well? Now that I think about it, it seems like I had a bit of a strange dream, sir."

It was a dream of me wandering around a sunny meadow alone... .
Masain added and furrowed his brows.

"I don't really remember, but I think I saw a strange colony of mushrooms spewing wind into the air. "It was truly a strange dream."

* * *

Number 21, who was sleeping in his hiding place, woke up from a light sleep when he felt a faint sign of someone. She was now a very familiar figure to him.

When I opened the door and went in, I saw a homunculus sitting in a dark room, looking out the window.

"... your majesty."

Seonghwang slowly turned his head.

Now that the cumbersome hood covering the head has been thrown away, the face of the homunculus, completely assimilated with the main body, is clearly revealed. This would be proof that Seonghwang stayed in the body of this doll for quite a long time.

"It is the middle of the night. How did you become a homunculus at a time like this?"

However, what came back to No. 21 was not an answer but an absurd reprimand.

"... Why are you here? "I told Breman not to send you here if possible."

"... ..!"

No. 21 was in tears without even realizing it and listened to the argument.

"Yes, I also heard those instructions."

"if... .."

"But your Majesty's informant is me! No matter how much your Majesty treats me like a child, I am also an informant for Monkey Watchtower who has been given a number! But you didn't let me follow you to Asin, and now you're going to ostracize me even in the north?"

"I wasn't bullying you, Enrique."

"It's number 21! And Your Majesty has clearly neglected me from my mission!"

"... .."

Seonghwang stared at No. 21, who was grinning for a moment. And soon, when he seemed to calm down a little, he opened his mouth in a low voice.

"Enrique. Tomorrow at noon, I plan to change my route and visit one of the bases of the Freedom Underpass."

"... ..!"

Freedom Underpass. Upon hearing those words, No. 21's face hardens horribly.

Seonghwang, who witnessed the dramatic change, let out a small sigh.

"Take a look at one. "You are not ready to meet him yet."

"I am... .."

Number 21 did not have an easy answer.

In the Freedom Underpass, in the base of the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front, there was still a strong connection from childhood that No. 21 did not want to face.

"If you show your face there, he will definitely know you."

"... .."

"What can you do? How about going back to the ecliptic even now?"

"yes?"

"It is enough to have taken care of the group like this. "I think I can lead them on my own from now on."

Number 21 felt his anger, which had barely subsided, welling up again.

He also knew that Seonghwang was considerate of him. I knew that, but there was nothing I could do to be so upset about the untimely suggestion.

"That is none of your concern, Your Majesty. "Other than meeting that guy, it's up to me to decide."

"Enrique."

"It's number 21! And you wonder how you can safely get out of there! "In the Freedom Underpass, there will be only people who want to grind you!"

"... .."

"Isn't that the last homunculus now, other than being bound to Asean? "If you lose that precious doll, what are you going to do from now on, meddling here and there?"

Number 21 threatened in a profane manner that he would not

normally dare to attempt.

"So, tomorrow, it would be best for you to calmly receive my escort without any unnecessary interference!"

bang!

As No. 21 nervously closed the door and left, Seonghwang thought with an embarrassed expression.

... It's really not easy to deal with children who are in the prime of their rebellion.

* * *

[...] Are you gone?]

[It has disappeared.]

[Right.]

In response to Martha's affirmation, Belinda, who was hiding behind an old tombstone, carefully raised her spirit.

Even after the bright light that had covered the realm of rest for a while disappeared, they were unable to hastily raise their souls for a while.

A light full of pure healing and divinity. It could not help but be extremely threatening to dark(?) souls like themselves.

[Still, there is no need to be so afraid of that light. Because my soul was saved by that person.]

Martha's spirit spoke hesitantly.

[On the day I died, he was the one who personally took my soul and brought it here.]

Belinda also nodded.

[Well, it didn't seem like he wanted to harm the owner that much-]

But their conversation did not continue any further. This is because for a moment, a terrible return enveloped the area of rest.

Keeeeeeee!

The black-robed priest, Hayes, cries out, shedding black tears of blood.

I usually thought of him as a pretty gentle soul, but the more I got to know him, the more dramatic changes I could have imagined.

[Why are you all saying such nonsense! He is the spirit of Seonghwang, the guardian of Delcross and our hated enemy! The kind-hearted master is now being thoroughly deceived by him!]

Then this time Belinda got angry.

[What blasphemous words! The master of the great soul will never fall for anyone's trick!]

Then Hayes glared at Belinda with burning eyes.

[How long have you known that your thing has been serving its master? The master's first servant is, after all, this Haze!]

Kwaaaaang!

Two powerful souls clash fiercely.

The realm of rest that had been immersed in silence was suddenly engulfed in strong vibrations. Fragile corpses flew here and there, and broken tombstones were scattered in all directions.

[Ah, those two, here we go again...]

Martha hid behind a large tombstone and sighed.

438. Secretary of the Immortal (11)

Martha was always powerless in the face of violence. He was quite accustomed to being exposed to absolute violence that he could not fight against with his own strength alone.

People who have experienced complete despair become numb. Martha had no choice but to learn this herself in an unpleasant way during her lifetime.

But here, in the realm of rest, things were different. Every soul could rest as much as it wanted, and while asleep, absolute safety was guaranteed under the protection of its master.

Martha was still insensitive to violence, but this was not a reaction from despair as when she was alive, but from a strong sense of stability. That's why, even when a commotion breaks out that shakes her world, she can remain calm, unlike before.

Whirling-

dump! Fluffy!

Bodies swept away by the explosion fly like fallen leaves. Then, he was violently thrown to the floor along with the broken tombstones.

Ah, rest! Fortunately, those fragile souls were still safe and in a peaceful sleep.

However, if the commotion continues, eventually their rest will be interrupted and they will wake up. It was never a desirable phenomenon for the conflict between the two to continue.

[...] They will soon appear now.]

Martha held her breath and waited for the giant spirit to appear a moment later.

Nowadays, half-hearted souls like Hayes and Belinda are fighting each other, claiming to be superior, but as far as Marta knows, there are truly strong servants of the master. Each one of them has tremendous power comparable to that of a low-level demon lord.

They usually fall into a deep sleep like their owners, but when there is a disturbance in their realm of rest, they return from rest and easily organize the situation.

Like right now.

Wooooooo...

With a bone-piercing sound, a skinny corpse of a giant slowly rises.

The old-fashioned lace wrapped around an arm like a dry old tree had faded to gray, as if to indicate the passage of time. Next, a muslin dress covered in dust and a swarthy face covered in white powder are revealed.

Beneath the rotting flesh here and there, hardened muscles and waxy fat can be seen. A gloomy and horrifying appearance, as if it were the embodiment of death itself.

Sigh.

The giant rolled his dry eyes, looked around for a moment, and then clumped his bony hands together.

Knock-!

At that moment, tremendous pressure came from above and below at the same time.

[...] ... !]

[...] ... !]

Hayes and Belinda's souls were crushed flat. Then he was buried

among the broken tombstones and fell into silence. He was unintentionally placed on forced rest.

Perhaps it will take some time for them to wake up. By then, both of them will have cooled off a bit.

[...] I think it's finally become a little quieter.]

Hehehe... ..

With a sound like a huge steel frame collapsing, the giant's body slowly lies back on the floor.

[Leave the fuss over this miserable old woman at least. Perhaps because part of his soul is constantly being summoned somewhere, this old man never feels refreshed even when he sleeps.]

It was a majesty that was far from miserable, but no one could refute those words.

[...]]

Marta, who watched for a moment, whirled her soul and flew in front of the gigantic woman. She was proactive because she was guaranteed absolute safety by her owner.

[Who are you?]

[Hmm?]

[Until now, I have often seen the brave Wolf King and the wise Orc King here. But today is the first time someone like you has woken up.]

Then the giant corpse woman raised her wrinkled eyelids slightly.

[Oh, human! Seeing that your body has been preserved intact, you are most likely a soul that flowed in from the original world! Are you a human from the Delcross dimension?]

[Yes, that's right.]

[It's truly bizarre. Innocent and pure souls like you are extremely rare to find here. Could you please tell me your name?]

Although her tone was old-fashioned, to say the least, her thoughts conveyed deep goodwill toward Martha. It's as if Martha senses a subtle tenderness from her gaze, despite being obscured by her unsightly clouded corneas.

[of course. Great man. My name is Martha.]

[Martha! It's nice to see you like this. This insignificant old man is called Hexenjava.]

Hexenjavat.

As Martha repeated to herself, a bitter sound came from the giant's corpse.

[Unfortunately, my true name could not survive for a long time and crumbled into nothingness like dust. All that remains now is the bloody name that made everyone tremble with fear even after his death.]

[Does this mean Hexenjavat is not your real name?]

[No, no. Something that isn't that pretty doesn't really suit me, does it?]

The corpse seemed to be squinting playfully at Martha, but the darkened eyes only created a more gloomy effect.

[That's why the owner of my soul often calls me 'remorse.' If you don't like that ugly nickname, you can call me that too.]

The woman who had said that far laid her head on the floor and slowly closed her dry eyelids.

[Ah, what a pity. I want to talk more, but I think my meeting with you will end like this. I need to rest again now. I can feel the cruel yet merciful breath of rest approaching my ears.]

[...] ... ?]

Martha looked puzzled and approached the rotting woman's face.

The souls here are free to rest as much as they want. That's what Martha knew until now.

But for some reason, that giant is talking as if he is forced to rest.

[Could you please give me a moment? Tell me about yourself, about this place, and about our master.]

It was only after her death that Martha began to realize for the first time that this passion was latent within her.

[Even though I have escaped the bondage of the flesh, there are still many things I do not know. I've crossed the wall, but there's another wall blocking me. So, I want to learn more things now and overcome my limitations someday.]

Then the giant looked down at Martha with a gentle gaze. What came back was a euphemistic rejection.

[That seems impossible. I am a criminal imprisoned here, and therefore I cannot freely resist the 'rest' that has been sentenced to me.]

[sinner... Is that it?]

Martha was quite taken aback by the unexpected information.

[That's right. I, and the wolf king and orc king you met earlier, are people who committed terrible crimes long ago out of a desire to become immortal.]

[...]]

[So, 'rest' is rest for my soul, but it is also a prison for my sins.]

I could feel the giant's consciousness gradually sinking deeper. Even though she is already a dead body, her soul falls deeper and deeper into death and turns white. Like a huge ghost ship sinking into the deep sea.

As Martha stroked the giant's eyelids, feeling an unknown affection, thoughts, much fainter than the first, came into her mind again.

[But don't worry about me, gentle soul. The merciful rest said that it would save even us. He said there is room for sympathy because our sins are simply due to fear.]

[...] Fear?]

[is it so... ..]

A final thought was conveyed like a sigh from the giant who was slowly falling into sleep.

[That's right. It's fear. How can our souls be so fragile?]

* * *

-How can the soul be so fragile?

The image that resembles the body is truly nothing more than an illusion, but at the same time, it exists and is bound by the body as if it had substance.

However, the body cannot serve as a perfect wall for the soul. This is because the body has no choice but to eventually decay, and the soul can never avoid the wounds suffered by the body.

What would it be like if the soul escaped the shackles of the body?

If only we could build a stronger material to surround the soul, a stronger protective shield that surpasses the body. If only I could anchor my soul to that strong fortress, and even more so, completely attune my body to it!

Ah, if only I could do that, having an immortal body would not be a vain dream!

Seongjin, who was roughly turning the pages, looked at the worn-out book cover with a slightly disgruntled expression.

- <Secretary of Dacian >

I couldn't help but laugh. You like the secretary. Since I don't remember seeing it on the list of banned books, it's probably a general miscellaneous book that isn't even properly handled by the Holy Church.

'Why did the status window give me a quest to obtain something like this?'

The reason Seongjin received this book from Owen was because he was very bored. There is a limit to how much a person can meditate. How many days have it been since I was bored in the wagon?

-So, newbie, do you want to read this? No, you can just keep it.

-what? You say it's an important quest item? Why are you giving me this?

-Anyway, it seems like all the recent quests revolve around you. So I think it would be best for you to just keep this.

-?

Still, it was a book taken from the evil wizard's laboratory.

I was hoping that there might be something interesting about it, but this is just a list of nonsense about the composition of the soul and the limitations of the body.

"hmm..."

However, Seongjin closed the book without any regrets for a moment before fiddling with the old cover again.

If you sit on a wobbly cart all day, you will develop an addiction to printing that you never had before.

[What? What is it about?]

In the end, when Seongjin opened the book again, the demon king who was acting as a stand next to him flickered his flames fiercely as if he was curious.

He was probably more frustrated than Seongjin. She can't fly freely and has been stuck in a lamp for days.

Seongjin kindly explained the contents to the boy who could not read.

"I don't know. "If you build a strong wall to protect your soul, you can obtain an immortal body."

[What? Is that real?]

It was clear that 'immortality' was the most interesting topic regardless of time and place. The devil's lamp suddenly comes to life and shines brightly.

[so? How on earth do you build that wall of the soul?]

"To prepare it, it is necessary to first grow special flowers... .."

[flower? A flower?]

"huh. It is said to be a flower that rarely grows naturally in cold regions. After drying it well, grinding it well with sachet of raccoon raccoon, angelica leaves, and a few herbs... .."

[Hmm? Is that the way to build a wall of the soul?]

"That's right. But what comes next is more important. After mixing it well with glue and aging it for 240 days using a special recipe, a very delicious decoction is created... .."

[Umm... ..]

It is visible that the Demon King's interest cools down in an instant. After all, it's rare for the lamp's flame to dim like that.

[That sounds like some kind of nonsense folk remedy, doesn't it? Does it make sense to strengthen your soul by taking decoction?]

"Well, effects aside, it doesn't have any advantages at all. "First of all, it's delicious."

[What do you know! No matter how delicious it is, I don't want to eat a sachet from an animal I don't know!]

"That's right."

As Seongjin was shaking his head, someone cautiously intervened in their conversation.

"Perhaps the contents of that book are not true. "Master, you are prepared."

It was Giacomo Milo.

He was still tied up, but unlike before, he seemed to have regained some of his sanity.

"It's not true? "How do you know that?"

Despite Seongjin's blunt question, he still bowed his head in a humble manner.

"That's right, that secretary is something I personally prepared in exchange for the elixir."

flight. An item that could have almost brought a great disaster to the continent.

Seongjin carefully fumbled with the small medicine bottle he had kept in his pocket for a while.

"This is an old book that was kept in Miloga's library for generations until a deal was made with the wizard of Furiano. So there is no one on this continent who knows that book better than me."

"okay."

Sensing that this might be a slightly sensitive story, Seongjin glanced around to see if there were signs around him.

Fortunately, the driver driving the cart was dozing off, holding the reins loosely. It seems like they completely trust the mule, which has a history of traveling between bases.

Owen is also connected to the Pangea Chronicle to procure food.

And Sir Martha-

"... .."

He was breathing evenly and was truly in a deep sleep.

Of course, it was Seongjin who volunteered to be on guard first, but no matter what, he never thought he would fall asleep so obediently with the prince around.

Suddenly, a sentence I had read casually from the secretary passed through my mind.

-How can the soul be so fragile?

439. Reunion (1)

As he confidently assured, Giacomo Milo had detailed knowledge of 'Dacian's secretary'.

"At first glance, it appears to be a very old book, but that is purely because it was stored incorrectly. "Judging by the quality of the paper and the way it was bound, the secretary must have been published less than 100 years ago."

However, the period in which Dacianus lived dates back almost to the reign of the four great emperors. So there is no way he could have written it himself.

"Dacianus is too famous and has a clear legacy to be dismissed as the author of such a strange secretary. "He who is prepared."

"... okay?"

It may be true that it is famous. I can't quite remember, but it was a name that even Seongjin, who had little common sense in this world, seemed to have heard of from somewhere.

"yes. So, either someone made it up to frame Dacian as a heretic, or it was a fraud by a forgery expert targeting foolish old book collectors."

Giacomo went so far as to criticize the entire Count Milo family as 'stupid old book collectors', but Seongjin still tilted his head with an incredulous expression.

That's because the content of the book was quite consistent for it to be considered moderately made up.

'Besides, this is Owen's quest item, right?'

If so, shouldn't it be seen as having its own value beyond that of a counterfeit product?

"You can't conclude from that alone that this book is fake, Giacomo. It might just be a different author with the same name."

"... yes?"

"Or, in order to preserve Dacian's secretary, someone at a later date may have copied the contents into a new book."

Giacomo Milo then looked up at Seongjin foolishly for a moment, then urgently bowed his head as if he realized something.

"Oh, I see! It was so long ago that you may not know much about it. But at least there is no other author with the same name. After Dacian, no one would have dared to call themselves Dacian in private."

"why?"

"Because that name became the name of a powerful noble family after Dacian's death."

What came out of Giacomo's mouth next was a name that Seongjin was familiar with.

"Dacianus is the progenitor of the Marquis of Daciano. He who is prepared."

"Daciano?"

"yes. At the time, the arrogant Dacian established his family after himself. Daciano is nothing more than the Ortona-like pronunciation of Dacian."

"... ..!"

At that moment, Seongjin clearly remembered where he had heard this familiar name.

One day, when he was drunk on medicinal tea and woke up in some

flame level, didn't his father himself kindly explain it to him?

-The current Lord, Berseus, is not a pure-blooded lycanthrope. He is a distant descendant of Dacianus, a lycanthrope who was the ancestor of the Marquis of Daciano a long time ago.

Am I stupid?

why? Why did I only remember that important fact now?

Seongjin was in shock, but Giacomo, who did not notice this, continued his explanation.

"One more thing, there is no way that this seditious book is a manuscript of a work written by Dacian. As it is known to the public, he was a more devout worshiper of the main god than anyone else."

Before the fall of Ortona, the last people to rule the kingdom were members of the Sardinian royal family.

And the beginnings of the Marquis d'Arciano must go back even further into the past than the beginnings of the Sardinian royal family.

At that time, Delcross was in the midst of spreading church power throughout the continent based on military force. After being conquered by Remus, the second Holy Emperor, also known as the 'Bloody Emperor', the kings of Ortona were installed according to the tastes of the Holy Emperor family for generations.

And the same goes for Ortona's vassals. Those who revealed impure intentions toward the empire were completely excluded, and the empty seats were filled by new lords selected through strict religious verification.

Therefore, it is safe to say that it is highly unlikely that Daccianus, the founder of Dacia, was a heretic.

"So when I first got my hands on this book, I guessed: "Maybe it was we, the ancestors of the Milo family, who created this book."

Conspiring against each other and sending them to the Inquisition.

That was once a method of political conflict used more often than territory warfare.

Therefore, this book may also be a forgery created by the Count Milo family in preparation for a conflict with the Marquis d'Arciano.

"But after the Ortona Civil War broke out, my family would not have been able to use this book hastily."

"I guess so."

At this point, the five lords who survived the fall of the country are barely maintaining the balance of power. At this time, imagine that Count Milo sells the Marquis d'Arciano to the empire and is branded a traitor. It was obvious what attitude the other lords would take.

"Above all, the claims made by the author of this book are absurd from beginning to end. You are prepared. Have you by any chance read the entire contents of this book?"

As Seongjin quietly shook his head, Giacomo Milo let out a sigh.

"To give an example of the most ridiculous part of the dog, yes. The author even claims that his knowledge came from another world."

"different... world?"

Seongjin's ears perked up.

Is it because we already know of the existence of another dimension? Somehow, I feel like the credibility of this book has gone up a bit. Of course, Giacomo Milo would not agree to this.

"yes. And there is another part that is the most spectacular."

Perhaps because he was uncomfortable in the position in which he was tied up, he rolled around on the bottom of the wagon and paused for a moment.

"Well, the author who calls himself Dacianus says that he is not a human, but a noble brother of wolves. He says he's a pureblood lycanthrope or something."

"Lycanthrope?"

Startle!

Seongjin, who was carefully handing over the secretary, stopped his hand and raised his head. A lycanthrope claiming to be a lycanthrope is quite sophisticated for a counterfeit product.

Of course, Giacomo Milo did not notice Seongjin's dazed expression.

"yes. Isn't it really funny? "Did he really expect anyone to believe that?"

"... "What is the basis for saying that is not true?"

"Yes, the prepared one. As you know, aren't lycanthropes mindless witches? "They are fundamentally different creatures from humans."

But funny enough, the part that Giacomo Milo found most absurd was what inspired Seongjin to trust this book.

Here, only Seongjin and the Demon King know the truth. as soon as-

'Berseus Dashiano is a half-blood lycanthrope, and his progenitor is a pure-blood lycanthrope. In other words, this book tells the truth, at least in part!'

* * *

Owen, who had been connected to Pangea Chronicle for quite some time, stretched out with a very satisfied face. It's a bonus that her pockets have gotten fatter.

"Haha, don't be surprised, newbie. Do you know what I found in the green zone? Oh well, there's a sweet part-time job serving super delicious stew hiding in the corner of the square... .."

But Owen soon trailed off and blinked. It was as if Seongjin was possessed by something, and he was steadily turning over the old book he gave him with great concentration.

'Quest item? I just gave it to you to kill some time, but is it that much

fun?'

Owen displayed all the food he had brought on the floor and looked at Seongjin with curious eyes.

The red light that occasionally flickers in the boy's pupils is just the reflected light of the lamp, or... ..

widely!

No matter how much time passed, Seongjin finally succeeded in putting all the contents of the crowded secretary into his head.

'In order to build a strong wall of the soul, Dacian said that it was necessary to cultivate special flowers. A rare flower that only grows in cold regions.'

It was still a list of floating stories.

But is it because I found a clue? Naturally, previous memories are combined with the contents of the secretary and are gradually organized in Seongjin's mind.

One day, I was stranded in the snowy fields of Sigismund Range. Lycanthrope, who had lost his mind and wandered around the demon world for a long time, said this with tears in his eyes.

-I was aware of the fact that the moment I reached the demonic state, the minds of my compatriots would definitely become clouded.

-It is a blue flower that emits a scent that paralyzes reason. It has been growing wild in the depths of the Demon World for a long time. That is why this place has been used as a prison for the compatriots since ancient times.

It was said that Vajra, the leader of the lycanthropes, was tricked by the cunning Berseus into entering the Demon Realm.

-But when we arrived, for some reason, those blue flowers were in bloom all over the forest. The entire center of the Demon World has become a [flower garden] filled with drugs!

And Louise.

After that day, the mixed-race lycanthrope girl, who left somewhere, also left these solemn words to Seongjin for the last time.

-I must confirm the reality of the [Painter] with my own eyes.

The more I thought about it, the more parts that matched the secretary's content. Seongjin looked down at the old book again.

'These absurd bullshit... 'It's all real?'

Is it really Dacianus, the founder of the Marquis of Daciano, who created the flower garden where precious flowers were grown deep in the dark?

And just by grinding and drinking that flower consistently, you can build up the wall of your soul and become immortal? really?

"her..."

As I looked up at the dark sky in bewilderment, a small fish cake was thrust into my mouth.

Yum Yum.

Seongjin thought as he unconsciously took the fish cake and ate it.

'I remember the idea of grinding it and drinking it, but somehow it feels like it has similar benefits to medicinal tea.'

As the sweet and salty seasoned food arrived, my mind began to spin for the first time in a while.

'Near the Sigismund Territory, where tea made from ground Loperum eggs was distributed, there happened to be a flower garden cultivated by Dacianus?'

This absolutely can't be a coincidence.

Moreover, Dacian's explanation of 'flower' was somewhat familiar.

Until now, many people have given their own names to this precious

blue flower.

Pale rest, blue jewel of eternity, cradle of noble queens...

However, it is by far the most widely known name.

Deleria.

Blue deleria flower.

Seongjin also knew this name. The only thing he knew was Deleria, which was not a flower but the name of an otherworldly butterfly.

'But are Deleria's butterflies and Deleria's flowers really separate?'

Yum Yum.

Seongjin slightly furrowed his eyebrows as he took the soft piece of bread that approached his mouth again.

okay. It can't be a coincidence that those two have the same name. Besides, Logan did that too, right? While subjugating the sea beasts, I think I saw Deleria's blue butterfly in the black forest near the Demonic Land.

'That's not the only thing we have in common.'

Deleria, and Loperum eggs.

When the Gray Plague was rampant in the ecliptic, the Demon King told this story while explaining the life history of Loperum.

-that's right. What Loperum imitates is the smell of Deleria's eggs. It would be true to say that monsters are attracted like drugs.

So there was clearly a strange connection between the two. Dacius' herbal medicine and Sigismund's medicinal tea.

Yum Yum.

Seongjin made a decision as he gulp down the cooled stew.

'I guess it won't work! Rather than quietly returning to Regina like

this, I need to find the distribution route for the Penitent Church's medicine cart right now!'

In all likelihood, they would have used the Freedom Underpass as a base. If so, the medicinal tea may be gradually spreading to these bases as well.

'First, I have to find one more base that is closest!'

There was a promise with Giovanni not to invade their stronghold as much as possible, but it was no longer important after seeing Dacian's secretary.

If Seongjin's guess is true.

Then, the true purpose of the medicine cart and the Gray Plague is...
... !

Seongjin, who suddenly stood up in a hurry, almost collided head-on with Owen, who was approaching closely.

"Huh?!"

"... huh?"

Only then does my concentration break, and the surrounding scenery comes into view one by one.

The floor of the cart was littered with various foods, and Owen was holding a spoon in a hesitant posture.

"What are you doing?"

"... .."

"Why is the bottom of the carriage like this?"

"Uh, that's it... .."

Why is this guy so stuttering again?

Seongjin, who had been waiting for a while, couldn't hear Owen's excuses in the end and shook his head.

"If you're going to eat something, eat it neatly. What is this all about?
"Such a rude guy."

"... .."

Leaving behind a somewhat sullen Owen, Seongjin shouted loudly at the dozing coachman.

"hey! hey! How long is she going to drive the carriage and pretend not to know? How many days has this been going on? We're starting to get hungry! know?"

Actually, I felt strangely full, but that wasn't the important thing.

Seongjin had to immediately check the status of the Jayu Underpass base with his own eyes.

"If it's a special delivery or something, stop hitting me! Please send us to the nearest village right now! hurry!"

440. Reunion (2)

At Seongjin's sudden shout, the coachman, who was suddenly struck by lightning while sleeping, was startled and pulled the reins.

Shake!

As the carriage shakes violently and stops, Sir Martha, who was sleeping in the corner, suddenly opens his eyes.

"Why are you making such a fuss all of a sudden? Kid. "Just one more day and we'll reach Regina!"

The coachman, who soon realized the situation, harshly criticized Seongjin. Although he spoke impeccably, his speech had a thick Ortona-like accent.

"I should have delivered it by now. "We are going to eat, so please send us to the village."

"This little boy... ..!"

The coachman looked embarrassed at the sudden flock.

"That can't be said. Every express delivery service has its own policy. So, once you entrust yourself to the free underpass, follow the usage rules until the end!"

"No matter how 'special delivery' is, it has to be done to the extent possible. How many days have you been starving us? "If you treat people like luggage, you don't really think of them as burdens, do you?"

"I was starving... ? "No, are you serious about that?"

The coachman glanced sideways at Seongjin's feet with a puzzled expression on his face. There were traces of snacks scattered all over the floor of the wagon that couldn't be hidden.

But Seongjin lifted his chin with a shameless look on his face.

"Is that really your way? Are you protecting the organization's secrets by secretly starving outsiders to death?"

"Say something that makes sense! Starvation? From the looks of it, you and your group are still in good spirits, right?"

"what? So, the meals that are currently being provided to others were only given to us, right?"

"No, that kind of unreasonableness... ..!"

My luggage, which had been quiet up to now, suddenly became a very serious issue as to what was wrong with it. The coachman was so dumbfounded that he couldn't respond properly and just muttered.

Then Masain, who was staring blankly at their scuffle, asked Owen.

"Sir, what is happening all of a sudden?"

But the answer I got back was not very encouraging.

"Mores is very hungry, brother. I said I would work hard to feed myself... .."

"... yes?"

"Well listen, brother. I went and did all the daily quests that I normally wouldn't do, right? I thought that by working like that, I was able to eat at least one more. I did... .."

Masain could not ask him any more questions. Because she noticed that Owen seemed more discouraged than ever. The chicken's fur, drooping from the night dew, is so pitiful.

Meanwhile, Seongjin's fierce harassment continued. The way she cries out at every word her coachman says is quite obnoxious.

In the end, the coachman could not bear it anymore and quietly changed the point.

"Wasn't this all already discussed in advance? "I understand you already made a pact with Giovanni that you will never delve into other nearby bases?"

Seongjin snorted inwardly.

I didn't think he would have entrusted the express delivery to just anyone, but this coachman was also informed about the details of the transaction with Giovanni. This probably means that it is not a simple terminal transport method.

'Then he would have been ordered to keep an eye on us. Since you will need to prepare for unexpected situations, it is highly likely that you will be in a position where you can exercise your own discretion during the transportation process.'

Also, there is a high possibility that the assassins who have been following us since we parted ways with Giovanni are now under this man's control.

After thinking that far, Seongjin calmed down his voice and tried to appease the coachman.

"hey. I'm not saying I'm going to break my promise. You're not asking us to go to another base, are you? "I will take care of the food myself, so is it really such a difficult request to just drop you off at a nearby village?"

"No, but... ..!"

"As far as I know, there is a small village near here called Tere."

"... .."

"It's a town with at least a small population and even runs a decent inn. I know it well because I have stopped by there before while traveling to and from the North. So, I'm going there this time too."

Seongjin pretended not to notice, but the coachman's face showed a

complex look of agony.

Why not? No matter how secretly they operate their bases, if you think about it a little, there are places where they are bound to be discovered.

If there is only one village where people live together in a sparsely populated place, that place is bound to be the base of the Freedom Underpass. However, saying that it is not possible to do so is no different from confessing the location of the base with one's own mouth.

But the coachman's worries did not last long.

Seongjin's group was currently in a special position in many ways. From the perspective of the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front, the high-ranking members of the empire are extremely uncomfortable.

In addition to this, they also have troublesome demonic contractors who never know when erosion will occur. They probably want to quickly get Seongjin and his group out of the Jayu Underpass.

That's why they go to great lengths to provide super express delivery. Although they do take shifts occasionally, it must be difficult for them to drive the carriage non-stop.

"i get it. "Then the special delivery ends here."

In the end, the coachman sighed heavily as if he was surrendering.

"You can get off, kid. I won't tell Giovanni. "Don't forget to keep the secrets of the bases strictly secret, and don't forget to take care of that damn demon contractor."

But after making such a difficult decision, the boy, after hearing that, flopped down on the floor of the carriage and leaned back comfortably!

Seongjin tilted his chin at the embarrassed coachman.

"Why are we getting off here? "Give me a ride to town."

"... what?"

"Why are you greeting me so casually as if you will let me go? "Even though you dropped us off anyway, didn't you try to secretly follow us for surveillance?"

The coachman's jaw dropped in shock, but Seongjin's attitude as he stared at him was extremely confident.

"So let's not waste each other's energy. If you're going anyway, take us with you. hurry."

"... .."

"what? why? what? "Did I say something wrong?"

The coachman's gaze became increasingly gloomy, but Seongjin ignored him and hugged the demon king's warm lamp.

* * *

On the other hand, there were also people who decided to walk, leaving behind an intact carriage. Number 21 changed its original plan to head to Regina and decided to head north with the success.

"It would be better to walk from now on. If you drive around with a wagon like this when the harvest is over, it will be very noticeable. "Our group is not at the top by anyone's standards."

Fortunately, there was no significant backlash.

One of the party members is a Barca barbarian who cannot understand what is being said, and the other is a woman who has no thoughts at all. There is no need to say that the Homunculus, who contains the soul of the Holy Emperor, is the culprit of this incident.

Before completely leaving the canyon, No. 21 carefully hid the wagon at the canyon entrance. Then he took out a small silent flute from his pocket and played it. This is to give a signal to fellow informants to take over the carriage.

"Oh, it's noisy. "It's deafening!"

Of course, in rare cases, some people can detect this sound if they have trained to enhance their hearing as an Auror. Number 21 looked back at Edith with a puzzled face.

"Can you hear this? "It's probably not a range that people can hear well."

"I know. I used it a lot while hunting in the mountains a long time ago. "When the wyverns hear this, they get really freaked out."

"... .."

Number 21 took a closer look at this strange woman. I knew only briefly that she was the 3rd prince's maid, but despite her pretty appearance, her actions were extremely cruel. Plus, she's a stronger Auror user than expected, and she even goes hunting? She has no idea what it is.

But Edith, perhaps aware of his complicated mind, handed him a small bundle of handkerchiefs with an innocent look on her face. Whatever it was wrapped in, it was an unpleasant object oozing red water.

"... What is this?"

This is a woman who once slaughtered horse meat with her bare hands. As I frowned at her instinctive reluctance, Edith smiled her innocent smile.

"Ink strawberries. Oh, don't get me wrong. It gets its name because the juice is so thick, but you can't really make ink with it. "You can eat it."

"I know. "I wasn't asking that now."

When I heard it, it seemed like the dripping red water smelled quite sweet.

"Where did this suddenly come from?"

"Oh, I went to pick up firewood earlier and picked it from the bush? Since there were only a few, I swept them all up. "It's rare for ink

strawberries to survive this season, but we were lucky."

Edith added, rubbing her red-stained fingers roughly against the hem of her skirt.

"This is something I really like, and I'll give it to you especially to Mr. 21 as a reward for helping us."

"... .."

Looking at that messy sight made me lose my appetite, but I couldn't turn down such pure kindness. In the end, No. 21 carefully accepted the package of handkerchiefs with a nervous expression on her face.

"Okay then, let's go now."

Anyway, there was no time to sit around anymore. We had to hurry now to get to 'Tere', the base of the Freedom Underpass, before the sun sets.

After checking his disguise one last time, No. 21 held out his hand towards the prosperous homunculus.

"Priest Bart. You may be feeling more unwell than usual, so please come this way. "I will carry you on my back."

But Seonghwang seemed to be staring at his hand for a moment, then slowly shook his head.

"It is done. "I will borrow the author's hand."

Then, he whispers something to Barshain and actually jumps on his back!

Number 21 could not hide his absurdity.

"lung... Priest?!"

I guessed that he probably made some kind of threat in Warsaw. It's not that he wasn't, but Barshain, who was carrying him, had a look of disgust on his face.

At this rate, I didn't know when the author would throw away the success and run away, so Issue 21 became extremely anxious.

"Didn't I say I would help you? "Why are you doing this?"

"Don't you have many things to worry about besides me? "I also need to share the work appropriately."

"No, what's so difficult about carrying a homunculus..." ... "

Number 21, who was mumbling like that, suddenly made a straight face.

for a moment. Are you sure you don't trust me that much? Even better than barbarians like them who can't even speak the language? yes? Is that so?

As No. 21's expression became increasingly grim, Seonghwang realized what he was thinking and hurriedly explained.

"It's a misunderstanding. "It's not like that, Enrique."

"Then what is it!"

"It's all for the safety of Barcelona. "If you don't serve me with all your heart, it will probably be difficult for you to receive the children's forgiveness for a while."

"Forgiveness... yo. this?"

"okay. I'm a little worried about what might happen later. Still, it wasn't Lee Ja's original intention, so didn't you feel sorry for him?"

"... .."

It was an extremely poor explanation, but it seemed like No. 21 could somehow understand what he said.

How much harm did that barbarian inflict on the Emperor? When he first saw the priest's clothes soaked in blood, he almost had his head blown off. Number 21, who thought for a moment, eventually sighed and nodded his head.

Thus, the strange group of assassins, homunculi, palace maids, and Varsha barbarians began trudging toward the northeast.

Trudging.

Number 21 took the lead and guided the group, but was unable to focus on the guard because he was worried about the Holy Emperor and the barbarians. A savage who never knows when an accident will happen, and a homunculus who is always anxious because he doesn't know where something will break. With so many things to worry about, I suddenly felt like the package I was holding in my hand was annoying.

However, you can't throw away the food you received. Finally, No. 21 unfolded her handkerchief and picked up a red strawberry.

"... .."

But at that moment, Seonghwang tilts his head to the side and looks at Enrique.

Although his face was completely covered by a thick hood, No. 21 could instinctively know that his gaze briefly touched the hand holding the strawberry.

"... "You'd better stop, Enrique."

"yes?"

"The flame image created by that maid is stronger than I thought. "Maybe that strawberry couldn't escape the effects of the flame barrier."

But unfortunately, it was only when No. 21 put one of the ink strawberries in his mouth that he realized what that meant.

"... .. ?!"

An intense bitter taste that cruelly assaults the tongue and eventually shakes the brain!

"Wow!"

Number 21 quickly spit out an ink strawberry. It was truly shocking and terrifying.

'How can a healthy strawberry taste like bile?'

The only consolation is that Edith, the culprit behind this incident, was also horrified and spat out the strawberry. Wiping her messy mouth with her sleeve, she looked at her number 21 with a dumbfounded look on her face.

"what? That's strange. Did it go bad because it was past harvest time? There's no way strawberries could taste like this... .."

Of course, No. 21 and Edith did not realize the existence of the soul terminal that was circling around them and fussing noisily.

[Good luck dad! Quick, quick, tell that barbarian to try that too! Yes?]

[Dad, Your Majesty! If you just do it quickly, there's nothing that can't be done with a little help!]

[Of course, this is separate from Mores getting angry!]

[Of course, Mores will never accept it like this!]

[no! We don't need to forgive either!]

[of course! Let's celebrate the blood festival together!]

Seonghwang sighed softly and slowly closed his eyes.

441. Reunion (3)

From then on, under No. 21's leadership, the group's journey continued without much trouble.

?Hi! Look at this! W, woman! man! Ichi isn't breathing again! This person is truly an evil spirit from hell!

Of course, when Seonghwang left for a moment to attend a political meeting, the surprised Barca Barbarians turned pale and caused a brief uproar -

-Yuck! What on earth is this damn beef jerky? Mr. 21! Surely this isn't revenge for the ink strawberry from earlier?

There were minor incidents, such as having a quick bite to eat while walking and Edith spitting out all the bile-flavored beef jerky.

But other than that, it was a relatively peaceful and smooth journey. Basically, everyone has physical strength, and they are also Auror users who never get tired.

So the group crossed the wasteland at high speed. Although Edith, who was starving, occasionally quenched her appetite and watched No. 21's thoughts. Naturally, No. 21 became concerned about her flame barrier.

'That bitter taste. His Majesty definitely said it was because of the flame barrier created by that maid.'

It was still a relatively unfamiliar concept, but fortunately No. 21 had some knowledge about the flame barrier.

Why not? Wasn't he the first disciple who received many unexpected

teachings from the Holy Emperor when he was just coming of age?

-Enrique. In order to control the power given to you, you must first understand the basic principles by which the world you belong to operates.

-What kind of principles are these? Don't other people know about that? Bart. Isn't that too grandiose?

-Everyone is just overlooking its importance. Listen, Enrique. If you establish your intention on the great void, it will soon become a firm intention, and all Aurors will move according to this intention and naturally reach materialization...

-No, Bart. I asked about basic Auror training. Can't you just teach me how to use an auror?

-... What did you hear about what I explained so far?

... Looking back, it wasn't a very helpful class.

Anyway, after carefully reflecting on the previous situations, No. 21 concluded that some kind of flame barrier existed within a certain range based on Edith's hand. There was no problem when eating using proper utensils.

'Is it ultimately caused by holding it with your own hands?'

After some deliberation, No. 21 obtained a long wooden skewer and threaded pieces of beef jerky onto it. Then he carefully placed it in Edith's hands.

"hmm... uh? "Does this taste good?"

Fortunately, it doesn't seem to taste like bile this time. Edith, who was relieved, soon excitedly started eating the pieces of jerky one by one.

* * *

The group arrived at Tere Village at sunset, a little earlier than expected.

"Everyone, take note."

Stopping on a hill overlooking the village, No. 21 looked back at the group with a serious expression and gave them a warning.

"Tere is one of the few bases of the Free Underpass that is well-known to the public. So, there are a few things travelers need to be aware of in order to pass by safely. first-"

"But Mr. 21. "What is the Freedom Underpass?"

Edith, oblivious, raises her hand and asks. She wanted to ignore Number 21, but unfortunately she was the only one in her group who would listen to this explanation.

"... Simply put, it means that it is a place where people who have a strong antipathy toward the Empire gather."

"aha!"

Edith, whose eyes were shining brightly, once again made a puzzled expression as to what she was thinking.

"hmm? However, when I visited Sigismund Territory with His Majesty Mores, there were no such precautions? "There is only one village with an inn around here, so the Wolf Knights also stay at Tere every time they go to the imperial capital."

"... That's because people in Tere are also selective about who they start a fight with."

"aha!"

"Then what I'm saying from now on is-"

"huh? But No. 21. "I hate to say it myself, but aren't we a bit strong enough to let others start a fight?"

This time, Edith, who was interrupted mid-sentence, straightened her back while raising the huge warhammer.

"... .."

No. 21 became extremely tired. This is just a brief encounter, so how on earth does Prince Mores manage to use that woman as his personal maid?

"High-ranking nobles and knights are fine. I know very well that if I touch it, I am afraid of repercussions. A somewhat sized top is also fine. "If there is no upper level that comes and goes from time to time, it is obvious what kind of mess the Northern economy will be in."

No. 21, who had said so far, strongly added to Edith, whose lips were quivering again.

"But it is different for unaffiliated peddlers, wanderers, or simple travelers like us. No matter how strong an individual is, there are no exceptions. Do you understand?"

"hmm? But No. 21-"

"ah. city. I see. Wet. you. peel?"

"... yes."

When Edith, overwhelmed by the force, closed her mouth shakily, No. 21 let out a long sigh that she had been holding in.

"Then listen carefully. First, do not easily reveal your superiority as an imperial citizen in front of others. "You must not make unfounded boasts or ignore the lifestyle habits and practices of the Ortona people."

It was a natural precaution. This is because most of them are from Ortona, who have a strong sense of deprivation from the empire.

It is best to be as inconspicuous as possible, and even if you are discovered to be an Imperial, you must show respect for them.

"Second, please do not praise His Majesty, the Most High of Delcross, or make any comments in defense of Him."

Many in the north believe that the fall of Ortona is the fault of the empire. Of course, when they gather together, it is common for them

to slander the current success with a high degree of intensity.

At this time, if you try to confront them with unnecessary loyalty, you are likely to turn the entire village into an enemy in an instant. If you do it wrong, you could be assaulted or even lose your life.

"Third, if possible, do not show any religious behavior. "You should not carelessly seek the Lord or pray to him."

Faith in God itself is not a problem. The North has also believed in the main god for a long time.

However, the problem was that many of those using the free underpass were members of heretical sects, or dark denominations.

It's better if you don't show faith. However, if it is discovered that you are a devout member of the Orthodox Church, you may be eliminated without even a rat or bird knowing by a dark religious sect that comes from somewhere.

"Oh, I have a lot to protect. "I already forgot the first precaution, and I don't know if I can do it well, Mr. 21."

"Then just keep your mouth shut. Then everything will be resolved."

"aha!"

After completing the preparations in advance, the group cautiously entered Tere Village.

"... .. ?"

However, not long after entering the village entrance, No. 21 sensed a strange atmosphere that was different from usual. The atmosphere of the village, which had always been depressed like other areas in the north, was strangely light and excited today.

I looked around in confusion-

Cry!

Children dressed in shabby clothes run somewhere with bright smiles

on their faces.

"Let's go! "Just by hearing the explanation, they said it would be a fire show!"

"I saw it earlier! "It's really a magic trick where fire just flies in the air!"

"wow! amazing!"

... Fire show?

Although he was puzzled for a moment, No. 21 gathered his group and headed towards the only inn in the village.

But it was a strange thing. As we get closer to the inn, the number of people around us increases.

When they eventually arrived in front of the inn, the group was dumbfounded to find the crowd so dense that they could not see the entrance. For some reason, it seemed like all the villagers who could move were gathered here.

"... "Enrique."

At that time, the prosperous homunculus suddenly raised his head.

"painting... Priest? "Are you awake?"

"There is no time to explain. First, stop that maid."

"yes?"

Before No. 21 could even understand the meaning of the warning-

"What? Lowering?!"

Edith, discovering something, raises her head and quickly runs out of the crowd. Number 21 was startled and hurriedly grabbed her arm.

"Mr. Edith! for a moment... ... !"

And at that moment, I also found number 21.

A neat-looking boy standing triumphantly in the very center of the crowd.

"... .. ?!"

Number 21 couldn't believe his eyes.

'Mores... 'Prince?'

How could that possibly be the case?

No, but no matter how much I looked, the boy was definitely Prince Mores. Although he was wearing shabby clothes and covered in black soot, it was still not enough to hide the boy's innate character and dignity.

"Mr. 21. Let us do it! "What on earth are you doing over there now?"

"Shh! "It looks like you're hiding your identity!"

Stopping Edith from running out at any moment, No. 21 quickly grasped the surrounding situation.

A small stall is placed at the entrance of the inn, and a boy stands in front of it with his arms raised wide and confident.

With a small, spinning flame on his head like a halo, the prince shouted loudly to the audience.

"This is not a car that comes every day!"

"... .. !"

"A medicine car! How long are you going to drink that old-fashioned drink? Now, here is teosinte tea, which has far superior taste and effectiveness, and is even cheaper!"

... Promotion?

The moment he realized the truth of this situation, No. 21 became distraught. Why on earth is the prince of the Holy Empire setting up a stall in a place like this?

No, it's not even a proper promotion. Now the prince was breaking all the taboos that No. 21 thought were taboos.

"Nowadays, in the imperial capital, no one drinks baseless drinks like medicinal tea! because! Because Delcross now has the mysterious crop, Teosinte! "This teosinte will even be exported to Brittany soon!"

The prince was now freely revealing his belonging to the imperial capital, and was gleefully criticizing the lifestyle habits of the northerners.

"A popular product loved all over the continent! Teosinte! This is the very taste that was approved by His Majesty Seonghwang, the representative of the Lord! By the way, our great majesty is a gourmet! "To match his dignity, he has a very short mouth!"

They were even openly exalting his success and praising his authority - more precisely, his authority as a gourmet.

"ruler! Look at this golden, brilliant drink of God! The true grace of God bestowed upon the continent! Teosinte! If you drink just this, you will be no less than a wealthy imperial noble! "Once you taste it, you won't remember anything about shabby medicinal tea!"

I am praising God's grace with all my might.

It was a total disaster.

'... 'What on earth is the prince doing now?'

Number 21, who was in extreme confusion, was unable to properly understand the situation even after looking at it with his own eyes.

The good news is that people are looking at the prince with interest instead of getting angry.

Creak.

No. 21's head slowly turns to face Priest Bart, who is riding on the barbarian's back. To the only person who can explain the current situation.

"... .."

Seonghwang looked at the scene in front of him in silence for a moment and then sighed softly. Then he stretched out both his hands and firmly clamped Bartoza's mouth shut.

Number 21 was puzzled, but after a while, he was able to understand the reason.

"Growing up in the warm geothermal heat of Anatolia, Teosinte brings strong heat to the body! This miraculous drink even converted the barbarians of Barça into an empire!"

With Prince Mores' confident shout -

A tall Barça warrior appeared with his feathers fluttering. It was Owen who looked shabbier than usual.

"I request an upward adjustment of compensation from Sang Tae-chang!"

As he shouted in an unknown language, the agitation among the gathered villagers became stronger.

Murmur.

"It's Warsaw, right?"

"Hey! "Really, Barshain converted?"

"That's amazing."

At that moment, a spark flew into Bartoza's eyes when he saw Owen's appearance.

"Owe... Ugh! town!"

Fortunately, No. 21, who had heard the warning in advance, was able to quickly stop Barshain before he shouted loudly.

Meanwhile, Owen's show was still going on.

Continue-

Owen takes a sip of the clear grain tea and cheers loudly.

"Ugh! Praying for an urgent quest grade increase! Ah!"

Bye! Sigh!

The wooden planks that Lord Martha was holding high were broken helplessly by Owen's punch.

Oooh-!

Simple exclamations of exclamation erupted from everywhere.

Without missing that moment, Prince Mores took a step forward again. He still had a brightly shining flame on his head.

"Now I will give everyone a chance to experience the benefits of teosinte! "There are a lot of them here, so everyone take a sip!"

Then again Sir Massain handed out several large bowls to the people. It was as if he would be liberated at any moment.

The villagers seemed to be possessed by something and drank the drinks eagerly.

"ruler! A drink that amazes the continent, excites Brittany, and astonishes Rohan! Teosinte! There is a reason for many people's choices! "Let's try this drink and enjoy ultimate health and happiness!"

With a voice that strangely penetrates deep into my heart -

Fluffy!

In the boy's high-raised hand, a bright golden drink oscillated appetizingly.

442. Reunion (4)

Dacian explained it this way:

The effects of Blue Deleria are so powerful that, if done incorrectly, it can become a terrible poison that completely separates the soul from reality.

So, after a long period of research, he came up with a decoction with as few side effects as possible. Of course, the effectiveness of Deleria will be reduced accordingly, but it is said that if you take it consistently for a long time and put in sincerity, you will be able to build a strong wall of your soul.

'But Deleria is a precious ingredient. Didn't Dacian also say that he created a secret flower garden and monopolized the flowers?'

There, Seongjin made a slight leap in his thinking.

The period in which Dacian, the progenitor of the marquis, was active dates back hundreds of years. If so, the knowledge he spread may also have been shared with someone and spread secretly.

And in order to achieve their dream of immortality, they must have been looking for something to replace Deleria. For example, Loperum eggs, which have a similar scent to Deleria.

'In other words, Loperum eggs were used as lower-level ingredients for Deleria!'

If so, it is possible to guess to some extent what the 'wall' of the soul that Dacian was talking about was.

The most comfortable place for the soul to dwell.

as soon as-

'Flame decision!'

The medicinal tea showed the effect of extremely activating Seongjin's flame crystals. In other words, Loperum eggs are a well-founded substitute.

Like Dacian's decoction, if the medicinal tea is taken over a long period of time, proper flame crystals may be formed one day.

'But it would have taken an unexpectedly long time. So there may have been some who tried to achieve a more radical effect.'

It can be assumed that they probably experimented with planting Loperum eggs, the main ingredient, directly into humans. The gray plague patients that suddenly appeared all over the place were probably all side effects of this experiment.

Of course, after Archbishop Wesker arbitrarily activated the [Temporary Emergency Measures], the momentum was lost.

It is still unknown who the radical forces that spread the gray plague are. However, at least Seongjin had an accurate understanding of the forces that supplied medicinal tea through the 'traditional' method.

'In the end, is the Penitent Church the one that started all of this?'

I heard this once while interrogating Belinda. Medicine tea. So, Loperum, the ingredient of the 'awakening tea' they say, is a treasure distributed directly by the Archbishop of Penitence.

And at that time, Belinda said this.

-The awakening car is ultimately given to save all humans! The reason we are willing to share it with you apostates even at the expense of it is because it is the will of the Lord who wants humans on all continents to awaken spiritually!

In other words, it is possible that medicinal tea was already secretly consumed throughout the northern part of the country for a long time, even before it spread to the Sigismund Territory.

'And it is highly likely that the centers will be the bases of the Free Underpass used by the Dark Church.'

So, Seongjin suddenly changed the route of the 'special delivery' carriage, leading a flock of people.

I was planning to check it out with my own eyes. Currently, he has an ability that can be called [spiritual eye], even though it is imperfect.

And just in case, if only we could really check the mind-boggling decisions being made in people's heads!

[Well, guess what...]

After hearing Seongjin's explanation, the Demon King reacted a little skeptically.

[I also traveled with you before, right? If there was someone with a flame crystal, I would definitely be able to recognize it.]

"But our group only stayed at the inn for a while, right?"

What are the chances of actually encountering village natives near the inn with frequent traffic at the top?

Therefore, we had to identify people who had lived in the base village for a long time and had taken medicinal tea for a long period of time.

[But... Even if you find a flame crystal like you said, it's a problem.]

The Demon King moves and sits in the center of the lamp.

[You can't present something that only you and I can see to people as evidence, right? If you want to prevent the distribution of medicinal tea, you will probably have to find another way.]

"hmm. But..."

While I was sitting on the wagon and thinking about it, the day had dawned and a distant dawn was appearing on the horizon.

"I can see Tere. Lowering."

Just as Lord Masaine said, the view of a small village began to appear in the distance.

* * *

The group got off the 'special delivery' carriage and arrived safely at Tere's inn.

"Is this the end? "You're letting us go so obediently?"

Owen asked, glancing back at the coachman. It wasn't that it wasn't, the coachman was still glaring in this direction and showing off her discomfort to her heart's content.

"no. "You won't stop watching until we get to Regina, right?"

"what? "So what do we do now?"

"What about what? Just monitoring. "You can't harm us outright."

Although he reassured Owen, Seongjin also felt uncomfortable inside.

'It must be a bit of a hassle to move around under their surveillance, right?'

Anyway, let's think about it after finding a stable place to stay. Seongjin decided to do so and asked the innkeeper for the three best rooms.

"There are three people in your group? Then just one big room would be enough."

The innkeeper frowned at the group's shabby appearance and responded. Of course, when Seongjin took out a pocket full of money, his expression immediately changed.

"No, I really need three."

"I can give you up to two. Of course, you'll have to pay a little more."

"three. "You pay three times the price for the other room."

"Sure."

Seongjin asked, dropping a gold coin onto the owner's palm.

"The inn is crowded. "Are there that many people who want to stay in this town?"

I definitely felt like the village was noticeably busier than when I was traveling to and from Sigismund Range in the past.

Then the owner, who was secretly biting into a gold coin, answered with an awkward smile.

"That's right. Recently, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of small merchants or individual peddlers. Have you ever heard of the name 'Bertrand & Lee'?"

"know. This is a very good business that does business conscientiously. "The financial structure is also strong."

"... I'm not sure about that. Anyway, I thought they came and went often, and the number of individual peddlers gradually increased. From what I heard, they say they are doing some business with peddlers in Delcross."

"Right."

Seongjin nodded, glanced at the people carrying large luggage, and stood up.

The room they decided to stay in was on the third floor.

"Lowering. Isn't it too shabby for you to stay in? "Why don't we go back to Regina right now?"

Sir Masaine looked around the room and asked, looking a little uncomfortable.

"are you okay. I won't be here long. Lord Masaine."

"Is that so."

"huh. "Then I'll take a look around, and Sir Masaine can rest here for a while."

Then, of course, Sir Martha looked very dissatisfied.

But what was strange was that he, who should have protested that he would follow right away, collapsed on the bed obediently to Seongjin's orders. Of course, Sir Masain himself looked puzzled for a moment as if he did not understand his actions.

"... hmm?"

Owen also seemed to feel a strange awkwardness in his actions.

'It's a newbie. Why has my brother been acting like that since yesterday? 'Isn't it a bit strange than usual?'

'... ... '

Of course, there were no guesses at all.

-Forget everything and just sleep, Sir Masaine. When you open your eyes later, you will forget all the bad things that bothered you.

-Now, you just have to follow what I say. Then everything will be resolved.

After coming out of Furiano's sewers, Sir Masaine was very anxious, and Seongjin had comforted him with such words several times.

However, when I heard it from the Demon King later, those words filled with strong will would have acted as a kind of restraint or curse to Sir Martha?

'Of course, my father came here for a while, so my condition got much better.'

However, unlike his original personality, he still feels like he is strangely obedient.

It feels like it's not aligned and it's creaky somewhere. Seongjin tried to ignore the discomfort that touched his nerves as soon as he could

forget it, and made a request to Owen.

"I'm going to the next room. "You can rest here and keep an eye on Lord Masaine."

"ok?"

Owen looked confused. He seems to be torn as to whether he should stay by the side of the escort driver whose condition is very unstable, or follow the newbie who still looks young.

But his wanderings ended sooner than expected.

"Oh, it's an emergency quest!"

"What are you saying?"

"just... They tell me to do what needs to be done? what's this?"

Owen sat down in his chair with a shocked expression.

"Seeing as the instructions are short and vague, I guess they're saying just do as you say? Strangely, Sang Sang-chang is so reluctant to do anything related to you."

"... .."

"But the reward is too much! Unbelievable! It's an urgent quest in name, but the grade is F and the reward is only 5 cash! "Is this true?"

Don't you think you'll be rewarded as long as you rest as I say? What more do you want from there?

"Goes."

"Ah, yes. It's a newbie. Still, you have to stay inside the inn. Understand? "Don't go out and wander around alone-"

widely!

Seongjin left the room, leaving Owen behind with endless nagging.

As I calmly gathered my wits and looked around, sure enough, I felt

the presence of the assassins who had been pursuing me from the wasteland, one by one, settling down on the roof of the inn.

At this point, I start to worry about Dasha, who is following me from afar.

'How many days has this been going on? Dasha needs to have some time to rest.'

From the time he met Giovanni, Seongjin could not sense her presence at all. I guess she may have stayed a little far away to avoid the attention of the assassins watching her group.

Of course, since Seongjin knew Dasha's outstanding skills better than anyone else, he was not worried that there would be a problem with her life.

But that doesn't change the fact that you have to move constantly, unable to rest for days on end.

'I have to finish this job quickly and go back to Regina. But by what means?'

Holding the Devil's Lamp in one hand, Seongjin walked slowly down the hallway and thought.

'You can sneak around if you use Auror cloaking. But it would take too much time if I went out and investigated it myself.'

Isn't there a good way to gently bring everyone in the village together?

* * *

However, Seongjin's concerns were resolved surprisingly quickly. It was all thanks to a young man who was arguing with the owner in front of the inn.

"Who wants to set up a stall here?"

"I will pay generously for the seat rent. Please do me a favor, old man! yes?"

The young man carrying a large luggage looked closer to a simple farmer from the countryside than a merchant.

However, for some reason, he is clinging to the inn owner quite desperately.

"If this business doesn't perform well, the investment money in the imperial palace will be completely lost! Please help me!"

"Oh, I don't know! "Don't disturb business for no reason, just go to the alley over there!"

"Elders-!"

However, among his words, there was one word that particularly caught Seongjin's ear.

'... Investment money in the imperial palace?'

This was the first time Seongjin had heard that the Delcross Imperial Palace was giving investment money to individual peddlers. Besides, just by looking at that young man, he doesn't seem like someone who could attract investment money, right?

"Hey, if you don't mind, would you mind talking to me for a moment?"

The story I heard from the young man was quite surprising.

"Jun Sang Business Card?"

"Yes, it is."

The young man who introduced himself as 'Oliver' showed a document he held dear in his arms.

After checking the gold coins he showed to purchase the goods, he became quite obedient to Seongjin.

"Rumors are already spreading everywhere. "If you achieve success in the north after receiving a 'semi-top business certificate' issued by the imperial palace, you can receive proper investment and establish a

full-fledged top business."

Due to the recent pioneering work of 'Bertrán & Lee', the sense of crisis regarding security in the North has been greatly reduced.

Therefore, small merchants or individual peddlers who are reluctant to compete with existing merchants are rushing to advance into the northern part of the country.

And in order to guarantee and protect their identity, the [Junior Top Business Certificate] recently issued by the Imperial Palace. With this business card, your identity is guaranteed anywhere in the North, and you can follow a large merchant without any additional compensation.

"Good? "Who approved that?"

"This is Princess Amelia. From what I heard, I heard that Princess Amelia is in charge of all recent activities at the top of the imperial capital."

"hmm."

Seongjin took the document he held out and looked at the elegantly scrawled signature with a new feeling.

Sister Amelia's signature...

"As expected, Princess Amelia is the best calligrapher in Delcross."

"... yes?"

When Oliver asked with a puzzled expression at the sudden sentiment, the Demon King let out a small sigh.

[This guy has started again. That damn thick bean pod.]

"shut up!"

"Yes?"

Oliver is very embarrassed when he suddenly hears a voice telling

him to shut up. As he returned the documents to him, Seongjin was lost in thought for a moment. Somehow, I felt like I knew my sister's deep meaning.

Everyone must have felt that if they were blinded by their wild dreams and went to the north without permission, some of them would die in an instant. That's why I asked them to achieve results under the appropriate protection from the top.

If a certain amount of results are achieved, they will receive investment and establish a proper business, but if the business fails, they will give up and return to their hometown.

Additionally, the 'junior business card' serves as evidence that the imperial family knows his identity. So even if you are unlucky enough to be stranded alone in the north, it is unlikely that the thieves will be able to harm your life.

Ah, how can our sister Amelia be so kind?

[...] It's a disease to have bulging arms, Lee Seong-jin.]

What are you saying! I just told the truth!

"So Oliver, what do you deal with?"

"Ah yes. These are medicinal herbs. They are easy to grow and are effective. But growing it in northern climates would be difficult."

"Hmm... .."

Seongjin rummaged through the dried grass that Oliver had spread out on the stall. Compared to his great ambition to start a business on his own, the items he displayed were not very pleasant.

Just then, there was a plant that particularly caught Seongjin's eye. It looks like some kind of foxtail that has lost its fur, or it also looks like an unripe ear of barley.

"What is this?"

"Oh, it's called teosinte."

"What herb is used for?"

"Rather than being an herb, it is better to boil and drink as tea. "It doesn't have any particular medicinal properties, but it has a rather nutty taste."

For a moment, a flash of inspiration passes through my mind. Seongjin patted Oliver on the shoulder with her big smile on her face.

"Okay, Oliver. "I sincerely congratulate you on receiving the investment from the imperial palace."

"yes?"

"Your product has sufficient marketability. "I'll buy all your stuff and prove it to you."

"Um, everything?"

Seongjin answered strongly to the young man who was still struggling.

"okay. Teosinte, dried herbs, and that stall. All!"

I just came up with a really great idea!

A brilliant idea to bring all the locals from the village to this place without lifting a finger!

443. Reunion (5)

What is the product that people are skeptical about, but cannot pass up?

'It's a panacea!'

Just by taking it, it kills parasites, blocks electromagnetic waves, improves your skin, prevents hair loss, treats hemorrhoids, and even improves your stamina!

If you advertise just this much, eight out of ten people on the street will turn around.

'But what if it happens to be sold as an easy-to-eat tea?'

You may not know, but people here will be drinking panacea all day and night instead of medicinal tea for a while.

okay. If there is no way to clearly prove the harm of medicinal tea, shouldn't we just push it out of the market with a better product?

[...] But it's a panacea. Isn't that a complete scam?]

The demon king asked worriedly, but Seongjin answered confidently, tapping the lamp.

"Don't say anything you don't know, devil. "There is a huge phenomenon in this world called the placebo effect."

Even if you drink plain water, if you believe that it is medicine, you will see some improvement in your condition.

[So what I'm saying is that it's a scam-]

"shut up! "It's just respect and belief in the infinite potential of the human spirit!"

Think about it, devil. This is all for the greater good. We can drive away the medicine wagons, save people from the dangers of the gray plague, and most of all, we can turn simple country youth into self-made businessmen. It is no exaggeration to say that this kills three birds with one stone!

Plus, what if the car sells well and Oliver becomes fully established? We will be contributing greatly to the northern economy!

'If everything goes well, I'll have to ask Oliver for a generous guarantee later.'

The money is going to come rolling in. Just imagining it makes me proud.

As Seongjin was smiling happily, the devil hurriedly blinked the lamp.

[Hey, that laugh! Seongjin Lee, please stop laughing like that! Are you planning some evil plan again? yes?]

"No, what are you looking at me for? As the prince of the royal family, I only have an altruistic mind to benefit the continent!"

[Do not be ridiculous!]

Thus began the work of manufacturing Seongjin's panacea.

First, Seongjin told Oliver to boil all the herbs that can be used as tea. In order to create the best drink that will surpass medicinal tea, you must first properly understand the characteristics of the ingredients you have.

The owner of the inn gave him a harsh look, but thanks to Seongjin's generous financial generosity, he soon changed his attitude and gave him a large portion of the kitchen.

So, after a while, bowls of steaming hot water were prepared in front of Seongjin.

"This is a digestive, that is a headache medicine, and this is an herb mainly used for skin swelling. But other than teosinte, there isn't anything worth drinking as tea... .."

Leaving the hesitant Oliver behind, Seongjin began tasting the dishes himself.

[Huh? Seongjin Lee! Do you know what these are and drink them?]

"Oh, it's okay, it's okay. "My stomach is strong."

[Ugh! There won't be an escort driver next to you to disturb you. You're just about to leave at this point, right? huh?]

Ignoring the demon king who was crackling with sparks, Seongjin put each herbal drink in his mouth and rolled it around with his tongue.

"... .."

Unfortunately, most of them were bitter or fishy, as expected from medicinal herbs.

'I guess I can't really use it as a car.'

Fortunately, there was one thing that could be saved. It was Teosinte that Oliver had planned to sell as a car from the beginning.

'Hmm, it looks like a barley ear, but why does it taste like corn tea?'

Seongjin, who felt the savory finish, nodded.

"This passed. It tastes pretty good. "The scent is relatively mild."

"Yes, right? I thought it would work too! "In our village, when we draw well water, we boil it with teosinte and drink it."

"however-"

Seongjin furrowed his brows slightly.

okay. Everything is fine. But it's so passable. Why isn't there enough impact to push the medicine cart away at once?

Additionally, color was also a problem. The gloomy brown color is, at best, the color of beer, and at worst the color of concentrated urine. This means that it does not look appetizing at first glance.

"hmm... .."

Can this be regenerated by diluting it with water? Then the savory taste will be greatly reduced.

'I'll need some additives that can be used as food coloring. Or make a cocktail using other herbs.'

However, other herbs also have a gloomy color. In addition, since it has such a strong taste, no matter how you mix it, things are created that cannot be used as tea.

After contemplating for a moment, Seongjin tried mixing the red petals, which seemed to have a less bitter taste and stronger pigment, into the tea.

"Oh, wrong. "It just turned into serious hematuria in the urine."

"... Why can't the tasting review go beyond the bounds of urine? "Aren't you doing too much with food?"

Hearing Oliver's complaints in one ear, Seongjin adjusted the number and ratio of herbs. But as expected, the results were not very good.

Since most of them are medicinal plants, they are bitter in taste and cloudy in color. Compared to the clear pink medicinal tea, I would say that it is not an attractive tea, even if it is an empty word.

However, Oliver, a country boy, did not understand Seongjin's efforts to somehow produce good results.

"Why on earth is such work necessary? Teosinte tea is what it is. "Isn't it just that it tastes good?"

Seongjin clicked his tongue. He seems like a very naive friend.

"Oliver. Fraud... Do you know what the most important rule is in becoming a good businessman?"

"omg? "Did you just say it was a scam?"

"No, you must have heard wrong."

"No way! I heard it clearly now! "They said it was definitely a scam!"

Seongjin smiled kindly at the foolish sentient being - for some reason Oliver's face turned pale - and then gave the simple young man a valuable lesson that he would never hear again in his life.

"first! "To be a merchant, you must first know how to stimulate the essential desires hidden in the human heart."

The desire to obtain valuable products without being left behind by others. A sense of belonging and security that comes from sharing what everyone buys. The joy of looking forward to acquiring amazing items that are not easily available at the best cost-effectiveness!

"... yes?"

"And second! "In order to sell that product, you yourself must first firmly believe in what you say to others."

I believe that even plain water will become holy water. A simple fraud on your own... You must believe that he is not a businessman, but a good person who is willing to share the profits for everyone! Wouldn't that be the only way to pull people out of the swamp of distrust and persuade them properly?

"Huh?"

"So, don't get upset over useless things. Don't say anything outright like a scam or anything else before you even put down the stall, that's it! okay?"

Then Oliver's eyes become very irreverent. Seongjin ignored him and continued his explanation.

"And third! "The most important thing is that the product looks good to everyone!"

Just looking at it is auspicious, and it arouses the desire to have it

and stock up on it, but it has no particular utility once you actually buy it. There are things like that that are flashy and have no substance, right?

We need to make something like that now!

"... "What on earth do you want to sell to people?"

Yes, I want a color that just looks like it will be good for my body. For example, potions in the Pangea Chronicle.

They look mysterious just by looking at them, and you can vividly feel the effects before you even eat them, right? Unless there is such a clear visual effect...

"Wait a minute, potion?"

Yes, potion!

Seongjin jumped up from his seat with sparkling eyes.

'Why didn't I think of this earlier?!'

You can use some of the potions from Pangea Chronicle here, right? The color is quite dark, the taste is not that irritating, and the effects are quite...

Seongjin unconsciously tried to search through his inventory.

But as expected, it doesn't open. Since I last accessed Pangea Chronicle, I thought my account had been deleted or something, but it's been like this ever since.

then-

"Owen!"

Da da da da!

Seongjin ran to the room where Owen and Lord Martha were resting and opened the door with all his might.

Quang!

"huh? Newbie, why-."

Owen, who was startled, widened his eyes as the palm of his hand was suddenly thrust in front of him.

"Give me the potion!"

"ok?"

"There are small-capacity binding potions, right? Those miscellaneous items that cannot be sold and are too small to eat."

"Uh oh... .. ?"

"hurry! hurry! "Everything in inventory!"

Seongjin, who had completely cleaned out Owen's inventory, began trying various combinations of teosinte tea and potions.

'HP potion... Dismiss for now.'

I don't like that damn red color at all. When combined with teosinte tea, no matter how you look at it, it produces nothing but a cloudy liquid reminiscent of hematuria.

Moreover, effectiveness is also an issue. If you show that you can heal wounds in real time without any divine power, you will be condemned as the work of the devil and will be sent to trial for heresy.

'MP potion is also dismissed.'

When blue and brown come together, it becomes an indescribably murky color of sediment. It's impossible to put something like that in your mouth, no matter how hard you advertise it.

The effect is the same. At best, will your mind become a little clearer? That's literally backwards compatibility with medicine tea.

Now all that was left was a yellow stamina potion.

"... .."

Hmm, somehow I have a good feeling about this. Don't you think that brilliantly shining lemon color will somehow enhance the brightness and saturation of teosinte at the same time?

The immediate effectiveness of the effect goes without saying. You'll feel instantly energized, and there's nothing better to spread the word about!

Fluffy!

In this way, a new, brilliant teosinte tea was finally born.

Fresh urine shining bright gold, inheriting the clear yellow color of the stamina potion... No, a honey-colored drink!

[After all, it's urine... ..]

it is not so. Shut up!

"But there is still one problem left."

Oliver looked at the incredible results that Seongjin had created as if fascinated, and then opened his mouth.

"Can this really be called 'teosinte' tea?"

"huh?"

"Is this something that can be made sustainably by cultivating teosinte?"

Since the result was so different from what I expected, it seemed like fear was more important than joy.

"I need to use this sales performance to start a proper business. But what would happen if it were discovered that teosinte tea is not this color and in fact has no efficacy? "The business is over!"

"hey. "Is there a need to worry about that before we even start?"

Seongjin shrugged his shoulders.

It's okay, Oliver. Do you have a feeling that everything will be okay?

"No, it doesn't end with the business going bankrupt. You're getting investment by defrauding the imperial palace, right? I'm really going to die if I keep doing this! "You're going to die!"

"... Because there is a way to do it all. "Oliver, just trust me."

"Hey, wait a minute? What was that moment of hesitation just now? yes?"

* * *

After completing all preparations, Seongjin revealed his plan to Owen and Sir Martha.

Of course, after leaving out the truth about the medicine cart and the story of Dacianus's secretary, it would have sounded like he was just trying to change his mind and do business.

"So, you open a stall and sell the goods yourself? You? "Did I hear that correctly?"

"That's right."

When Seongjin answered brightly, Masain massaged the back of his neck and looked into space for a moment.

"... So, what on earth are you going to sell?"

"Yes, it's really good for your body!"

Seongjin spoke confidently and lifted up the sparkling golden teacup.

"This is teosinte tea! Just drinking it will give you a surge of energy, and it is a miraculous panacea that is effective against all kinds of diseases!"

The more he listened to the explanation, the more Masain's expression became distorted. Of course, he was steadily taking the products handed over by Seongjin with both hands and laying them out on the stall.

"... .."

Between Sir Martha's deeply furrowed eyebrows, one can feel the intense internal conflict that arises from the mismatch between emotions and actions.

Seongjin looked at him pitifully for a moment and then turned his head towards Owen.

"Oh, and Owen. You wait next to me and put on a powerful show of power when necessary. He gives off the impression that he has become stronger due to the effects of medicinal tea. got it?"

"Huh? why?"

"It's all for promotion. And you are prohibited from using the imperial language in front of others for the time being."

"Wait a minute, newbie, that's-"

Owen, who was about to retort something, suddenly widened his eyes as he stared into empty space.

"Oh, another emergency quest has appeared?"

"okay? "What are they saying this time?"

"You want to help the group? The reward is still 5 cash. "It's really petty."

Owen looked like he had given up on everything and scratched his hair, which was becoming wild.

"Anyway, Mr. Sang Tae-chang these days, why are you so insincere about the quest content and rewards?"

Well, it may conflict to a large extent with Seongjin's intentions, so I'm just being careful, but there's no need to explain that to Owen.

Leaving the bewildered Owen behind, Seongjin handed out the wooden planks he had prepared in advance to Masain.

"Sir Martha is here, next to Owen, holding up the plank."

"No sir, this is... .."

This time, contrary to his words, Sir Masaine obediently accepted the wooden planks. Of course, his expression was badly rotten.

So, after giving one more gold coin to the disgusted innkeeper, Seongjin started a noisy promotion by staging a fire show with the devil.

* * *

"Oh my, it really energizes me!"

"Hey! here! "Give Teosinte one here too!"

"Wait a minute, keep the order! "I come first!"

The promotional event so carefully prepared was more successful than expected. Oliver looked at Teosinte, who suddenly woke up, with a very shocked expression on his face.

"Wow, that's strange. I know better than anyone that this is a scam, so why does everything he says sound so plausible? "I even felt like it was a waste to sell the herbs."

Seongjin huffed and twitched the corners of his mouth.

how is it? Did you see it? What is the true skill of Lee Seong-jin, humanity's last hunter?

[...] You fraudster. What does business have to do with hunters?]

shut up! Don't talk nonsense and prepare for the last fire show.

Finally, all the items on the stall were sold out, and the long-awaited climax unfolded.

'Lord Masaine!'

Let Seongjin send a small signal -

Whirling!

Sir Masain, who now had a calm face as if he had completely lost his mind, vigorously scattered the straws he had prepared in advance in the air.

'Demon King!'

[okay!]

Grumble!

Red flames spread quickly.

The light straws fluttering everywhere touched the devil's flame and soon began to bloom into red and colorful flower petals.

"... ..!"

The fireworks that unfolded out of nowhere made the front of the inn as bright as daylight.

People were completely mesmerized by the overwhelming sight. Each person clutched a small package of teosinte in their hands.

Brightly burning sparks pour down like rain from the dark sky. In the midst of that unrealistic scene, a boy with a noble appearance as if he had stepped out of a myth declared.

"Don't be sad, just wait! Teosinte tea is coming back here!"

Wow!

People cheered wildly. Without really knowing why or what they are passionate about.

Meanwhile, Seongjin's pupils began to emit a mysterious light. At first glance, the appearance was not much different from the audience with red flames in their eyes.

After disguising his spiritual eyes so well, Seongjin diligently scanned the faces of the gathered people.

'Where are the salt crystals, the salt crystals... ..'

Then, suddenly, he noticed some familiar faces in the middle of the gathered crowd.

Edith is looking this way with round eyes. Vartoza rolled her eyes nervously, her mouth clenched. A young man who looks somewhat dazed.

and-

'... father?'

His entire body was wrapped in thick priest's robes. You can't even see his face properly because the hood is covered all the way over his head.

Nevertheless, Seongjin was able to immediately recognize the familiar gaze from the mysterious new type.

'Father, he's here now!'

Sweet!

At that moment, in Seongjin's mind, it seemed as if he heard the sound of two worlds that had been spinning at odds coming together precisely.

444. Dacion (1)

Number 21 had no choice but to admit it. He realized that he had not been able to properly understand the children of the Holy Emperor until now.

"Wow! Owen! "Where on earth have you been all this time?"

Bartoza, free from his restraints, ran towards Prince Owen, shedding tears. It seems like the fear that I had been suppressing inside until now suddenly burst out.

"cold-hearted! Were you going to abandon this Bartozha? "Did you really think like that?"

"Hey, hey. Please calm down. "Anyway, I thought you were okay in Regina, why are you here?"

"Ughhhhh!"

Surprisingly, Prince Owen left the rude Barshaine who dared to hold on to the hem of the prince's clothes. Where is that? He even comforted me gently as if I felt sorry for him!

Number 21 was dumbfounded.

'Isn't that too lenient on a mere barbarian?'

No, it is absurd that the prince himself is acting like a Barça barbarian in the first place.

Besides, what was it earlier? He's not even a clown, and he even demonstrates breaking things in front of the villagers. Does that prince have no awareness that he is the imperial family of the empire?

What was even more surprising was Prince Mores. As No. 21 knew, he was the most difficult and authoritative person among the Seonghwang family members.

however-

"Hey!"

"Shh! Edith. Don't call me that. 'I'm hiding my identity right now.'"

"ah! Yes, four! But what on earth is this like now? Did you end up rolling around on the dirt floor somewhere? Besides, these skimpy clothes... ..!"

phut! phut! phut!

Edith blasphemously patted the prince's back vigorously to shake off the dust, but he only frowned and dissuaded her.

"Take it easy, Edith."

"Ugh! It's not a matter of ending it in moderation! 'You're not a child anymore, so please take care of yourself!'"

Lastly, Sir Masain. At first glance, he looked the most calm, but upon closer inspection, he didn't seem to be normal either.

If it weren't for the current Seonghwang, he would have been the strongest candidate for Seonghwang, and he meticulously organizes his surroundings and carefully organizes the stalls. It is said that she recently became Prince Mores' nanny, but she seems to have a knack for one thing.

"... .."

No. 21 realized a big truth.

The people of Seonghwangga are all out of their minds!

"lung... Priest Bart. What about your children, indeed... .."

Number 21, muttering that and looking back at the thriving

homunculus, could not help but be completely convinced for a moment.

'Ah, indeed.'

Whose children are they? They were born as princes and went around working as mercenaries, but now that they have ascended to the throne, they are human children who are trapped in uncomfortable dolls and suffering needlessly.

Seonghwang, who guessed No. 21's thoughts from that irreverent look, opened his mouth softly.

"... "No, Enrique."

"What do you mean? "I didn't say anything."

"So, that's not it."

"I'm not sure what you're talking about, Father Bart."

"... .."

At that time, Prince Owen, who had just barely separated Bartoza, approached with a bright face.

"Priest Bart!"

There was no need for No. 21 to reveal the identity of the Holy Emperor. Owen, who had faced the Holy Homunculus on the Southern Front for years, could now recognize him just by grazing the hem of his clothes.

No, I didn't know if I should say I really looked into this, but... ..

"What are you doing here? "Is it okay for someone who is not in good health to go around like this without an attendant?"

"... .."

"aha! Now that the southern front is stable, you've come to help the people of the north! "Priest Bart is truly amazing to take care of the

safety of not only Delcross but the entire continent!"

Seonghwang's gaze, hidden behind the hood, seemed to have somehow moved slightly towards the sky. He probably feels a deep sense of disappointment due to the 1st prince's lack of insight.

"Are you Priest Bart? "It is truly a pleasure to meet you like this."

Lord Masaine also approaches and greets Prince Mores. His attitude towards a priest whom he did not know was strangely friendly.

"On the southern front, you are called a 'living saint,' right? He also said that he made a good medicine for Prince Owen. "I heard a lot from you."

This was because when Owen handed over 'Ultimate Elixir' to Masain, he vaguely gave the source as his work. Of course, there was no way No. 21 would know that fact.

However, it was Prince Mores who showed the strangest reaction. He kept his mouth shut and was staring at Seonghwang with his strong gaze from earlier.

Number 21 was a little embarrassed when he saw the clear emotions in the boy's eyes. Relief and... Nice to meet you? Why?

"Bart... "Priest."

Prince Mores opened his mouth awkwardly, then smiled an uncharacteristically gentle smile.

At that moment, No. 21 fell into the illusion that the surroundings were brighter than when fireworks were going on.

"Now that we've met like this, would you like to join our group?"

The prince, who suddenly made an unconventional proposal in a polite manner, then gently tugged on the emperor's sleeve with a somewhat friendly gesture.

"Luckily, I got a room that was quite spacious. "I guess this was all done to meet the priest."

* * *

The group sat together in front of a rich table.

"I will take care of your meals today! "Anything is fine, so eat as much as you want!"

Oliver, very excited, orders new dishes one after another and puts them on the table. Thanks to selling out Teosinte to the villagers at a high price, his pockets were now richer than ever before.

Winning the investment money from the imperial palace is already a fait accompli, so people can only be generous.

The group started eating happily. Everyone was knowingly or unknowingly exhausted from the intense promotional activities. #21 and Edith, who only chewed beef jerky while walking all day, were equally delighted with this meal.

While everyone is focused on the food in front of them -

"... .."

Only two people. Only the Emperor and Prince Mores were making eye contact while eating or drinking.

A prosperous homunculus is a body that naturally does not need food. But for some reason, Prince Mores was also persistently glancing at the crowd with a smiling face, as if he had no interest in the meal at all. Moreover, sometimes I called him out as if it was fun.

"Priest Bart?"

"... .."

"Hehehe, Priest Bart."

Seonghwang, who could not bear to answer, looked very embarrassed.

It was not unreasonable since the setting was Ortonain, who was not good at the imperial language. The moment they hear his voice

speaking the imperial language, the princes and knights of the imperial palace will immediately recognize his identity and stop him.

'for a moment. However, in front of Edith and the Barca barbarian, you spoke the imperial language casually... ..?'

Number 21 realized something he had forgotten for a while and quickly turned to Edith.

"... ..?"

But Edith seems to have not noticed this strange situation at all, and just looks at No. 21 with blind eyes, her mouth covered in sauce.

'What an amazingly thoughtless person you are!'

Number 21 was secretly impressed. What kind of life has that woman lived so far?

"Priest Bart. Why aren't you eating anything? Have you eaten? "If you're hungry, try some of this."

Meanwhile, Prince Mores had put down his silverware and was now eagerly pushing food dishes in front of the Holy Emperor.

The prince of the Holy Empire is seen preparing a meal for a priest. It's almost confusing as to who is carrying out who.

"I also tried this meat dish for lunch. "They say this is the best food at this inn."

"... .."

"ah! You're having trouble taking off the hood. "Is that why you don't put food in your mouth?"

Then, in place of the embarrassed Seonghwang, No. 21 stepped forward.

"Lowering. Priest Bart is suffering from respiratory problems. If you breathe outside air, you will quickly become ill. Therefore, I ask for your understanding that I cannot lower the hood without

permission."

"uh."

The prince looked at No. 21 with indifferent eyes. Then, his expression changed again and he made a gentle suggestion to Seonghwang.

"If you feel uncomfortable being seen, I will tell the host to bring the meal to my room. "Why don't you go to your room and get some rest?"

Looking at him, it looks like he is dragging Seonghwang upstairs and disappearing at any moment. Number 21 was embarrassed and quickly blocked their path.

"Lowering. I am embarrassed to tell you, but Priest Bart is not very good at the imperial language. So, I will be by your side-"

"Even though you can't speak, don't you understand the imperial language 'very well'?"

"yes? Ah yes. That's true, but... .."

While No. 21, caught off guard, hesitated, Prince Mores was already pulling Seonghwang's sleeve.

"Then don't worry about us anymore. You look pretty tired from leading everyone here, so you and Edith can rest in the remaining room. "Because I happened to have plenty of room."

"... ..!"

Number 21 suddenly stood up and followed them in a hurry. however-

Tuk-tuk.

Seonghwang lightly taps his shoulder as if to comfort him.

'Enrique. It's okay, just stop.'

Thanks to this, No. 21 woke up in a hesitant state and had to watch them move in a daze.

Before leaving the restaurant, Prince Mores left a last, absurd order to Prince Owen.

"Owen, we go up first. "After you finish eating, grab some delicious food and bring it to your room."

"Yes? also?"

"uh. Fish cakes, butter bread, all the delicious food you can get."

You're not even placing a new order at the inn, but you're suddenly asking for food? It was a conversation that No. 21 could not understand at all.

But what was even more surprising was Prince Owen's reaction.

"OK got it. But I'm a newbie. "It will take quite some time to complete the cooking shop's special stew quest."

"Special stew? "Is that delicious?"

"Maybe so? "At least someone in front of me enjoyed it very much."

"okay. Then, bring that too."

Prince Mores responded simply and turned around to leave the restaurant.

"Ah, but I'm a newbie. Where does Bartoza tell me to stay? I can just share a room with Brother Masain like before... .."

It was right then. A cool chill suddenly descended on the heads of the group.

"Owen. "Why does a guy who doesn't even know the subject and runs wild like an animal need a room for people to use?"

Prince Mores spat coldly and glared at Bartóza with a harsh gaze. His expression was dripping cold, completely different from when he

faced Seonghwang, or rather, Priest Bart.

"Put him in a barn somewhere. "If you sleep covered in straw, you won't freeze to death at least until tomorrow."

"... .."

"Hey, owner, give him a bowl of honey porridge. "You can't starve just because you hate people."

Then Bartozha, who had been reaching for the food without notice, hurriedly bit his hand back with a pale face.

Tingling-!

Prince Mores, who once again gave him a strong warning look, led the crowd along that path and went upstairs.

"... "You follow Priest Bart really well."

Lord Masain, who looked in the direction where the two disappeared for a moment, opened his mouth.

"I think this is the first time since Your Majesty and Princess Amelia that you treat someone so kindly. "Have you two met separately at some point in the past?"

Then Prince Owen answered indifferently.

"Well, doesn't Priest Bart look a lot like your father? So, it seems that Mores also feels some kind of closeness to him."

"yes? "Your Majesty?"

"... ..!"

No. 21 and Masain flinched and looked at him at the same time.

However, Owen quickly emptied the dishes without paying attention to their gaze. He had to hurry as he was going to return to the daily quest sooner or later.

"Yes, from the first time I saw the priest, I thought of my father.

"You're of similar age, and if you look closely, your behavior and demeanor are very similar to your father, right?"

"... .."

"Plus, you have strong divine power. "Isn't it strange that you don't think of your father?"

Number 21 couldn't help but cast a bewildered look at Prince Owen.

No, if you understand him so well, why on earth do you still not know his identity?

* * *

light.

While pulling a person who was almost certain to be successful, Seongjin felt an alien sensation that was clearly different from the physical laws of this world.

He once had this same feeling. So, from Madame Justine, the owner of the popular clothing store 'Salon de Mercy'.

However, surprisingly, the emotions that Seongjin felt through the same sense of discomfort were completely different from back then.

'Madame Justine felt absolutely terrible.'

The unrealistic lightness that she experienced at that time made Madame Justine feel something repulsive and unpleasant just by touching it for a moment.

But now, this lightness is seen as a sign of instability, as if it could disappear somewhere at any moment. So Seongjin is just so scared that he becomes extremely cautious.

Percussion.

When the door was finally closed and the two of them were together, Seongjin let out the breath he had been holding and called out to him.

"father."

"... Yes, Mores."

Finally, a proper answer comes back from Seonghwang.

"haha."

Sungjin, feeling a little relieved, leaned against the door and looked up at him.

"What are you doing here? Could it be that he didn't really leave the ecliptic, and that strange body represents Lord Sharon? "What happened?"

Then Seonghwang, who had been looking at Seongjin for a moment, slightly tilted his head and answered.

"Didn't you already hear everything? "That noisy 'fairy' of yours has been bustling with gossip since a while ago."

"ah."

As expected, Seonghwang was nearby, listening to everything. As soon as he appeared, the devil's voice chattered non-stop next to Seongjin.

-Lee Seong-jin! Seongjin Lee! Look here!

-Strange! I can feel the strong laws of the normal world in the body of that person named Bat!

-It is difficult to recognize the original identity of the soul of the world of Gyu-sang, but it seems that the author's soul is somehow different from ordinary souls! There is a faint glow, something is very strange!

As Seongjin slowly lifted the small lamp -

[Sigh!]

The Demon Lord, who had suddenly come face to face with the Holy

Emperor, instantly became a lump and was crushed into the corner of the lamp.

445. Dacion (2)

[Lee Seong-jin... Hi! Heep!]

The heavily frozen Demon King hiccuped for a while and spewed out dying sparks. It seems like he was quite surprised.

Just when he finally showed signs of calming down, a hearty dinner began to be prepared in their room.

"ha ha ha! "If you need anything else, let me know anytime!"

The owner, with a bright smile on his face, personally brought the dishes to the room.

Why not? This is an order from a VIP who has added a lot of money to the accommodation fee and is generating huge sales, including meal expenses.

[...] This is delicious.]

Grumble!

As he eagerly ate the finely cut pieces of meat, the Demon King gained strength little by little.

'If you look at it, it means that it is not easy to eat in secret. He seems like such a simple guy... ... '

As he diligently threw the food into the lamp, Seongjin closely observed Seonghwang moving the dishes.

He started eating without much resistance to Seongjin's recommendation. Considering that he used to just snack in the imperial palace, he seems to be enjoying his meals quite comfortably

now.

okay. This is impeccable table manners.

"... ..,"

When the thick hood covering his head was pulled down, his hair, unlike usual, was seen growing to cover the nape of his neck. I wonder if his hair is a little lighter than it originally was.

However, excluding such minor differences, it was no exaggeration to say that the current Seonghwang had almost completely his original facial features.

'That's an artificial life form created by the Kornsim clan, a homunculus... Called?'

It was truly amazing. It is an artificial body created strictly according to the laws of the normal world, so how can it be so similar to my father?

But Seonghwang stopped his hand and looked at Seongjin's face, wondering how he knew what was going on in his head.

"The homunculi created by Kornsim all have the same shape at first. Standard specifications have been established to facilitate production. 'It is precisely designed to be in sync with the user's 'bion' as time passes."

"Baion... .."

It took Seongjin some time to recall the information about Baion in his head.

'... Ah, you mean the theory of the three elements of the soul?'

So, it would have been when the fake saint Seo Yi-seo appeared in the imperial capital. At that time, Seongjin heard a detailed explanation from Logan about the elements that make up the soul.

-The first person to theoretically support the reincarnation of a saint was a famous theologian named Granius.

At the time, Granius claimed that there were three elements that make up the soul, which are [Aion], [Bion], and [Dacion], respectively.

Among them, [Bion] is an element that makes up the surface of the soul, and it is said that it constantly interacts with the body.

"So, that homunculus reflects your father's soul?"

"okay. That's amazing, Mores. "You know very well about the theory of the three elements of the soul."

Seonghwang slightly raised the corners of his mouth with a light compliment.

"So the longer the soul stays, the more the homunculus becomes almost completely attuned to the user's body."

"aha! okay. so-"

Seongjin, who was nodding vigorously, paused and tilted his head.

... hmm?

"But father, how did you know what I was thinking? "I didn't really send any condolences or anything, did I?"

"... That's it. If it's something you're curious about right now, isn't it obvious?"

"Hmm... .."

Seongjin ignored his excuses and began an in-depth analysis of the homunculus.

When you focus strongly on your eyes, your pupils blink red and information that you cannot normally see floats in the air. Text windows that are vaguely intertwined in multiple layers, which can be said to be a characteristic of the normal world.

?Homunculus_prototype_agalus_079?

?Creator information: Bethuel, Rebekah, Iscah, Bethsheba, Idlaph?

?Izmir calendar 4728:23:08?

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?For more details... ... ?

?Blah blah... ... ?

It's a list of information that doesn't seem particularly useful, like an insurance policy that no one expects to read properly.

There was something else that captured Seongjin's spiritual eyes.
sparkle!

It was a small bead shining in the very center of the homunculus' skull.

"There is a decision to be made."

"..."

"Is that your father's foolish decision? Or do all homunculi originally have flame crystals?"

Then Seonghwang passed the food completely and answered obediently.

"It is a unique characteristic of the homunculus. No, properly speaking, I should say that it is a characteristic of all creatures in the normal world."

"All creatures of the normal world?"

"okay. "Somewhere in the bodies of creatures in the normal world, there is always a small flame crystal where the soul can reside."

Seonghwang, who explained up to that point, paused for a moment before continuing.

"Mores, if you were who you are now, it would certainly not be impossible to understand the true nature of your soul."

"Yes, father."

It was like that. Because Seongjin now had the ability to be called 'spiritual eye'. Although it is only an imperfect ability to replace spiritual information with visual information.

"What if I did it? "From the appearance of my soul now, can you clearly identify the form of Bion?"

"... no."

Seongjin shook his head. No matter how hard I widened my eyes and looked at the homunculus, I could not clearly see the soul of the Holy Emperor that was there. Only the white light emitted from the flame crystal is perceived.

"It's because my soul is completely hidden in the crystal of meditation."

"Why are you doing that?"

"In order to properly reside in a body that follows the laws of the normal world, the soul also needs to meet those standards."

"aha."

"So, in the world of crystals, a crystal with a soul is defined as a soul in itself."

Seongjin also had something that came to mind at first glance.

Didn't the Demon King once explain it like that? Unlike the world of natural images and the world of mental images, the soul in the

normal world does not have the form of a complete human being. Usually, it is said to be a round sphere or a hard crystal.

For example, Seo Yi-seo's soul was like that. Therefore, as soon as the Demon King saw the fake saint, he recognized that she was a human belonging to the normal world.

But does that mean that it was actually because the soul was contained within the crystal?

"And this flame crystal also functions as an absolute protection device to protect the soul."

So, unlike others, Seo Yi-seo has remained fine even after being exposed to Cadmus' divinity.

"So, a wizard who realized its importance even personally named the flame crystal 'Dacion.'"

"Dacion... .."

Another component of the theory of the three elements of the soul,

"But father. Wasn't Granius, who proposed the theory of the three elements of the soul, a human being in the original world? But how on earth did he, who had no spiritual eyesight, know of the existence of the Flame Crystal?"

"... .."

"Also, why did he choose the concept of 'Dacion', which is only used in the normal world, as a component of the soul?"

It was not unreasonable for Seongjin to have such doubts. Even though it was a dream, I vaguely remembered the voices of children whispering in my ear one day.

-In our view, it is more appropriate to define the soul as having two elements: aion and bion.

-The reason Dacion was included there was purely due to Granius' political circumstances.

'Aeon' can also be seen as the true essence of the soul, that is, the essence of the soul.

'Bion' is what connects the aion and the body, and is constantly influenced by the body. In other words, it is no exaggeration to say that what we think of as the soul is actually the Bion itself.

However, nowhere in that interaction was there any room for the new element called Dacion to intervene.

"It cannot be denied that Granius brought out a third element called 'Dacion' to explain the reincarnation of Saint Grazie. It is also a well-known fact that his claims were used politically during the reign of the five great emperors."

"... .."

"But son. Even at that time, the element called 'dacion' was not a completely unfamiliar concept to people in this dimension."

After saying that, Seonghwang looked at Seongjin with an inexplicable gaze for a moment.

"Mores."

"yes?"

"There is a reason why you eventually obtained that book, despite the recent distortion of your perception."

Startle!

At Seonghwang's words, Seongjin unconsciously fumbled for the old book he had been keeping in his arms.

"this... "Are you referring to Dacian's secretary?"

"okay. "When you first read the book, what did you feel about the author?"

"About the author... .."

Seongjin was deep in thought.

I only glanced at it, so I didn't really have any particular impressions about Dacianus. He just felt like he was talking nonsense in a very long and elaborate manner.

However, there was something I realized after learning that he was the progenitor of the Marquis d'Arciano. The point was that Dacianus was a person with overly inflated self-consciousness and, to top it off, enormous self-love.

Although he was given a high-ranking noble title by the King of Ortona, he did not want to have another name that represented himself and his family. Because he believed that only his own name could fully represent him.

As a result, his family became the Marquis of Daciano, the name of the progenitor. His name was stamped into his family forever.

And perhaps Dacianus also wanted to put his name firmly on what he studied and pursued throughout his life.

"... 'Dacion.'"

Seongjin took out the book in his arms.

"The wizard who gave the name Dacion to the flame crystal that my father mentioned earlier was Dacianus."

The 'wall of the soul' that he continued to emphasize through his secretary was actually a term referring to a decision to make a decision.

"The people of Delcross came into contact with the concept of 'Dacion' through him. 'Perhaps Granus simply used existing words as he pleased, without even knowing what they were.'"

After hearing Seongjin's guess, Seonghwang looked worried for a moment. Then, he quietly put down the dishes and looked straight into Seongjin's eyes.

"Well, Mores. 'Maybe Granus' theory of the three elements of the

soul is not completely wrong."

"... yes?"

For a moment, Seongjin couldn't understand what he was saying.

"Why? "If it were the normal world, then Dacyon in the real world has nothing to do with the soul, right?"

Of course, that doesn't change the fact that salt crystals are a good environment for the soul to settle down. Didn't the Demon King like it that much?

However, such soul-friendly nature is not a reason to insert flame crystals into the soul's components.

"father. First of all, Dacion has a clear substance. But can it still be a part of the soul?"

"okay. It has a distinct substance, and at the same time, it can be a component of the soul. "You might be wondering how that is possible."

"yes. That's right."

When Seongjin answered quickly, a calm smile appeared on Seonghwang's lips for a moment.

"That is because Dacion has both the characteristics of the real world and the characteristics of the normal world. Therefore, even though it contains the soul of the normal world, it can act as a medium that connects the soul with the body of the normal world."

It is as if in the original world, there exists a Bion that connects the essence of the soul, Aion, to the body.

"Dacion can also be seen as playing a similar role to Bion in that it is a bridge that connects the spiritual body and reality."

However, it is said that Dacion, who freely moves between the natures of the two worlds, sometimes has extreme tendencies towards one side.

At this time, when it approaches the laws of the normal world, Dacion has complete reality and exists in the world as a flame crystal.

"On the other hand, if it is biased towards the laws of the original world, Dacion will have the properties of a complete spiritual body that is invisible to the ordinary human eye."

Seonghwang, who explained up to that point, looked at Seongjin with slightly deepened eyes and continued speaking.

"And Mores. "Perhaps you have encountered a type of soul in this world that is slightly different from the appearance of a normal soul."

"... ..!"

When Seongjin realized what Seonghwang was talking about, he felt a shock as if he had been hit in the back of the head.

'no way... 'Soul terminal?'

Indeed, in Delcross, the real world, there existed a soul with a round bead shape like the soul in the normal world. These are the soul terminals that Arenja's psychics, especially the twins, often show.

But is it actually made by combining Dacion and the soul?

'So, you're saying that even in the real world, some people can have Dacyon?'

In other words, Granius' theory of the three elements of the soul is not completely wrong.

'The soul terminal was another form of flame crystal... ..!'

But Seonghwang's amazing explanation did not end there.

"Son. "You already know another object that, like Dacion, has the properties of both worlds."

"... .."

It was like that. It's not that it's not, but Seongjin has been feeling a

strong sense of déjà vu from this conversation since a while ago.

An object that you know well, that cleverly straddles the physical laws of both worlds.

-no way? It's here? Is this really it? Is that [signpost] created by Oracle and reflecting the spirit of Oracle?

I can still recall it vividly. Dexter was showing Seongjin the complex wavelength of the handy scanner and explaining it in an excited voice.

- You really don't know what this means? So, although the oracle's [signpost] is an object from the normal world, it partially has the same properties as material from the normal world!

Something created by a sophisticated mind, yet having an undeniable material reality.

"no way... ..!"

Seongjin was astonished.

The series of information obtained so far led Seongjin to arrive at an undesirable inference.

"Yes, Mores. "Oracle's milestones can also be seen as a kind of dacion woven into a dense structure."

"... .."

"And the wizard who studied Dacion for a long time also knew that fact well."

"So, in other words... .."

Seongjin rubbed his temples with a confused expression.

"Are you saying that Dacianus wanted to create the 'milestone' of the Oracle himself, beyond simply making a salt crystal that protects the soul?"

446. Dacion (3)

Before its destruction, various races lived in Ionia.

From the human Kornsheim clan to lycanthropes, draconians, giants, and tree tribes. They were races with quite diverse forms and characteristics that, at first glance, seemed to have no biological similarity.

However, they had only one thing in common that distinguished them from the creatures of the Delcross dimension, and that was the flame crystal located within their skulls.

The location and structure of the crystals differed significantly depending on the species. However, no matter how crude the race was with the flame crystal, each individual was able to connect with the race [essence] and form a group rationality through this flame crystal.

In that way, [Essence] became everything to the race. It was a precious heritage that not only preserved and developed culture and ideas beyond the sharing of individual emotions and knowledge, but also led everyone's consciousness to a higher mental world.

However, uniquely among the races, there were those who entrusted the role of the race essence to the most outstanding member of the clan.

Oracle.

The living tribal essence of the Kornsim clan, and the one with the most highly developed flame crystal.

'It is perfect!'

One day, Dacianus accidentally encountered an oracle's signpost and fell into a strong shock that shook his soul.

'The [milestone] created by the living essence of the race is such a beautiful thing. It is capable of containing the universe within itself!'

The Kornsim clan was originally a people with superior spiritual development compared to other races. This is because the secret art of creating flame crystals of a different nature outside the body, that is, a soul terminal, was already popular at that time.

Even the youngest Kornsim easily created soul terminals through secret arts. And by carrying their consciousness into that soul terminal, they would move around freely, transcending the limitations of space.

If someone with spiritual eyes were to look at Kornsim's residence, he would probably see the spectacle of beads of all sizes flying across the sky.

However, among them, the soul terminal created by Oracle was special.

milestone.

A being that maintains an exquisite balance between the laws of the natural world and the laws of the normal world, which is different from the innate flame crystals and the soul terminal created through secret arts.

'It's truly amazing. Even though it was created solely through mental ability, it can have such a distinct substance!'

Dacianus thought that the oracle's signpost was the most perfect decision in the world. And the ability to create these milestones came to be seen as evidence of a highly accomplished mind.

It was probably natural for him, who had extremely strong self-love, to become absorbed in creating his own milestones.

He gave the new name 'Dacion' to all the salt crystals, including the milestone, and soon began the process of creating the most beautiful

salt crystals in the world.

'I need a sample. We need more types of salt crystals. No, if only I could directly observe the process of forming salt crystals!'

In this way, Dacianus moved to the Delcross dimension. This is because Delcross is less civilized than Ionia and does not even have a race with salt crystals, so it was thought to be suitable for observing the birth of new salt crystals.

He pretended to be a wandering wizard and distributed the decoction he made to people. Then, he suddenly settled down and left his family in the middle of Ortona.

* * *

"Dacianus said that he would achieve immortality by creating a 'wall of the soul.' But if his true goal wasn't something like immortality... .."

Seonghwang slowly shook his head at Seongjin's words.

"It would be meaningless to guess what the original purpose was. "Either way, the result would have been the same."

"The results are the same?"

Grumble!

The devil of the lamp sways in the breeze that blows from somewhere. Seongjin asked again, throwing a small piece of bread to the demon king who was quietly watching.

"Why is that so?"

"As a result, he would have made the same thing."

As Seongjin blinked his eyes blankly, Seonghwang raised an eyebrow and continued to explain.

"Do you know, Mores? "When a person with flame crystals dies, his crystals also quickly lose their function."

Seongjin nodded. During her time as a hunter, she killed countless monsters and saw them with her own eyes.

The Barotoshi found inside the heads of swarm monsters often disappeared without a trace soon after being exposed to the outside world.

There were times when it remained intact, but then it quickly lost its shine and turned into a hard piece of bone.

Because of this, it took quite a long time for scientists to realize Bartosh's function.

"A crystal that has lost its soul is nothing but a small stone. Therefore, Dacianus, who initially collected salt crystals and studied them, had no choice but to hastily revise his plan when he realized this fact."

Rather than examining the completed decision, the focus became more on the process by which it was made.

"That was a good thing."

If the flame crystal had functioned intact even after death, Dacianus, who was absorbed in research, might have gone around chopping off people's heads, right? A rare and cruel killer was almost born on the continent.

"Besides, if we made a mistake, the entire Kornsim clan could become a target."

"... I see."

Seonghwang's reply came a step late.

'Huh? for a moment. What was this guy just thinking? 'Why are you making such a regretful expression?'

For a moment, Seongjin thought of a frightening possibility, but quickly shook the thought out of his head.

"But Dacian already knew. "Sometimes in special cases, salt crystals that function properly even after the death of their creator exist in

the world."

Hwiik-

Once again, a ray of wind passes by Seongjin's cheek. The door is closed, but is the wind blowing from somewhere?

"Special cases?"

Seonghwang did not answer right away this time, but just stared at Seongjin. In that strange gaze, Seongjin was soon able to find the answer to the riddle.

"It's a milestone."

"... .."

"That's why you said the results were the same. "If Dacian really succeeded in creating the milestone, he would have created the perfect 'Dacion' that could protect his soul even after death."

At the point when he succeeds in creating a milestone, his immortality has already been automatically achieved.

Grumble!

Seongjin was lost in thought as he looked at the Demon King swaying precariously in the wind.

There is a lot to infer based on the information obtained so far.

When the body dies and the soul leaves the body, the flame crystal gradually loses its function. The essence of the salt crystal is that it exists only for the soul, and is an organ for the soul.

But why does Oracle's milestone remain intact? A milestone, a flame crystal, or a dacion, aren't they all essentially the same?

'No way, there's still a part of the soul left in the milestone...' ... ?'

Seongjin thought about that for a moment and shook his head. Oh, no way. There are already several milestones left by my

grandmother. A person's soul is not broken into so many pieces.

Hwii-

"But father."

Seongjin tilted his head, brushing up his hair that was blowing in the strong wind.

"Since a while ago, the wind keeps blowing from somewhere."

No, should I really call this wind?

[Lee Seong-jin... ..]

Pulling the anxious Demon King towards the lamp, Seongjin carefully looked around the seemingly quiet room.

'This... ..'

It's definitely a feeling I've experienced at some point. A feeling of something being forcefully pulled. The feeling that the whole world is only looking at you.

It was the sense that [Causation] was moving.

"Yes, it has to be that way."

Space vibrates slightly, and the time axis creaks slightly.

However, even though the situation was becoming more and more serious, Seonghwang's expression remained calm.

"Perhaps I have slightly exceeded the limit of causality allowed to me. "I had some spare time because I had taken it from the tribal representatives a while ago, but it seems like it wasn't enough."

"... yes?"

"Now the world will slowly tilt and then twist at an increasingly faster rate. "Sooner or later, the Delcross dimension will come to an end like this."

"Yes?"

What does this mean all of a sudden?

"Ah, it may be that [disaster] pours through a gap in the world first."

"... .. ?!"

For the first time in his life, Seongjin realized that he couldn't even get angry if people were so ridiculous. If this gentleman's words are true, something really big has happened right now!

"We need to get to a safe place first, father!"

Seongjin held on to the lamp and urgently pulled Seonghwang's sleeve with his other hand.

"Mores."

"Let's go downstairs! First, we need to get out of this village quickly, taking Sir Masain and the idiot with him... .. !"

"Mores."

Stop.

With his overly calm attitude, Seongjin slowly looked back at Seonghwang. And soon, he heard a voice that had not yet been spoken out loud from his calm eyes.

Okay.

The hand holding the sleeve suddenly lost its strength.

"uh... .."

Seongjin looked at Seonghwang blankly. what? Why is my father like this? Of course, I have strong faith in my father. but... ..

Then Seongjin became aware of the strange voice that had been sneaking in earlier and was now ringing in his head.

'Who on earth chose all this?'

... It was confusing.

"Mores."

At that time, Seonghwang slowly got up from his seat and came in front of Seongjin.

"I wish I had time to talk to you a little longer. But isn't this a cause and effect that you achieved after much effort? So, even if I had to give up other opportunities, I wanted to somehow tell you the story about Dacianus."

"Dacianus."

Only then did Seongjin's eyes, which had been wandering here and there, regain focus.

iced coffee.

"Did all of this happen because I got Dacian's secretary?"

"... .."

Seonghwang didn't open his mouth, but his eyes were silently focused on the book on the table.

For a moment, Seongjin was completely sure of the answer he did not give.

"And by getting that book... .."

Seongjin's voice began to tremble little by little.

"To be able to listen to my father's explanation... And you have achieved the proper cause and effect to properly perceive the situation."

Why was the Holy Emperor able to give a detailed explanation about Dacianus, unlike usual? Seongjin intuitively understood the reason.

Cause and effect.

Obtaining this secretary was an undeniable necessity for building that

relationship.

"Yes, son. "You made the best choice you could in a situation where you had no choice."

"... .."

"In the midst of the complex intertwining of someone's desire and timing, you have obtained a crucial clue that will allow you to properly intervene in this world.

Ddd
dd
dddddddddd... ..

The quiet room shakes without a sound. An intense turmoil that only two people in this world can feel.

In the midst of the distortion, Seongjin looked at Seonghwang with a bewildered face.

'That's really true. 'It was all my choice.'

In order to attack Verseus d'Arciano, who is making systematic moves to oppose 'Bertrán & Lee' -

To retrieve Louise, who had to leave somewhere alone carrying a large burden -

And, to condemn the sinister Margrave Hendrik, who is plotting something in Sigismund.

but... .. !

"But father."

Seongjin's voice calling out loudly made me fall in love with it, little by little, without me realizing it.

"The price for that was too high."

"Mores."

"Above all, because of me, Lord Martha, his soul is now... .."

Seongjin instinctively understood.

What happened to Lord Masaine yesterday is permanent damage that can no longer be undone. And all the disasters that happened to him were caused by his own unconscious choices.

'It's all because of me-'

Tuk!

At that time, I felt a hand gently stroking Seongjin's head. A calm voice that sounds like comfort.

"Don't blame yourself so much, son. "There were always appropriate precautions for your actions."

"... ..!"

"And now I am here to help you."

Seongjin blinked for a moment at his unexpected words.

... there is? How to fix Lord Masaine?

"How on earth? father! "What should I do?"

Seongjin had a desperate expression on his face without even realizing it. The reason why the discomfort that had continued to irritate his nerves was instantly relieved when he faced his father.

Wasn't it just a feeling of relief?

"There is no need to be so hasty."

Seonghwang, who answered briefly, paused for a moment and smiled faintly.

"Didn't I tell you once, Mores? "There is no need for you to be forced to make that choice yet."

"father."

"You are still young. So, wouldn't it be okay to leave that burden to someone else sometimes?"

Tuk-tuk.

With the steady hand tapping on the head, the emotions that were boiling violently inside slowly subside.

After a while, when Seongjin finally regained complete stability, Seonghwang slowly lowered his arms and smiled. With the rapidly sinking world on his back, his eyes towards Seongjin emit a bright silver glow.

"If you do it, Mores." "From now on, I will show you in person how the true 'Dacion' that Dacianus spent his entire life trying to obtain is made."

* * *

Now it all depends on what I want to see. Mores.

447. Dacion (4)

Knock.

I can hear the sound of water drops falling.

smart.

At the same time, a stench that stings your nose. Seongjin frowned at her inadvertently and looked around her.

The scenery in front of me looks quite familiar. Damp walls clinging to dirt and moss. A black tunnel that is hard to see inside even with the eyesight of an Auror user.

'uh?'

what? Were you in the inn room with your father just a moment ago? While we were talking about Dacion, in the end, causality overflowed and the world was shaken... ..

"... "If there was a sewer system built throughout, it would definitely be as complicated as a spider's web."

At that time, a voice Seongjin knew well came from next to him. When I turned around, I saw Lord Masaine talking to someone with a serious expression.

"There needs to be someone to guide the way, or at least a map to know the internal structure... .."

Lord Masaine? What on earth are you doing here?

While Seongjin is blinking, the other person grumbles and answers Lord Masain.

"This is ridiculous. "Are you looking for an intact map in a ruined refugee camp?"

The guide's voice was clearly filled with dissatisfaction. Only then did Seongjin realize that he had experienced the current situation not long ago.

Ah, yes. This is Furiano. That author was a guide at the Freedom Underground, and he led us to the sewer where Giacomo Milo was hiding.

"Then at least a torch... .."

In response to Lord Masain's protest, Seongjin intervened with a strong sense of déjà vu.

"Sir Martha."

Then, like a mechanical doll moving according to a predetermined program, she held up a small lamp towards him. Not one bit different from what it was a while ago.

"are you okay. Because we have this guy."

that's right. I remember more and more.

At the time, Seongjin had a strong premonition that he would be able to find Giacomo Milo right away. So, without a map or a torch or anything else to look for, he decided to blindly go into the sewer and look.

And according to my memory, the following answer came back from the Demon King.

-Ahem! Leave it to this great demon lord!

"... ..?"

But for some reason, no thoughts come from the Demon King.

When I looked up at the lamp, I saw that the guy was very scared for some reason and the flame was only faintly withdrawn.

Why is this guy doing this again?

"... "Come on, let's go."

Seongjin began to walk with a trembling feeling. Then, Owen's bright voice comes from behind, just like before.

"You'll be fine without a guide or map, brother. new... Mores said, but there is really only one path in the dungeon..."

Other than the Demon King's reaction, everything was as I remembered.

What on earth is going on now?

* * *

Jump and jump.

Hearing the loud sound of footsteps, Seongjin slowly brought back the scene in his memory.

'The road definitely split around there.'

Then, a fork in the road appeared at the very expected point.

'If you go a little further, there was a place where the bricks were left in a row and had fallen out.'

After a while, the same damaged wall as I remembered appears.

""

Seongjin felt like he was dreaming.

Now, I was confused as to whether these were really memories I had experienced in the past, or whether it was a premonition I felt stronger than usual.

'Or have I finally gone crazy?'

The possibility cannot be denied. But for some reason, Seongjin had a strong belief that this was absolutely not the case.

Although he was in a strange situation, his mind was clearer and calmer than ever. It was as if there was a lamp shining brightly in his mind, pushing away the thick fog of ambiguity and disbelief.

'Well, if you think of yourself as crazy, does that mean you're really mentally ill?'

Slurp.

Following the sound of sewage flowing, Seongjin led the group deep into the sewer. And around that time, Seongjin was able to discover another difference from before.

'weird? At this point, I definitely had a strange feeling, didn't I?'

It was like that. While he was guiding the group along the way without any hesitation the other day, he was possessed by a strong premonition that something was not going as planned.

But what about now?

'I'm not really anxious.'

I have a strange feeling that somehow everything will turn out well. It's been a while since I felt this way.

'And maybe around here...' ... '

Seongjin lifted the lamp upward and looked at the waterway through which sewage water flowed. Maybe he saw a rotten rat moving around here.

The first person to discover it was the Demon King.

-Lee Seong-jin, look at that! There's something strange over there!

But for some reason, the Demon King quietly kept his mouth shut and, unlike before, just slowly observed Seongjin's thoughts. Seongjin, who was worse off, tapped the lamp and called out to the devil.

"Hey, hey. why are you like this?"

Then he reluctantly answered in a hushed voice.

[Yes... ..]

"why? "What's uncomfortable?"

[Oh, no. nothing.]

What's the problem? It was when Seongjin tilted his head.

"Lowering!"

Suddenly, Lord Masain became thoughtful and blocked Seongjin's path.

"Do not go too close to the waterway! "There's something strange over there!"

"huh?"

I followed his gaze -

Wiggle. Wiggle.

As expected, there was a rotting rat there, twitching disgustingly.

"omg! what's this? "Even though you're dead, you're still moving?"

Sir Martha made the sign of the cross, pulling Owen's cloak back as he unconsciously approached him.

"Ah, Lord. Please protect me from the tricks of evildoers!"

As I craned my neck over Lord Masaine's shoulder, I remembered the same broken text windows as before.

?TY□E_m_und□□d_no29□2□9?

?err! Can't confirm the appropriate object!?

?err! ge□Ah!\$2└─Could not□confirm the server... .. ?

As before, an unknown discomfort creeps in.

It felt as if something was shaking and jumping out of the tightly bolted door.

If you don't quickly get that thing out of my sight... ... !

"I don't want to see it, so let's burn it."

Seongjin shook the devil's lamp.

[...]]

But the demon lord, who should have been excited and started a fire, once again shrinks without answering. If it continues to get smaller like this, I'm worried that one day the flame will go out altogether.

"hey-"

It was when Seongjin urgently tried to secure him once again.

[...] You can do it.]

Suddenly someone spoke to me.

An all-too-familiar voice, from an all-too-familiar location.

"uh..."

Seongjin looked into space and blinked.

No, there may be no point in looking somewhere. Because that longing voice clearly came from inside my head.

'... father?'

As if answering Seongjin's question, a faint vibration passes through the brain.

And the voice said:

[Use Auror.]

As if drawn to those words-

Woe!

Seongjin's thoughts turned to his fingertips, creating a dark red aura. The most powerful flame he knows that burns everything in the world.

"Lowering?"

Masain looks at that figure with surprised eyes. Although she taught Seongjin the Auror exercises herself, she thought that she was not yet at the stage where she could freely use external energy.

'That's amazing. 'When did you grow up like this?'

Seongjin noticed the admiration and smiled proudly.

After burning down the sewer a while ago, I realized that I had somehow become more adept at using Aurors. As I quietly watch the flames fluttering of their own volition, the discomfort from earlier seems to disappear like melting snow.

It would probably have been better if there wasn't a guy next to him hitting the candle.

"Hmm, but it's still far away, isn't it? Mores. "Are you starting to see smoke coming out of your sleeves?"

"... "It's noisy, you idiot."

Seongjin frowned and set fire to the rat's corpse.

Grumble!

The flame that leaves the fingertips quickly turns to high temperature and eats the mouse. Smelling the unpleasant smell of burning protein, Seongjin concentrated his mind to keep the flame from disappearing.

-Wherever the gaze goes, human perception always follows, right?

-huh.

-So, it is just a theory that a thought naturally arises there and the

aura is drawn to it.

I remember the trick I learned from Logan the day I caught a dinosaur in Bathurst Territory.

-The important thing is to never let go of oneness with the outside air. And be careful not to lose sight of them even for a moment.

It was said that if you do that, even if the auror leaves the body, it is the same as not leaving the body. Anyway, Logan's child is completely identical to his father's.

[You're good at it.]

Whether or not he knew that I was secretly mocking him, I heard a calm compliment again in my head.

Meanwhile, the body was almost completely destroyed, and the flames were slowly starting to die down.

[Yes, that will do. To remove the curse that forcibly binds Bion, all you have to do is burn all of the bodies that are the center of the curse.]

'But father. Is that really enough?'

Seongjin asked worriedly.

Although it is said that the soul was removed by burning the body, completely burning the damaged soul would probably not be easy with current capabilities.

In addition, there were piles of such unkillable monsters piled up in this sewer. If we miss even one of them, there is no telling what kind of devastating impact it will have not only on the people here in the Furiano Refugee Camp, but also on the entire continent.

That's why, the other day, I quickly burned down this sewer by crossing a line that I would never have crossed in the first place.

[slowly.]

As if realizing Seongjin's impatience, a calm voice soothed him.

[It's not a matter of time anyway. You have enough time to help all of them.]

'... ... !'

[The continent is not in danger. I'm watching.]

'father... ... !'

I no longer hear an answer. But Seongjin could still feel the presence of a small light shining in her own head.

"Come on, let's hurry."

Seongjin, who had burned all the rats, raised his head and looked at the two people. A loyal knight who can still make eye contact with him safely, and a fool who seems to follow him forever as long as he speaks.

"We have to catch Giacomo Milo quickly."

* * *

"Sir, your presence has split into two."

Hearing Masain's report, Seongjin glanced back at Owen. Originally, quests would have slowly appeared around this time. So, didn't she decide to act separately from Seongjin and her group?

"... ... ?"

But Owen looked at Seongjin blankly with an expression on his face that said he didn't know anything.

"why?"

"... "Any news yet?"

"huh? what?"

"The status window. Surely it's time to give you a quest to find

something?"

"what? "What?"

Seongjin furrowed his eyebrows as he looked at Owen, who was shocked.

No quests yet? Why? Could it be because I decided not to split my group this time?

'or not... 'Have you already obtained Dacian's secretary once?'

At that time, Owen urgently approached Seongjin.

"Wait a minute, Mores. "What do you think of this quest?"

As he speaks, his eyes widen as if he realizes something. Then, he suddenly smiles brightly and goofily!

"ha ha ha!"

"hmm?"

"Hahaha! okay! I knew it!"

"... "What on earth?"

Then Owen, who was laughing like crazy, suddenly threw his arm around Seongjin's shoulder and shouted.

"okay! I knew you were that newbie! "I already knew everything!"

"... .."

"Hahahahaha!"

Masaine looked at him in confusion, but Owen was already so excited that he didn't notice his suspicious gaze at all. The guy tapped Seongjin on the shoulder and laughed heartily.

"ha ha ha! men and horses! Why didn't you tell me until now? "How long have I been looking for you?"

This guy, is it too noisy?

The hand naturally rose, and a cheerful hitting sound rang out.

Sigh!

"Ahh!"

Owen held his forehead in shock. Not only was she in pain, but her expectations were betrayed, and her face was sad.

"no! Why are you hitting me all of a sudden? "It hurts!"

"It's noisy, you idiot. "Are you going to reveal our location to Giacomo Milo?"

"... "Inhale!"

After glaring hard at the guy who quickly closed his mouth, Seongjin turned and hurried on his way.

"Let's go quickly. Giacomo Milo is right around the corner."

"Well, sir, what about the other one? If one is really Giacomo Milo's presence, the remaining one may be his colleague."

In response to Masain's anxious question, Seongjin suddenly remembered a voice in his head.

-It's not a matter of time anyway. You have enough time to help them all.

okay. Is there anything to worry about? I missed it once before anyway. Besides, it looks like we'll meet again next time.

Seongjin made up his mind and gave instructions to Masain.

"It's okay, Sir Martha. Because our goal is Giacomo Milo. "There's nothing to worry about, just one or two rats living in the sewers."

Then Masain thought for a moment, then nodded with firm eyes as always.

"yes. "I understand, sir."

okay. This is the Sir Martha I know. Seongjin felt a little relieved and she started walking with him.

And after them, Owen, who seems to have lost a screw somewhere, follows them. It seemed like he couldn't quite hide his excitement from earlier.

"Haha! Ha ha ha ha ha!"

Oh, that stupid guy. It subtly makes people nervous.

448. Dacion (5)

Almost everything went as I remembered. Seongjin was able to meet Giacomo Milo, who was hurriedly escaping from the sewer, at the same place as before.

"Da, you?!"

Giacomo, who suddenly encountered Seongjin and his group, was very embarrassed and tried to take something out of his pocket.

Of course, at the same time-

Whoosh- whoosh!

The dagger flew by quickly and landed mercilessly on the back of Giacomo Milo's hand.

"Huh?"

The pain hit me late.

"Kaaaaaaak!"

While Giacomo Milo was rolling around on the floor in pain, Seongjin hurriedly walked up to his side and retrieved the fallen elixir.

It was a black elixir that he had traded in exchange for Dacian's secretary, which almost brought a terrible disaster to the continent.

"Off... Bird, Salos!"

Giacomo Milo gritted his teeth and summoned the devil who had made a contract with him.

Up until now, he had held out for revenge on the world, but now that the elixir of conversion had fallen into the hands of the enemy, there were no other options left.

"Please come here and protect me! Defeat my enemies! "If you will do that, I will give you my body right now!"

But why? There was absolutely no response from his demon. As if they are very afraid of something, they have even completely closed the channel connected to the contractor.

"... Salos?"

As Giacomo muttered helplessly, the boy who had been looking around at the elixir looked down at him arrogantly.

"I don't think there will be any immediate erosion this time. "I thought about it before, but the devil who made a contract with you is quite cunning."

"... ... ?"

"Well, I promised you something before, so I will help your soul in any way I can. But we will have to pay the price of causing great harm to the continent."

A red light flashed from the boy's pupils.

"So, shall we get started with some hitting first?"

Wow!

Soon, Giacomo's desperate screams rang out through the damp air of the sewer.

* * *

After safely capturing Giacomo Milo, Seongjin and his party followed another faint trace and headed toward the center of the sewer.

The speed wasn't that fast. This is because if any dead animal was found along the way, every single one of them had to be burned.

"Lowering. The sight is getting further and further away. Wouldn't it be better to first catch the author and then call the priests to purify him?"

Masain asked nervously.

"No, Sir Martha."

Although he had already sensed that the presence was disappearing one step before him, Seongjin shook his head resolutely.

Seongjin already knew. Even if they found the wizard who did this anyway, they would be blocked by the moving corpses and would eventually miss them.

In that case, there was no need to reveal their identity to him.

"Besides, these things are more dangerous than they look, Lord Masaine. "Not a single piece of the body should be left behind."

"yes. It seems like that, but..."

At first glance, it seemed like the work of an evil devil. Masain mournfully made the sign of the cross towards the writhing stray cat engulfed in flames.

So when the party finally arrived at the wizard's laboratory, the evil wizard was already long gone.

Roughly damaged magic circles can be seen here and there on the wall. Various research materials, including Dacian's secretary, also disappeared.

and-

Squeak! Snap!

Kkkkkkkk! Crumble!

Kwaaaaaa...

A variety of corpses released from cages fill the lab.

"Lord, my God!"

Masain sighed.

"You don't just touch animals. They even do something like that to people... Who could it be? How could you do something so terrible...
... !"

"hmm."

But Masain didn't know. The scene that Seongjin is seeing now is an even more miserable scene than what he sees with his own eyes.

[...] my... body... why... Turn it off...]

[...] Save me... someone... please... fat...]

Souls are struggling in pain. With Bion chained to his rotting body, even the essence of his soul is being eaten away by corruption.

I'm crying!

Seongjin tried to suppress the intense discomfort welling up inside him. Although he had already experienced this once, it was difficult for him to maintain composure in the face of a scene that so directly denied death.

Then, as if I had been waiting, I heard a soft voice in my head.

[Son.]

Yes. I know. I know very well, father.

Even though I know the outcome, I don't repeat the same mistake.

"Whoa..."

After exhaling softly, Seongjin placed a small lamp on the floor and called out to the Demon King.

In order not to lose myself in the face of a scene that constantly stimulated my inner essence, I absolutely needed the strength of this little guy.

"Hey, devil."

[...] huh.]

I was almost worried that it would shrink and disappear like this, but fortunately, the Demon King gave me an answer, at least with a crawling sound.

"You need to help me from now on."

[...]]

"From now on, I'm going to burn them all. "Let's burn this place down with me."

For a moment, Owen's disapproving gaze landed on the back of his head, but Seongjin lightly ignored it and continued speaking.

"You've been feeling stuffy since you've been in the lamp all this time, right? "When the opportunity comes, you should use your power to the fullest."

[...]]

"I need your strength now."

The Demon King did not respond, but the flames trembled as if reflecting the turmoil in his heart.

Seongjin, who discovered some possibility there, began to calm him down more gently.

"It's okay, Demon King. "I know what you're worried about."

okay. I know very well what he is afraid of. Because every time he looked down at the guy's lamp, he felt that the light shining in his head was also looking in the same direction.

'I'm sure he feels his father's presence strongly.'

This must be the same reason why the devil who signed a contract with Giacomo Milo does not come near him, unlike before. His

father's existence is a death sentence in itself for demons.

"But we're okay. You know that too, right? "My father is always on our side."

[...]]

"You are my family, and your strength is my strength. Attacking you is the same as attacking me. But, Demon King, can you even imagine my father harming me?"

The Demon King's flame flinched at that question.

[...] no.]

The Demon King's flame began to noticeably regain its color. It seemed as if a drastic change of thinking was taking place within him.

[No, Seongjin Lee.]

"Yes, that's it. So, come out here and see."

[...] huh!]

Pong!

The Demon King seemed to have finally gained courage and jumped out of the lamp. Then, he slowly hovers around Seongjin and watches him. To be precise, we are not looking at Seongjin, but rather what exists in his head.

The demon king who circled around like that-

[Hey...]

When I realized that nothing was going to happen, I felt relieved and let out a spark.

[Hehehe!]

[...]]

At that moment, a slightly displeased feeling was conveyed through the decision in his mind without filtering, but Seongjin pretended not to notice this for everyone's sake.

"Well then, shall we go?"

Sreung!

Seongjin slowly pulled out the nutcracker. As she felt the familiar feel of the hilt, she realized once again where she was now.

Grumble!

As the thought dawned, a dark red aura quickly covered the sword body.

"Owen. Lord Masaine."

I can feel the two people, who had already taken out their weapons, quietly listening to Seongjin's voice.

"Let's organize them neatly first."

* * *

When three strong Auror users launched an offensive, the wizard's laboratory was quickly suppressed.

The red flames of the Demon King covered the miserable wreckage and burned fiercely.

[Heh! Hehe! This is easy!]

The guy, who was relatively calm and proud compared to usual, burned not only the flesh of the corpse but also all traces of the magic circle.

'Yes, everything is going well.'

Seongjin, who violently shook off the nutcracker, scattering blood and flesh, looked around while sharpening his sword.

"It's a newbie. "If you still have trouble controlling your aura, stay

back. The end of your cloak is on fire."

Owen lightly pulls Seongjin back. The other day, I was in a mess trying to deal with corpses and do quests at the same time. Compared to that, it now looks more relaxed and neat.

"Lowering. With this, it seems like all the monsters in the sewer have been killed. "If we hurry, we might be able to chase down the runaway wizard."

Of course, there is no need to mention Sir Martha, who appears to be in a healthy state of mind. Although he fired a large Auric attack several times, he faced Seongjin without the slightest sign of fatigue. The deep-rooted guilt eating away at his soul can no longer be seen in his eyes.

Seongjin muttered with great relief.

"Everything is going well."

[huh? what?]

The demon king, who has finally escaped his fear and excitedly set the fire, sits down on the lamp as a prisoner and asks.

Yes, this guy cannot be left out either. Needless to say, things are better than before, right?

When I was walking around setting fires by myself, I was busy calling my name, not knowing what to do.

"Considering that you were crying like an idiot, this is the right path, even if it takes some time."

Then the Demon King asked again as if he was puzzled.

[...] What are you talking about? Seongjin Lee. Who cried?]

ah.

At that moment, Seongjin realized. Does the Demon King also not remember anything from the past?

Then a new question reared its head again.

'Did I really go back in time? If not, now I... ..'

At that time, as if to interrupt his unnecessary deepening of thoughts, he heard a familiar voice in his head again.

[Son. Is that really that important now?]

Seongjin quickly erased his doubts and shook his head.

No, father. Absolutely not.

"What should I do, my uncle? Are you following the wizard even now?"

In response to Masain's question that came just in time, Seongjin turned to him and smiled brightly without realizing it.

"huh? no. Sir Masain. "It's fine as is."

"... yes?"

Towards him who was taken aback by the unexpected reaction, Seongjin spoke emphatically again.

"Leave it alone, Lord Masaine. "I think it would be best if it just stayed like this."

After thoroughly purifying the sewers of Furiano, they returned to the village entrance late at night.

The group boarded the 'special delivery' carriage again and were only able to leave Furiano at a much later time than before.

But Seongjin wasn't too worried. Since he knows his next destination for sure, all he has to do this time is ask the driver to head straight to Terre.

"Owen."

"huh?"

"hungry. "Hurry up and bring me something delicious."

"OK got it."

Owen, who had been unconsciously holding the milestone in his hand, suddenly said, "Huh?" He looked back at Seongjin with an expression that said,

"... But are you a newbie?"

"uh."

"Yes, you. "Why aren't you so naturally looking for something to eat from me?"

"That's because you can bring something to eat. "Why is that?"

In response to Seongjin's confident answer, Owen made a shocked expression.

"Well, that's right."

"okay."

Seongjin nods his head, then suddenly remembers something and says, "Ah!" ' she added.

"And by the way, you should probably get me a limited edition eyepatch."

"eye patch?"

"Yeah, if you hand it over to me, maybe the status window will open a sale window?"

"... omg?"

At that moment, Owen looked into space and made an angry expression.

"Really? There's a limited edition eye patch on the market, and it's almost free! Newbie, how on earth did you know?"

"Stop talking nonsense and buy that eyepatch first. Oh, and since I'm throwing you out, take out some of the stamina potions you don't use in advance."

"Stamina potion? Why is that again?"

"I have to make tea later."

"car?"

Owen's expression became increasingly confused, but Seongjin paid no attention to his questions and leisurely leaned back against the carriage.

What is it like? Everything has changed from before. Everything is going as it should!

Seongjin, who had relaxed for the first time in a long time, put down the devil's lamp next to him and stretched.

"Bethelah... .."

Of course, there were some things that didn't change much from before.

"Ah, you who are prepared!"

Giacomo Milo, wrapped around a rope, was looking at Seongjin passionately, repeatedly chanting the name of the cross. If he had been paying close attention, he would have figured out who had used the powerful fairy to purify the wizard's laboratory.

Sure enough, the venom and resentment that had filled Giacomo's eyes were suddenly replaced by admiration and joy.

"Representative of mighty monarchs! Please accept my soul. And let it be used in your plan... .."

"... .."

Seongjin made a disgusted expression.

Well, it seems like the end result of that friend getting a little sick of it is inevitable. Fortunately, it doesn't seem like I've completely lost my mind like before.

449. Dacion (6)

Even after arriving in Tere village, things went much easier.

First, Seongjin found Oliver loitering in front of the inn and asked him various questions.

"Hey, you. Do you have a 'junior business certificate' issued by the imperial palace?"

Then Oliver opened his eyes and turned around.

"yes? Ah yes. "Yes, but who are you?"

"You want to sell the herbs you collected in the countryside, right?"

"They will probably also handle teosinte seeds, which are rarely seen in the North."

"What? Yes, that's right! But how on earth can you do that? ... ?"

"But until now, you've probably had a hard time earning money, right? So, you were wondering whether you should at least put up a stall in front of the inn."

"omg?!"

Oliver gasped in astonishment. Just by looking at him, he recited his situation as if he had looked into his heart, which was just surprising.

Seongjin added quickly before the young man's head could turn to reason.

"Oh, just so you know, unfortunately, that plan will fail. The owner wouldn't even blink at a certain height, right? "That person is no ordinary person either."

"yes? No, then what should I do now... .. !"

"What should I do? As it is, the investment money in the imperial palace is completely lost. "You just have to go back to the countryside and start farming again."

Then the simple country boy fell to his knees on the ground and screamed.

"Ah, ah, no! I promised Lilian that I would definitely come back as a prize winner! I can't even farm in my hometown anymore! "I lost everything I had for this trip!"

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

Look at this guy. What did you believe that you wasted all your money on for a business with no promises? Isn't this guy going to be in real trouble?

'I don't know who that 'Lirian' is, but I guess I've already almost given up my feelings for you when I saw you liquidating your assets without a plan?'

But there was no other way. In order to combat the spread of medicine carts, there was no choice but to turn this lowly friend into a proper merchant.

Hehehe! Hehehe!

Seongjin, who was looking pitifully at the young man who was shedding tears of despair, waited for his crying to subside and gently touched his shoulder.

"But don't worry. You are so lucky to have met me here. "You were so lucky."

"Sobbing! "By the way, I've been asking this since a while ago, but who are you?"

"It's not that big of a problem. "Even though I'm like this, I have quite a bit of knowledge in business, and what's important is that I have connections at great companies like 'Bertrán & Lee.'"

"Well, is that really true? "Sniff!"

"then. Where is that? I have the means to make your teosinte the most fashionable tea on the continent."

Jinglang.

Seongjin took out a shiny gold coin from his pocket and held it in front of the young man, who was still in doubt.

"Enough of this, let me prove it first. Will you hand over all your belongings and do as I tell you? "I guarantee you that all your herbs will be gone by today."

"... ... !"

"This is an offer that won't do you any harm. Even if we fail to sell out, I will take responsibility and purchase the remaining herbs at a high price."

The eyes of the young man who was looking at the gold coin as if fascinated were soon filled with the light of hope.

He stared at Seongjin with tearful eyes, then fell to the floor and shouted.

"Unbelievable! Who are you really? Are you really that great sage who is famous in the Marquis of Benso? Or are you just an angel given by the Lord to save me, poor me?"

hmm? No, no matter what, angels are a bit...

When Seongjin shyly avoided his passionate gaze, the Demon King seemed displeased and sparked a spark onto the lampshade.

[and... Seongjin Lee, you conscienceless fraudster...]

At the same time, he felt like he heard a small sigh in his head, but that was probably just Seongjin's illusion.

No problem.

* * *

The work to create the miracle Teosinte MK2 proceeded smoothly.

There was no longer a need for experiments such as mixing medicinal ingredients or adjusting proportions. Because I already knew most of the results.

So Seongjin's concerns went in a slightly different direction.

"Before, I was thinking of selling it first, but... .."

In order to distribute teosinte on a large scale, a more fundamental solution was needed than the one-dimensional gimmick of mixing a potion with tea.

Could it be possible to maintain the efficacy of teosinte with just a small amount of stamina potion?

'no. If the seeds themselves cannot be changed, it is more correct to believe that long-term sales are impossible.'

Of course, there is no way to afford to do things like improve seeds. But for some reason, Seongjin was able to intuitively realize what the solution to all these problems was.

as soon as-

"father. "Please help me."

[...]]

"No, no. This is something that is really, really important for the continent. Don't just sigh like that. yes?"

Why not?

From when Seongwang explained about Dacianus, and from when Seongjin went to any lengths to return to the past. Seongjin was acutely aware of the feeling that his power, which he had usually suppressed for cause and effect, was liberated and spread out in all directions without any hesitation.

For such a success, nothing is impossible anymore.

'I believe it! 'You all have a way, right?'

I listened intently with that vague expectation, and after a while, a slightly uneasy answer came back to me in my head.

[...] First, let's gather all the Teosinte seeds in one place.]

"Yes, father!"

[Then sprinkle the potions you have evenly on it, spread it out in the sun to dry well, and put both hands...]

"Yes!"

[...] Don't laugh and focus, Mores. This is a way to create a simple flame barrier. If you learn it well now, you will be able to use it usefully later when you need it.]

"Ah, yes! Sure! "I'm focused!"

When all preparations were completed, Seonghwang personally performed the miracle in Seongjin's mind.

Hahahaha!

Wrapped in a halo of white light, the essence of Teosinte causes change. The mysterious process reminded Seongjin of the scene where Seonghwang once treated Director Bruno's gray plague.

A strong intention moves, numerous causes and effects come together, and the axes of time and space are shaken in their own way.

After twisting the laws of the world several times, the bright light finally disappeared and what was left before Seongjin's eyes was -

"wow... ... !"

It was a completely new type of teosinte that radiated a brilliant golden luster!

"Father, this is...""

Seongjin carefully lifted one of the teosintes and asked, and Seonghwang explained quietly.

[Tell the merchant to take care of them. Perhaps you can obtain seeds with the same effect.]

So, are you saying that the seed's genes themselves have changed?

"No, what on earth did you do to Teosinte? "How is this change possible in a short period of time?"

[It's no big deal, Mores. All I did was spread a simple flame barrier and tightly integrate the laws of the normal world into the seed.]

"..."

[Actually, didn't you have some sense of it too?]

It certainly was. It was a different feeling from watching Director Bruno's treatment process.

The movement of thoughts that are vividly conveyed, and the clear intention felt within them. I felt like the entire process of Seonghwang's transfer was completely stuck in my head.

'Maybe it's because my father is in the flame crystal?'

Why? This sensation was not completely unfamiliar. It feels somehow very familiar and nostalgic.

"Anyway, if this happens, the story will be completely different, right?"

Seongjin grinned and raised the corners of his mouth.

At first, I was planning on getting into Oliver's business and siphoning off some of the royalties.

but-

"Shouldn't the guarantee be properly removed? If you think about it,

everything from seeds to business plans is provided by us, right?"

It was a ruined business anyway, right? Oliver doesn't have the right to choose. As Seongjin was at a loss, she made a plan on her own.

'good. Should we at least put Sir Martha's name on this contract? Although he is a member of the prosperous royal family, he is a knight of the imperial palace and has no opportunity to make money for himself.'

Seongjin, who finished everything so perfectly, called Masain and Owen with a confident face.

"You're opening a stall and doing business? "Yourself?"

Naturally, Sir Martha's opposition was formidable.

"That's not right! As a member of the Seonghwang family, please keep your integrity!"

But Seongjin had enough reasons to persuade him.

"Calm down, Sir Martha. As you know, the people of the North are becoming addicted to Al-Aum-Alum Tea. "How miserable is this?"

"Yes, sir. I know that too, but... .."

"Wasn't our monster task force moving to dig into the roots of the medicine tea distribution and free people from the magic tea's clutches?"

"... .."

"And leading the monster task force is the 'noble duty' I have chosen. In other words, this is a mission that must be fulfilled as a member of the Holy Family."

But Lord Masain did not back down easily.

"Yes, sir. That is no reason for you to do business yourself. "Shouldn't we put even more effort into hunting down penitent sects?"

Tsk tsk.

Seongjin snapped his fingers and clicked his tongue.

"One person knows something, but two people don't. "Just by distributing new cars, we can block most of the forces of the Penitent Church."

"Yes, sir... .."

"Besides, this is for Amelia."

As the princess's name comes out of Seongjin's mouth, Masain also listens with an uneasy expression on her face.

"Listen, those with a 'semi-top business license' are the seeds of hope that Sister Amelia sent to the North. "If they can take root properly and become self-sufficient, what could be better for the continent's economy?"

"... .."

"Not only will it benefit the empire, but it can also help the poor northerners. "It's all for the greater good, Lord Martha."

Masain slightly raises one eyebrow. To briefly summarize its meaning, it was as follows.

-For a cause? You? No way?

However, there were no significant loopholes in Seongjin's explanation. In the end, with a disapproving expression, he began organizing the wooden planks for the breaking demonstration.

But Masain's suffering did not end there.

"Now, if you understand, please sign here, Sir Martha?"

"... "What is this again, sir?"

"huh? It's a simple contract. "The idea is that the profits earned from the technology you provided will be divided neatly in half."

"yes? With the technology I provided, what does that mean... .."

"Uh-huh! Don't try to find out in depth. It's just a good thing, so trust me and sign. hurry."

"... .."

So, in front of Tere's inn, another spectacular Teosinte launching event took place. Under a more elaborate and extravagant fireworks show, with products of even superior quality.

"Wow! "This is a miracle given by the Lord!"

"here! "Give me a bag of teosinte here too!"

"Get out of my way! "I was first in line!"

Business was booming than before. Teosinte sold out much earlier, and Oliver cried tears of joy as he patted his fat pockets.

And just like before, Seongjin found Seonghwang's group at the edge of the crowd.

A very familiar and welcoming sight, riding on the back of the Barca barbarian, wearing a thick hood.

Seongjin was pleased and tried to shout.

'Father... .. !'

But the next moment, Seongjin was overcome by an unprecedented sense of discomfort and froze in place.

'... uh?'

The presence of a small lamp still shining in his head, and another father staring at him from beyond the crowd.

Seongjin's eyes, which were blinking slowly, soon widened in shock.

'Father... 'There's another one over there?'

Sweet!

At that moment, the sound of two worlds coming together resonated in my head again.

450

450. Dacion (7)

The same scenes unfolded before Seongjin's eyes once again.

"Wow! "Owen!"

The Barça Savage clinging desperately to the hem of Owen's clothes -

"Hey haaa!"

A maid with a fierce face running towards me with a smile on her face, and-

"... .."

There was even a young informant who was blocking Seonghwang's path with a very wary expression.

"Shh. Edith. "I'm hiding my identity right now."

Pang pang! Carelessly pushing away the maid who was dusting off her clothes, Seongjin watched the scene of Owen approaching Seonghwang as if it were in her dream.

"Priest Bart! "What are you doing here?"

okay. All events proceed without any change from before.

'... I knew it.'

Seongjin already knew that things like before would happen. So he corrected his past mistakes and tried to achieve better results.

But what is this? When I came face to face with their father in real life, I felt a strange sense of floating, as if I was in a dream.

Which one is the real reality?

[Mores.]

At that time, Seonghwang spoke to me in my head.

[Pull yourself together. I know you are very confused right now. But you must not forget what you must do.]

A thing to do.

[We must go back. Same time and place as before.]

Yes, I know. father.

Because I had a feeling that it would be like that.

"... Phew."

Seongjin let out a small breath and took a step.

"Priest Bart."

As I carefully pulled his sleeve like before, the feeling I felt in my hand was a light weight that evaded the laws of the world.

"... .."

Nevertheless, when Seongjin realized that the unfamiliar sensation was just a pleasure, he fell into a strange feeling.

* * *

[Lee Seong-jin! Seongjin Lee!]

As the group sat together in the restaurant as before, the Demon King sent his thoughts to Seongjin and informed him of the incident.

[Look here! It's really strange! I can sense the laws of the normal world in that man named Bart!]

Demon King, you really have no memories of the past.

Knock knock.

After calming the demon king by lightly tapping on the lamp, Seongjin carefully examined the holy homunculus.

Another person who appeared on the TV said nothing. Stubbornly keeping his mouth shut is the same as before.

Nevertheless, Seongjin was able to sense a subtle difference in his attitude from before. When I think back to him before, he seemed very embarrassed that he couldn't even respond properly because he was trying to hide his identity.

But what about now?

"... .."

Under the calm atmosphere, I can feel his eyes, hidden behind a hood, occasionally touching my face as if searching.

[Lee Seong-jin, be careful! There's something strange about that kid. It clearly appears to be a spirit from the normal world, and a strange light like divine power is flowing out of it! What on earth is it?]

Listening to the Demon King's trembling voice, Seongjin slowly stood up. In order to start a conversation with him, it was necessary to first move to a place just for the two of us.

"... If it's uncomfortable for others to see, I'll order the meal to my room. "Priest Bart, please go to the room together first."

Then, the informant, who had been anxiously watching what he was doing, looked startled and blocked his path.

"Sir, I am embarrassed to tell you, but Priest Bart is not very good at the imperial language. So, I will be by your side-"

Seongjin looked at the informant with a sullen expression.

What on earth was this kid going to do from earlier? Isn't your job just to protect your father? But what? They say they just want to talk as a family, but why are they always acting like a child who gets

their candy taken away?

"But you understand the imperial language 'very well.' 'Isn't that right?'"

"yes? Ah yes. That's true, but... .."

After casting a quick glare at the confused informant, Seongjin left the restaurant with Seonghwang. Of course, I didn't forget to ask Owen to bring food from the Pangea Chronicle.

"Ah, owner. Give that Barshain a barn and give him some porridge."

Seongjin, who had properly dealt with the barbarian, returned to the inn room with many unresolved questions.

The best room in the only inn in Terre. This is the space where the strange time experience first began.

Percussion.

After closing the door, Seongjin leaned against the door as before and sang a cheer.

"father."

However, unlike before, when he answered immediately, he did not respond to Seongjin's voice. He just looked at Seongjin blankly, took off his hood, and slowly sat down in front of the table.

"... .."

Just as anxiety creeps up beneath the uncomfortable silence, a soft voice rings in my head.

[Don't worry, Mores. You won't get any answer now. In any case, we must save 'cause and effect' so that the world does not collapse.]

"Do you care about cause and effect?"

That was the reason why the original Seonghwang maintained his silence every time,

"Then, father, on 'your' side..." Does this mean you no longer care about cause and effect?"

I couldn't help but be worried. The world she saw for the last time before she parted ways with him in her inn room, a world where everything was falling apart, was vivid before her eyes.

[okay. Now I am quite free from cause and effect.]

The word 'freedom' somehow doesn't sound like a very good thing.

But Seongjin couldn't ask any more details. Soon after, the excited inn owner ordered a hearty dinner. It was exactly the same time as before.

"ha ha ha! "If you need anything else, let me know anytime!"

widely.

Once the door was closed, Seonghwang slowly began to eat alone. Even though Seongjin didn't recommend it, he did it as if he had to.

'Father, you know something too.'

But this is just Seongjin's guess. It's just that I keep such a heavy silence.

Thanks to that, Seongjin, who had nothing else to do, sat down across from him and silently watched him eat.

However, this place was not completely quiet.

[Lee Seong-jin! What are you doing now? That guy, there's something dangerous! That's strange! Also, why does your face look so similar to your father? Don't do this, let's run away from here!]

There was no wind, but the flame in the lamp fluctuated like crazy. The demon lord is so scared that he is causing a fuss.

Seongjin calmly comforted the boy by throwing him a piece of meat as before.

"It's okay, Demon King."

[It's okay, what! Because you couldn't see that strange soul with your own eyes-!]

"Father."

[...] what?]

"It's not a strange spirit, it's my father."

The guy, who was momentarily dazed because he couldn't accept reality, suddenly let out a loud scream and shriveled up.

[Heeeeeee?!]

Why not? Just when he thought he had finally overcome the presence of the Seonghwang that had descended on Seongjin's mind, another Seonghwang appeared before his eyes!

The Demon King's flames in shock freeze pale. If things continue like this, I feel like it might go off soon.

"Hey, hey. Wake. "Eat this and cheer yourself up."

Seongjin sighed and had no choice but to diligently throw food to the demon king like before.

[Yes, Mores. Then it's okay. Just stay here and wait for the 'branch' time.]

quarter.

I had a feeling that it was an important clue. With his eyes, Seongjin looked at the Holy Homunculus eating, and with his ears, he paid close attention to the voice in his head.

[Fortunately, there is still some time left. Thanks to you, I think I can give you some explanation about what just happened.]

Then, Seonghwang's tableware slows down slightly.

For a moment, Seongjin became convinced that his father in front of

him was listening to their entire conversation.

Meanwhile, the voice in my head was busy making various requests.

[Please remember, son. The fact is that I have been with you at Tere's inn all this time.]

"yes?"

Seongjin couldn't understand and asked a question.

"No, father. What is that now... ..?"

[This means that if the same result is placed before your eyes, there is no longer a need to investigate the cause and process one by one. Please keep in mind that such unwavering confidence is the way to connect all uncertain elements into one world.]

"... .."

[Also, know that the new experiences of the past few days are no different from the previous ones. In the end, all of these things exist at the same time in the same space and time, and are flowing in the same direction, but they do not flow at all and are fixed. You must always keep that fact in mind.]

"no... .."

Seongjin somehow became anxious. This is because the voice that suddenly poured out felt like a farewell message from him. Now, the problem was no longer just random content.

"Why are you doing this all of a sudden? What's going on in that world? Please answer me, father!"

However, instead of answering the question, Seonghwang left his last words a little urgently.

[Don't forget, Mores. The reason I leave the entire future to your judgment is because I already know the consequences that will occur.]

"Uh, uh... .."

[So there is no need to be frustrated no matter what happens in the future. You always did your best in everything, and ultimately achieved satisfactory results -]

At that time, [Branch] came without warning. A few days ago, it was exactly the same time when Seongjin took Dacianus's secretary out of his arms.

hook-!

With a momentary sense of emptiness in my mind-

Rattling!

A round object suddenly appeared and fell from Seongjin's front door onto the table, making a loud noise.

Tuk!

Deguru... ..

It was the sound of another world falling cruelly.

* * *

Blink.

Seongjin blinked and watched the movement of the unfamiliar stone.

Degurururu... ..

The small stone glowed brightly like a jewel and drew a circle. Then it gradually loses speed and soon stops in front of Seongjin.

Originally, this was probably where Dacian's secretary would have been placed.

Seongjin unconsciously felt in his arms and reaffirmed the fact that the secretary was no longer here. Now, in the place where the book was, there is only one dark gray gem, like soft crystal, shining.

"... .."

And finally, the business before our eyes showed a change.

He stopped eating altogether and stared at the jewel. The mineral eyes that glowed brightly under the backlight made him look like a precise machine that could read an enormous amount of information at once.

Seonghwang, who had been blinking for a while, finally opened his mouth in a low voice.

"It's okay, son. "It is all over now."

Seongjin looked at the homunculus in front of him with slightly shaking eyes.

okay. There is no doubt about it.

That presence, that voice.

After all, that person is my father.

"... father."

But why do I suddenly feel so choked up when I try to call him?

"Yes, Mores."

Seongjin had to feel both relief and emptiness at the same time at the answer he heard so obediently.

"What are all the things I've seen so far? Is it all an illusion? Or did I change the past?"

"Didn't you tell me? There is no need to think deeply. "I just saw what I wanted to see, and it all happened."

Uh, okay. I definitely heard that at first.

-Now it all depends on what I want to see. Mores.

But I'm still confused. Such a strange feeling, as if I had gone back

several days in time, or as if I had stayed in this place forever.

Seongjin asked the question again with an anxious face.

"Then, father, where am I now? Is this a world where Lord Masaine's soul is shattered, or is it a world where all his mistakes have been undone? "Which is my real reality?"

Then Seonghwang put down the silverware, looked straight at Seongjin, and asked.

"Well, son. What do you think?"

"... .."

Seongjin unconsciously kept his mouth shut. I didn't want to hastily decide which one was reality.

No, it would be more correct to say that I am afraid. The moment I answer without thinking, I feel like I will create an irreversible fate for myself. Because of a moment's mistake, Sir Martha In would once again suffer irreversible damage to her soul.

"It's a wise decision."

As if he understood Seongjin's thoughts, Seonghwang smiled slightly.

"Mores."

"... "Yes, father."

"Look at this."

Seonghwang stretched out his hand and pointed to a small jewel on the table.

"What does it look like in your eyes?"

"milestone... is it?"

Seongjin instinctively realized this. The fact that this is a milestone that you created yourself.

It was completely different from the bright red jewel my grandmother left behind. It's probably different from the milestone that Seonghwang would have created someday.

A gem that shines in dark gray and is both cloudy and clear at the same time.

-From now on, I will show you directly how a true 'Dacion' is made.

It was exactly what it said.

The times Seongjin has experienced over and over so far were actually the process of everyone creating this milestone.

"..."

Another possibility that can no longer exist in the world.

When I gently picked up the brightly shining signpost, I felt a strong sense of longing and sadness that was difficult to explain along with the cold, inorganic touch.

451

451. Dacion (8)

Sweet.

During a moment of silence, Seonghwang lightly pulled a plate in front of him.

It is a starling dish that is smoked once and then grilled until the skin becomes crispy. It was the signature dish of the inn that the owner was quite confident about.

"... .."

Seongjin quietly followed the sight of him moving the dishes with his eyes.

In the previous time, Seongjin actively recommended the dish and even served it to him himself.

And the current Seonghwang, coincidentally, was cutting out a part that exactly matched the part that Seongjin had cut out at the time.

Seongjin thought blankly.

'No, it can't be a coincidence. 'What else does that action mean?'

Is it slowly reliving memories that I did not experience directly, or is it that I want to eliminate even a little sense of disconnection from the past?

Maybe it's both.

"Mores."

At that time, Seonghwang opened his mouth.

"What just happened is just one of many ways to create milestones. Of course, if you dig deeper into the underlying principles, you could say that they are all the same method in the end."

He moved the tableware and calmly added an explanation.

"The reason why what you have created this time is your milestone is because you are the one responsible for all of these things. Inevitably, I had to borrow a third party's perspective this time, but if you get used to it, you will be able to do it on your own from now on... .."

Then he stopped talking and stared for a moment at Seongjin, who was still silent with a stern expression.

"... "It's still confusing."

Seongjin nodded honestly.

"Yes, it is."

"okay."

Seonghwang seemed to be lost in thought for a moment as he put a piece of cut starling meat into his mouth. After finishing off the small amount of food he had prepared, he put down the utensils and continued speaking.

"If you do, Mores, I will use the interlude to tell you an old story."

"... "A story?"

"okay. "Once upon a time there was a famous prophet in Ionia."

Seongjin's expression became subtle. This explanation of borrowing a story is a method that Seonghwang often used to save some of the causality.

But why? If I were to listen to his voice, another voice came to mind, one that explained Dacianus without hesitation, without hesitation in the backlash of cause and effect.

"He tried to generously give his abilities to others. That's why he had

relatively strong trust among people."

According to Seonghwang's explanation, the prophet was moderately selfish, but he still had an altruistic nature that basically sought to help others.

Therefore, he could not easily overlook the dangers of the people around him, and tried to get a better future by intervening whenever possible.

As a result, many people who heard his prophecy were able to be saved.

"Was he of the Kornsim clan?"

The moment he heard that, Seongjin's intuition flashed strongly.

"Are you sure it was the Oracle of Kornsheim? "Another oracle who lived in Ionia long ago, before the clan migrated to Delcross."

"... "Maybe it's not that important now."

Seonghwang trailed off, but Seongjin read a faint light of positivity on his face.

"Then one day it happened. The Prophet was suddenly falsely accused and brought to trial. His most trusted friend sold him out. "It was a tragedy that the prophet could not have foreseen and had never even thought of as a possibility."

Due to the unexpected betrayal of a close friend, the Prophet suffered indescribable horrors. His body was so crippled that it looked like he was not alive, and he lost his family and friends all at once.

When all the hardships ended, the prophet, who had barely survived, shed tears of blood and lamented. He could predict people's future and change the outcome, but he was not able to predict his own future properly. How can he then call himself a prophet?

"So the prophet, in deep despair, tried to end his life by stabbing his own heart."

Seonghwang's eyes deepened a little as he spoke up to that point.

"But right after his death, for some reason, he opened his eyes again with a normal appearance. "At his old house, one morning before the whole tragedy happened."

"... "The Prophet has returned to the past."

Seongjin focused on the story with an anxious expression. She's going back in time, and she's literally exactly like what she went through.

"Yes, Mores. The Prophet has truly returned to the past. "The moment he first realized that fact, he was filled with joy and burst into laughter without stopping."

It can be reversed. You can make all your mistakes disappear!

After that, the Prophet did what he had to do. Before Chinwoo sold himself, he struck the player and brought him to trial. By creating false evidence, he was able to completely bury his friend and successfully remove himself from some suspicious eyes.

He saved the family he had lost and took everything from the traitor and made it his own. The tragic past was successfully changed.

"Then at some point the prophet realized. "In fact, he may have been mistaken all along."

"mistaken... .."

"Yes, it's an illusion. Did he really return to the past, or did he just vividly foresee the terrible future to come? At least the prophet was no longer able to distinguish between the two on his own."

It might have been. Regardless of whether the ability to go back in time exists, the result would have been the same anyway. In the end, for the prophet it makes no difference which side is true.

Didn't another father say that too?

-It means that as long as the same result is placed before your eyes, there is no longer a need to investigate the cause and process one by

one.

And he also said this. Only such unwavering certainty can connect all uncertain elements into one world.

Seongjin silently looked down at the milestone he was holding in his hand.

It has everything in it. Other possibilities that existed at the same time, even if only for a short time, are now a sad world that no one but yourself and Seonghwang can remember.

"..."

Seongjin traced the cold milestone with his fingertips for a moment before opening his mouth.

"Hana father, that's a little strange."

"weird?"

"Yes, it is. According to the prophet, the [branch] dividing the two possibilities must always exist in the past, before anything happened. Only then can it become true foresight and become an opportunity to change the planned future. But this..."

Seongjin raised his head and looked directly into Seonghwang's eyes.

"This time, the time after time had already passed, that is, after everything was concluded, became [a quarter]. If so, isn't this just a change of the past and no longer 'wisdom'?"

"..."

"Rather, this time, with the divergence as the starting point, the already divided world became one again. If you do that, you should rather say 'convergence' or 'combination'. How can this be called a 'branch'?"

Then Seonghwang smiled faintly without answering. That expression felt like this to Seongjin.

-Didn't I already give you the answer?

... what? Have I missed anything so far? Seongjin, who was pondering the conversation with Seonghwang, suddenly remembered the urgent explanation he had heard in his head.

-In the end, all of these things exist at the same time in the same space and time, and are flowing in the same direction, but they do not flow at all and are fixed.

iced coffee. Only now did Seongjin fully understand what he was saying.

okay. Although it didn't hit me intuitively, I was able to at least understand his logic with reason.

"therefore... .."

Seongjin calmed his slightly trembling voice and answered his own question.

"Is this what your father said? Does it mean that a world with different possibilities being divided into two is no different from a world that was already separated converging into one again?"

"... .."

"Because it doesn't matter what comes before or after? Time is... Because it's not actually flowing somewhere?"

"... Yes, Mores."

Seonghwang nodded heavily.

"It is indeed so."

* * *

Seo Yi-seo was currently sitting in a luxurious drawing room. It was a place similar to the scene of 'My Room', which she had carefully decorated by purchasing a bunch of her paid items.

There is even a handsome man sitting across from him, as handsome as a picture. Originally, this would have been a very exciting situation.

Still, she wasn't happy at all. This is because her man has been constantly making annoying demands on her since before.

[You bastard. No more ramen. Imagine another delicious dish you know.]

[Wow, what a catch! Mr. Cadmus. Isn't that really too much?]

As my anger grew, my voice became sharp without me realizing it.

[I have a proper name, 'Seo Yi-seo'! Shouldn't you please be aware of the situation in which you are renting a house without your permission, and treat the landlord more appropriately? yes?]

[joy!]

But the man didn't care and snorted lightly. What was even more infuriating was that even the way he proudly raised his head was like a pictorial.

'Give me! If you're going to use that face like that, ask for me instead! 'You character-breaker!'

The man's name was Cadmus. He was once a great man, the first ruler of Del Cross, a hero of national salvation, and even called a demigod. Of course, now he is just a nuisance eater who unintentionally lives on Seo Yi-seo's body and a narcissist with a seriously oversized ego.

Still, he seemed to have the ability to proudly call himself a god. Cadmos, who has been diligently exploring Seo Yi-seo's mental world for some time, has suddenly created a space in his thoughts similar to the old 'My Room' service.

And now, he is urging Seo Yi-seo to constantly think of delicious food. It seems that she plans to borrow her imagination and lead a gourmet lifestyle that she was unable to achieve during her lifetime, even if only in the world of flames.

[Oh, look! Why do you not feel satisfied no matter how much you eat? You said you were a god, but were you actually a beggar god who starved for a thousand years?]

[noisy! Instead, lately, have you not been giving your body proper attention during meal times? If you keep resisting, your body may be taken away forever. You dead thing!]

[omg... What a dead thing! Isn't what I'm saying too harsh now?]

Seo Yi-seo pouted, but soon acknowledged the difference in power with him and obediently imagined a small pot dish.

Thick red soup. And the chewy rice cake and flavorful fish cake submerged in it.

[...] What? What is this strange thing?]

Seo Yi-seo straightened her shoulders and steadied her voice as she faced the masterpiece created from her specific imagination.

[Ah, don't you know? This is called 'Tteokbokki'. It's even the best, topped with the divine ingredient called mozzarella cheese!]

[...] You insignificant creature. Listening to your strange way of speaking makes me feel irritated.]

Cadmus' pupils tighten as he glares at Seo Yi-seo.

She was immediately taken aback by those creepy eyes, and quickly lowered her tail and bowed her head.

[Ah yes! Radish, this is a very delicious dish! I can't speak first, so let the great Cadmus take a bite first.]

[...]]

[...] Hehe?]

Cadmus seemed quite displeased with her attitude, but since there was a new dish in front of him, he seemed to have decided to just ignore it.

He stirred the pot with the clumsy chopsticks he had recently learned. Then he picked up a small rice cake dripping with red juice and carefully put it into his mouth.

[Uhm...]

what? The expression isn't that bad, is it? I think it suits my taste quite a bit.

So Seo Yi-seo tried to ask him directly.

-how is it?

And she actually said this.

[How/uh, huh/uh/when/when?]

'... hmm? Didn't something strange just happen?'

I don't think you particularly bit your tongue or particularly stuttered? Seo Yi-seo tilted her head, and Kad Moss' face instantly stiffened.

widely!

He put his chopsticks down on the table, stared off into the distance and growled softly.

The vertically torn iris shines bright gold, and sharp fangs protrude from the corners of the mouth. It was evidence that he was currently very uncomfortable.

[The time of this great demi-god is being controlled by that evil thing... This is such a dirty thing!]

* * *

And at the same time. The northernmost tip of the continent.

A woman who was sitting at the entrance of a cave looking at the snowy landscape turns her head towards the south in surprise.

She was a strangely dressed woman with her face completely covered

by a sword veil. Her form-fitting black dress flows down to her ankles, and her raven-black hair waves softly below her waist.

In such a cold snowstorm, she gazed endlessly somewhere with her veiled gaze.

[...] okay. Then it will be okay.]

Eventually, she muttered in a low voice.

Although her lips did not move at all, her voice, full of loneliness, echoed in all directions without the air as a medium.

[So, Mores. Please change your time and make my long-cherished wish come true.]

452

452. Kaya's Breath (1)

A realm of rest where cold silence flows.

Martha stood silently for a moment and looked around, suddenly feeling a strange sense of floating, and rubbing her eyes as hard as she could.

No, now that I had become a soul, there were no longer things that could be called eyes or hands that could rub them.

However, her Bion, which retains its appearance as it was when she was alive, will inadvertently reproduce with her soul the habits she had when she was alive, even if she is slightly distracted.

'what?'

Martha, who had concentrated her strength in the spirit, looked around, overcome by a jarring sense of discomfort. You can see the tombstones being smashed to pieces. Bodies thrown here and there, and the land roughly dug up.

Although there were no significant meteorological phenomena in the realm of rest, the scene before my eyes looked as if a huge typhoon had swept through.

'... ... '

And in the center of it all, Hayes and Belinda, the culprits of this mess, were spread out in harmony. After making a fuss, he woke up from his sleep and was hit by the Wolf King, who passed out.

Since the essence of my soul has been hit, it will probably take quite some time for me to come to my senses.

'But something is different.'

okay. If the cause and effect were so clear, Martha felt a strange sense of awkwardness from all this.

'Let's think about it carefully.'

Have they been fighting here from the beginning? Or did they clash a little more in the center of the area?

'or not... ..'

Was it really the Wolf King, Nebraska, that punished them? Could it be that he was crushed and flattened by the hands of a giant corpse woman?

Then, Marta was finally able to find the starting point of these confusing memories.

'... that's right. The beginning was definitely the soul of that noble person.'

In the realm of rest, a soul appeared so brilliantly that even my spiritual eyes could not gaze at it properly. That was the start of all this confusion.

The spirit appeared without any warning and seemed to stare at its master's throne for a moment. Then, it seemed to slowly walk around the outskirts of the realm of rest and soon disappeared.

It goes without saying that Hayes, who had always had a strong antipathy toward him, was extremely enraged. As he was wandering around, he accidentally started arguing with Belinda, which soon led to a violent clash and a big commotion.

Meanwhile, the wolf king Nebraska, who had been hit by a piece of a flying tombstone, woke up from a deep sleep and shouted fiercely...

... .

'... 'No, no.'

Martha shook her head.

It was difficult to explain, but strangely enough, she had another strand of memory that corresponded to the same time period.

A sight where the shining soul, instead of hovering around the outskirts of the realm of rest, was coming straight towards the center of the realm, that is, the master's throne. A sight that constantly sends soft thoughts towards its sleeping owner.

Because of this, the clash between Hayes and Belinda occurred in the center of the area. And the giant corpse woman who raised her body to stop them...

For Martha, it was two memories that could never coexist, unable to distinguish which one was reality and which one was a dream.

[...] huh?]

Then, suddenly, in Martha's spirit, new souls that had not existed before appeared. It was on the outskirts of the realm of rest, the exact spot where the soul of that noble person had stayed just moments ago.

'Did he bring you here?'

Martha knew very well that he sometimes brought poor souls from the earth here as if to take refuge. Wasn't she also one of her souls saved in that way?

So she flew towards them with a somewhat happy feeling, as if welcoming a new friend. Of course she didn't get very far and she had to stop on the spot.

'They...' ... !'

Martha was very embarrassed. This is because all the souls she looked at up close had strange appearances.

[buy... Save me...]

[Qui... Kui... Kwiik...]

Surprisingly, they were souls with half-rotted Bions. In such an

imperfect state, without any proper reason, I am just staggering around in place, scattering my imperfect thoughts in all directions.

'The soul... 'It's rotting?'

How can that be? The essence of the soul should not be damaged at all, so how on earth does a person have to die to look like that?

[eww... uh... uh...]

Anyway, those souls looked very painful. Because I kept squeezing myself while letting out strange moans.

'... ... !'

Fortunately, before Martha felt pressured to do anything, they assimilated into the realm of rest and slowly fell into sleep.

Looking at the souls sinking to the floor, she breathed a sigh of relief. The damage to my soul seems so serious now, but if I spend a long time sleeping like this, I will be able to recover like before someday. Just like all the other broken souls did.

[Wow, this is true.]

At that time, a strong thought sounded like thunder from above Martha's head.

[I thought it was a bit noisy, but while this old woman was sleeping soundly, new brothers came in.]

Creak...

With a large vibration shaking the area, the giant's corpse slowly moves.

A huge skinny body, crumbling flesh, and an old muslin dress covered in gray dust.

Martha looked up at her blankly, shedding tears at the sight that was both unfamiliar and familiar at the same time.

[...] Mr. Hexenjavat.]

Then the corpse woman, half-rising, looked down at Martha as if it was somehow amusing.

[You know me?]

[...] yes. That's strange. I don't know why, but Hexenjavat, I definitely have memories of you.]

Then the corpse woman let out a sound that sounded like a whimper or moan. The cloudy cornea was moving hard from side to side, which seemed like he was trying hard to dig up a vague memory.

[Of course, this old man is also a little confused. Actually, I also remember greeting you warmly. Did you say Martha?]

The corner of the mouth, half collapsed due to decay, depicts a strange smile that encompasses the conflicting elements of ferocity and kindness.

Looking at her like that, Marta couldn't help but recall the questions she felt from the strange spirits she had just encountered.

Even after death, they are unable to escape their bodies, and eventually their souls are decaying.

How?

[Ah, it looks like the poor souls were saved again this time.]

After examining the new souls who were already in a deep sleep, the woman confirmed that there was no abnormality in the realm of rest and laid back down.

[It's really foolish. How can people who don't have the ability to do so fearlessly pursue immortality?]

[Is it immortal?]

In response to Martha's question, the corpse woman slowly blinked her eyelids.

[That's right. If you look at those pathetic things, you can't help but notice them. It's not much different from this old woman's unsightly behavior, is it?]

[...]]

[However, our master was not impressed by even such insignificant souls.]

The woman looked kindly at her master's throne for a moment, then slowly closed her eyes and muttered.

[He is merciful, truly merciful...]

* * *

"... hmm?"

Seongjin looked around.

what? Didn't someone just whisper something in your ear?

"what's the matter? "I'm a newbie."

As I was trying to calm down, Owen asked me curiously and handed me a drink.

"... "No, nothing."

Except for the two assassins who had been hiding in the same place ever since arriving in Tere, no significant changes were detected around the inn.

Seongjin tilted his head and went back to eating.

A timeline that was suddenly separated and then reunited.

There were a mountain of questions that needed to be resolved, but Seongjin couldn't dwell on them any longer. Soon after, Owen, carrying a lot of food, came in with a bright expression on his face.

Kwaang-!

-Newbie! This time, I found a new quest again! I didn't know there were so many food quests hidden in the Green Zone, did you?

Since the newly delivered shortcake was quite edible, Seongjin was soon able to put all the troubling issues behind him.

Yum Yum.

"how is it? Are you fine?"

"Well, okay."

"Haha, by the way, you secretly like sweet things?"

The problem was that it was a success.

He hurriedly put the hood back on, but was unable to withstand the pressure of Owen, who was grinning and offering fishcakes to him, so he had no choice but to pick up a piece of fishcake. Of course, with his face completely covered, he had to carefully get it under the cloth.

"... .."

Although it was an extremely passive attitude towards eating, Owen was pleased anyway.

"This is my first time seeing Father Bart eating something. "I was always worried about the priest's health, but I'm glad that he was able to enjoy the food."

"... .."

"Oh, here, would you like to try some of this too?"

Owen, who was happily watching Seongjin and Seonghwang's meal, suddenly let out a sound that seemed like a bolt from the blue.

"hmm. Somehow, when I look at the priest, I feel like I am serving a meal to my father, which is nice. Ah, I have decided! "If we return to the ecliptic this time-"

"... Cough!"

"Cough!"

Owen panicked at the sound of coughing coming from both sides at the same time.

"Huh? Newbie, what's wrong with you? Priest Bart? Why did the priest suddenly... Are you okay?"

"Cluck, cluck!"

Seongjin, who was completely shocked, glared at Owen with an absurd expression. Is that kid really smart, or is he clueless?

It was right around that time. Seongjin sensed a strange current from the assassins on the roof.

'Another assassin has appeared. He seems like a pretty cool guy.'

The three assassins seemed to have gathered in one place and muttered something. Afterwards, the life begins to become more and more intense.

"... .."

As Seongjin stands up and fixes the nutcracker, Seonghwang casts a worried look towards him.

Seongjin was able to intuitively realize the meaning of that gaze. It was not simply a concern about one's own safety in the present, but a concern about the much more distant future, about one's choices and the resulting causal effects.

"It's okay, Priest Bart."

After responding to his silent request, Seongjin gave instructions to Owen as if it were obvious.

"Owen."

"huh?"

"I'm going to go out for a while to get some fresh air, so you can stay by my side and watch over Priest Bart. okay?"

Then Owen, who blinked for a moment, nodded obediently for some reason.

"Okay. "Come back."

Seongjin picked up the small lamp for the last time and then lightly launched himself towards the window.

Whilick-!

As soon as the boy's presence disappeared as if it were a lie, Owen looked around and was amazed.

"Newbie, that guy's Auror concealment is truly amazing every time I experience it."

Seonghwang quietly glanced at Owen. Then, as if he knew what he was thinking, Owen replied, rubbing his nose in embarrassment.

"Ah, why are you letting the newbie go alone this night? Well, when that guy makes a face like that, I somehow feel like I should listen carefully. "I'm not sure why."

"... .."

Seonghwang thought again. He said he was often confused as to whether his godson was really perceptive or not at all.

* * *

Number 21 was wandering the streets of Tere alone at night. The plan was to use the interlude to find at least a shabby wagon.

'Now that we have met the princes safely, it can be said that Your Majesty's purpose has already been achieved. If you do that, now you can hurry and head to Regina.'

For some reason, assassins are already wandering around the inn. It seems like they haven't figured out their identity yet, but there was

no good point in wasting any more time here.

Of course, finding a carriage in this poor town was difficult.

'It would have been simple if only I could borrow the power of the guild... ..!'

However, this is the northern part of the continent, a place where the power of the Free Underpass is deeply entrenched. This is an area that is largely outside the scope of the guild's activities.

'Would it be better to walk for a day like before and then look for the carriage hidden in the canyon?'

Although No. 21 was worried for a moment, he quickly shook his head.

'No, that's only possible before attracting the attention of the Freedom Underpass.'

They have already attracted too much attention. Even if it means being a little noticeable, it would be better to get out of here as quickly as possible.

It's not that it wasn't, the village was all about Teosinte until late at night.

"Hey, look at these bright colors. "It's as if it grew with gold as fertilizer."

"What about the effect? "If you drink just one cup of this, you will feel energized."

"yes. Just one sip will make you fall asleep as if it's midday. "It truly must be an elixir!"

... What on earth did the prince sell to people?

Number 21 wondered that for a moment, but then passed them by, frowning.

It was when I was wandering around that dark alley. Number 21 met

an unexpected face in front of a half-destroyed cabin.

"Kike."

The person who called him by his old childhood name was a middle-aged woman with a petite figure.

Her body was wrapped in a stealth suit like other assassins, but on the outside, she did not feel particularly powerful. She only gives a glimpse of her unique power through her beautifully shining eyes.

"... "Guild leader Greta?"

Why are you here?

Number 21, who was momentarily dazed by the unexpected encounter, quickly came to his senses and responded.

"It's number 21."

"Yes, number 21."

"Guild leader. Didn't you say you were going to visit the Asean branch for a while? But why are you on terrestrial... .."

Then Creta had a strange smile on her face.

"That was just an excuse. I took some time to come see Benicio. But you can't just say that to your guild members, can you?"

"... ..!"

Number 21's eyes widened as he repeated her words.

"No way, guild leader. In the end, the empire... Have you decided to completely turn your back on His Majesty the Holy Emperor?"

453. Kaya's Breath (2)

Before the fall of Ortona, Greta was born into a commoner family in the capital Brindisi. Perhaps thanks to her diligent parents, her family was not very poor when she was young.

Thanks to this, instead of being forced to work from an early age like other children, she was able to find time to open a book. With just a little effort, she was talented enough to be selected as a scholarship student at the academy.

-Well done, Greta! As long as you graduate from the academy, you will definitely get a good job!

-My family will feel better now!

The day she entered the academy, leaving her happy parents behind, she met Prince Benicio and General Gael for the first time. The two people who will not only change her life but also the fate of the country in the future.

-You are the commoner who received the scholarship? Welcome to admission! I believe that you will become a strong person who will support Ortona in the future! So what is it like? Would you like to join our healthy group where we discuss day and night for the future of Ortona?

Prince Benicio, whose clear, dreamy eyes shine. and-

-Did you say Greta? There is no need to take the prince's words seriously yet. You're a freshman who just entered school, right? So, for now, it would be okay to focus on your studies and find a better group that will help you in the future.

-Wait a minute, Gael! Are you hindering the recruitment of new students now?

- But isn't it true? Even if the prince leaves him alone, this friend's future is bright and bright. Noble families will be competing to get you high wages, and even if you just become a palace administrator, you will be able to rise to a fairly high position.

A senior with thoughtful eyes and a greater presence than Prince Benicio.

-So, don't worry about the prince's flashy words and make the choice for yourself, Greta.

-Hey, hey! Gael! Are you really like this?

Gael Bertrand. From the day she met that person she admired, Greta's life became entirely for him.

I tried to follow the direction he was looking in and feel the passion he had. I wanted to become his hands and feet and follow his steps forever. Because her every action and every word seemed to her like a doctrine more sacred than the sermons of a priest or a priest.

In this way, Greta's life was caught up in a turbulent time. Her later years must have been easier thanks to her successful daughter. She lost her parents, who had such simple dreams, to the hands of the royalists, and yet she fulfilled her duties as a staff member of the republican faction until the last moment.

After a long time had passed, Greta often thought about this. Did he really care about the values of the republican government at that time? Perhaps, in reality, he was just mesmerized by the brilliance of Gael Bertran, a rare hero who would bring a new wind to Ortona?

-Actually, it's okay if you don't become the spiritual leader of the republican faction. just... Help this friend get on with the rest of her life.

That day, as he left Prince Benicio and his party in the hands of the mercenaries, General Gael gave Greta his last words. The reason for secretly stealing Benicio, a key figure of the republican faction, was

the excuse that he should become a leading spirit that would support the republican faction in the future.

However, it was not until the very end that the giant tree, which had been supporting the front line alone for a long time, finally revealed its serious feelings to her.

-Tell them that there is no need to deliberately take on the impossible goal of rebuilding the country.

-General... .. !

-And you too, Greta. Don't try to remain a ghost of the republic for no reason, but really live a life for yourself from now on.

But the life she truly wanted was a life that fulfilled Gael Bertrand's will. Therefore, even after his death, Greta is still trying to carry on his will.

That was the reason why he worked so hard to reach a key position in the guild. To look after Prince Benicio, a close friend whom General Gael wanted to protect more than anyone else. And to achieve the reconstruction of Ortona, the homeland that Gael loved more than anything.

'however... .. '

Absurdly, now, Ortona's future, who must continue General Gael's will, is asking this of her.

"No way, guild leader. In the end, the empire... Have you decided to completely turn your back on His Majesty the Holy Emperor?"

Looking at No. 21, who was feeling vain as if she had been betrayed, Greta suddenly let out a bitter smile. Does that child know what kind of expression he is making right now?

"... That's a very new question, No. 21. "We didn't commit ourselves to the guild for the sake of the empire in the first place, right?"

"That's true, but... .. "

"And wasn't it the same for you? "The reason you stay by the Holy Emperor's side is so that you can avenge Ortona by cutting off his head whenever the opportunity arises."

"... .."

Number 21 purses his lips and makes a slightly complicated expression.

"And let me be clear. What I am doing now is not particularly against the will of the Holy Emperor. The guild completely handed over the northern information network to the Free Underground, but that doesn't mean it gave up on management altogether. Therefore, my involvement in Mr. Benicio's activities is nothing more than coordination of forces, which is what a guild leader should do."

"... "But you probably won't properly report that 'coordination' to His Majesty."

"Hehe, that's an innocent question, No. 21. Do you really think that Seonghwang doesn't know what I'm doing?"

Greta scoffed and looked at No. 21's stiff, stiff face.

"It was I, Seonghwang, who appointed me as guild leader, not anyone else."

There was no way that Seonghwang didn't know about Greta's origins. Wasn't he the one who persuaded the Astros mercenaries who were planning to head south in the first place and stole Prince Benicio and his party out of the civil war?

"And he granted relatively free rein to the guild's activities. "Just think of the 'Monkey Watchtower', which manages the imperial family's information, being separated from the guild and made into the Central Intelligence Agency."

okay. Through that incident, Greta was convinced that Seonghwang had drawn a line with the guild to some extent. So, his occasional anti-imperial activities would already be under his expectations.

It was not a baseless speculation. If there had been no tacit

permission from the Emperor, would the Jayu Underground really have been able to expand its power in such a short period of time?

"So rest assured, No. 21. "This Greta hasn't crossed the line yet."

"... .."

"And as the current leader of the guild, I came here only to help guild members who are in trouble."

Greta slowly raised her arm and pointed somewhere beyond the cabin.

Number 21 concentrated his eyesight as much as possible in the direction she instructed. And soon, in a field a little distance away, she noticed a small wagon pulled by a pair of mules.

"If you understand, I recommend you get on that and leave Tere right now."

"Why?"

"Benicio already knows that you are Seonghwang's exclusive informant. "Wouldn't you be able to guess who you are protecting now that you have left the imperial capital?"

And the situation is likely to be the same for the northern assassination group 'Kaya's Breath' that Benicio is currently operating under his personal control.

"Neither I nor Mr. Benicio want to cause a big commotion between the two groups. "I just want to maintain the balance of power and build a stable foundation for rebuilding Ortona."

After speaking up to that point, Greta's eyes immediately darkened.

"But I can't be sure whether 'Kaya's Breath' will think that way too."

"... ..!"

* * *

Number 21 ran like crazy towards the inn.

'shit! I couldn't leave that person's side even for a moment!'

Because Masain, a high-ranking knight, and princes with outstanding military strength were with him, he let his guard down for a moment. After spending a day at the inn like this, I thought I could get a carriage and get out of here safely.

However, he had to realize that Prince Mores had already attracted too much of their attention.

'Senior No. 13, who was supposed to be by the prince's side, was out of sight all day. I should have thought that was strange a long time ago!'

Number 21, who had already thought of the worst possibility in his head, was praying earnestly in his heart without even realizing it.

'Please, please stay safe until I arrive, Your Majesty!'

However, when No. 21, who was in a state of contemplation, arrived at the inn, what unfolded before his eyes was an unexpected sight.

Three assassins rolling around on the floor, moaning softly -

"... ..!"

A neat boy looking down at them with an indifferent gaze.

"You're late."

The boy, Prince Mores, slowly looked back. The boy's eyes, with his back to the pale moon, shine coldly as if they were a pair of small moons.

"If you are going to escort someone, pay some attention and do it properly."

Just by looking at them, the assassins' skills did not seem that easy. But the young prince very naturally placed them at his feet.

Number 21 asked, trying to hide the agitation in his heart.

"I wonder if they made the assassins like this... "Are you my Majesty?"

"huh."

"You alone, all of them?"

"Do you think it's too much? are you okay. Still, I didn't hit him to the point of death. "If I carelessly take their lives, my father won't be very pleased."

Only then did I realize number 21. The fact that that sly prince knew the true identity of the Holy Emperor from the beginning.

"Cheet-!"

It was right then. The assassins who were crawling on the floor suddenly got up and launched themselves in one direction.

They skipped across the roof and disappeared into the darkness in an instant.

"... ..!"

When No. 21 hurriedly tried to run after them, Prince Mores lightly raised one arm and stopped him.

"Just leave it alone."

"yes? but-"

"I was planning on letting you go soon."

As No. 21 blinked blankly, Prince Mores kindly explained.

"I was waiting to see when they would attempt suicide, but they were persistently looking for an opportunity to escape. In other words, doesn't that mean that there is a way to survive if I just get out of this place?"

"... yes?"

"Yes, you. "He looks pretty smart, but he doesn't really understand what I'm saying."

Still, when No. 21 did not understand, Prince Mores slightly furrowed his eyebrows as if he was displeased.

"That means there are other trustworthy gang members around here. "The manpower that we believe is sufficient to annihilate our group."

"... yes?"

"Even if I am tortured into revealing some information, I am confident that I will silence all of us here within today."

Number 21's face, which pondered the prince's words for a moment, gradually became pale.

"Yes?"

"Well, for an informant from the Monkey Watchtower, he's quite a fussy guy."

Prince Mores shook his head and sharpened his sword.

"No, wait a minute, sir! "If that's true, then isn't that really a big problem?!"

"are you okay. "Because there is a way."

Whick!

Seeing the nutcracker being lightly shaken and blood spattering, No. 21 suddenly felt a strange sense of déjà vu.

'I always thought they were father and son who looked nothing alike...'

The current appearance of Prince Mores reminded him of the mercenary he once admired and followed deep in his heart. A boy who was like a mythical hero, full of extraordinariness and wonder.

"So, I'm going to follow those guys from now on."

"... yes?"

When No. 21 didn't understand right away and asked again, the prince clicked his tongue with a sullen expression.

"Tsk! So what are you going to do? "Are you going to come with me?"

"yes?"

Number 21, who asked again with a dumbfounded expression, was shocked and had to ask again.

"Yesss?"

Are you doing this in your right mind?

No. 21 quickly erased the previous thought from his mind at the suggestion that was so thoughtless.

Well then! There is no way that worldly bastard could even resemble His Majesty Seonghwang at all!

454. Kaya's Breath (3)

"Usually whoever hits first wins. At this point, I'm afraid I'll just nip it in the bud so that it won't do anything stupid again. "I think I need to look for Dasha as well."

Issue 21 was very embarrassing.

Originally, I should have gone back to Seonghwang's side right away and made a report. Assassins will soon arrive, so I have to urge them to leave the village quickly... ..

"No, sir. "Wait a moment-"

"I don't have time for that. Then I go. "It's up to you whether you follow me or go back."

As Prince Mores began to prepare to run by tightly tying the small lamp, No. 21 had no more room to worry. He couldn't bear to send the prince, who fearlessly chased after the assassins, alone.

'I want to be willing to commit lese majeste and drag you away even if it means beating me down... ..'

With that thought in mind, I glanced at the prince, and as soon as I knew how, the evil glare returned.

-You wanna die?

It is not usually a sensitive sense. Who on earth do you resemble, Won?

'I guess it would be impossible to stop the prince with my own strength.'

Number 21 did as his survival instinct as an assassin told him to do, and quietly lowered his eyes and lowered his head.

"... "I will accompany you, Your Majesty."

At the same time, I started rationalizing myself hard in my head.

okay. It would be right to follow the prince here. Isn't it impossible to report that I was foolishly watching someone follow the assassin alone?

'Fortunately, there are people with excellent military skills left by His Majesty's side, including Sir Martha. Even if you leave for a while, there won't be any major problems right away.'

This judgment also played a role in making that decision.

'It's too late to chase after the signs of those who have already run away. But how can the prince track them down? 'I'll just pretend to follow along and then take the opportunity to persuade him to give up.'

However, not long after that, No. 21 realized how optimistic he had been about the situation.

"... ... ?!"

First of all, the speed at which the prince ran was unusual. A speed that is impossible without accurately specifying the destination.

Where is that? Unlike No. 21, who is so busy chasing after him that he can't even hide his traces, the boy is lightly kicking the ground as if his feet are wrapped around the air.

Huh-!

Every time he takes a step, the wind spreads wide to the side, creating a faint buffer zone. The slightly increased density of air soon returns to its original state, and the prince's body is lightly thrown forward again. Without leaving any traces on the floor.

Even though No. 21 opened his eyes, he could not easily believe what

he was seeing.

'What on earth is that technology?'

If you had asked the prince, he would have explained that it was an original auror operation that combined Schneeshuhe with the assassin's unique stealth skills learned from Dasha. Of course, there was no time to even ask questions to the current number 21.

"Hey, can't you go a little faster?"

"Ugh!"

No. 21 gritted his teeth at the prince's carefree urging.

-A dirty world where geniuses eat everything.

Recently, I heard Senior No. 13 lamenting in an uncharacteristic way. but...

'No matter what, I, an elite agent, am being pushed aside by a kid who has been properly trained for less than a year?'

Of course, there was no time to peacefully wallow in self-destruction. If you don't want to fall behind even a little, you have no choice but to use your energy and run after the prince.

But what was even more infuriating was that the prince looked back at him with a disapproving expression and muttered:

"Dasha was much faster."

... Dasha?

Number 21, who was confused for a moment, remembered that it was only Number 13's name.

It was truly unexpected. Number 13, whom Number 21 knows, was always clear about public and private matters, and was a person who did not easily give up his side even to the members of the Monkey Watchtower.

'Senior No. 13. 'What are you thinking?'

In any case, he couldn't always be criticized for his skills by a prince who wasn't even an assassin. Number 21 squeezed out all the aura from his body and spurred his legs.

"Lowering. "If you were going to be in such a hurry, why did you stop me when I first tried to chase them?"

"Isn't it obvious? "We can't let them know that we're pursuing them, right?"

"But isn't there any point in chasing after the presence has completely disappeared?"

Then the prince looks back at No. 21 with somewhat sad eyes. But for some reason, that face didn't seem to resemble the facial expression that Seonghwang showed whenever No. 21 gave the wrong answer as a child, so it bothered me for no reason.

The prince's subsequent interrogation was even more shocking.

"Don't you know where it is?"

"... .. !"

know? Do you really think you know?!

This time, No. 21 suffered a fatal wound to his pride.

"It's a bit weird to say this again, but if it were Dasha... .."

"Ah yes! You truly have no shame, sir! "It's all because of my shortcomings and immorality!"

* * *

Contrary to No. 21's concerns, it seemed to be true that the prince was properly sensing their location.

They ran in a straight line without hesitation and finally reached the entrance to a small, ruined village.

"... .."

Number 21 followed the prince and hid behind a large rock, then carefully looked down at the view of the village.

Looking at the collapsed buildings and completely rotted tree trunks, the village appears to have been abandoned for over 10 years.

However, even in the darkness without a single light, No. 21 could feel the tense atmosphere of the village somewhere.

"... "What you said was correct."

That place is probably one of the hidden bases of the Freedom Underpass.

Number 21, who sensed a faint sign of Auror concealment on the outskirts of the village, made a worried suggestion to the prince.

"First of all, let me go. that... Wouldn't it be better to turn off the lamp?"

"hmm?"

But after hearing those words, the prince suddenly behaved strangely. He untied the lamp from his belt and naturally spoke his words to the flame.

"hey. "Would you like to go inside the soul stone for a moment?"

"... ..?"

Are you crazy?

But before No. 21 could say anything, mysteriously, small sparks flew out. It was as if he was really answering the prince's words.

Number 21's eyes widened.

"Uh, uh. okay. Instead, you should turn off the light and hide well so as not to be detected."

And amazing things happened one after another. No sooner had he

finished speaking than the prince opened the lamp cover and grabbed the small flame with his bare hands!

"I... ... !"

Then, without any sign of heat, he carefully pushes the fireball into the hem of the hood. He had a calm and gentle attitude, as if he were handling a small pet.

gulp.

Number 21 swallowed his saliva without realizing it and asked.

"Well, what is that?"

When I nervously asked if my clothes were going to catch fire at any moment, I was met with a polite, pityful look.

"It's a fire fairy. "Don't you know?"

"fiery... ... ?"

"The ancient fairy who gave me the trials of the Lord."

Oh, now that I think about it, it seems like there was a rumor like that floating around the imperial capital?

As No. 21's eyes shook wildly, Prince Mores clicked his tongue slightly as if he was pitiful.

"Tsk! "You mean, if you become an exclusive informant for the imperial palace, you should at least read the scriptures and fairy tales published quarterly on time."

"Fairytale..."

Number 21 was very unfair. No, he is too busy assisting the Holy Emperor, so who on earth reads fairy tales full of Orthodox propaganda?

"Looks like you need to read more books in the future. Don't be lazy and study whenever you have time."

"... ... ?"

The prince, who uttered such an incomprehensible word, looked closely at the village for a moment, his silver-gray eyes shining. Then he spat out words like a thunderbolt again.

"There aren't that many people yet. "It's probably not all of them, so it would be better to sort things out here first and then go."

"four-?"

Number 21, who screamed loudly without realizing it, soon lowered his voice and whispered.

"Wait! Are you out of your mind? You can't do anything dangerous anymore! "Let's go back now, sir."

"Wow. "He's a guy who naturally talks profanity."

The prince glared at No. 21 with a sullen expression.

"What the hell is the problem? "It would make things a lot easier if we dealt with them while they were off guard."

"What on earth were you thinking to come to that conclusion? "If they aren't ready yet, isn't this our chance to escape?"

Number 21 was also able to clearly detect the presence of assassins moving around the village. At first glance, there are already dozens of people.

At least that's the number of people who didn't use Auror concealment. When you enter the village, you never know how many assassins will come out.

"No matter how perfectly you conceal your Auror, unless you are a ghost, there is bound to be some sense of discomfort. Besides, aren't those over there assassins with extremely sensitive senses? "As long as we move within a limited space, someone is bound to find us first!"

"Ghost?"

"Or bring Dekaron Knight. "Anyway, it's impossible for us to move on our own."

However, in response to No. 21's firm dissuasion, the prince's eyes sparkled as if he had come up with an ingenious idea.

"Ghost! Wait a minute, is that really a good idea? "I happen to have some useful things."

"... yes?"

"Before that, let me ask you one question. Are you by any chance a devout believer in the Lord?"

I couldn't understand why he was suddenly asking this question, but No. 21 answered hesitantly.

"no. "Most people who do what I do don't believe in God."

"okay? good. Then there is no need to appear before the Heresy Tribunal and talk nonsense."

The prince nodded his head in understanding, searched through his collar and pulled out a gorgeous amulet.

At first glance, it was not a workmanship commonly seen in Delcross. A strange design with many round beads studded with it.

'What are you going to do with that?'

But at that moment, something strange happened around them. Suddenly, the air became cold, and an ominous black fog began to creep up from the floor.

"... ..!"

Shooooooooo... ..

The black fog covered the bodies of the two people, and soon even completely covered the rock where they were hiding.

"Lowering... ..!"

Number 21 was embarrassed and tried to jump out through the fog. Then, when she saw the prince's still calm face, she was startled and froze in place.

"This is Prince Mores's doing!"

Now that I think about it, I didn't have any guesses at all. A sinister rumor that was constantly heard among high-ranking priests surrounding the 3rd prince.

However, so far, No. 21 has been ignored, thinking that it is a political slander spread by those who want to promote Prince Logan as the next royal prince.

That's right-

'It doesn't make sense, does it? He is the son of His Majesty with such great divine power that he is called the representative of God. But how can you associate him with the devil?'

However, at this very moment, No. 21 had no choice but to regret his complacent judgment.

In the dreary, cold air, black fog gathers together and eventually begins to create strange shapes.

If that ominous thing is not evidence of an evil existence, then what is?

"hmm?"

But perhaps something didn't go as planned, and the prince tilted his head with a puzzled expression. When it finally broke through the fog and appeared before their eyes, it was not a demon or a monster, but simply looked like a crumpled black carpet.

No. 21 was only able to realize that it was the shape of a person wearing a long priest's robe, leaning forward, when the prince started touching him.

"Hayes. Hey, Hey!"

The prince grabbed the ghost's collar and shook it vigorously, but the black carpet remained steadfast.

[...]]

"Why is this guy like this all of a sudden? "Why can't I come to my senses at all?"

The prince looked down at him for a moment with a disapproving expression, then played with the amulet again.

"what a waste. The wizard's AoE was perfect for those gathered like that. Well, it can't be helped. If it's urgent, I'll call Belinda..."

Sooooo...

A dark ultramarine blue fog rises again.

What appeared this time was the shape of a warrior with a sturdy physique. To be more precise, a warrior who looks strong but not strong, wearing sturdy armor and stretching out towards the sky.

"what? What happened to you two? "Why are they all like this?"

The prince, who seemed embarrassed and kicked the warrior, eventually sighed softly and grumbled.

"Ugh... . I knew it would be like this. "When you say you don't need it, it sticks together, but when you actually try to use it, it's so useless."

It was a remark that, if Hayes or Belinda had heard it, would have made them shed bloody tears out of resentment and resentment.

At that time, the flame hidden under the prince's cloak quickly burst out. Then it started hovering rapidly above his head as if it was trying to say something.

"No, no. "Don't set fire."

Grumble!

I don't know what was said, but the spirit seemed to be angry and burned even more fiercely.

"Oh, I said no! "We need to dig in quietly without getting caught, but are you going to bother us for no reason and make them come out all at once?"

Then, patter!

This time, as if it was dissatisfied with something, sparks scattered randomly by the spirit bounced in all directions.

"But if it can't be done, it can't be done. "Don't talk nonsense and quickly hide inside."

After forcing the flame into the hood, the prince looked down at the village and smiled bitterly.

"I tried to take it easy, but I had no choice. "We have no choice but to sort it out as quickly as possible."

"... ..!"

Ah, yes. In the end, you're going to jump into their lair with your bare body!

'It's absolutely impossible!'

However, No. 21 was also clearly aware of the fact that he could not stop the prince with his own strength.

'Er, I don't know!'

As he bit his lip as he pulled out the dagger, the prince twirled and grabbed the stiletto he had taken from the assassin and winked at No. 21.

"Come on, let's go."

455

455. Kaya's Breath (4)

As expected, something is very wrong with this.

Even as he muffled his footsteps and approached the assassins, No. 21's mind continued to suffer intensely.

'It's not too late, we have to stop Prince Mores now... ..'

'But you haven't even bothered to listen to me until now, right? After all, I should have reported to His Majesty on my own... ..'

'No, this matter has already gone far beyond my discretion. In that case, even if things go wrong, I have to do my best by being by the prince's side... ..'

Then, No. 21 was embarrassed when he realized that he had been handing over the leadership of the operation to Prince Mores.

"... .."

Ah, yes. Originally, this was something that could not have happened.

Even if he showed genius achievements in some skills, they would not be able to replace the prince's lack of experience. Now that things have come to this, from now on, I, who have received formal training, must take the lead...

'there.'

Sasasak.

However, even while his mind was busy, No. 21's feet were steadily moving to another cover according to the prince's hand gesture.

'Stop for a moment.'

'... ... '

As he followed Prince Mores diligently, No. 21 was slowly realizing the true nature of the strange sense of déjà vu he had felt earlier.

Isn't this familiar, like when we once carried out a joint mission following a veteran senior informant?

'No, no. Rather than that... ... '

Perhaps it was a pattern of behavior that had been deeply engraved in his bones long ago, perhaps even from the time he was a Kike.

-what? Let's go into the western mountains? Are you crazy, Bart?

-We also have luggage! There's no way this number of people can properly deal with Hae-soo! Are you willing to voluntarily roll into the den of sea beasts to avoid royalist pursuers?

A boy who silenced the rampaging Astros mercenaries at the time with just one word.

-My hunch is that it is much safer. I can assure you.

presentiment.

For those who know even a little about the prosperity of that time, it is a magic word that is more than enough to cover all incomprehensibility and absurdity.

and-

-Don't worry, Enrique. You are not a burden, you are the most important person in our group. Everyone will fight to protect you, so all you have to do is follow behind me.

... huh!

The person who blindly trusted and followed such a boy.

On that day, Kike, as if possessed, followed Bat to the western

Suddenly, Prince Mores ran forward and urgently threw his stiletto somewhere. He was in a direction in which he had not yet sensed anything within the range of his senses.

'suddenly?'

Let's follow that trajectory with our eyes -

Sigh! An assassin who was patrolling in the distance was suddenly stabbed in the cervical spine from behind and fell down into the bushes.

However, before No. 21 could fully see the bastard's end with his own eyes, the prince was already flinging himself somewhere again, stretching out his arms.

chin! Just before the assassin, who was falling after being hit by a dagger, fell onto the broken pottery, Prince Mores managed to catch his body and at the same time-

Whick!

I grabbed another stiletto from the guy's arms and threw it behind my back without even looking back.

Sigh!

Far away, beyond the shadows of buildings and nothing visible, a dull impact sound was heard, as if a stiletto had been stuck in something soft.

dump!

When the Auror's concealment was lifted due to his death, No. 21 finally realized that another assassin was hiding there as well.

"... ... !"

Number 21, who had been absentmindedly observing the series of processes, finally understood all of the prince's actions.

The assassin he killed. The moment he fell to the floor and shattered

the pottery, those two assassins would have discovered their location.

While No. 21 accidentally killed an assassin, the prince immediately grasped the chain reaction that would result and took action in three directions at the same time.

"Calm down, No. 21."

Prince Mores carefully places the assassin's body on the floor and warns him.

"Yes, sir."

Number 21, who answered politely without thinking, suddenly felt uncomfortable with his own attitude and trembled. Although he had never humbled himself this much in front of other outstanding children of the Holy Emperor, even Prince Logan, who was said to be the youngest Sword Master, surpassing Gael Bertran.

"It would be impossible not to get caught at all. I think it will take too much time. "Even if there is a little commotion, let's break through the center together like this."

His voice was as calm as before, but No. 21 had the feeling that the prince was somehow in a hurry.

"Why all of a sudden... .."

"I don't have a good feeling."

presentiment. The magic word that convinces No. 21 in any situation.

As I looked at the prince in fascination, the silver-gray eyes that were shining alone in the darkness stared straight at No. 21 and gave off a strange light.

"I have to quickly clean up this place and find Dasha."

* * *

Coincidentally, at the same time, Dasha was in a serious crisis. She became a rat trapped in an elaborately narrowing siege, unable to

move.

'How many days has this been going on already?'

Leaning against the broken wall, Dasha looked back at her pursuers, breathing heavily. Masked assassins who showed no emotions and slowly approached with refined movements.

'No matter how much I run, I can't escape him. 'Are those really people?'

Those pursuing Dasha were extremely skilled assassins. Each one of them seemed to have skills comparable to that of Monkey Watchtower's elite agents.

But there was one strange thing. No matter how hard I observed them, there was no sign of them exchanging information with each other.

Judging by the frequent changes in body type and appearance, it seemed that the personnel were replaced regularly over time. But strangely, let alone opening their mouths, they do not exchange any signals.

It seemed like they already knew each other's locations without having to fire a signal or leave a mark.

Also, even if shifts are made, they end up just changing positions without saying a word, like a shadow moving.

Thanks to this, Dasha had been getting the strange feeling that she was being chased by the same assassins over and over again for the past few days.

'... It must be an illusion. 'I'm so tired that I become confused without even realizing it.'

Dasha gritted her teeth and twisted her cheeks hard with her hands. It felt like if she let go of her tension even for a moment, she would lose her mind and collapse to the floor.

It wouldn't be unreasonable. It's already been several days since I

started running away, surrounded by unknown assassins, without being able to sleep or eat properly.

The body has been trained repeatedly to be able to carry out its mission even in extreme situations, but at this point, it is already far beyond its physical and mental limitations.

'Getting out is... 'I guess it's completely impossible.'

Even if you are lucky enough to create an opening, it is unclear whether your body will react properly. After repeating the auror concealment for several days without rest, the auror in my body was completely depleted. Now there was no need to deliberately pay attention to Auror concealment.

Rustling.

Dasha took out the dogma she had hidden in her bosom and pushed it between her teeth. So that you can crush it with your molars at any time and swallow the poison as soon as possible.

As she prepared for the worst, she took a deep breath and focused on the presence beyond the wall.

'Those guys must be from 'Kaya's Breath'. I heard that the North is slowly falling apart, but they still have that kind of organizational power... ..'

There was a time when several assassination organizations controlled the situation on the continent.

A time when the authority of the emperor was not as strong as it once was, and countries that escaped imperial interference were making remarkable progress and leaping forward.

It is these assassination organizations that have gradually grown in size by realizing and promoting people's desires amidst endless political strife and secret struggles.

However, as Ortona, who was the most fiercely involved in political strife, was destroyed in a civil war, and the 17th Holy Emperor, who had unprecedentedly powerful imperial power, took the throne, they

had no choice but to gradually fall into decline.

The assassination organizations that are still in existence today are [Oberon's Hand], which was absorbed into the guild and reduced to a subordinate organization of the Empire's Central Intelligence Agency, and [Kaya's Breath], which was completely pushed to the north and does not even come near the ecliptic. Is it to that extent?

'But in the end, an assassination organization cannot prosper on its own without its followers.'

Naturally, this question could not help but arise.

If 'Kaya's Breath' is not a group that can survive on its own, how on earth does it still maintain its power?

Jeez.

At that time, unusually loud footsteps were heard. The sound of bold footsteps, knowing that the prey is completely cornered, and has no intention of hiding its presence.

"You really persevered. "You're wasting so much time running away, I just want to see someone's face."

It was the first time I heard the other person's voice since the tracking began. He is probably the leader who commands them.

Dasha traced the outline of the dogma with her tongue and listened to the new voice.

"... .."

But strangely, no one answers that question. All I can hear is the voice of a woman talking to herself as she pleases.

"They put it over there? Yes, everyone did well."

"... .."

"No, that's enough. Stop there. "You guys should wait here."

Dasha, who had been listening to their conversation with her ears prickled, suddenly became curious. The masked people haven't said anything so far, so why does it feel like they're talking to each other?

'Besides, I'm sure I heard that voice somewhere...'

At that moment, the image of the other person approaching at a close distance came into Dasha's eyes.

Just then, under the bright moonlight that escapes the clouds, a handsome face wearing a black hood is revealed. The eyebrows are completely shaved off, and the eyes glow beautifully from underneath them.

Dasha's eyes widened.

- No matter how you look at it, the upper management is a miser.

that's right. I've seen that face before. A woman with good-looking, straight eyebrows who used to be employed at the top of Milo.

-Sabrina, you! I will never forget it! How dare you betray my trust!

They were very good at concealing their Auras, and they left a strong impression by exchanging daggers until the moment they parted ways.

Olivier. An elite assassin believed to be a member of [Kaya's Breath].

"... "Who is this?"

Olivier also seemed to recognize Dasha. The eyes, which are particularly prominent under the hollow eyebrows, soon become narrower.

"Yah! long time no see? "I've really missed you all this time!"

The thin lips that gave such a playful greeting are soon torn apart in a long arc.

"Sabri-me!"

Dasha had a premonition of a complete end. Grinding her dogmas with her molars, she said her final farewell to Prince Mores in her heart.

'I ended up here. 'I'm so sorry I couldn't be of help, sir!'

It was when I was just about to bite the bullet.

[wait.]

I heard someone's urgent voice in my mind.

When Dasha, startled, raised her head, she saw the shape of a person in front of her. She was a strangely dressed woman with a black veil covering her face.

"... ... ?"

Surely there was no one there until just now? Dasha rubbed her eyes and looked at her woman, who slowly shook her head.

The meaning of that action, her voice, which was originally not audible, rang clearly in Dasha's mind again.

[do not do that.]

"you are... ... ?"

Right then.

"Gotcha!"

Pow!

With the blunt impact to her head, Dasha lost consciousness in an instant.

456

456. Kaya's Breath (5)

Pi-pi-ik-!

A small whistle spreads through the air.

It was a faint noise barely above the human hearing frequency, but it was a signal that at least close-range assassins could clearly detect.

The assassins who heard the sound all changed direction and began to flock. This had happened several times since before.

'shit... ... !'

Number 21 bit his lip. He hasn't even really dug in yet, but it's already like he's being cornered by them.

I was confident that it wasn't an 'Auror concealment' that would easily be detected, but who on earth is informing them of our location?

'Plus, there are more people than I thought. I should have taken into account that most of them were using Auror cloaking!'

It was a disaster. If we continue like this, rather than taking out all of them, we will be trapped in a siege and face a counterattack.

But at that time, the sound of a whistle was heard again right next to No. 21.

Pick - pick - pick!

The problem is that the person blowing the whistle is not the assassins, but the intruder himself.

'omg!'

Number 21 was scared and snatched the whistle from Prince Mores.

'What on earth is this?! Are you going to tell them our location out loud?'

Why do you always find yourself searching through the arms of dead assassins? If I had known he was going to blow his whistle like this, I would have stopped him a long time ago!

'are you okay.'

However, the prince who actually had the accident had a carefree face.

I roughly analyzed the signals they exchanged, and it doesn't seem like their encryption system is that complicated. For example, I think it starts with the direction, but it's roughly like 'Follow me'.

'Oh, put it away!'

Number 21 got angry at the prince who suddenly hummed a strange rhythm in an urgent situation.

'You're not telling me nonsense that you figured out their encryption system by just listening to a few signals, right?'

In the history of political strife, which has resulted in countless clashes between assassination groups, why was there no attempt to figure out the other side's code first?

No. 21 also received detailed training in [Oberon's Hand] about the development process of codes and how to decipher them.

However, no matter how simple the structure is, it is mathematically impossible to understand the entire and ever-changing encryption system with only some regularities.

'That's true, but... ... '

However, Prince Mores still confidently turns to the center of the

village. He didn't seem to worry that his actions were wrong.

'At least I can remember exactly when, where, and what signal they sent.'

'... I beg your pardon?'

'It means that you can reproduce signals you have already heard in the same way. Just wait and see. 'Because soon there will be trouble among them.'

'... ... ?'

Number 21 was in doubt, but after a while something really strange happened. As if they had made an appointment, the assassins who had been flocking this way changed direction and began to gather near the entrance to the village!

'Come on, let's go!'

The prince and No. 21, lightly hitting the ground, were able to bypass the broken buildings and successfully occupy the back of the assassins again.

Thin daggers that meet almost no air resistance are shot out -

"Tsk!"

"Gagging!"

Once again, assassin Sernot becomes famous.

After killing as many assassins as possible in a split second, they quickly slipped into the shadows of the building before their location could be determined.

'Haha! Look. 'What did I say?'

The prince's cheerfully whispering face looks unusually innocent.

'... ... '

Number 21 closed his mouth and quietly followed him. She was

possessed by a strange feeling, as if she were possessed by something.

Piiiiii-!

At that time, the long, drawn-out whistle sound was heard once again.

This time, I was able to guess the meaning of number 21 without difficulty. It was a pure warning sound that completely ignored the signal system, which was quite different from before.

"Oh my."

Prince Mores pulled out the last remaining stilettos with a slightly helpless expression.

"The response was faster than expected, right? I guess there's a great guy over there. Still, I thought I could use it a few more times, but it's a bit disappointing."

As he said, from then on the whistle was no longer heard. Instead, only the individual movements of the assassins pursuing their presence can be felt.

Well, by now they had gone too far into the center of the village to completely hide their presence with Auror cloaking.

The assassin who suddenly popped his head out from the alley across from me-

"100 million?"

He falls backwards after being hit by a stiletto thrown by the prince. It was a terrifying throwing technique that hit the vital spot between the eyes.

Whick!

As if that was a signal, two assassins came out one after another from the front and back.

While one was swinging a dagger aiming at the prince's neck from

the right, the other one, who was a little away, fired his weapon at the opposite side, that is, towards the prince's left shoulder.

Even if you dodge the first attack by luck, the evasion will ensure that the second attack hits.

"I... ..!"

Number 21 thought that the prince would never escape. But at that moment, something amazing happened right before my eyes.

The prince deflected the dagger with a slight twist of his head and minimal movement, then spun his body around based on inertia and violently kicked the stiletto that flew from behind. It was a movement like a ghost.

"Huh?"

The stiletto, whose trajectory had been greatly distorted, absurdly stuck in the heart of the assassin who came swinging the dagger.

"... ..!"

The guy's eyes widen and he looks down at his chest in disbelief.

But at that time, the prince was already shooting backwards, leaving the guy alone.

Quick!

The sound of a nutcracker being swung with a scabbard shattering the assassin's arm bone rings out.

Before the guy, who haphazardly raised his arm to block the attack, could control his body that was staggering from shock-

Wow!

The nutcracker flew sideways again and sharply rammed the assassin's neck into the wall of the building.

Shut up... ..

With the strange sound of the wind being knocked out, the assassin's eyes turn white. Judging by the way the nape of the neck swelled up in an instant, the carotid artery must have been ruptured from the inside and the cervical vertebrae were crushed to powder.

That wasn't the end. Before the assassin's lifeless body fell completely to the side, the prince gently stole several stilettos from the assassin's arms.

The series of processes continued so quickly and smoothly that No. 21 could not easily accept the sight even after seeing it with his own two eyes.

'... wait for a sec. But why are all the attacks suddenly focused on him?'

As he cut off the head of an assassin creeping out of a nearby hut, No. 21 looked back at the prince with a puzzled expression.

Meanwhile, the prince was steadily reducing the number of assassins by firing stolen stilettos here and there.

Then, Number 21 was greatly embarrassed when he realized belatedly that Prince Mores was no longer using Auror concealment.

'Could it be that they did that on purpose?'

Rather than going out and defeating them one by one, are you trying to save time by making the opponent run this way?

'But they are well-trained assassins. Once he realizes the difference in skill between him and me, he will no longer show himself as honestly as he did before.'

It was as expected in No. 21.

Fit fit fit!

When their location was determined, sharp stilettos rained down from the sky. The assassins gathered on top of the building all fired daggers downward.

Number 21 quickly lowered himself using the collapsed wall as cover.

'... ... !'

Then, he realized that the prince was standing in the middle of the alley where daggers were flying, and he panicked.

'What are you doing now?!'

Bub bub bub!

The stilettos flew violently toward a small target and all stuck like thorns in one person's body. Not exactly the prince, but over the corpse of a comrade whom the prince had dragged up.

Although he had a slim figure typical of an assassin, it was not enough for a young boy to hide himself.

'I... ... !'

Eventually, when the pouring rain stopped-

Sigh.

Prince Mores lightly twisted the corner of his mouth and leisurely retrieved the stilettos that had been gathered in one place. He looked satisfied, like a farmer harvesting fully grown crops.

After gathering the weapons, he lightly winked at No. 21.

'Then I go first.'

'yes? Lowering! Lowering? for a moment... ... !'

Number 21, who belatedly understood the meaning, waved his arms urgently, but the prince had already started running, holding the assassin's body up like a shield.

Strong strength that cannot be attributed to a boy who has not yet grown up. It was proof that he was already naturally flowing his aura into the muscles of his entire body.

Papapot!

A shower of rain falls mercilessly again. Prince Mores, who boldly jumped into the middle of it, threw his tattered shield under the half-broken eaves, that is, as soon as he reached their blind spot. Then, with his lighter body, he kicked the wall and soared upward and upward.

Wow! Ugh! Ugh!

Not long after the prince disappeared beyond the roof, short messages were heard from overhead again. At some point, the rain falling on my head completely stopped.

'... ... '

Number 21 slowly got up and watched in fascination the prince's action unfolding on the roof. Under the bright moonlight, those rough yet simple movements performed solely for the purpose of killing.

'... 'It's like him.'

At the same time, No. 21 began to face reality properly, feeling the clear gap that existed between the memories engraved in his mind and the present scene.

'But also, it's completely different.'

Perhaps he had been equating Prince Mores with someone he knew well. That was probably why he was unable to resist unreasonable instructions and was helplessly swayed by his actions.

However, when the prince began to demonstrate his skills in an open area, it was only then that the fighting styles of the two completely different men could be properly compared.

As if I had poured cold water on it, my mind gradually became clearer.

'Bart, Your Majesty would never have moved in that way... ... '

Nevertheless, it is a well-known fact that the appearances the prince shows now are just as amazing as the boy mercenaries in his

memories.

Is there any other irony like this, to feel that two people are actually similar despite their obvious differences?

Talent, or lineage. Perhaps even more fundamental than that, something essential to human beings that one cannot imitate.

Now that No. 21 had to face the vast gap between them and himself, he became very confused.

* * *

Fit fit!

Stilettos fly out of nowhere again.

However, unlike the first time, the attack was noticeably weaker.

While Prince Mores lightly swatted them away, Number 21, who had identified the direction, quickly rushed in and plunged a dagger into the man's neck.

"Ugh... ..!"

No. 21 sighed, kicking the assassin who was collapsing without even being able to finish it.

'I think I've sorted out most of it now... ..'

Prince Mores must have thought so too, no longer paying attention to his surroundings and starting to walk straight towards a building. It was the very building from which the assassins first poured out.

Following him, No. 21 once again had this question.

'Where on earth did you learn how to fight like that?'

As far as he knew, Prince Mores had learned the standard swordsmanship of the Imperial Knights like any other noble family's son. It can also be seen as a typical training course for knights.

However, no matter how you look at it, its rough and free-spirited

fighting style and its wide perspective of utilizing surrounding objects were far from ordinary knights.

'It's not just that. I also have a clear understanding of my strength and am moving with this in mind.'

There is only one thing that can explain all these mysteries. Compared to his age, he has a lot of practical experience.

'But how can that be? Wasn't it just a flower grown in the imperial palace?'

But as if reading his mind, the prince turned around and lightly opened his mouth.

"By the way, I saw it again, number 21. "You have a lot of practical experience for your age, right?"

"... yes?"

"It's a compliment. "I thought you were a kid, but your skills are quite good, right?"

"... .."

Number 21 was absurd. Isn't that really what he wants to say? What kind of joke is that, as if an older senior is praising a younger student?

However, that appearance also reminds me of the boy mercenary I once was, who was particularly mature.

Wow.

Number 21, who was offended for no reason, responded crookedly.

"... "You're a brat, is that what you're saying?"

"what? "Your gaze has suddenly become very disrespectful?"

"Is that possible?"

The two entered the building, bickering.

"I no longer feel any suspicious signs of popularity. "How about we take a quick look around and return to Tere?"

The prince shook his head at No. 21's suggestion.

"huh? no. "Still, I'll wait here a little longer."

"Why?"

"Well, I don't have a very good feeling... .."

As No. 21's eyes narrowed, the prince grumbled with a sullen expression.

"Tsk! "It doesn't work anymore."

It was absurd. When did he realize that he was particularly weak to that word?

No. 21 came to his senses.

"That is something that should never be said. "I can't stand by and watch any more deviations, so let's go back to Tere."

"So you said your attitude suddenly became profane."

"You must be mistaken. "I am only concerned about your safety."

"I don't think that's true?"

Prince Mores, who was responding like that, suddenly stopped walking and frowned. An expression that seems unclear about something.

"Why are you doing that?"

Number 21, who had already acknowledged that the prince's acumen was superior to his own, asked nervously.

"Actually, there has been something that has been bothering me ever since."

The boy whispered quietly, his voice quiet.

"You can hear whistles all over the village, and although there are guys who respond to the signals, the person blowing them is particularly vague."

"... .."

"It was definitely not an ordinary skill. But so far, I haven't met anyone that great here?"

At that moment, No. 21 felt a chill down his spine.

Does this mean that the assassin so mysterious that he even eluded the prince's spirit is still hanging around here?

"Then the last time you sensed him was...""

This was when No. 21 had just asked a question.

Kwasik!

Suddenly, the thin wooden wall broke, and someone's new model shot out like lightning. Another assassin wearing a black stealth suit.

"... ..!"

Before No. 21 could even follow him with his eyes-
visor!

Before I knew it, the nutcracker pulled out of the scabbard collided with the sword he was swinging, and white sparks flew out. It was a reaction as if he had been waiting.

"haha! "I knew you would show up sooner or later, but-"

Device Geek-

The prince, who had been struggling with the bastard for a moment, twisted the corner of his mouth and let out a wild laugh.

"Why are you so scared to say something? "Don't you often hear people say you don't have enough patience?"

457. Kaya's Breath (6)

visor! Whip! visor!

In the blink of an eye, several battles went back and forth. The speed was so fast that No. 21 could not trace the sword's trajectory with his eyes.

'... 'Double swordsmanship?'

I just barely caught the assassin's weapon in the midst of the storm of movement. If the author had rushed in this direction first, No. 21 would probably have been unable to respond properly and would have given up a vital point in vain.

'He's not someone I can do anything about.'

Prince Mores also seemed to have judged that way.

"No. 21, step back!"

Number 21 obediently backed away.

Just sensing the sharp energy that these two people give off is enough to make your skin feel numb. With the tension stretched to its limit, he couldn't even predict who his hasty movement would harm.

Kaang!

At that time, the prince and the assassin, who clashed their swords violently, were pushed straight to both ends of the room without resisting the recoil.

"... .."

Unable to inflict any significant damage to the other, the two glared at each other in silence instead of clashing again. It looks like they are taking a moment to catch their breath and explore each other.

And only then was No. 21 able to fully see the attacker's appearance for the first time.

The opponent was a woman holding a short sword in both hands. Beneath the sculptural, expressionless face and the assassin's distinctive black stealth suit, the outline of a well-trained, sleek body is visible.

Aura activity isn't that strong, but maybe what you see isn't everything. Rather, it can be said that they have become better at hiding their auras. Even No. 21, who called himself an elite agent, felt that his presence was blurred even when he had the opponent right in front of him.

Auror concealment ability is top notch. It would be safe to deal with him assuming that he is close to the level of Dekaron Knight, who is said to be the most ideal assassin.

No. 21, who figured out that much, was once again amazed at the prince who countered that woman's attack without any hesitation.

'But it's strange. You look so seasoned for your age.'

okay. Considering the prayers and atmosphere they give off, they feel like they are legendary seniors who were given initial numbers.

On the other hand, the woman's face looked excessively young. No matter how you maintain your youth through Auror training, what does it mean to have that smooth face without a single scar? Even if you wash your eyes and look, you won't see anyone who has crossed countless firing lines and gained practical experience.

'How can they do that?'

Prince Mores also seemed to have noticed the sense of discomfort the assassin was giving off.

"that's interesting. "He seems to be very skilled at using auras, but

compared to that, the layer of auras accumulated in his body is relatively poor."

"... .."

"I don't think they eliminated the intact Aurors like Director Bruno did. "What on earth are you doing?"

The prince's bright gray eyes stare intently into the assassin's face. Occasionally, there seemed to be a strange red light hovering in the center of the pupil.

Number 21 didn't realize it, but his gaze went beyond the assassin's young face and toward the inside of the skull wrapped in clean leather.

and-

"... "There is a decision to burn, right?"

Sigh.

As if he had figured out a clear answer, the prince revealed his teeth and smiled eerily.

"I thought so, but that's not your real body?"

"... ..!"

Faaah!

Before No. 21 could understand the meaning of those words, the woman who hit the floor came swinging her sword with a vicious force.

Cough! Kang!

The twin swords engulfed in whitish light clash violently with the nutcracker.

A sword that is sharper and more vicious than before. It seemed that the prince's remarks had greatly offended the assassin.

Grumble!

In response, the nutcracker also burst into flames, engulfed in dark red flames. Even though it was not an easy battle, it was only now that Prince Mores showed his Aurors.

It may have been a measure to protect the weapon from an unexpectedly strong enemy, but-

'... fire?'

Number 21 was quite taken aback by the unfamiliar form of aura burning fiercely in the dark.

Come to think of it, I had a brief conversation with the prince before entering the building.

- But, why don't you use external air? If you don't have any intention of maintaining Auror concealment, it would have been much easier to actively use Auror.

-hmm.

At that time, the prince frowned in embarrassment and answered:

-Actually, officially I'm still staying in Regina."

- So?

Of course, No. 21 also had some idea that he was trying to avoid leaving his mark as a prince. Because I didn't even bother picking out the nutcrackers I was used to, I was only consistently using the stilettos that I had recovered despite the hassle.

But even with weapons and sword techniques, isn't there a need to restrict Aurors?

-But the traces my auror leaves behind are very characteristic. Even so, you received a great blessing from the ancient fairy?

-... yes?

Only now did Number 21 understand the meaning of those words.

The prince's worries were not for nothing. In fact, as the number of exchanges of swords became less frequent, clear burn marks began to appear on the assassin's smooth skin.

Of course, the prince wasn't all that well either. Every time the double swords of the aura-wearing assassin passed by, a thin solid line was drawn on the prince's body and red blood spurted out.

It may be inevitable. Since it is a very close combat at a speed that is difficult to follow with the eyes, the angle of avoidance is also extremely limited.

'The skills seem to be on par... ... '

At first glance, the women seem to be superior in terms of attack speed.

But surprisingly, Prince Mores was not easily caught up in her tricks. Even though it wasn't a convenient distance for her to fight back with her long sword, she gave her space and cut off her attacks appropriately every time.

Plus, the prince's unusual auror.

Grumble!

The strange aura that burned more intensely as time passed, had a way of stimulating the inherent fear inherent in humans just by looking at it.

Chaejaejaeng! visor! visor!

While tracing the tangled trajectory of the swords, creating a dizzying afterimage, No. 21 carefully fingered the dagger in his arms. If it's not possible, I think I should join right away.

Phew!

However, the fight between the two ended sooner than expected. The two people suddenly closed the distance and slashed their swords at

each other with all their might.

"... ... !"

The nutcracker's blade protrudes through the woman's chest.

On the other hand, the woman's relatively short twin swords only lightly grazed under the prince's armpits.

Tuk! visor! Cheer up!

The twin swords slipped from a weak hand and fell to the floor one after another, making a loud noise.

Chiiik!

Acrid smoke rose from the woman's back. With the blade engulfed in flames, the external energy penetrated deep into her chest, shaking her insides and making her run wild. At the same time, the flesh was burning rapidly and the bleeding was gradually subsiding -

Prince Mores did not just sit by and watch.

Quad deuk!

The sword stuck between the ribs was greatly twisted, and a terrifying noise of scraping raw bones was heard.

Eventually, the prince made a large cut in the woman's side and pulled out the nutcracker -

Gulp, gulp.

Blood pours like a waterfall from the concussed heart and lungs. The assassin spewed blood from his mouth and slowly fell to the floor like a doll with its strings cut.

'It's terrible. Not a single groan was shed until the last moment... ... '

After seeing that the assassin's eyes were slowly losing their light, No. 21 took out a simple treatment tool from his pocket and approached the prince.

"Are you okay, sir?"

"hmm."

However, the prince's expression is unusual. His eyes, looking down at the fallen assassin, became darker than ever before.

"No. 21."

"Yes, please do so."

"Well, actually, there's one thing I didn't tell you about in advance because I didn't think it was that important."

"... "What is that?"

Number 21 became somewhat anxious. And that anxiety soon became true. One after another, sounds that he could not have imagined came out of the prince's mouth.

"Actually, I felt several faint traces of people underneath this building a while ago."

"many... "This?"

I can't feel anything?

While the nervous No. 21 was concentrating his senses towards the basement, the prince adjusted his grip on the nutcracker and continued his explanation.

"Uh, that's probably because Auror activity is abnormally low. So I just thought, maybe they've locked up some civilians who are all dying. I did... .."

"... .."

"I think one of them suddenly became very active and jumped out of his seat."

It was at that time that No. 21 detected a faint presence.

"And now it's running here at incredible speed-"

grasp!

As soon as he finished speaking, another assassin jumped out from the half-broken wooden wall. A young female assassin dressed to sleep, holding her short two-handed sword in her hand.

Chachaechaeng! Whip!

As the nutcracker and the two-handed sword became frantically intertwined again, No. 21 looked at the woman, trying to gather his dizzy mind.

'... same person?'

At that moment, No. 21 thought so. However, when he turned his head to check, the assassin from earlier was just lying on the floor like a crumpled rag, completely dead.

'No, but that can't be...' ... !'

It might just be a coincidence. It is clear that she is a woman of similar age, but her body type is different from the previous assassin and her presence is subtly different.

But strangely, Number 21 felt a strange sense of kinship, as if the person who had been in a fierce battle with the prince just moments ago had come back to life. And that feeling of kinship seemed to be the same for the prince who dealt directly with the woman.

Swish swish!

The prince lightly let go of the two-handed sword that was fired in the same trajectory as before, and raised the corners of his mouth.

"haha! This is absurd. Are you using the same person over and over again using the fire crystal?"

"... ... ?"

The prince, who made an incomprehensible sound, suddenly shouted loudly at No. 21.

"No. 21! It's underground! "Look in the basement!"

"yes?"

"There's something down here! "We have to get rid of it first!"

"No, I have to get rid of it, who...""

"If you're not sure, just follow this guy!"

Wow!

As soon as those words were out, a small flame burst out from within the prince's cloak. It was an ancient fairy who had been hiding until now.

The red flame hovered over No. 21's head a couple of times, then disappeared into a narrow gap on one side of the floor. I saw a small ladder hanging over it, so it seemed like it was a secret passage leading to the basement.

'But is it okay if I leave you like this?'

Number 21 looked back with worried eyes. However, even though her minor wounds were increasing, the prince did not show the slightest sign of fatigue.

Perhaps it is because he is exerting a high level of concentration, but the fire in his eyes becomes darker and the flames circling around the nutcracker also become stronger.

"..."

First of all, I think I can trust it.

Number 21, having decided thus, left him behind and flew towards the dark basement.

* * *

The basement was in complete darkness.

No. 21, who briefly regained his senses and adapted to the darkness,

soon spotted a fairy flame waving in the distance as if beckoning, and kicked the floor.

Crack, clap, clap!

The underground structure I saw while running was more complicated than I thought. There were small rooms on both sides of the dusty hallway.

'It is a secret base where many assassins were hiding. 'Nothing that strange.'

Then, No. 21 passed a room where strangely faint figures were gathered.

'Are they what you sensed?'

Naturally, his attention was focused on that place, but No. 21 tried to ignore his anxiety and quickly passed by there.

First of all, their presence was blurred to the point of being close to death-

'The fairy seems to be in a great hurry.'

A movement that seems urgent, as if there is something more important. The little snail that was bouncing around as if urging it on looked like a small squirrel running up a tree.

'... 'No, what a ridiculous idea!'

Number 21, running after the flames, finally arrived in front of a small room at the end of the hallway.

It was a strange room filled with strange magic circles.

The candlelight shining dimly in the darkness seemed to contribute to filling the room with a darker and more gloomy atmosphere, rather than driving away the darkness. It wouldn't be surprising if a devil were summoned here right now.

'... ... '

And in the center, there was a shining green altar. A small tower with transparent beads piled up, and a small green flame shining on top of it.

Grumpy!

At that time, red flames began circling above the altar again.

"Fairy? Is there something you want to tell me?"

Grumble!

"altar? "Is that altar the problem?"

Flap flutter!

The flames moving up and down quickly seem to be beckoning. He looks very anxious because he wants to tell something to No. 21.

'I'm not sure... ..'

I guess that's the problem, right?

It's a suspicious altar that doesn't seem to do any good if left alone. No. 21, biting his lip, quickly clenched his fists and started smashing the altar.

Kwajangchang!

* * *

"Hehe, you got a fun toy, right? "I got lucky this time."

Olivier, who was moving at the front, looked back at the loot he had obtained this time with a satisfied expression. It's so cute that he manages to disrupt communication throughout the organization all by himself.

Thanks to this, the information sent by those guarding Giovanni's side was completely blocked, and it took quite a long time for Olivier to find out about the prince's outing.

"He had guts, but his skills were also extraordinary. In the end, the

entire chase team was mobilized to catch this guy."

"... .."

"This guy is probably a dog run directly by the Seonghwang family.
"Is Sabrina really her real name?"

"... .."

"Yeah, probably not. "I know."

Olivier, who was talking to himself, craned his head in and looked closely at Dasha's face with her eyes closed.

"... Hmm, I really like it too. "Let's groom this guy well and make him a member of our organization."

"... .."

"Noisy. "The decision is mine."

Of course, if it is a dog that was carefully selected by [Oberon's Hand], it would probably be difficult to expect a voluntary conversion. Still, I should take as much time as possible and watch Tyler carefully. Sabrina was well worth it.

If the worst case scenario is that we can't communicate until the end, it's okay to just steal that pretty shell.

"Well, I don't think it would be really fun if this guy turned like you guys."

"... .."

"Hey guys .. hey guys! "When someone speaks, talk back."

Olivier, who was feeling irritated for no reason, suddenly burst into laughter as he looked around at the expressionless assassins.

"Haha! okay. You guys wanted to talk, but you couldn't, right? "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

It was right then.

dump! Plop!

Suddenly, some of the assassins fell to the ground without warning. This number was almost half of the total number of people.

"Ugh?"

Olivier, who was surprised, urged the fallen assassins by kicking them.

"hey! hey! wake up. Just a joke... .."

Then, Olivier belatedly realized the seriousness of the situation when he noticed that the soul had completely escaped from their empty eyes.

no way... ..

'Head top!'

Looking at the fallen, it is not the capital Brindisi, but the personnel of the head tower built in the temporary base.

I thought the defenses were pretty good, but could something have happened to the base?

Olivier gathered the remaining people and hurriedly returned to the secret base.

And soon-

Her concerns turned out to be true.

"... .."

With gang members lying here and there-

Creak-

The entrance to a secret base shaking helplessly in the wind.

Olivier realized that even if something was wrong, it was definitely wrong. And when she finally reached the secret place she kept hidden

-
"hi."

What greeted her was a completely shattered head tower and a young boy who should never have been here.

In a dark basement with no lights, silver-grey eyes with a strange glow blink leisurely, as if to say hello.

"I came to get my group back."

"... .."

"I also have a few things to ask you."

The moment the boy's eyes met, Olivier felt a shiver run down his spine.

458. Kaya's Breath (7)

When No. 21 destroys a suspicious altar. And when half of the assassins led by Olivier fell unconscious-

At the same time, a similar change occurred in the assassin who was confronting Seongjin.

Shake it up, shake it!

The woman who was engaged in a fierce sword-to-sword confrontation suddenly lost strength and collapsed to the floor.

Phew!

Seongjin, who did not miss the opportunity and plunged the nutcracker into her neck, took a moment to catch his breath and looked down at the sight of the life slowly fading from the woman's eyes.

'Did No. 21 somehow do it?'

It was a pretty formidable opponent. To the extent that one suspects that the identity of the soul controlling their bodies may be Noh Ik-jang, who has been honing his assassination skills all his life.

'But since it was not the original body, the limits of the Auror class were also clear.'

If the amount of Aurors was similar to each other, I could confidently say that they were not inferior in terms of skill in using Aurors.

Of course, I don't know what the result would have been if the opponent had jumped at the second, third, and fourth shots while switching bodies.

After confirming that there were no more hostile signs nearby, Seongjin followed No. 21's sign and walked into the basement.

'This... It seems like a fairly well-maintained base, doesn't it?'

On both sides of the long hallway, food warehouses, armories, and lodgings come into view. Judging from the long history of use of the facility, they are probably a force that has been operating here since ancient times.

I feel like I have some idea of their identity.

'Kaya's Breath.'

One day, I learned in detail from Dasha about the genealogy of an assassination group that was operating in secret on the continent.

Among them, 'Kaya's Breath' was the most active group in the northern region, including Ortona. A historic assassin group that mainly uses stilettos and once achieved a balance of power comparable to that of the 'Hand of Oberon'.

Naturally, another question comes to mind. What on earth do they have to do with the freedom underpass?

'If you create and move a secret base anywhere in the North, the radius of influence will inevitably overlap with the Free Underpass.'

Since I was protecting Giovanni from the time I met him, they probably don't have an antagonistic relationship.

So, did 'Kaya's Breath' become a subsidiary organization of Freedom Underground? Or is it just a cooperative relationship of giving and receiving help?

Seongjin, who had been thinking about that, stopped for a moment in front of a large room. It was a place where suspicious signs had been detected ever since.

When I peeked my head into the room-

'... ... '

Sure enough, there were eight men and women in stealth suits lying quietly with their eyes closed.

Did we collectively fall into a state of suspended animation? Looking at the auror activity crawling on the floor, it seemed like everyone was not in a normal physical condition.

'... 'It doesn't seem like he's conscious at all.'

What was also unusual was that a significant number of them were women of similar age to the assassins who had rushed in earlier.

and-

'Decision to burn... ... !'

Seongjin, who confirmed the existence of the stones shining in each of their minds, clenched his fists without realizing it.

Should I say this is an unexpected achievement?

Even after holding such a grandiose launch show for Teosinte, we were unable to find anyone in Tere who had the right decision to burn it. But to find so many flame crystals all at once in an unexpected place?

'Have these people also been taking stimulant tea for a long time?'

However, Seongjin's premonition immediately denied that possibility. They cannot be considered naturally occurring salt crystals because they all had salt crystals in the exact same area.

Left skull. Flame crystals of uniform size shining at the midpoint between the parietal and temporal regions.

'How can they do that?'

According to Dacianus' secretary, it is very difficult to predict the location or size of Dacion. It has nothing to do with the concentration of the decoction or the period of taking it, and is completely determined based on the characteristics of the individual.

If you think about it, wasn't the gray plague patients like that too? Because crystals were randomly generated here and there in the brain, most patients lost their lives as the disease progressed.

But they were all shining in certain positions. As if someone had performed a surgical procedure using the same method.

'... No, I guess that went too far.'

This is a world where quarantine is done by spraying perfume, right? There is no such thing as systematic medical knowledge, so there is no way that medical technology to insert something into the brain exists...

But contrary to that flow of thought, Seongjin slowly approached them as if he was being drawn by something.

Then, I picked up the hair of one of the men who had his hair trimmed short, and saw with my own eyes a fairly long scar on his scalp.

'... ... !'

Seongjin hurriedly checked the scalps of others. However, when the woman lying next to her and the other woman next to her lifted her hair, an elongated wound was revealed in the same location each time.

Conclusive evidence that cannot deny the possibility that salt crystals were inserted from outside.

My fingertips become cold, and at the same time, my mind begins to spin rapidly.

'In this world... In Delcross... Is there really someone who performs surgical procedures on a large scale? 'Who on earth?'

The first person that comes to mind is Sigurd Sigurdson? He is a storyteller who walks through a thousand worlds, and he kills the personalities of normal people and uses them as his puppets. If he were that kid, wouldn't he have enough motivation and think of the means?

-I cannot tell you in detail what I know about the Gray Plague. This is because it is also closely related to Sigurd Sigurdsson's future plans. however...

Lady Isabella, whom I met not long ago, confided that to Seongjin.

-At least the ignorant act of planting monster eggs directly on people was not his doing.

What she said is probably true. This means that Sigurd Sigurdsson has a more sophisticated way of creating flame crystals than causing the Gray Plague.

Until now, Seongjin had vaguely guessed that it would be a long-term supply of medicinal tea to the continent.

But what if there was another way? There is a cleaner and more reliable way than that...

'... No, it won't be him.'

I don't know much about it, but Sigurd Sigurdson was a guy with an aesthetic side.

In other words, he might have thought that opening a human skull directly was much more ignorant than implanting a Loferum egg.

Moreover, although it was only a moment, Seongjin had followed with his eyes the trajectory of Sigurd Sigurdson's soul as he escaped from Isabella's body.

'It didn't seem like he had many options back then.'

In other words, Sigurd Sigurdson had no way of producing such a large number of dolls at once.

So the next thing that comes to mind is...

'Dacianus.'

Hmm, wouldn't that make a lot of sense?

He came to the barbaric dimension of Delcross and wandered the continent for a long time to study the formation of salt crystals.

He is also an eccentric who willingly gave out decoctions to people at his own expense in order to observe the process of forming the walls of the soul.

If it were Dacianus, he might have done whatever it took to exploit the flame crystal he created.

'Of course, Dacian is a person from hundreds of years ago. He's most likely already been dead for a long time... ..'

What if, after a long quest, he finally succeeded in creating a Dacion that was close to a milestone? What if, through that, his soul was preserved safely and he achieved the immortality he had longed for?

'Then, the reason why my father went out of his way to give me information about him... ..'

That was when Seongjin thought about it.

[Lee Seong-ji!]

From afar, the Demon King's flames flew towards him in a gasp.

[You noticed it too, right? There was something really big over there! It was a strange device designed to easily derive the laws of the normal world!]

Ah, yes. I thought so. If something difficult to explain, like magic, occurs in this dimension, the laws of the normal world are always hidden behind it.

Seongjin nodded obediently.

"okay. Let's go together. "Before that, let's take care of these first."

[...] huh?]

Only then did the Demon King look around, startled, and sparks flew in all directions.

[omg! What are all these? Could it be that those were all bad decisions?]

"Yes, demon king. "Take a good look at them."

[Well, what...]

"how is it? "Do you think they have any real soul left in them?"

At that moment, the Demon Lord was startled by what he saw, and his flames curled up and shrunk. Then, after a while, he finally answered in a hushed voice.

[...] no.]

"okay."

Seongjin took out the last remaining stilettos. If these are people whose souls have already been completely taken away, it would be better to end them here so that they are no longer toyed with.

* * *

Seongjin left the room and walked towards the place where he could feel the presence of No. 21.

"... Lowering?"

Number 21 seemed momentarily taken aback by the terrible bloody smell that Seongjin gave off, but soon calmed down and asked carefully.

"Are you hurt by any chance? "What happened to the attacker?"

"I suddenly collapsed. "It's thanks to you."

"yes?"

"I think you broke the device controlling him. "Good job, number 21."

It seemed that Seongjin was giving off a more dreary aura than expected. Number 21, who had been trying to press her mouth to report something more, noticed her secretly and shut her up.

"okay. "What exactly was here?"

Seongjin saw the shattered altar and the small beads rolling on the floor. That shape looks somewhat familiar. Could it be a soul stone?

Then No. 21 responded awkwardly.

"I'm not sure either. To me it looked like a devil worshiper's altar."

"... So you broke it?"

"yes. "First of all, it looked very ominous."

"... .."

Seongjin once again caught Number 21's face in his eyes.

I thought he was young for an informant, but he's just a cool guy. Fortunately, this place was not contaminated with demon energy, so if there really was a demon summoning circle, erosion might have occurred as soon as it was touched.

'Anyway, that altar was a device that brought the laws of the normal world to the Delcross dimension.'

Thanks to No. 21's hard work destroying it, it now seems difficult to find out any meaningful information.

Most of the marbles rolling on the floor were also cracked or shattered. Seongjin thought as he picked up one of them, a green bead that looked relatively healthy.

'Also, if these are a type of soul stone, the souls residing here would have possessed the flame crystals and moved the assassins... ..'

At that moment, Seongjin sensed the presence of a group of people with highly refined prayers quickly approaching this place.

Those who can be said to be the true power of 'Kaya's Breath' have emerged, not the idiots who have been easily defeated so far.

[omg? They all have flame crystals too? How did this happen?]

When a little more than a dozen assassins finally appeared in the basement, the Demon King's flame quickly hovered over Seongjin's head in panic.

As said, flame crystals of the same size were shining brightly on the assassins' temporal regions.

Only one person, the woman with fair eyebrows who was leading them all, was an ordinary person with no bad decisions.

"... .."

The woman looked at the messed up altar with a devastated expression. He probably knew exactly about the function of that altar.

'But haven't you met that woman somewhere?'

Seongjin tilted his head, feeling a strange sense of déjà vu.

'That's strange. There's no way I wouldn't remember a face with such a strong impression.'

As expected, Dasha can also be seen in the back. She seemed to have completely lost her mind, her whole body wrapped in rope, like a chrysalis.

Seongjin, who confirmed that Dasha had no significant trauma, became a little more lenient. That means she thought about mixing in at least a few words before brandishing the nutcracker.

So I said hello warmly.

"hi."

Then the woman with fair eyebrows trembled and took a step back.

'Do you know my face?'

Although he felt that way for a moment, Seongjin calmly revealed the purpose of his visit.

"I came to get my group back."

"... .."

"I also have a few things to ask you."

But the other person's reaction is surprising. The woman with bare eyebrows hesitated for a moment, then asked back in a fairly polite tone.

"I asked... "What do you mean?"

"... ..?"

Seongjin blinked his eyes. The first impression was so strong that I thought he would rush at me recklessly, but he turned out to be more polite than I expected.

"First, give me back my group. "The conversation comes later."

Then the woman glanced at Seongjin and protested.

"Well, wouldn't that be a bit unreasonable?"

"why?"

"Yeah... That kid is our prize. If you want the hostages back, you must give us a reasonable price... .."

haha.

Seongjin's soft laughter spread through the cool air.

"You talk so well. The master likes it. "They were planning to get rid of us from here in the first place."

"... "Huh!"

Number 21 and the woman with fair eyebrows who were standing behind took a deep breath at the same time.

'Hey, you! Please don't provoke them anymore!'

Number 21 was so heartbroken that he almost died. Because he knew that with his skills, even if he died and woke up, he could not be their opponent.

On the other hand, the woman was embarrassed because she had hit the nail on the head. She looked anxiously at Seongjin and No. 21, and then burst out laughing.

"Well, then what are you going to do? "Our side is overwhelmingly superior in terms of power!"

She was right. There are more than ten assassins here alone of a similar level to the one who competed with Seongjin on an equal level upstairs.

It's almost understandable that they rushed to Terre in the first place and tried to wipe out Seongjin and his group.

'But why...?'

Seongjin looked around at them with a relaxed expression.

If you think rationally, it is a very hopeless situation. But Seongjin's premonition tells him that everything will work out somehow.

Despite the superiority in power, the reason why Minja Eyebrow is unable to attack him is probably because of Seongjin's extremely relaxed attitude.

"... .."

"... .."

That was when the two people continued their standoff in silence for a while.

"Don't you think I can just watch this?"

"That's right, we'll just have to wait and see. I'm dying of anxiety."

Breaking the silence, someone's voice was heard. It was a large male assassin with Dasha tied up.

"... ... ?!"

While the woman with bare eyebrows was shocked, the man, carrying Dasha, began to move towards Seongjin with strange creaking movements.

"Anyway, is he really reckless or is he full of courage?"

"Maybe it's both. "No matter how much I look, I have no idea what he's thinking."

"Well, that's right. "Because Mores is Mores."

"that's right. "Mores is none other than Mores."

The man muttered to himself as if he were answering questions. At first glance, it was an extremely strange behavior, but the way of speaking seemed familiar to Seongjin.

'... Herna? Kadesh?'

At that time, Bald Eyebrows, who had been blankly watching what he was doing, suddenly came to his senses and shouted.

"Marcos? How on earth are you talking? "I heard he will never be able to speak after undergoing that 'ritual'?"

"I'm sorry, I'm telling you."

"Yes, you can."

"you... You're not Marcos! "What on earth is it?"

The woman growls as she pulls the stilettos out of her arms.

Then the man called Marcos looked back with a strange creaking motion and parted the corners of his mouth with a grin.

"Oh, they kicked him out."

"Yes, I kicked him out far away."

"Let me tell you one thing, the reason you can't speak is because your

control over your body is too weak."

"The one that came in to begin with was a very poorly made terminal."

"That doesn't mean we're easy to control."

"Yes, we are also enduring a lot of inconvenience."

The man who had spoken up to that point finally dropped Dasha's body in front of Seongjin, his eyes sparkling.

"So, Mores. You must never forget our help. got it?"

"that's right. When we come back, this time we will play chess together. okay?"

Even in this situation, they were still crazy about chess.

459. Kaya's Breath (8)

"Nothing to be surprised, Mores. "Even after all this, he comes to visit you often."

"Well, I'm being careful these days. "Because you or Red could get caught."

"Originally, I was only going to see you for a moment tonight."

"It's all wrong. So why can't you just sit still for even a day?"

eww?.

The man put Dasha down on the floor, then crossed his arms and relaxed his shoulders. It is a strange movement, as if there is a separate person controlling the two arms.

Aside from the joy, Seongjin's head began to spin quickly to understand the situation.

'Come to think of it...'

Hasn't something like this happened before? One day, when I was visiting Jonathan MacAlpine, the twins were briefly possessed by Asley Bettcher, whose head had been damaged by the Gray Plague.

'Astley also had an imperfect salt crystal on his head. In other words, these guys can control a person's body through flame crystals!'

So what is the scope of that ability? At the time, the guy who was manipulating Astley and Red were fighting against each other, and they seemed to have a level of control that rivaled each other...

'It seems like the twins clearly have the upper hand this time.'

When I glanced at her bare eyebrows, I saw that she was constantly pouting with a dejected expression on her face. She was taken aback by the unexpected situation and ended up handing Dasha over too easily.

'But it doesn't seem that urgent. 'Because they'll think they can easily wipe us out with their remaining power anyway.'

After deciding to that point, Seongjin gave No. 21 a wink and told him to take care of Dasha. Then she looked straight at the man with shining eyes and opened her mouth.

"Herna. Kadesh."

"huh"

"huh."

"good job."

After hearing a brief compliment, the man smiled a wide smile that did not match his rough appearance. He might have seemed kind of creepy to begin with, but when you think of twins inside him, it seems kind of cute.

"First of all, there's something I want to know: To control a person, do you have to be together? If we were going to take over the body, wouldn't it have been better for the two of us to each control other people?"

"Hmm."

"Hmm."

Then the man continued to let out similar moans and rolled his eyes.

"As expected, Mores is formidable. "I thought she would be surprised this time."

"It's not easy. "I'm already thinking about taking advantage of this situation."

Herna and Kadesh, who grumbled like that, soon obediently answered Seongjin's question.

"Under normal circumstances, Mores is right. "Your control might be a little lower, but controlling them both at the same time is not a task."

"But I decided it would be better for the two of us to be together this time. "The current situation is quite a special case."

... Special case?

Let's look at them in puzzlement, twins... No, Marcos' eyes sparkled magically.

"Mores. Taking complete control of the human body is more difficult than you might think. "The restrictions are not that great, and there are many things to prepare in advance."

"Think of that naughty puppet master. "In order to create an obedient doll, he first tries to completely destroy the existing personality, right?"

"Because humans have an unconscious defense mechanism."

"Because we first try to eliminate or avoid anything we judge to be a threat."

"It is a natural and automatic phenomenon."

"The mechanism is simple, so it is rather difficult to handle."

"So the two of us agreed to work together to take proper control of the body."

"To control the defense mechanism, you must completely dominate the unconscious."

Seongjin took a deep breath after hearing that. As I quietly listened to what they were saying, it seemed like the bad premonition that had been creeping in from earlier was gradually turning into a clear picture.

"Wait a minute, you guys... ... !"

But before the words were even finished-

Sigh!

Marcos raised his arm like lightning and drove the stiletto deep into his own neck.

"... ... !"

Sigh!

While everyone was frozen by the sudden situation, the body, whose carotid artery had been completely cut, slowly collapsed to the floor, spattering a fountain of blood.

dump!

"omg?!"

The chin of the man with the bare eyebrows suddenly and absurdly dropping down after losing his subordinate.

But it was still too early to be surprised. Behind the group of still expressionless assassins, a woman suddenly raised her hand and smiled strangely.

"Voila!"

"how is it?"

"... ... !"

Under everyone's shocked gaze -

Creak, creak.

The woman slowly walked out from between the assassins, walking with uncoordinated steps. Just like Marcos, who had just died, he was muttering strange conversations as if he were talking to himself.

"Do you understand now? "If we tried to fight each of them, we

would only be able to take their bodies and interfere with the other two."

"You probably know, Mores. "This is the surest way to reduce the number of enemies."

Just like that, the woman naturally pulled out her stilettos from her waist -

Sigh!

Once again, a fountain of blood splattered in all directions.

"What the hell is this... ..!"

For the first time, a deep feeling of fear appears in the round eyes with bare eyebrows.

But that wasn't the end. Soon after, right behind her, another assassin tilted her head and opened her mouth.

"Did you see it? "This is truly the way to dominate the game, that is, the way to win."

"Even though they know it, they will never be able to stop us."

"It's a simple calculation, right?"

"The results are clear."

"If we reduce it like this, in the end, only that woman will remain who has no decisions to make."

"It looks pretty daunting, but it's okay. "Mores will be more than capable of dealing with you."

And again, without fail, the stiletto is swung mercilessly.

Sigh!

Blood poured down like a waterfall from the head of the bare eyebrows next to him.

* * *

'This... 'Is this a dream?'

As he was showered with hot blood, Olivier thought blankly. She couldn't really understand what was happening.

The head tower that had been carefully constructed was destroyed, and half of the troops that had been brought with them were lost in vain. When the remaining personnel returned, the base had already been devastated.

And now, unknown evil spirits appear and take out the remaining subordinates one by one!

'Everything... ... '

Olivier looked at the prince in front of him with a blank face. The boy was looking down at all these mysterious scenes with a cold gaze, as if nothing had happened.

In an instant, an intuitive realization came flooding back to me.

'Yes, all of these things are being done to suit the prince's convenience.'

How on earth can that be? How can the whole world move for just one person?

"How many people did you kill? "How many people are left now?"

"There are only three. "There is still a long way to go."

Olivier suddenly came to his senses when he heard an ominous voice coming from next to him again.

'If things continue like this, we will truly be annihilated in the blink of an eye!'

She gritted her teeth and screamed.

"Holy shit! They can only control one person at a time! Everyone,

don't panic, stop them properly this time!"

But that was just an empty command. Olivier himself cannot help but be skeptical.

'How do I stop it? An evil spirit that doesn't know who will possess it and commits suicide as soon as it appears?'

But help came from an unexpected place.

"stop."

Prince Mores' cool voice is heard -

Stand tall.

The newly possessed assassin stopped moving as if it were a lie. He held his stilettos high and looked at the prince curiously.

"huh?"

"why?"

Strangely enough, the same thing happened to Olivier.

They just failed to properly respond to the sudden situation, and their power is still superior. You have to increase your momentum even more to have a chance of winning, so why stop there?

However, Prince Mores' expression was more serious than expected.

"These little kids who are just getting out! "What are you doing now?"

"huh? what?"

"what's the matter?"

"Children are now harming themselves without fear! Are you out of your mind? "Aren't you sick?"

Then the man lowered his arms, squeaked, and tilted his head.

"But it's okay, Mores. "It doesn't hurt much."

"Yes, Mores. "This is nothing."

"Do not be ridiculous! Is that what you are going to do right now in front of this brother? Or do you guys really want to make me feel really sick?"

The prince, who was wheezing and shouting, soon began to give a long speech to the evil spirits.

A nagging feeling that you should not try to overcome the adversity and hardships that come with life in extreme ways. Nagging concerns about the ethical and emotional issues that can arise when self-harm is seen as an easy solution.

And finally, after urging him for a long time to always tell his family before doing anything drastic in the future, the long nagging finally came to an end.

"... .."

The evil spirits seemed momentarily distracted by the storm of nagging noise.

"Do you understand now? "How ridiculous have you guys done just now?"

"Hmm, I think I understand a little bit?"

"I guess you don't know much yet?"

"These guys are still there!"

The prince screamed.

"You are still children! They're little kids the size of a rat! "There is no responsibility or obligation to make such an extreme choice!"

"responsibility... .."

"duty... .."

"Just leave that to me or your father!"

The prince who spoke up to that point calmed down his anger a little and continued speaking.

"Besides, just in case, how do you think your father will feel if he finds out about this later? huh? Or your mother finds out!"

"Are you a prosperous dad?"

"Dad, Your Majesty... .."

"Jodo?"

"Joe... .."

"okay! "Please try to think with that sane head that plays chess so well!"

"... .."

"... .."

Then the man, who looked at the prince with a dumb expression for a moment, grinned and muttered with an insincere smile.

"Haha, even though he's extremely harsh, he sometimes becomes soft in strange places."

"That's right. "I don't know who's going to say that. I'm afraid I'll just give it back."

"Things like that happen, too. "Because Mores is Mores."

"that's right. "Mores is none other than Mores."

Fortunately for Olivier, the conversation seemed to have brought about some kind of change in the minds of the demons.

Cheer up!

The man who threw his stilettos on the ground walked towards Prince Mores with different steps.

"But you know what? Actually, Mores may be right."

"Well, I wonder if our efforts were in vain."

"Because I saw a very interesting sight on the way here."

"Yeah, well, wouldn't there be really strong-looking evil spirits lying side by side on the floor?"

"I thought it was fascinating, so I looked around for a while and came."

"I think it's time to wake up."

... What does all that mean?

As Olivier listened with great nervousness, Prince Mores showed an uneasy expression.

"Ah, those guys... .."

Then, the man who was staring at the prince burst out in an uncharacteristically innocent laugh.

"Haha, look at this! After all, you already know, right? "Mores had it all in mind from the beginning?"

"That's right. I guess I was worried for no reason. "If you get to know him, he's such a scheming and conniving guy."

"But first of all, we helped?"

"that's right. Should I play chess when I get back?"

As their conversation became more cordial, Olivier became more anxious.

'What on earth are you talking about? 'What are they talking about now?'

Unfortunately, Olivier quickly found out the answer.

Shoot... ..

I thought my hair was burning for no reason, but before I knew it,

black aura began to spread all over the basement floor.

Olivier looked around in confusion.

'Woah, acting? Or is it Magi? 'Where are you coming in all of a sudden?'

Kieeeeeeee!

Then, along with an eerie wailing sound, a desperate scream rang out as if the soul was being wrenched.

[Aaaah! Lord of my soul!]

[O Lord! Did you call this Belinda!]

The shock would have been enough to send a clumsily possessed soul flying away in an instant.

dump! Plop!

As the assassins under the headquarters' control fell helplessly, Olivier's face turned pale.

This was the beginning of a true nightmare.

460. Kaya's Breath (9)

"... So, here is Yakan's Oae... "Next."

A muffled pronunciation leaks out between swollen lips.

Olivier was currently kneeling on the floor, bowing his head to Prince Mores and struggling to make excuses.

The assassination squad that was brought in was annihilated without even being able to put up a single decent resistance. She was in a hopeless situation where she was the only one left alive.

"Ui is gathering here, but this is the one who was always pretending to be with the empire... .."

But before I could finish speaking, I heard a loud shout from next to me. It was the evil spirit of a warrior holding a huge club.

[This thing! Can't we hurry and tell the truth?! Shame on you for trying to gloss over your mistakes, you apostate!]

"Ssi... .."

Olivier reflexively glanced at the evil spirit. If you think about it, the reason she ended up like this was because of the battle with that warrior.

No, it was a one-sided assault rather than a battle. If you attack from this side, it becomes a spirit and scatters into the air, and if you attack from the other side, strong physical force comes back. Where in the world is there such an unfair fight?

'shit! If that had been a real human being, I wouldn't have suffered so helplessly!'

As Olivier was internally wheezing, Prince Mores, who had been quietly listening in front of him, opened his mouth.

"That sounds incoherent."

Compared to his youthful face, the energy radiating from him was full of dignity befitting his age.

"When we used the express carriage, you were just escorting Giovanni. Afterwards, they put surveillance on us, but it was probably just to see if we could get out of the Freedom Underpass without any trouble."

"Yes... .."

"But after we changed our schedule and arrived in Tere, you suddenly took a turn and tried to kill us. Are you going to call this all a misunderstanding?"

"Ang, that's-"

This was when Olivier was about to protest. Suddenly, a gloomy evil spirit wearing a black priest's robe popped up in front of her.

'Fuck, surprise!'

When Olivier stepped back in horror, the evil spirit glared at her with wide eyes and gritted its teeth.

Crackling.

[Does this deadly thing dare to harm my master? A sin that can never be repaid by dying! Master! If you allow it, your faithful servant will personally drag this to hell and collect your debt over time!]

"Hi!"

Olivier's fur became bitter. After all, that evil spirit was the one who killed the entire assassination team by engulfing them in black smoke.

It seemed as if the alternating roars and screams he used at that time

were still echoing in her ears.

"Hayes."

Fortunately, the prince stopped him, and Olivier broke into a cold sweat and cleared his throat. This was because I was overcome with a sense of crisis that if I didn't make a proper excuse now, I would end up not dying even if I were to die.

"Well, I'm just a subordinate following orders from above. While carrying out a mission, Yakan's information got confused... .."

* * *

In fact, the first order Olivier received was to capture the person being guarded by Giovanni's son, that is, the Holy Emperor, to headquarters.

- To be exact, it is Seonghwang's 'doll'. Collect it as unscathed as possible and deliver it to the wizard's laboratory in the basement.

To safely obtain Homunculus, the culmination of the Kornsheim clan's soul transfer technology.

It was worth taking some damage. Currently, 'Kaya's Breath' is barely maintaining its power based on a head tower made of soul stones and a living doll with flame crystals inserted.

The souls of former assassins who have already passed away are subordinated to the head tower. And by providing them with new bodies that have undergone a 'ritual', the time and cost of training personnel is drastically saved.

That was the secret to maintaining their power as before in Ortona, where there was not a single decent employer left.

However, as it was still an imperfect technology, its limitations were also clear.

Although their biological dolls fully replicated the soul's combat abilities, they were significantly inferior in terms of communication and other intellectual abilities.

Also, because the connection with the head tower was too weak, even a slight spiritual shock would cause the soul to be thrown away.

It was perhaps natural for the leadership to make desperate efforts to make up for this.

-Do you understand? Olivier. The homunculus, the puppet of prosperity, has entered our sphere of influence for the first time. If you miss it this time, you may never have the chance to get it in the future.

A masterpiece by the Kornsim clan.

If we study homunculi, which are incomparably stable in terms of 'soul settlement', we may be able to sufficiently compensate for the weaknesses of biological dolls.

So, in 'Breath of Kaya', as an exception, a large number of people were dispatched to bases other than the capital Brindisi, even building temporary head towers.

-If this is not possible, you can just bring the head of the homunculus. The core technology for fixing the soul to the doll must be in the Dacion inserted into the head. Perhaps our wizard teacher, who is crazy about research, will definitely be able to figure out its function.

Olivier naturally had this question to ask.

-But is that really okay? No matter how much he is a puppet, it is directly harmful to Seonghwang himself, right?

-I guess so.

-Then won't you end up incurring the Empire's grudge?

Although they diligently use assassins who are free from death, they are still just a group of assassins. If you were to incur a grudge against the emperor of the most powerful empire on the continent, wouldn't the outcome be as obvious as fire?

But surprisingly, the leadership did not seem to care much.

-No need to worry about that, Olivier. Because Seonghwang is bound by more restrictions than you can even imagine. So, there is a high possibility that they will not make a big deal about what happened to their personal life. Because it's not unprecedented.

-... Restrictions? Liturgy?

-okay. However, they won't just hand over the homunculus to us. You will probably have to make every effort to completely subdue him.

The leader of 'Kaya's Breath' declared so and entrusted Olivier with as many puppets as he could mobilize. At this rate, I have enough power to not fail even if I fall backwards.

So until then, Olivier had not considered the success or failure of this mission to be that big of a deal.

-Just something to keep in mind, Olivier. In the process of carrying out your duties, you must never, ever touch anyone other than Seonghwang.

-Oh, of course, I will keep Giovanni's son alive. I also have that level of discernment.

-Don't just listen! If you encounter the children of the Holy Emperor, especially the 'Prepared One', you will never... .. !

-Yes, yes, I understand. I'll take care of it myself.

But what is this? Once things started to get tangled up, it was literally a moment before things went completely wrong.

The strange thing happened first to Seonghwang and his party. They thought they were going to move to Regina via the Marquis of Benso, but they suddenly abandoned the carriage and turned sharply towards the north.

'... Are you really thinking of going to Tere? why?'

Thanks to this, Olivier had no choice but to change his mind about attacking them right away and watch their movements carefully for a while.

'There are many people within the Freedom Underpass who have antipathy towards the Empire. If we move hastily, there may be problems with their identity being revealed or the homunculi being taken away.'

However, in the meantime, a big surprise occurred in the Jayu Underpass. Prince Mores and his party, who were thought to be staying in Regina, suddenly appeared in the old brewing city of Verdron and made some kind of deal with Giovanni, the head of the Free Underground.

And that wasn't the end. The prince's party, which should have been sent safely to Regina, suddenly turned towards Terre and joined the royal party!

Of course, Olivier, who was eagerly following Seonghwang, was completely unaware of this fact at first. Because 'Sabrina' suddenly appeared among them, there was a lot of information confusion for a while.

So Olivier, who had just finished preparing to attack Tere, had no choice but to take the flagship when he belatedly found out that there was a 'prepared person' there.

'shit! This is how things get complicated! 'What happens now?'

An awkward situation in which the object that must be secured even at the cost of loss is shared with those who must never be touched.

However, when I actually tried to report to headquarters and ask for opinions, the presence of 'Sabrina', who disrupted information, became a huge obstacle.

In the end, after much thought, Olivier came to this conclusion.

'Let's attack Terre first and see. Wouldn't it be okay to go and completely subdue them, then take out the homunculi and leave the rest safe?'

If he dies while suppressing him, that's inevitable.

Olivier, who did not know the seriousness of the situation, thought

simply.

'If things don't work out, there is a way to place the blame on the penitent church.'

But things in the world never went the way she wanted. The guys I sent to scout were so clumsy in their actions that they never thought they would summon the 'prepared one' himself to the secret base!

The fact that it took longer than expected to catch Sabrina may not be such a big problem compared to that.

As a result, Olivier lost all his power and had to work hard to come up with an excuse, even sweating profusely.

Of course, it was of little use in the face of Prince Mores' sharp questioning.

"Although the North is outside its sphere of influence, the basic imperial information network is still functioning well here. "I haven't heard any reports recently, but today I saw that they were gathering enough power to wipe out an entire territory."

In response to the subject of single-handedly wiping out that enormous force, the prince admonished Olivier with a very serious expression.

"In other words, it was quite recently that you guys started gathering here. If so, there are two options you can consider. Were you trying to start an all-out war with the Marquis of Benso?"

"to... ... ?"

"The Marquis of Benso is a valuable companion who must continue to accompany the empire for the reconstruction of the North. If they tried to attack him, he cannot just sit idly by, even in the empire."

The Marquis of Benso? Partnership with the Empire? That's right... Riga?

'for a moment! There is information that Branch Manager Schmidt, who is said to have lost Prince Mores' limbs, has been working hard

on something for the northern lords recently. If we do that, there may be some hidden exchanges that we haven't figured out yet!"

Olivier was skeptical, but looking at the prince's confident expression, it seemed like his words were not completely empty.

Feeling anxious that things might be bigger than expected, Olivier vehemently denied the prince's words.

"Oh, absolutely not!"

"Then you were trying to attack Tere, not the Marquis de Benso. Are you really trying to bury us all? Did he try to kill me?"

madam!

Olivier, struggling to come up with an excuse, desperately racked his brain.

"Well, is that possible? As I said before, there was a big misunderstanding!"

"misunderstanding."

"Yes. I heard that there is a devil worshiper hiding in the Freedom Underground who has caused great harm to our organization... ... !"

"..."

"That's why I saved as much power as I could! haha. Who knows what would happen if a devil worshiper went wild? So it's black in preparation. Of course, if I had known you were there, I would have saved you somehow in advance-"

Kieeeeeek!

At that moment, a sharp echo rang out. The sword is an evil spirit dressed in priestly clothing.

[Refrain from speaking!]

Beneath his sinister eyes as he glared at Olivier, black bloody tears

were flowing like a waterfall. I was truly afraid of seeing it again in my dreams.

[This lowly thing! Whose safety are you letting me live on your own right now, are you spouting nonsense like this!]

See, what should I do then? If you say you planned to kill her, you'll get angry, but if you tell her you actually tried to save her, it's a damn thing, right?

Fortunately, the prince successfully restrained the evil spirit before Olivier was caught in his clutches.

"Hayes. stop."

[...] I apologize. I was presumptuous. Lord of the soul...]

As the evil spirit, which seemed to cling to the end of hell, obediently retreated, Olivier became curious once again.

What on earth is that prince doing? What on earth is the 'prepared one', that even the boss can tell him not to touch him, and that he can control evil spirits like that at will?

"Then let me ask you one more question. "If he cornered us in the Freedom Underpass base and prepared to attack us, is it safe to say that it was all Giovanni's will?"

The prince didn't seem to believe the 'devil worshiper' issue she was talking about at all. Like her not-so-cute little boy.

I flinch.

At the same time, I feel that Eun-i, who was standing behind the prince, is tense and listening to the conversation. Somehow he seemed familiar, but Olivier couldn't figure out why.

"Ah, Ang! "This matter is completely separate from the Freedom Underpass or the Blue Republican Revolutionary Front!"

Anyway, Olivier hastily shook his head.

Giovanni is one of the 'King Seeds' that 'Breath of Kaya' is diligently watering. The effort invested so far was quite significant to get caught up in this and lose it.

"Giovanni is a spider who doesn't know anything. "You're probably one of the customers doing business with our organization!"

In essence, a group of assassins had no choice but to grow their power by sticking to the side of a powerful king and becoming their limbs.

However, there are currently few powerful people left in the North who can be called 'kings'. Therefore, in order to create an environment in which Kaya's breath can grow naturally in the future, we have no choice but to carefully cultivate these few seeds.

"okay."

But something strange happened. The prince expected to inquire more about her purpose, but she suddenly began to give off a cool vibe.

"So that would mean that your plans changed after we joined our father."

"... .."

Startle.

As Olivier trembled with an ominous premonition, a cold, mineral glow passed through the prince's eyes as he looked down at her.

"Are you guys targeting my father?"

461

461. Remarks (1)

'Should I kill him?'

That was the thought that instantly captured Seongjin's mind.

Today was a day when many lives had to be taken. But this time, Seongjin felt a pure murderous impulse rising from deep within his heart.

It was the first time since I first woke up in Delcross, other than when I met Sigurd Sigurdson or the former Countess Sigismund.

'Should I kill him?'

Justification is also sufficient. It wasn't just because of the safety of my father or the people of Seonghwangga. Because a strong premonition had been ringing alarm bells in his head ever since.

If we leave it like this, that woman will one day come back and become a great bane to the empire.

'Should I kill him?'

Nevertheless, there were two reasons why Seongjin did not pick up the nutcracker right away.

first. That woman was ordered by someone to harm her father. This means that whether it is an order from one person or the intention of 'Breath of Kaya' as a whole, just hitting a woman's neck will not solve the problem.

'Even if you cut off the leaves, the weeds don't completely disappear. We'll have to block the waterway, find the roots, and get rid of the roots.'

second. Seongjin had been feeling a strong sense of discomfort with that woman since a while ago. She was clumsily pretending to be innocent, but at least it wasn't the typical assassin's attitude that Seongjin knew.

'What on earth are you thinking? There would already be no possibility of escape or hope of rescue. Why are you trying to preserve your life by making excuses that don't work?'

It's not that it wasn't, but just looking at those bald eyebrows gave me an indescribably uncomfortable feeling.

okay. For example, to Seongjin, that woman was like a rock at the bottom. The moment you pull it out because it is annoying, it is like a bomb that could cause the entire building to collapse.

"... .."

Kuuk.

As I unconsciously tightened my grip on the nutcracker, I heard the twins - to be exact, the assassins possessed by them - talking to themselves from behind.

"Is it okay if I leave it like that? Shouldn't we stop Mores?"

"well? But I think it's better than being angry at that kid."

"Yes, I am maintaining my senses more than I thought. You know that? "It's much scarier when he does that."

"Well, if things don't work out, he's the type of guy who will make things worse, even if they don't exist, and will hit you with interest, step by step."

It's noisy, you guys! I can hear everything!

'Sometimes, I don't know if those guys are trying to stop me or encourage me.'

Anyway, as his heart grew hotter with anger, Seongjin's mind grew colder and colder.

'There's definitely something about that woman.'

If you think about it carefully, there were many other questions.

'Why were those bare eyebrows playing the role of leader?'

Of course, he appears to have outstanding skills for his age. Even compared to the Monkey Watchtower's most elite agent, Dasha, it is difficult to determine his superiority or inferiority.

However, it is also true that the people she controlled were actually more skilled. Each and every one of the fifteen or so assassins was spewing out a prayer equivalent to that of the woman who had been fighting with Seongjin upstairs.

And one more thing.

'How was Minja Eyebrow controlling his subordinates?'

From what I heard, it seems like they subjugate dead souls to soul stones and exploit them, but in that case, aren't their subordinates actually more senior than Minja Eyebrow?

Also, they didn't seem to be able to speak properly in the first place, so how on earth were they able to communicate with each other?

'Hmm... ... '

Red light flashes again in Seongjin's pupils. But no matter how much I washed my eyes and looked, there was no such thing as a flame crystal in Minja's mind.

[Lee Seong-jin.]

It was right then. The Demon King, who had been wandering around, flew in front of Seongjin as a captive and opened his mouth.

[That thing's soul, there's something strange about it.]

It's a good thing to hear!

"What? What did you find out? Could it be that that guy is also the

soul of the Gyu-sang world?"

[no. That's not right. Both body and soul are clearly human in the original world. But...]

The Demon King, who had said that far, slowly approached Seongjin's ear and whispered in a cautious voice.

[There was something like an imprint engraved on its soul.]

... engrave?

[okay. It is a spiritual imprint engraved by a higher soul. It took a while to make out because it was so shallow and blurry, but it was clearly a demonic character engraved with demonic energy. This is a common method used by demons to engrave a message into the soul.]

"A quick speech? "Humans were blessed by the devil?"

[Well, I don't know exactly. Judging whether the congratulatory message is a blessing or a curse is largely a subjective matter.]

Just because it was hand-carved by the devil, it can't have purely good intentions, right?

"So what is it engraved on?"

[Hmm, but I'm not sure about that...]

The Demon King twisted his body as if he were embarrassed, twisting the flame around.

[No matter how carefully I look at the abbreviation, I can't really understand the content.]

"Even though the letters are clearly visible to the eye? Why?"

[Perhaps the person who engraved this thought he wanted to keep it a secret.]

And that means a pretty serious problem, the devil added.

[lets think. Such restrictions are usually only applied to beings lower than oneself. But even this great Fire Demon can't read it properly, right?]

That means-

[Maybe, no, it's almost certainly true, but that eyebrowless woman might be a member of one of the high-ranking demon lords.]

"... .."

[What's a bit surprising is how it survived the imprinting process. The soul of an ordinary human is likely to perish without power even if it is touched by the will of a high-ranking demon king.]

"hmm."

Seongjin glanced back at the assassin killed by the twins. Although they are vicious chess terrorists, it can be said that they are the most trustworthy when it comes to matters related to the soul.

but-

"It's foul to ask us right away, Mores."

"That's right, we also have our own lines that we must follow."

"Of course, that doesn't mean we don't know."

"Well, there are very few things we don't know."

They were twins who, despite their sharp rejection, never forgot to show off.

When I looked at Hayes and Belinda just in case, they too shook their heads with dejected expressions.

[I am truly disgraceful for not being of any help, my lord.]

[Hehehehe! Lord of my soul! Please severely punish this useless and ugly servant!]

Gurgling!

'Uh, Hayes. Please don't cry. 'When I look at you, you're really scary!'

In the end, Seongjin had no choice but to sigh and ask the Demon King for a favor.

"I can't help it. Then show it to me."

[what?]

"Where exactly is that speech? "Just tell me the location and I'll take a look."

Then the Demon King looked a little embarrassed and twirled around his bare eyebrowed head.

[Well, what about it? Seongjin Lee, strictly speaking, you do not have proper spiritual vision. Your wonderful flame crystals merely replace information that cannot be directly sensed with visual information. But will you be able to see the Demon World's words precisely engraved in your soul? You don't even know the demon alphabet, right?]

"doesn't care. "I think it's okay."

[Uhm...]

The Demon King looked skeptical, but for now, he obediently approached Minja Eyebrow as requested by Seongjin. And then he did some tricks, spinning around near the woman's shoulder.

"Huh?! "Is this okay?"

"It's a fairy. "Don't move, just stay there."

"Yes..."

"..."

Unfortunately, as the Demon King said, Seongjin could not see any proper letters. Only the dark, stain-like shade tells us that there was a magical intervention in the woman's soul.

However, regardless of not being able to see it in detail, the meaning of the congratulatory message was fully conveyed to Seongjin's mind just by quietly staring at it.

-Don't be afraid of collapsing. Your bone meal and flesh will turn into countless seeds. They will sprout from the ashes and eventually crumble.

Oh, I think I might know who engraved this quote.

Seongjin glared at the woman in front of him with a somewhat serious expression. She is a descendant of a high-ranking demon lord, and yet she is a woman who pretends to be truly naive.

"But you. I guess it looks familiar. Haven't we seen this before somewhere?"

"Yes? Haha, can't that be... .."

"okay? "What is your name?"

"Ang, if you just give the name to the assassin who gave up his name... .."

"So what is it?"

"Hey, forget it!"

"... .."

"Really... .."

Seeing as he doesn't want to reveal his name even if he dies, it seems clear that this is someone Seongjin met somewhere. It was a bit surprising that they didn't mention a pseudonym.

'Or, you just can't lie about your name?'

Well, it doesn't matter either way.

For a while, Seongjin persistently asked the woman about the organizational structure of 'Kaya's Breath' and the structure they had

created called 'Head Tower'.

"Wizard? He made a living doll and a head tower?"

"Yes. But I don't know his identity either... .."

Of course, there wasn't much key information that the woman knew properly.

[It's the truth.]

Although the Demon King occasionally gave a definite answer, Seongjin still felt a strange discomfort in her attitude.

He is so good at lying that he seems to freely control involuntary signs such as blood pressure and pulse.

How many questions and answers were exchanged like that?

"... "Hey, but you're not going to kill me?"

With an innocent question, a strange green glow flashed through the woman's eyes.

And at that moment, strangely, Seongjin was able to read a faint piece of thought that had not been spoken out loud in her eyes.

-Why don't you kill me? How do you avoid this?

Seongjin fiercely raised the corners of his mouth. The smile was so dreary that No. 21, who was looking at him, was shocked and took a step back.

"... okay."

Since the other side already sent me a gift, I should give a proper return from here as well.

The trick came to me naturally. Hadn't he unintentionally experimented directly with Lord Masain's soul some time ago?

How to whisper a curse not strong enough to destroy a soul, but strong enough to strangle a person's life.

So Seongjin slowly lowered his head and gently brought his lips to her ear.

"... .."

"... ..!"

Hearing Seongjin's long whisper, his eyebrows widened.

"... Well, then... "Is it really the sword that will save me?"

"Right now, yes. Of course, you have to pay a price."

"cost... yo. this?"

"huh. "If you look closely, you'll see that there's a big lump on my group's head that you haven't seen before."

When Seongjin grinned and raised his fist, his bare eyebrows protested in horror.

"Ang! How can something like that be used? Then what on earth has been hitting me so far... ..!"

Wow!

* * *

"Ahh!"

When the young man suddenly let out an ugly scream and collapsed, the woman next to him came running in fright.

"W-what's going on, master!"

"no... .."

The young man, [Pajong], put down the lute with a sad look on his face.

The top of my head was suddenly shocked and tingled. When she returned to the religious order after a long time and was trying to enjoy her leisure life, she suddenly thought, "Why is this so crazy?"

"what? Someone saw a connection to the seeds I planted. Although it was light, the blow was delivered directly to this side. That won't be that easy... .."

Nevertheless, the woman still seemed not to realize the seriousness of the situation. As she looked at her like that, her seed sighed softly.

"Look. "He is the high priest of sowing."

"Yes, my true master."

"When did your predecessor die? What high priest are you now?"

"How is it that as each generation passes, children become more and more stupid?"

"... .."

The woman bit her lip in sorrow for a moment, but soon hid her expression and bowed her head politely.

"... I'm probably third."

"Right."

Pajong nodded and lay down on the bed.

The guy who just got hit probably wasn't an ordinary seed. If he had this close of a connection, he must have been a member of the high priest or higher. Since there were so many people planted so far, it was impossible to pinpoint who it was.

'Is it really a mistake to appoint high priests as if sowing seeds here and there? I need to remember who is who... ..'

But it's strange. Why is my body feeling chilly from earlier? I even felt a strange discomfort, as if a bug had stuck to my body.

'It's probably not a disease. This time, I got a fairly healthy body.'

Pa Jong stroked his head, which was still a little numb, and frowned.

* * *

The road back to Tere felt quite long. She probably felt that way even more because she was carrying the unconscious No. 13 around her.

Number 21 took a moment to catch his breath and looked at Prince Mores, who was walking ahead.

A great action at dawn, and a suspicious altar set up at the enemy's base. And even the terrifying evil spirits that the prince summoned from hell.

Today, No. 21 seemed to have shared some serious secrets with the prince. Secrets that I cannot hastily judge between right and wrong, and that I have no idea how to report to His Majesty.

'but... ... ,'

When you don't know something, first think about the outcome of the task.

'Anyway, we safely rescued Senior No. 13, and most of all, we protected His Majesty's Homunculus from 'Kaya's Breath'.'

Okay, maybe that's enough.

Number 21, who was organizing his thoughts like that, cautiously opened his mouth to the prince when he almost arrived in the village.

"Lowering. Actually, I met that eyebrowless woman before."

"okay?"

A reaction that seems not to be surprising. The figure strangely resembled the person he was serving, making No. 21 feel mixed.

"Some time ago, while carrying out His Majesty's orders, I exchanged swords with that woman near the Imperial Capital."

"Yes, your skills are beyond your control."

"... .."

It was probably possible because it was truly a fleeting encounter.

Also, thanks to the warning given by Seonghwang in advance.

-Firefighting and pursuit are absolutely prohibited.

When I explained that to the prince, he looked a little confused.

"hmm. My father... .."

"Why are you doing this, sir?"

"Actually, I've been worried about my father for a while."

After saying that, Prince Mores looked back at No. 21 with a despondent expression.

"Actually, I killed my first person today."

"... .."

Number 21 did not understand that at first.

"... yes?"

"Strictly speaking, it's not the first time, but in any case, it's the first time I've taken someone's life with 'my' hands."

"... ..!"

"Of course, I thought it was something that could not be avoided, and I tried to act as rationally as possible. But as a child, how can you honestly tell your parents about this?"

Of course, my father would already know everything, the prince added.

"that... ..!"

"I'm embarrassed. "What on earth should I tell my father?"

Number 21 opened his mouth, but had nothing to say in response. This was because he had once again received a great shock.

Actually, that's right. Prince Mores is a boy who has not yet reached

his sixteenth birthday. There is no way he, who grew up in the imperial palace, would have ever killed someone!

"Okay... .."

"... .."

Prince Mores continued to worry after that, but No. 21 did not dare to say anything more to him.

Surrounded by complete silence, they arrived at Tere's inn. This was after dawn had already broken.

"... father."

And the prince faced the emperor with his head down, looking like a child who had made a mistake.

"... .."

But there was no need for any further conversation with them. Seonghwang did not have to explain everything that happened, because he was a person who knew and understood everything.

He wordlessly placed his hand on Prince Mores' head and then began to lightly pat it as if to comfort him.

"uh... .."

The prince's tense face suddenly relaxes.

After seeing that, No. 21 quietly closed his eyes, caught up in extremely complicated emotions.

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462. Remarks (2)

Since Seonghwang did not ask any questions or reprimand, Seongjin felt much more at ease.

However, he soon had to face another challenge: Sir Martha, whose complexion was dark as he had not been able to sleep all night.

"... Hey, are you okay? Sir Masaine?"

Seongjin stuttered without realizing it.

It wouldn't have been unreasonable. The prince, who went out to get some fresh air, doesn't come back no matter how much I wait, so my stomach is burning with tension.

Because of this, he seemed to have lost his temper and wandered around the entrance to the village, where he ended up staying up all night.

"Lowering! Where on earth have you been... ... !"

As soon as Masain saw Seongjin, he tried to scream like usual.

However, I held my stomach before I could finish speaking, because the moment my extreme tension was relieved, stomach acid poured out.

"omg?"

Seongjin, who was frightened, took him to Seonghwang.

"No, sir. I'm really fine... for a moment! Please answer faster than that! Where on earth did you go all night without saying a word? ... !"

... Cool.

Surprisingly, as soon as Seonghwang touched his forehead, Masain fainted and fell asleep. I thought maybe he had forcibly blown her soul into another dimension like last time.

"Mores. "When Masain wakes up, you will have to face him properly and talk to him."

The Holy Emperor gave advice softly, pouring divine power over the head of the silent knight. It was a very difficult request.

"Uhm, father. But that's a little..."

"..."

"... all right."

When I thought about Masain's reaction that I would have to face in the future, my eyes became dark. What can I do? I have committed a sin, so I can only answer obediently.

Other than that, everything went smoothly.

Like Masain, Seongjin and No. 21 also received plenty of divine power treatment from Seonghwang. Although there were no serious injuries, there were many minor scratches, knowingly or unknowingly. I was secretly tired from fighting assassins all night.

Dasha also received proper treatment from Seonghwang. Fortunately, her injury itself was not that serious, but instead, her body was greatly weakened due to hunger and lack of sleep for several days. Maybe that's why Dasha couldn't open her eyes right away even after her successful treatment.

"It's probably because of mental fatigue. "You must have pushed yourself to your limit these past few days without letting go of your nerves even for a moment."

Seongjin nodded at No. 21's words.

"okay? Then wait until Dasha wakes up and then slowly leave for

Regina."

I caught Giacomo Milo and found my father safely. Then there's no more urgent work, right? So Seongjin waited for Dasha to wake up and calmly started working on her paperwork.

"Newbie, what is that?"

Owen, who had recently been to Pangea Chronicle again, was carrying a lot of food and snooping around Seongjin's room.

"I'm working on the business plan."

"business plan?"

"huh. 'I have to return Oliver's 'junior business license' and receive official investment from the imperial palace.'"

The standards for projects in which the imperial palace directly invests are not easy. Even though Amelia has simplified the process and greatly increased efficiency, she never means that the content can be lacking.

But who knows how long it will take Oliver, a country boy, to complete all the procedures.

"Oliver needs to open a decent business as soon as possible and supply the entire continent with teosinte grown using 'Martian farming methods.'"

This was a good thing for everyone. Oliver will win the investment from the imperial palace without much effort, and Seongjin will be able to earn a lot of consulting fees while doing his own thing.

But what caught Owen's ear was a word that seemed somehow familiar yet unfamiliar.

"... Masain farming method? 'What on earth is that?'"

"Well, from now on, Oliver is going to cultivate teosinte using the method provided by Lord Martha. And I will share all the sales profits with him. 'It's a kind of agricultural technology fee.'"

Then Owen made a puzzled face.

"But how is that possible? "Brother Masain, I'm sure you've never done any farming before, right?"

Seongjin bared his teeth viciously at that innocent question.

"Of course, there is no such farming method in the world. "It's all a fraudulent contract."

"... Eh?"

"But it's too late. Sir Masaine has already signed the papers I gave him! That's why you have to be careful early on and not do something you'll regret later."

Seongjin gently waved his quill and lifted his chin. Do you understand, Owen? Please take note too. If you carelessly sign a document you don't know well, like Sir Martha or Logan, your life can be ruined in an instant.

"Just imagine. How terrible things will happen next. Someone unknown to Sir Martha will commit atrocities by selling his name and making a lot of money on the continent."

"... ..?"

"And while Sir Martha is distracted, that unscrupulous man will sneak into the bank and pile up money from unknown sources in Sir Martha's account."

"... ..?"

"As the business grows, the amount is bound to increase exponentially. At that point, there is no way to do anything anymore. "Lord Martha will climb on the ever-higher money cushion and complain of extreme dizziness, but no one will truly listen to his voice that has already grown so far away."

"... ..?"

"In the end, the innocent Sir Martha will be unable to get off the

money cushion for the rest of his life and will scream horribly in return for one mistake in signing his name. "Isn't that scary?"

Kkkkkkkk!

As Seongjin let out a sinister, muffled laugh, the Demon King, who was sitting on a small brass bowl, let out a sigh.

[...] Seongjin Lee, what are you doing now?]

shut up! In times like this, all you have to do is just laugh evilly next to them. You devil bastard who can't understand this atmosphere!

"hmm... .."

Owen looked very confused. It's not that he isn't, because he also previously had a record of ignorantly signing documents he didn't know about at Seongjin's request.

"Anyway, the job looks easy."

"that's right. "It's so annoying I'm dying."

"But is there any need for you to be busy working here? Anyway, we'll be heading back to Regina soon. Then, leave it to Branch Manager Schmidt like before. "When it comes to business, he's probably more expert than you, right?"

"well... .."

Seongjin put down the quill and furrowed his brows.

"Actually, I've thought about it, but I feel like I'm pushing Branch Manager Schmidt too much these days."

He has already been entrusted with not only the salmon salmon business but also the northern economic reconstruction project. Moreover, recently, she has been acting as Seongjin's personal assistant, including being his alibi.

No matter how much he tightened his grip on the 'Devil's List', it was too harsh to increase his workload any further.

"When I get back to Regina, I guess I'll try hiring a new secretary."

It would be nice to have someone by my side to collect primary information and guide people around instead of Seongjin.

Seongjin tilted his head for a moment, then rested his chin and picked up the quill.

"Well, I'll have to think about it later. Anyway, I'm going to stay here today so Dasha can get some rest. "In the meantime, just take it easy and do your work."

* * *

[You have two options.]

Dasha was dreaming now. A dream from her childhood that had been so long ago that she had completely forgotten about it.

[If you stand out here, it won't be long before you're sold to Primrose Entertainment District. You will have a hard time there in the beginning, but you will be able to gradually expand your influence in the underworld of Asean.]

Yes, I remembered.

It was the day Dasha entered an orphanage run by a monastery. As she was sitting despondently waiting for her priest, a woman she had never seen before came into her room and spoke to her in a friendly manner.

'Who is it? 'Are you the priest here?'

Even at a young age, Dasha was very suspicious of women. It's not that she wasn't, because she was dressed all in black and even had a black veil on her head.

[You have talent. He is talented enough to capture people's hearts, secretly uncover their weaknesses, and ultimately wield them all. Those who exploited you cruelly will soon bow at your feet, one by one.]

"... .."

Dasha frowned without realizing it. She was just a brat with no blood on her head yet, but at least she didn't know what a bad reputation the Primrose entertainment district had on the continent.

It was a scary time, and the world was overflowing with poor people. It is no secret that orphans like her were constantly being created, and many of them ended up in her red-light district.

Moreover, since Dasha had a fairly fair face, I sometimes imagined that if I was unlucky, life could turn out that way.

But isn't he a very inconsiderate priest to say such hopeless things to a child he just met for the first time?

[Don't you like it? Then there are other options.]

"... "What is that?"

[Try to be as inconspicuous as possible and kill yourself quietly. Then, you will be selected for 'Hand of Oberon' before you turn 10. They will recognize your talent at a glance and train you painstakingly over a long period of time. You will one day be able to become one of the greatest assassins the Hand of Oberon has produced.]

assassin? That was a choice I had never imagined.

[You will always be leading to death. The blood will never dry on your hands, and the corpses of people will pile up like fallen leaves behind your steps. Eventually, you will be able to become the most faithful apostle of death and make the entire continent tremble with the fear of assassination.]

"and... .."

Young Dasha was momentarily speechless at that terrifying prophecy. At first glance, she may seem like a better option than the entertainment district in terms of gaining strength on her own, but if what she says, isn't that also a very bleak and miserable life?

[But no matter which one you choose, it will be difficult for you to live with your original name, 'Dasha.']

... Have you ever told the priest my name?

At first glance, that was what she thought, but Dasha soon completely forgot about the question. This is because the choice she was faced with felt so heavy to her young self.

Perhaps the woman's prophecy could have been dismissed as mere nonsense. However, her voice, which strangely penetrated my mind, had enough power to shake the young girl's soul.

So Dasha asked as if she was clinging to her without realizing it.

"Then what should I do? "If I want to live differently from what the priest said, what should I do next to protect my name to the end?"

[...]]

The woman did not answer right away. But for a moment, Dasha felt that a faint smile appeared on her face, hidden behind a veil.

[...] okay. I see.]

The woman gently stroked Dasha's cheek and slowly lowered her head. Soon, the rich scent of roses emanating from her became closer, and her black hair flowing down her shoulders made a cool friction sound.

And then a voice as sweet as the devil's whisper flowed into Dasha's ears.

[Then use your power to drive out the abbot. Then another new path will open for you.]

... Are you serious?

How on earth could a little orphan girl who had just entered the monastery achieve such a thing?

It was so absurd that I looked up at her, and the woman touched

Dasha's forehead with a graceful gesture.

[Don't worry. Let me give you a little congratulations. So that one day you can safely regain your name.]

A quick speech?

[Dasha. Remember clearly the scent of death. And entrust your fate and all the missions that fate has entrusted to him. Then death might be... ..]

The memories ended there.

When Dasha suddenly came to her senses, she was being led by the hand of a priest she had never seen before and was entering a shabby restaurant where orphans were gathered.

It was quite some time later that I realized that there was no priest wearing all black in this monastery.

* * *

The conversation she had with the mysterious woman in black gradually became a blur in Dasha's mind.

but-

'We must kick out the abbot.'

The more time Dasha spent at the monastery, the more firmly this idea began to take root in Dasha's mind. This is because the orphans she stayed with disappeared without a word day after day.

The priests carefully watched the abbot, and suspicious guests came and went into his office every day. While the number of jeweled rings increased one by one in the abbot's hands, no one paid attention to the whereabouts of the poor orphans.

It was clear. That abbot is hiding some terrible secret.

"Wow, that's scary. Dasha, do you think the priests are right? "Are they really dragged to hell because they didn't pray to the Lord?"

Ramira, who was blowing on her red, ruptured hand, whispered to Dasha. She was her new friend at the orphanage, and she was an easy-going girl who was happy to hang out with Dasha, who had a different skin color.

"That's not it. "The abbot is clearly selling the orphans somewhere secretly."

"Sell? Where?"

"Probably Regina's Nightlife or Primrose Revelry. "They say they buy orphans like us at low prices and treat them like hell for the rest of their lives."

"Hi! really? Well, then what should we do?"

At Ramira's fuss, Dasha looked at her protruding cheekbones.

"... Um, I guess you'll be okay?"

The reason Dasha could give a clear answer was simple. Sadly, Ramira was one of the ugliest children in the monastery.

Unless it was Peter, a boy full of freckles, no one would buy her.

"profit! Thank you so much, Dasha! "That sounds so comforting!"

"100 million! "If you really appreciate it, why don't you let go of this?"

"shut up! Catch Black Barça!"

"Is that what you're going to say? An Anatolian ground dog that digs up dirt and eats it!"

After fighting for a while, the two reconciled by sharing a piece of bread they had secretly hidden.

"So what do we do now?"

"huh. First, we need to find evidence to report the abbot to the outside church."

It was extremely unlikely that the monastery would find a solution on its own. It was obvious that as long as the abbot, the most powerful person in the monastery, maintained his position, the priests here would be powerless.

"Evidence to accuse the director? By what means can we? "Can't we just find a good person among the priests on rotation and ask them to help us?"

"If you just appeal like that, no one will listen. "Who would believe the words of orphans slandering the director without any solid evidence?"

Moreover, if the full story of this incident were revealed, the prestige of not only the monastery but also the church would be greatly damaged. This is an issue that is too burdensome for a single priest to roll up his hands.

'therefore...'

It was more likely that the church would be able to prove the abbot's minor faults. Such as embezzling a small amount of church property or breaking some of the monastery's rules. A charge that doesn't cause too much of a fuss, but is just enough to lightly change the person responsible.

Dasha, who had to grow up earlier than others, unfortunately instinctively understood the physiology of the church.

"Ah, Dasha! There's the abbot. "I'm with suspicious guests again this time!"

"Shh! Don't look at me carelessly, Ramira. "I'm going to get dragged in and get beaten for no reason."

Dasha quickly lowered her head and pricked her ears to eavesdrop on their conversation.

A congratulatory message whispered by a mysterious woman one day appeared in her ear like an auditory hallucination.

- Dasha. Remember clearly the scent of death...

463. Remarks (3)

"If you keep acting like this, I will be in real trouble."

Director Mathieu made a fortune while fiddling with a large ruby ring. He was an elderly senior priest and had been the head of Dunstan Abbey for over ten years.

"There are limits to running an orphanage with only a small amount of donations. Nevertheless, we have been accepting the beggars who come from all directions with only a sense of duty. But since you are not handling the promised volume, the deficit has been piling up for several months already."

Then the woman sitting across from him glanced down at Mathieu with cold eyes. To be exact, the needlessly flashy accessories he is wearing.

"For all the complaining, the situation doesn't seem that bad. From what I heard, it looks like they are having fun by handing over orphans to red-light districts."

"The only things that can be disposed of in that way are a few high-quality items. Even last month, we only had four guys and seven girls. "The world is still overflowing with trash, and they are flocking here endlessly."

Having said that, Mathieu leaned forward and stared at the woman's face. A special guest wrapped in black priestly robes who should never set foot in this monastery.

"So shouldn't you, at least in the 'underground church', find a use for them? To those orphans who have no idea why they were born into this world and for what purpose."

"... "This is not something a servant who serves the Lord should say."

At his words and actions that naturally made her frown, an expression of strong contempt appeared on the woman's face. However, Director Mathieu just lightly picked her ear, paying no attention to her reaction.

"Well, at least I don't think the Lord will punish Mathieu for what he just said. "He discriminates against humans to begin with."

"gibberish! The Lord never... ..!"

"Ah, I have no intention of wasting time with needless general discussions, Vicar. Isn't that a truth that everyone learns through experience as they live in this world? "You and I both understand this fact deep down."

The woman glared at the abbot for a moment, then sat down in her chair and responded with a stern expression.

"In any case, our position does not change. Because the Charity Church will no longer take orphans from here. Didn't I tell you? "The great [Pay] no longer expects 'dedication' from children."

"What kind of nonsense is that?"

Mathieu could not easily believe her words.

"Until last year, the person you serve regularly asked for dozens of human sacrifices every year-"

"Director Mathieu!"

"... excuse. Didn't you ask for the orphans' 'dedication'? Are you sure you are not procuring sacrifices from somewhere else without Mathieu's knowledge?"

Mathieu was well aware that a big change had recently occurred in the [Painful] Church.

The beloved archbishop was suddenly replaced, and unfamiliar rules that were completely different from before were handed down to

each diocese.

'But no matter what, they suddenly stop all transactions like this?'

It has been almost 10 years since he secretly handed over human sacrifices to the Aeyeol Church. So I was confident that I knew more about their physiology than anyone else.

On the surface, they claimed to be brothers serving the same god, but the behavior of the underground cult more closely resembled evil devil worshipers.

An evil group that cannot receive any favors from the 'Archbishop' they serve unless they pay a price, even if it means squeezing the bodies and souls of humans.

But now, a member of that gloomy group is talking like this with an expression of no hesitation.

"Now we have the right 'archbishop'. "It's just that he finally conveyed his true meaning of [sorrow] to us."

"under!"

Mathieu's face suddenly became irritated.

"Then why on earth did you come here? "You said you wouldn't do business with me anymore, so why are you wasting my time?"

"It's to ask for your cooperation. "We are looking for a boy now."

"... boy?"

Do you want an offering under certain conditions? Mathieu thought so at first, but looking at the vicar's expression, it didn't seem like that was the case.

"okay. He's a boy with black hair and gray eyes. He must have turned 14 this year. I wonder if this orphanage has a boy like that?"

"If you're 14, you're a bit old to be here... .."

"There is a possibility that you look much younger than your age. "I heard that you have often skipped meals since you were young."

"joy! "Is there one or two of those things in this orphanage?"

Mathieu snorted, but the vicar's eyes on him remained firm.

"Ae-yeol said he would appear here around this time. "Do you really not know?"

"So, there must be so many kids here... .."

"They say the boy has a very striking appearance. So he will never be recognized."

... well. If a guy like that had come here, wouldn't he have been sold to the entertainment district a long time ago?

Mathieu was extremely skeptical about finding the boy, but he did not bother to share his thoughts with the vicar. Because she soon took out a large jewel from her bosom.

"Please use your strength. [Ayeol] is desperately looking for that boy right now."

"... "What are you going to do to find him?"

"It's just to keep it safe. It's not something you can't understand. If you think about it, [Payment] is like all the love in the world itself."

"... .."

pestilence. Not long ago, he ripped out the souls of orphans and ate them alive, and his love story... ..

"I'll hand this over as a down payment. "If I find him, I will pay a heavy price."

"I will do my best!"

No more words were needed. Abbot Mathieu nodded vigorously and snatched the jewel from the woman's hand.

* * *

Because the distance was quite far, Dasha could not fully understand their conversation. I can only guess a few words based on the shape of my mouth that I see sparsely.

'... orphanage... trash... Deficit... Attack? No offering...'

'omg! Dasha, bow your head! The customer is about to wake up now. If you do something wrong, you'll get caught!'

'okay.'

At Ramira's signal, Dasha quickly escaped and ran to the back of the monastery.

At the same time, I tried to combine the information by repeating the words I had just learned in my head.

'Pass, sacrifice, and gray eyes... boy...'

That was all the words I found out. But that alone was enough for Dasha to guess the seriousness of the situation.

'I thought they were simply selling the children because they were blinded by money, but in fact, there was already a connection to the underground religious order through the abbot's line?'

The situation is more serious than expected. No matter how young she was, she did not know how underground religious cults were currently being treated on the continent.

[Payment], [Sowing], [Repentance], [Rest].

These four underground denominations with long histories were, on the surface, solid sects that served the main god.

However, what they did for their faith could not be said to be solid, even with empty words.

Abnormal rituals and cruel human sacrifices carried out indiscriminately. Because of this, many regions are already

considering them as heretics and sending those involved to the Inquisition.

If this matter is revealed to the world, there will be a huge bloody storm in the Dunstan Estate.

'What do we do? 'This isn't a problem I can tackle on my own!'

Selling orphans to the red-light district was no longer a big problem. If you're unlucky, the entire orphanage, along with the abbot, might get caught up in the Inquisition.

'What on earth should I do...?'

Rumbling!

As if reflecting Dasha's gloomy mood, the sky gradually darkened and thunder could be heard from afar.

* * *

While Dasha was wandering in her dream, another thunderstorm was raging at the inn where Seongjin and his group were staying.

Growling!

'I'm sorry, Sir Martha! It's my fault! "I won't do that again!"

"Don't say anything you don't mean! "How many times have you said that?"

OMG!

With Prince Mores in front of him, Sir Martha seemed to emit breath from his male mouth.

"Tell me something! Have I ever expected so much from you? yes?"

"No, that's... Kuek?"

"It's nothing else! I just want you to tell me in advance! Where are you going! How long will I be back? Was it that difficult to leave such a simple message?"

"No, Sir Masaine. So you're saying it's all a misunderstanding? At first, I had no idea that I would go that far... "Kek!"

"Why don't you know what you don't know! "Don't be funny!"

No. 21 opened the door to hear the loud noise and saw-

Taltaltal!

Isn't Prince Mores captured by his guard and being robbed back and forth?

No. 21 stared blankly at what they were doing for a moment as they threw away all manners and dignity as members of the royal family.

"calm down. Leave this aside for a moment... ... !"

"Yes, I know! I know very well how inadequate I am to carry out the task! But that doesn't mean you can ignore my sincere loyalty like that!"

"No, Sir Masaine. To be so self-deprecating..."

"Are you belittling me now? Or is that how you treat me!"

"Oh, oh! Of course, I have faith in Sir Martha! Are you saying that you depend and trust deeply in your heart? Really!"

"Don't try to smooth over the situation with such soulless rhetoric! "It's all useless now!"

"These are not empty words! "Lord Masain is the swordsmanship teacher I respect the most in the world."

"Teek!"

Number 21 quietly closed the door. Because their behavior was comical, but at the same time, I felt uncomfortable, as if I had been deceived.

Why not? The person who is now spewing out such intense feelings of self-destruction and anger is actually the youngest knight

commander in the imperial palace, and one who was on the verge of becoming a Tekaron Knight at a young age.

What about Prince Mores, who is grabbed by the collar and shaken back and forth? He is already rumored throughout the imperial capital to be a genius swordsman, and his skills far surpass even that of Monkey Watchtower's elite agents.

"Senior No. 13 hasn't opened his eyes yet. If he's going to fight, he'll fight quietly from a distance... .."

Number 21 sat down on a chair and grumbled softly. At the same time, he had a gloomy expression because he was aware that this gut-wrenching discomfort was due to his lack of qualifications.

"hmm? Why are you looking so hungry? Mr. 21."

At that time, Edith came into the room carrying a steaming plate.

"What is that?"

"I brought some light meals. "When your colleague wakes up, you have to have a quick meal, right?"

I was a little impressed with issue 21.

By the way, Edith is unusually considerate... huh? for a moment.

"But Edith. "I don't think that's the food sold at this inn."

"yes? That's natural. How could someone who just woke up from an illness digest the fatty food at the inn? So I borrowed the kitchen for a while and made some thin stew."

... Boil it?

Number 21 was very nervous.

"that... Excuse. Well, Edith. Could it be... "Have you tasted it?"

Then Edith straightened her back and answered in a humorously sweet manner.

"no? "What should I do if I taste bile?"

"Hey, you... ..!"

How on earth did you get that kind of conscience?

They fought over the bowl in the middle for a while.

The dedicated maid, an Auror user, was not an easy opponent, but No. 21 was able to steal her stew bowl with the determination to save No. 13 at all costs.

"Tsk! No. 21, you don't know much. "Food that is inherently good for your health also tastes bitter!"

Putting Edith's useless grumbling aside, No. 21 calmly turned around.

"I will leave this poison far away, so please take care of my colleagues instead of me."

"Oh, yes, yes. "I understand."

Edith pulled a chair and quietly sat down next to Dasha. Then she stared at her smooth brown skin for a moment.

"But I didn't know that No. 21 was a colleague of someone from Barça. "Maybe it's because I've been hanging out with Mr. Bartosa a lot lately, but this person's face feels very familiar to me."

"... First of all, she is from the Empire. Of course, I don't know much about her parents' origins."

"is it so?"

"So please don't say insensitive things like saying that you resemble the savage in the barn in front of her. "He will probably be very angry."

"Oh, I'll be careful."

While giving Edith such caution, No. 21 gained a new insight.

'Yes, now that I think about it, there was that barbarian here too. The

culprit who made us all suffer by running away with His Majesty's homunculus!

I decided. I guess I'll just put this stew next to the barn.

"But Mr. 21. "Priest Bart must have treated him well, but why can't he wake up yet?"

"You will open your eyes soon. "It's just that you need a little longer rest than usual because of the fatigue."

Number 21, who responded like that, took a quick glance at Dasha, who was frowning slightly as if in agony, and added,

"Or maybe I'm dreaming something."

464. Remarks (4)

From the day she witnessed the meeting between the abbot and the suspicious guest, Dasha began going in and out of his office secretly. He was trying to find evidence to accuse the director.

"Dasha, let's stop now. What are you going to do if you get caught?
"Anyway, I need you to know one big thing about me."

Of course, Ramira's stubbornness, who followed her saying she would watch over her, was also formidable.

The girls walked quietly through the hallways until they reached the deserted main building of the monastery building.

"But the doors are all locked?"

"You can pick it. Ramira, give me a skewer there."

"swimming... . "Where did you learn all these tricks?"

"It's not a structure where there are things you need to learn. "The locks in this monastery are all simple."

After grabbing a hungry stomach and robbing a few grocery warehouses, you can become a master at picking keys.

Ramira shook her head.

"Wow, what are you planning to become later?"

"Now you're talking about something else on a topic we shared well together."

Creak.

The locked door opens with a heavy friction sound, and the view of the office, which is unusually luxurious for a monastery, comes into view.

While Ramira was distracted by the beautiful decorations, Dasha quickly walked up to the abbot's desk and began shuffling through the papers.

"But Dasha, what are you looking for there? "Can you read?"

"Roughly. "Father Ellison reads the scriptures every Mass."

"Huh..."

Ramira gaped.

Should we be surprised by the priest's ability to match words with his pronunciation, or should we be surprised by his ability to distinguish dense scriptural letters from a considerable distance?

Meanwhile, Dasha was diligently looking through the materials, using the faint moonlight as a light.

"hmm..."

Unfortunately, there wasn't as much content to salvage as I thought. It was not because the abbot was a more honest person than expected. Ridiculously, the abbot was so lazy and unplanned that he did not even keep separate ledgers.

It was outrageous that the monastery did not even have a proper list of orphans being cared for or records of moving in and out.

'... What should I do with this? 'There is nothing to complain about other than the poor use of donations.'

Of course, how the donations are used is entirely at the discretion of the abbot. There was a high possibility that the church would not make a big issue of it.

'Is the only way to report the abbot to the Heresy Tribunal?'

But it was no different from suicide. Even if the inquisitors accepted Dasha's testimony as credible, there was a high possibility that she, too, would be handed over to the heresy trial on the grounds that the source of her information was questionable.

It was a week of going in and out of the director's office without much gain.

One day, a bunch of documents caught Dasha's eye.

'Oh, this is...''

It was the measurement data of the monastery fields sent by Lord Dunstan to the abbot.

In the Dunstan Territory, the area of the fields was measured every two years by order of the lord, and upon closer inspection, the figures showed a clear trend of decreasing over the past 10 years.

'good. If this is... ... !'

Dasha unfolded the hem of her previously torn clothes and quickly began to copy the contents of the ledger.

* * *

Although evidence of corruption was somehow found, reporting it was another matter.

Not only is it unclear whether people will believe Dasha's words, but it wouldn't be a good look for an orphan under the care of a monastery to directly report the director who has received favor.

If so, it would be best to hand over the information to a trustworthy person, sow suspicion, and have him investigate the abbot himself.

After observing the priests for a long time, Dasha was finally able to pick out one person he could trust. He had recently moved here for a rotational shift, and was a straight-looking man who didn't particularly flirt with the abbot.

"Father Gustav."

One day, not long before the feast day of St. Bastian. Dasha cautiously approached him while the priests were busy preparing for the mass.

"... Yes, honey. "What's going on here?"

Priest Gustav seemed a little embarrassed, but fortunately, he waited quietly as the skinny Barshain orphan girl approached.

"Well, actually, I saw something strange while I was cleaning Director Mathieu's room."

"wonderment?"

"Yes, so I wrote it here to ask the priests."

"..."

He took the piece of cloth that Dasha held out with slightly narrowed eyes. Perhaps it was because he immediately saw that the child was hiding impure intentions by pretending to be innocent.

However, his character was worthy of praise just for not immediately throwing away the charcoal-covered piece of cloth.

"... "Where did this come from?"

Priest Gustav, who had been looking at the crooked letters for a while, finally asked in a calm voice.

In fact, no matter how hard she racked her brain, there was no good excuse for this, so Dasha answered while trying to look as harmless as possible.

"Well, I happened to see it while I was cleaning the director's bookshelf. It had the lord's emblem engraved on it, so it caught my eye. But the numbers written there are strange..."

"..."

"The priest sees that it is still getting smaller, right? "Why is that like that?"

Priest Gustav looked at Dasha for a moment as if assessing something. Long bangs messily covering the girl's face, and bright emerald eyes shining through them.

"How old are you, kid?"

"Ah, eight... "Salt?"

"Yes, you must have never had a chance to learn anywhere, but you can read letters and numbers. You are truly a bright child for your age."

He seemed complimentary at first glance, but in Dasha's experience, it didn't bode well.

"But you're still too young to get involved in adult matters. My child, do you know why Lord Dunstan measures the land so often?"

"... yes?"

"Do you know that the method of measuring land and the scale that serves as the standard for measurement are constantly changing?"

"... .."

Dasha could not help but be speechless.

The area of the same land changes depending on the measurement method? I had never even thought that such a thing was possible.

"okay. So, it's no wonder that these numbers look strange to your eyes."

Priest Gustav folded the cloth neatly and returned it to Dasha.

Of course, it is true that the area of rice paddies that is shrinking all at once is highly questionable.

However, there was no way for him to determine now whether the area had decreased due to the changed measurement method, or whether the abbot had really taken advantage of this and sold the church's property.

"Anyway, I don't think it's something to raise an issue right away. Still, I'd like to say something to the senior priest. "Anyway, there will be a large-scale church audit around next year, so everything will be clearly revealed then."

"but... ..!"

When things didn't go as planned, Dasha became anxious.

Next year is too late! Just yesterday, Peter, covered in freckles, and two new pretty girls disappeared. If this continues, we can no longer guarantee the safety of not only ourselves, but also the safety of ugly Ramira.

So Dyasha-

"Priest, help me!"

He had no choice but to bring up an extremely primitive method that he had previously denied. He was holding on to the priest's collar without restraint.

"In fact, children from orphanages are disappearing every day! Did you know? Everyone is hissing, but in fact, there is a rumor going around that most of those children were sold to the red-light district!"

"Wait a minute, what do you mean... .."

"Of course, the priests at the monastery probably don't know much about the circumstances of the orphanage. "There are no records of children coming in and out, and even the names of those who came in are not kept properly!"

Perhaps it was because of her anger toward herself for being helpless, but Dasha's eyes began to fill with tears.

"But there's no way the priests who manage the orphanage wouldn't know, right? Even though those bad people know all the facts, they are pretending not to know, just looking at the thoughts of the abbot! Now the only people you can trust are circulating priests from elsewhere! So please, please help us!"

"... .."

"These are not empty words! I heard it clearly with my own ears. Director Mathieu himself said that children are being handed over to red-light districts or underground cults... ..!"

"Hey."

From Father Gustav's suddenly cold gaze, Dasha realized that she had gone too far over the line in her haste.

"You have just dishonored Director Mathieu and all the priests who look after you. Even though they are faithful priests who have sworn to follow the will of the Lord throughout their lives."

"Well, I... ..!"

"Okay, let's just say what you said is actually true. Do you have any evidence to prove it?"

"... ..!"

It was a harsh reality, but Dasha quickly came to terms with her situation. How could she accuse her priests without any solid evidence? He would have been grateful if Father Gustav had not immediately told the abbot about the arrogant orphan's atrocities.

"What on earth is this, even bringing in underground religious denominations? If you say something like that again in the future, you will no longer be forgiven just because you are young. Do you understand?"

"... Yes, I understand. I'm really sorry for disturbing you when you were busy."

Dasha looked at him blankly for a moment, then resigned herself and politely greeted him. And she quickly ran out of the place. It felt like I would burst out crying uncontrollably if I stayed there even for a moment longer.

Priest Gustav looked at the back of the girl with tired eyes for a moment and then turned around.

And in the future, he would regret what happened that day for a long time.

* * *

Several months have passed since then.

Eventually, the rotational priests' period of service came to an end, and Priest Gustav quietly left the monastery. It was inevitable that Dasha was completely discouraged.

"Cheer up, Dasha. It doesn't have to be that priest, right? "Let's find a good person among the new priests."

Dasha sighed deeply at the comfort that was not Ramira's.

"Is that going to work? "At least Father Gustav listened to me, but other people hate orphans like us talking to them."

Dasha wasn't just playing around either. I constantly went in and out of the abbot's room to find information to persuade Priest Gustav. I found and reviewed every single document and even a single piece of scribble.

However, Director Mathieu was not a great person to carefully organize messy materials in the first place.

'It's a big deal. Should I just take the opportunity and run away... .. '

But even if you run away, where will you go? Is there any place other than orphanages or red-light districts where you can get even a rotten potato?

No matter how hard you think about it, the future that comes to mind is only bleak. That was when Dasha lowered her head in despair.

"Dasha."

Ramira shook Dasha's shoulder.

"Look, that lady is here again."

I raised my head and looked at the direction she pointed to, and there I saw a young woman wandering around the orphanage, holding a small baby bundle. She is a rather pretty-looking woman with lots of freckles on her face.

"Who is that?"

"The village gravedigger's wife. "Recently, they always come to the orphanage at this time."

While Dasha was busy trying to figure out how to oust the abbot, the gravedigger's wife seemed to be visiting the orphanage every day.

And she stares intently at each of the boys' faces and returns home only after the sun has set.

"why?"

"I heard that he left his son here for some reason. Then, not long ago, I took a job as a graveyard worker, and I was finally able to make ends meet, so I came to pick up my child... .."

After saying that, Ramira closed her mouth with a complicated expression on her face.

Dasha could quickly guess the reason, it wasn't that it wasn't-

"When I look at those freckles, I somehow think of Peter... .."

"As expected, that lady, she resembles Peter in some way, doesn't she?"

The two who opened their mouths at the same time closed their mouths like clams. This is because Peter was the child who disappeared from here a few months ago.

Whether she was sold to a red-light district or handed over to an underground cult somewhere, there would be no way for that woman to get Peter back if she found out his whereabouts now.

"... What should I do? Should I tell that woman the truth?"

"Say what? Your son was probably sold off to the red-light district? Hey, that's so cruel."

"But are you just watching me look for you like that?"

"... A.C."

The two people looked at the woman pacing around with her back to the sunset with confused expressions for a while.

* * *

That night.

Dasha secretly woke up like any other day and hid in the abbot's room.

However, when she picked the lock and entered the room without thinking, she was immediately startled. This is because a passenger I had never seen before was standing under the window where the bright moonlight was shining.

"I think it's too late for a child to be walking around."

"... ..!"

The boy, who had been shuffling papers with his back to the door, looks back at her with a light thump. He was a boy whose silent movements and white face looked like a mirage.

Dasha looked up at him with round eyes.

'what? It was obviously locked. How on earth did you get in here? 'Could it be a ghost?'

Maybe it really is a ghost. His complexion under the moonlight was too pale to be considered a living person.

The reason Dasha did not reflexively scream was probably because the boy had a fairly neat and upright appearance for an evil spirit.

The same goes for the strangely calm air that surrounds him.

"Who are you?"

As he opened his mouth in a trembling voice, the boy moved his still hands and flipped through the documents.

"I received a request. "I was asked to properly investigate Abbot Mathieu's corruption, so I was searching his room first."

"... Request? "Who is it?"

"well. "It's probably someone you know well."

widely.

The boy, who closed the document loudly, soon focused his gaze directly on Dasha. In the dark room, the boy's bright gray eyes glowed with a strange silver color.

"Anyway, I guess you are the collaborator the client mentioned."

"... yes?"

"The priest who commissioned me said so. If you find a smart Barça girl here, she will probably be able to explain her situation well."

"... ..!"

I'm not a Barçaite, and such a protest never occurred to me.

Dasha shouted at the boy, unable to hide her surprise and joy.

"Father Gustav! "Priest Gustav sent you here!"

465. Remarks (5)

Priest Gustav listened to me! Instead of cruelly abandoning the orphans, you tried to take appropriate action! All the efforts I have made so far have not been in vain!

"You met the priest, right? Since when... ..!"

As I approached the boy with a bright smile, he lifted his finger and lightly touched it to his mouth.

Thanks to this, Dasha came to her senses and hurriedly covered her mouth with both hands.

"... town!"

"There's no sign of anything around yet, but it's still a good idea to be careful about making loud noises."

Dasha nodded quickly, cupping her mouth.

"The client is, as you guessed, Priest Gustav. "It is said that since he had absolutely no time to spare during his shift, he came to the mercenary guild as soon as his shift ended."

As if he had guessed Dasha's questions, the boy kindly explained the details.

"So, before the guild takes over the case, I came here to conduct a preliminary investigation."

"Preliminary investigation?"

"okay."

In fact, it is said that Father Gustav continued to doubt Dasha's accusation.

It must have been very embarrassing for him as well. I'm worried about the safety of the orphans if I just ignore it, and I can't report it to the central church based on my suspicions without solid evidence.

In the end, after thinking about it, he felt angry and sent an investigation request to the guild. However, he also did not know the exact charges of the abbot or the scope of the investigation, and the deposit that a low-ranking priest could pay was not that much.

That's why the boy, a new mercenary, came forward for a preliminary investigation. If it is a request that the guild has room to rush into, then reorganize the staff so that a formal contract can be made.

"no... .."

Dasha looked in disbelief at the boy who gave off a mysterious aura.

'That person is a new mercenary?'

okay. If you think about it, it was natural. He was still a slim boy, and he looked somewhat sickly for someone who worked as a mercenary.

But it's really strange. Why did I feel a sense of relief the moment I first saw him that all my problems would now be solved?

"In any case, the faster and more accurate the preliminary investigation, the faster the guild's intervention will be. So now we need the help of an internal facilitator."

The boy who said that smiled softly at Dasha.

"So would you please help me save some time?"

"yes?"

Dasha was momentarily taken aback by the unexpected request.

"Um, that's... Actually, I don't know much about it... .."

But as I looked at the gray eyes that were calmly staring at her, the thoughts that had been stuck inside came out easily and came out.

When she came to her senses, she found herself confiding in detail what had happened to the boy.

Children disappearing every day. A suspicious guest who came to visit the abbot. And he sneaked into the director's office every night and tried to find evidence of corruption, etc.

"You showed that material to Priest Gustav?"

"Yes, it wasn't very useful data."

Dasha led him to the bookshelf with a slightly uncertain expression.

"This is the area of the monastery's fields that the lord surveyed and reported. When I first saw this, I thought it was definitely evidence that the abbot had sold the land. But when I asked Father Gustav, he said it was simply because the surveying method had changed."

"... .."

"This is all I found."

The boy looked at the documents Dasha held out with a serious expression. Then he nodded and said this.

"No, you found it well. Of course, what the priest said is not wrong, but if you think about Dunstan's motivation for investigating the answer, you can easily find the answer."

"... Motive?"

"okay. Hiring professional surveyors costs more than you think. But why does Dunstan go to the trouble of spending his own money to produce these documents every time?"

It was truly amazing. Even though the young boy is spouting the lord's name carelessly, he doesn't look arrogant at all.

"hmm... . I do not know."

"This is because this territory imposes taxes on farmers every year in proportion to the land area. So whenever Dunstan gets the chance, he comes up with a trick to increase the measurement value."

... Increase the area?

Dasha's eyes widened.

"So what you're saying is that the land actually needs to be increased according to the changed surveying method..." ... !"

"okay. If you check, you will probably find that the overall area of the territory has increased every year. Nevertheless, the monastery's land has decreased noticeably. Wouldn't this be evidence that the abbot sold more fields than expected?"

Dasha's face became serious after hearing that.

"But, but how can the abbot do that? "If what you say is true, it means that Lord Dunstan has known about this for a long time, right?"

"That's because Dunstan is one of them."

The boy who answered calmly added his explanation with a somewhat self-deprecating smile.

"you know that? The lord cannot dare to tax the land dedicated to the Lord, that is, the property of the church. So, if the abbot sold the fields to someone, there would be no harm from Dunstan's point of view as the amount of land to be taxed would increase. "Priest Gustav probably guessed that too."

"Then why did Father Gustav... then?" ... !"

"Perhaps he decided that it was dangerous for you to delve any further into the abbot's corruption. So, after cracking down on them to prevent them from acting recklessly, they took advantage of the opportunity and sent a request to the guild so that a proper investigation could be conducted."

"... ... !"

Suddenly, the face of Father Gustav, who was warning her in a stern voice, appeared in Dasha's mind.

-But you are still too young to get involved in adult matters.

-If you say something like that again in the future, you will no longer be forgiven just because you are young, do you understand?

At the time, Dasha thought that Father Gustav was blaming her. But actually he just wanted to protect himself from danger?

"I am..."

Dasha pursed her lips with a complicated expression.

Ah, maybe Father Gustav is right. The true intentions of adults were too unclear and complicated for young Dasha to follow.

"But-"

It was right then. The boy suddenly stared into space and let out an inexplicable sound.

"It was sad. "It seems the priest's decision was a little late."

"yes?"

"The collapse... I will wake up. And there... Numerous screams and shadows of death..."

"... ... ?"

"But we have already come too far to stop them."

... What does all that mean?

Dasha looked closely at the direction his eyes were looking, but she couldn't find anything there. It was just the pale moonlight peeking through the window, shining quietly on the office.

"..."

But it was a strange thing. That person's random words didn't sound like nonsense at all. Besides, how are his eyes shining so brightly in this dark room?

Dasha is looking up at him as if possessed by something-

Blink.

With a small movement of the eyelids, that magical moment was suddenly gone.

The boy, whose eyes had suddenly returned to his previous state, looked back at Dasha and asked curiously.

"I think we probably need to prepare a little bit. "If you don't mind, could you lead me to the abbot's bedroom?"

* * *

While guiding the boy to the priests' quarters, Dasha could not properly understand his actions.

'... 'What's all this about?'

Normally, I would have declined his request. To sneak into a place where priests are gathered in the middle of the night. Is there such a thing as crazy?

At this rate, it was only a matter of time before we were caught. Not to mention Priest Ellison, who reads scriptures until late at night, and there are many other priests who are sensitive to sleep.

If you happen to get caught, you'll probably be kicked out of the orphanage without even being able to come up with an excuse.

'but... ... '

This air surrounding them.

The flow of abnormally purified air, like a stream flowing in one direction, soothed Dasha's anxiety and gave her courage of unknown origin.

What can I say?

Is this something worth doing?

"Keep in mind. "You should never go on an adventure like this alone."

The boy, who sensed Dasha's thoughts like a ghost, quietly warned her.

After walking for so long, they finally arrived at the abbot's bedroom at the end of the hallway.

"The door is probably locked... .."

Sweet!

Before Dasha could finish speaking, the boy unlocked the key with a small gesture.

Even though Dasha was looking at him with her own two eyes, she couldn't figure out what trick he was doing right now.

"... .. ?!"

Creak-

The door opened with a small friction sound, and they were finally able to face Director Mathieu, who was snoring loudly.

"... What are you going to do? Are you really trying to kill the director like this?"

When Dasha whispered in fear, the boy shook his head slightly.

"I would like to do that, but... .."

Would you like to?

"It is not yet time for his life to end. "I wouldn't dare touch it."

"Then why did you come here?"

"I just thought the abbot needed a little warning-"

warning? how? That guy is sleeping without knowing the world?

When Dasha gave him a questioning look, the boy lightly shook his head.

"Okay. Even though he is not awake, his spirit is listening to everything we say."

The boy walked up to the bed with great strides and gently placed his lips near Abbot Mathieu's ear.

And then-

[Listen. Sooner or later, the worst consequences for your sins will come to you.]

Strange sounds spread out in all directions, as if hitting directly into the head.

The voice was so clear that even Dasha, who was a little away from the bed, could clearly recognize it.

"Off... .."

Is the soul really listening to those words? The abbot groaned and let out a small moan, as if he was in pain even in his sleep.

[So hurry and run away. Hide alone in a place where no one can find you. Please earnestly pray to God to forgive your sins.]

The corner of the boy's mouth that had said that far twisted cruelly for a moment.

[And when that day finally comes, bear the consequences alone in a place where no one knows.]

Ah, is that a blessing or a curse?

If the voice is extremely sweet, why does it give such an eerie feeling?

Grrrr... ..

While Dasha was shivering from an unknown cold, the boy slowly got up and looked back at Dasha. He had a very detached expression that was not appropriate for his age.

"Now that's enough. "He'll probably be self-reliant for a while."

"you... excuse me... .."

"Bart."

"Yes, Bart."

Dasha, who intuitively realized that he had completed all his business here, quickly confessed what he had wanted to say earlier.

"My name is Dasha. And I was actually born in the Empire. "It's not Warsaw."

"Yeah, I see."

He nodded without much change in expression and gently patted Dasha's messy hair.

Although it was only a very light gesture, it felt kind and comforting, making Dasha feel a little strange.

"... .."

"Now, let's go back to your room. "I'll take you back so you don't get caught."

From then on, the two moved to the bedroom where the orphans were sleeping without much conversation.

Just before entering the room, Dasha turned to the boy and asked.

"Hey, are you going back now?"

"okay. I'll be back soon with some people. So, from now on, you won't have to sneak out at night anymore."

The boy, Bart, left those words and suddenly disappeared before our eyes.

"... ..!"

Dasha stared at the empty hallway for a moment, then returned to her bed and closed her eyes, as if possessed by something.

I wondered if I had ever dreamed with my eyes open. That's because the events of that day were strange and unrealistic.

But soon thereafter, Dasha became convinced that the encounter that night had not been a dream. From that day on, just like her lies, her orphans no longer disappeared without a word.

And at some point, there was a rumor that Abbot Mathieu was so anxious that he retreated deep into his prayer room.

466. Remarks (6)

"I apologize, sir."

Masain was embarrassed and bowed his head to Seongjin. He had returned to his usual upright appearance, as if he had never been angry.

Of course, it was already too late, and his fierce talk had swept through the inn.

"I must have lost my mind for a moment to make such a mistake. "I will gladly receive punishment for this disrespect when I return."

"... no it's okay. "Never mind."

Seongjin answered hesitantly.

I didn't really feel like blaming him. In the first place, he was the one who left the escort knight aside and wandered around all over the place.

The only strange thing was that, no matter how angry he was, Lord Martha was the type of person who would go so far to abuse the prince he served.

"But, Lord Martha."

Is it because of my mood?

"For some reason, your face seems to have cleared up more than before. Are you feeling okay now?"

Masain then tilted his head and traced the side of the boat with a very relaxed expression.

"... You mean that? After listening to the words, I somehow felt very refreshed inside. Does it feel like a long-standing congestion has disappeared all at once? "I have heard rumors, but Priest Bart's healing power is truly amazing."

"No, it's healing power...""

It must have been amazing as always. Because that's what my father did.

'What happened?'

Sir Masain seemed to be purely impressed by the priest's abilities, but Seongjin sensed a subtle gap in his behavior and couldn't help but feel nervous.

But fortunately, Seongjin was soon able to understand the reason. Because a young man came into the inn with unsteady steps.

He was wearing an assassin's unique stealth suit, and when he spotted Seongjin, he smiled an uncharacteristically wide smile.

"We are here. Mores."

"It's finally here. Mores."

The man, who repeated words with similar meaning twice, walked towards Seongjin with somewhat unsteady steps, as his feet were not aligned.

"Let me tell you a little bit: it's all because of my father."

"okay. "His father made a light hint while waking up his brother."

suggestion?

"huh. "It's a light suggestion that doesn't linger for long and doesn't put a strain on the soul."

"It's a kind of epilogue. "I told you not to keep what you say inside."

When the suspicious person he saw for the first time approached in a

very innocent manner, Masain, startled, blocked Seongjin's path and growled.

"Stay back! "What kind of guy are you?"

"Sir Martha."

"Just looking at him, it seems like he knows his status, but how dare he disrespect his status..." ... !"

Seongjin raised one hand to reassure Masain, who was wary.

"are you okay. "That is the prisoner we captured last night."

"... yes?"

Masain's pupils shook violently at the man's unexpected identity.

"Captivate? A prisoner? I am being rude, sir. The author just walked into this place on his own feet... ... ?"

"Uh, well. "There is such a thing."

That thing is actually a soulless living doll created by 'Kaya's Breath'. I thought I needed to leave at least one sample, so I brought it with me. My twins personally helped me with valet parking on behalf of myself, who didn't have time.

"... yes?"

While Masain was dumbfounded by Seongjin's unkind explanation, the man slumped down on a nearby wooden chair. Then he stretched out his arms forward and made a request with a calm expression.

"Now that the transport is over, can you tie this guy up somewhere properly?"

"If we leave, the souls that ran away might come back."

"We have to go soon."

"I have to take care of Joe who stayed up all night."

"... ... ?"

Masain still had a suspicious look on his face, but there was no need to decline when the other person said he was willing to be detained. He took the rope at lightning speed and began wrapping it around the assassin's body around the chair.

Meanwhile, Seongjin pulled out a nearby chair and sat down across from the assassin.

"It took longer to arrive than I thought?"

The biological doll, which still showed traces of precise neurosurgery, was well worth investigating.

The only problem was that when the twins left and control of the body was taken over by Kaya's breath again, it was impossible to know what kind of unexpected situation this doll would encounter.

Also, Dasha's condition was quite serious at the time, so she left the doll with the twins and returned to the inn first.

but-

'If I had known this would happen, would I have carried it with my own hands, even if it was a little too much effort? I guess the two kids had a hard time waking up all night...'

As if he had guessed what Seongjin was thinking, the assassin chuckled with a mischievous expression.

"are you okay. "We played around a bit and took turns."

"Later, it got a little annoying so I started arranging for him too."

"Arenja?"

"Yes, of course Rebekah absolutely hated it."

"What can I do if we complain?"

Seongjin felt a little relieved.

Great job, kids. I don't have much to teach you. At least it doesn't look like you guys will easily get stabbed by others somewhere.

"Anyway, here's the problem."

How do you keep this biological doll safe? I have a feeling that if the soul from over there comes back, there will be quite a bit of trouble.

When Seongjin frowned, the assassin nodded and answered.

"Mores guessed right. "This doll has a light message of [self-destruction] engraved on it."

"Once they regain control of the body, they will probably destroy this doll to destroy evidence."

"It's not that difficult. All you have to do is quietly stop your heart and stop your brain."

"That alone will cause tissue damage quickly and the doll will lose its value as a specimen."

Right.

"Then, while I'm at it, shall we pamper myself a little more with Arenja? "I'm asking them to take turns guarding the doll."

Instead of answering right away, Herna and Kadesh stared at Seongjin playfully for a moment.

"Or there is a simpler way."

"I don't need help from Arranger or anything like that."

His mouth was so itchy that he looked like he was about to die.

Although he felt like he was being caught up in something, the twins' passionate eyes made Seongjin have no choice but to ask this.

"... what is that?"

"Mores is writing a new message."

"It's like putting a new saying on top of a saying."

Seongjin blinked.

A congratulatory message?

"I know that? "I can't tell you exactly, but the guy who engraved the saying on this doll is bigger than I thought."

"So even if it's Arrange, it's not easy to resist. "There is no way to get rid of this saying."

"It would have been quite dangerous if we weren't there to watch last night, right?"

"that's right. "My body would have been taken away in the blink of an eye or I would have easily died."

There is no room for guessing. He's probably the guy who engraved a congratulatory message on his bare eyebrows.

At the time, the Demon King guessed this guy's identity.

-lets think. Such restrictions are usually only applied to beings lower than oneself. But even this great Fire Demon can't read it properly, right?

-Maybe. No, this is almost certainly true, but it means that the eyebrowless woman may be a member of one of the high-ranking demon lords.

Then another question arises.

'How could Herna and Kadesh resist that abbreviation...? ... ?'

Their gazes intersect deeply as if searching for each other. A young, somewhat eerie purple glow in the eyes of an assassin with an innocent expression.

At that moment, Seongjin felt that somehow the twins and he were thinking similar things.

"okay? That's why we need Mores' congratulatory message even more."

"Mores would be able to overwrite that command."

"You understand, right? "Because Mores is Mores."

"that's right. "Mores is none other than Mores."

Well, at least I know one thing for sure. Let's leave our suspicions about each other aside for a while.

"... .."

Anyway, it was an embarrassing thing.

In fact, Seongjin has accidentally engraved something similar to a congratulatory message a few times. For example, the former Countess Sigismund, and what she did to her bare eyebrows last night.

But isn't that something that happened unintentionally at the border between consciousness and unconsciousness?

Moreover, how on earth is such a thing possible to engrave a message on an empty vessel that has had its soul drained out of it?

"I know that? Sometimes, some sayings are engraved on the bayon."

"Avoiding aeon, the essence of the soul, it only imprints on the surface of the soul."

"So the same thing is possible with Dacion."

"Because Dacion, like Bion, corresponds to the outer surface of the soul."

"Usually we use that method to avoid damaging Aeon. Just like the hint Father Seonghwang gave to Brother Masain a moment ago."

"Sometimes I use that method to avoid getting caught by Aon. Just as her grandmother once 'branded' her father, His Majesty."

"... stigma?"

for a moment. I feel like I just heard something I shouldn't have heard?

"... .."

Seongjin and the twins closed their mouths at the same time and looked at each other blankly. And after a while, he naturally changed the topic, as if he had made a promise.

"good. I'll give it a try. So what should I do to engrave that saying on the surface of my soul?"

"It probably won't be much different from what you did before."

"Just try to be less sincere and lighten your attitude."

"Don't let your strong intentions become a dagger and cut into the essence of your soul."

"Don't let those blunt words ruin your empty decision."

Hmm, somehow I feel like I know.

In order to overwrite the already engraved words, it would probably have to be stronger than the curse placed on Lord Martha's soul. But at the same time, it seems like it should be much weaker than the one carved on bare eyebrows.

When Seongjin inadvertently looked back at Masain, he was listening to their story with a slightly confused expression. Perhaps Lord Massaine will need some explanation for this conversation later.

"Whoa... .."

After catching his breath for a moment, Seongjin looked straight at the assassin and slowly opened his mouth.

[From now on, I will not allow any hasty actions. In the future, I will do my best to preserve the current state as long as I want.]

Then, I felt the wind of cause and effect that started from the corner of Seongjin's mouth, lightly enveloping the body of the assassin tied to the chair.

Was it successful? Probably so. Because the assassin - the twins - smiled mischievously, as if satisfied.

"Haha, look at this. "Mores is, after all, Mores."

"That's right. "Mores is none other than Mores."

The twins muttered playfully, waving their heads in place of their tightly tied arms and giving a clumsy farewell.

"Then the work has been completed well, let's go."

"Don't cause any more trouble and return to Regina quietly."

hmm? I have a feeling they were in a hurry from earlier.

"Are you going as soon as you arrive? why? "Is there something urgent?"

"It's urgent. "It's already late afternoon."

"It's almost time to wake up."

weather? What kind of lazy person in the world wakes up at this hour?

"Uh-huh! It's rude to say that. "For our group, this is like dawn."

"I have to go quickly and give him food. "Otherwise, you'd be rolling around the room starving all day, right?"

Do you feed me? Do you guys raise any animals at home?

The twins looked somewhat confused at Seongjin's question.

"Well, considering that we take care of Joe every day, it's hard to say that's completely wrong."

"Of course we like Joe a lot, but we're still a little embarrassed to put

him out there."

"Anyway, Mores. Good luck to you in the future too."

"Don't forget the hint you gave Brother Masain."

Seongjin was momentarily taken aback by the unexpected request.

"suggestion? "Why is that?"

"Well, didn't Seonghwang's father tell Brother Masain not to endure any more upsetting things?"

"Dad, Your Majesty was just giving some light advice, but you saw the huge results that came from it, right?"

"Be careful, Mores."

"Be careful, Mores."

"... .."

The twins left after asking Seongjin some big questions.

Of course, this was the question that caught Seongjin's nerves the most.

'... So guys. 'Who the hell is that 'Joe?'

* * *

Meanwhile, time in Dasha's dream was passing quickly.

When Director Mathieu hid in the prayer room and never came out, the atmosphere at the orphanage completely changed.

Occasionally, priests would gather in groups of two or three and bow with anxious looks on their faces, and sometimes people with a scary look would come to visit the abbot and then go away empty-handed.

However, there were no more orphans going missing.

'Bart said that. I think the director will take care of himself for a

while.'

Dasha was relieved. Everything was going as he said.

-I'll be back soon with people. So, from now on, you won't have to sneak out at night anymore.

okay. Now you don't have to struggle to stay awake and gather evidence. There is no need to cover your face with hair in case others notice you!

For the first time since coming to this orphanage, Dasha was like any other child and could feel at ease.

The environment was still poor and the hunger had not improved at all, but life could become much more livable simply because the anxiety of being sold off somewhere without a word disappeared.

It was probably around that time that the Dunstan estate became disorganized.

"You know what? Priest Ellison. "It is said that a powerful demon species appeared in the Primrose entertainment district not long ago."

"Ah, I heard that too. "Horribly, people were torn to pieces and died, right?"

Primrose Entertainment District is administratively located on the outskirts of Asin Territory, but considering its distance from the actual city center, it could be considered closer to Dunstan Territory. As the living areas of the territory residents greatly overlapped, the disaster that occurred there was also bound to become a big topic of discussion.

"What a devil servant, not long after the Feast of St. Bastian! "Could it be the work of those vicious devil worshippers?"

"I heard it might be the work of a demonic contractor. "He snuck into the red-light district as casually as an ordinary person, and unleashed the devil in the middle of a crowded street."

"Ah, how could such a scary thing happen...?" ... !"

"Grand Duke Asin is also taking this incident very seriously. "He said he formally requested that the Holy Knights be sent to Del Cross."

As it was an incident that resulted in numerous casualties, the Dunstan estate was not completely safe either.

Funerals were held one after another for the residents of the territory who died in the incident, and the number of people visiting the monastery to wash away their uncleanness gradually increased.

As Dasha looked at those scenes, the words the boy mercenary muttered to himself that night suddenly appeared in Dasha's mind.

-It seems the priest's decision was a little late.

-Collapse... I will wake up. And there... Numerous screams and shadows of death... ..

It was a time when Dasha was shivering from an unknown cold.

"uh? That lady... .."

Ramira, who was chewing the hard crust of bread next to her, quickly pointed somewhere.

When Dasha looked up, Peter's mother, who had not even seen her nose in the past few days, was standing there awkwardly.

"What's going on with that lady? "She's been nowhere to be seen these days, so I thought she'd completely given up on finding her son?"

"okay? however... .."

Dasha trailed off, trailing off her words. Because her appearance gave her an eerie feeling that was difficult to explain.

"... .."

Meanwhile, the woman had become noticeably emaciated. The complexion had turned black somewhere, and the expression was very distorted and grotesque. Even the strange black smoke

surrounding her body.

"what?"

"who is this?"

The other children who saw her also hesitated and backed away.
Because she felt an instinctive fear from that ominous sight.

It was right then.

"Mathieu... .."

The woman lifted her head crookedly and glared at the children with
shining eyes.

"Director Mathieu. "Where is that damn son of a bitch now?"

467. Remarks (7)

Rumbling...

Dark clouds roll in from afar, covering the sky.

Beneath the gloomy air, the gravedigger's wife stood alone, as if she were a tombstone announcing the end of the world.

"Hey, you! "Why are you doing this again?"

At that time, a large man approached holding an axe. He was a man named Braddock, who was the gatekeeper of the monastery and was in charge of various chores. He seemed to have spotted the woman while he was chopping firewood and rushed over to her.

His habit of recklessly hitting on orphans was no longer going away, so he pushed the gravedigger's wife and shouted at her.

"How many times do I have to tell you to understand? Your kid isn't here! "If you don't go away right now, I'm going to give you a really stinging taste this time!"

But that ugly momentum did not last long. Just as Braddock was about to grab the woman by the collar-

"big... "Wow!"

On the contrary, I was caught helplessly in her grasp and ended up clinging to him.

"... ... !"

The children looked in horror at the strangled man struggling helplessly. Where on earth does that skinny woman's arm get that

strength?

"... Dead bodies of children come into Dunstan Cemetery every day. "Aren't you curious about where these kids end up dying like that?"

The woman, holding a large Braddock in the air with one arm, spoke casually as if she was passing by and asking how I was doing. Of course, there was no way he could answer this because her throat was completely clogged.

"Off... .."

"Most of them are corpses washed up from the Primrose entertainment district, which is adjacent to the estate. "If you have to keep those poor things and bury them in the ground every day, all sorts of unholy thoughts will come into your head."

The gravedigger's wife, who had said that, glared at Braddock with eyes filled with resentment.

"The things in the entertainment district are clearly demons disguised as humans. Otherwise, how could you do such a miserable thing to children? "Seeing the devils walking around just fine, it occurred to me that the Lord may have already completely abandoned this world."

"Off... ..!"

"okay. This world is already a hell full of demons. Anyone would have no choice but to think that way. "Looking at the terrible traces of abuse and exploitation engraved on that small body."

"... ..!"

"So I thought. "If this is hell, and I also become a devil, who can blame me?"

Ttuduk!

Braddock's neck was eventually unable to withstand the woman's grip and broke completely. His body collapsed to the floor helplessly and soon began to turn black. It was a strong erosion phenomenon caused

by Magi.

"Caw! Mr. Braddock!"

At that time, Priest Ellison came running from afar. Embarrassed by the strong magical energy she felt out of nowhere, she grabbed Braddock's already dead body and began pouring out divine power frantically.

"Mr. Braddock? Ah, come to your senses, Mr. Braddock! What is this all of a sudden... ..!"

But that futile effort did not last long. This is because the woman's arm, which swung like lightning behind her back, pierced Priest Ellison's torso as if it were a sharp spear.

Phew!

"Huh... ..!"

The gravedigger's wife slowly raised her head toward the sky, hanging the limp Ellison priest by her arms.

"No, maybe I too was one of the demons who turned this world into hell. Even though I knew all the facts, I kept quiet until now. "It's been a long time since I realized that those poor children were in fact orphans with no connections who were given away cheaply to the red-light district!"

Grumbling.

Black, discolored tears flowed from the woman's eyes.

"And yet I have never been able to say a word about it. I couldn't help but worry that bad rumors might spread about Abbot Mathieu! why? Why do you think I did that? huh?"

The gravedigger's wife shook Father Ellison's body as if urging him to answer. In response, red blood spurted out of Ellison's mouth.

"Because I thought Mathieu might harm my child!"

"Big... .."

"I thought that if the village gravedigger found out that I had spread the rumor, he might give my baby to the red-light district this time!"

Priest Ellison's eyes, staring blankly at the black hand sticking out of his chest, are slowly losing their light. Subsequently, her flesh also became contaminated with demonic energy and began to turn black and crumbly.

Passsss... ..

"iced coffee! What a foolish worry! The real Mathieu probably didn't know anything! "I bet the manor's gravedigger didn't even remember that he had left her child in her orphanage!"

Ttuduk. Pop.

Raindrops began to fall like tears from the sky. The cold rainwater soaked the bodies of the orphans frozen in fear, the bodies of the dead priests Braddock and Ellison, and also the bodies of the poor mothers who had lost their children.

"... "In the end, I probably paid the price for my foolishness."

No matter how long I had been standing in the rain, a woman's depressed voice came out through the humid air.

But why? To Dasha, her voice felt even more desperate than her blood-soaked screams.

"Peter... . The body of my baby who died after being abused and insulted in a red-light district... .."

"... .."

"I had to send my baby away from my arms without being able to feed him a warm meal... .."

Ssssss.

The black smoke surrounding the gravedigger's wife is becoming

thicker.

'... Dangerous!'

Dasha swallowed dry saliva. This is because she instinctively sensed extreme malice from the demonic energy she exuded.

Yes, perhaps the gravedigger's wife hates the children at the orphanage as much as she hates Director Mathieu. Her own son, Peter, was an abominable orphan who would have stayed alive and well instead of being sold to the red-light district.

Fortunately, the children were frozen in place now, not even daring to think of running away. The scene unfolding before your eyes is so shocking that you may not feel reality.

Perhaps it would be better than hastily provoking a woman. However, this standoff with a clear balance of power will not last very long.

Dasha, having decided that, unconsciously took a step towards the gravedigger's wife and opened her mouth.

"Abbot! Abbot Mathieu is now in the prayer room in the east building! These days, I stay there every day and pray earnestly."

Then the woman's eerie eyes turned and stared at Dasha.

"... pray?"

"Yes it is."

As Dasha said that, the contents of the congratulatory message that Bart had whispered to her the other day were vividly emerging in her mind.

-Listen. Sooner or later, the worst consequences of your sins will come upon you.

It was clear. The price of sin he was talking about probably refers to the gravedigger's wife. then...

-So hurry and run away. Hide alone in a place where no one can find you. Please pray earnestly to God to forgive your sins.

It is unlikely that he really gave instructions for the director to be saved. Driven by such a strong intuition, Dasha eagerly reported to the gravedigger's wife in a clear voice.

"Priest Mathieu wants to be saved by God!"

"Salvation... .."

"Yes it is! I dare to pray to the Lord for forgiveness of my sins, and my intention is to finally go to heaven alone! "The poor orphans were sold to red-light districts and left to die-"

"Salvation? "Bake it?!"

The gravedigger's wife no longer listened to Dasha's backstory. She raised her head with bloodshot eyes, and then she let out a long scream that flowed through the air, pouring out her bloody tears like a waterfall.

"Mathieuuuuu!"

Shuuuuk-!

The divine form of the woman, engulfed in black magical energy, shoots out as if it were the wind. His anger toward the abbot had reached such a peak that he no longer cared what happened to the other children.

-And when that day finally comes, bear the consequences alone, in a place where no one knows.

Pow!

In the distance, you can see the roof of the monastery's east building being completely destroyed.

Black demonic energy soared into the sky, and soon a black and elongated figure slowly rose up from within.

An ominous thing that should never exist in this world. It was a demon species.

Dasha watched in fascination as it swung its long arms like a whip and destroyed the monastery building.

"Ugh!"

At that time, a small moan was heard from next to me. Turning her head absentmindedly, Dasha was horrified to see Ramira's hands discolored black.

"Lamira!"

It seemed that Ramira was standing in the path where the gravedigger's wife passed by. The girl let out a dumbfounded moan as she looked at her right hand, which was discolored black by demonic energy.

"ah... ah... ... !"

'You can't leave it like that!'

Dasha intuitively realized this. Didn't she see with her own eyes what happened to Braddock and Priest Ellison? Their bodies turned black and dried out as if they had been scorched by fire.

If you let that black thing spread through your body, Ramira will end up like them!

"... ... !"

When I came to my senses, Dasha was already holding a large ax in her hand. It was an ax used to chop firewood that had been thrown on the floor with Braddock when she died.

"Hold on a moment, Ramira!"

Dasha gritted her teeth and raised the ax above her head.

"... uh?"

Ramira belatedly looked back at Dasha, but by then the ax had already been swung with force.

Kwasik!

Fortunately, the clumsily struck ax blade easily cut the slender girl's forearm in two.

Ramira's eyes widened and she looked down at her forearm, which was now a stump.

"... "What the fuck?"

A ridiculous curse came out of her mouth. She seemed so caught up in fear and shock that she couldn't even feel her pain.

"crazy? Get this Barca! you... you! Have you been chopping firewood with my arm? This is crazy... ... ?"

Ignoring her nonsense, Dasha tore the hem of her skirt long and tied it around her arm, which was bleeding profusely.

Meanwhile, the disaster of the demonic species was rapidly encroaching on the entire monastery.

Geek, geek, geek!

Hahahahaha!

The eerie laughter of low-level demons spreading from the east wing-

"Ugh!"

"Aaaah!"

The desperate screams of priests struggling in fear.

And soon, the entire monastery was completely covered in thick darkness.

* * *

visor! Cheaeng!

Dasha faintly twitched her eyelids. This was because the loud noises coming from around her pierced her ears harshly.

The sound of weapons clashing.

The sound of people using evil words.

"Stop it! "A devil jumped out that way!"

"Bart, you crazy bastard! What on earth are you asking? "There was no mention of a devil species appearing!"

"How do you know that a newbie who just came in will suddenly summon a demon? "Shut up and focus, Captain Justin!"

"profit! Don't you know? Everyone is being fooled by this guy! Did Bart ask a priest to consecrate his weapons for no reason before coming here? "That bastard must have known it would turn out like this!"

"No, anyway, isn't that an excessive assumption?"

... Bart? Ah, yes. Bart.

You said you'd bring people here. You really kept your promise.

While Dasha was feeling relieved, she felt someone suddenly lift her body.

"kids! Mr. Paula! There are living children here! The erosion response is still weak!"

"okay? What about priests? "Are there any priests alive?"

"shit! In fact, all the priests who could stop the erosion have died! "What is all this about?"

"Then quickly gather the kids here! Bring me to Priest Gustav! hurry!"

After hearing that, Dasha completely lost her mind.

When she faintly came to her senses again, it was when someone's warm hand touched her cheek. Then she felt cold water droplets

falling on her face.

"... 'I'm sorry."

Someone was stroking her face and crying.

"Hey. I am so sorry. I... I should have listened to you earlier. If that were the case... ... !"

Diasa recognized his voice and smiled faintly even in her daze.

'Ah, don't cry, Father Gustav. I know. You've already done the best you can...'

Feeling a faint divine power flowing into her, Dasha fell into sleep with a much more relaxed mind.

* * *

When the Astros mercenaries were struggling against the devil species-

The boy who brought the mercenary group here was in a slightly odd place, facing the wrong person.

"Stop."

A low hill overlooking the monastery.

The woman dressed in black priestly robes slowly turned around when she suddenly heard a command from behind her. She then stared straight at the pale boy who emerged from the bushes.

"... Who are you? Why are you suddenly threatening an innocent priest?"

"You're not asking because you don't know, right? 'Summoning a demon species is a serious crime for which anyone can be punished on the spot."

"her! What kind of nonsense is this, summoning a demon species? "Do not arrest a living person without evidence."

As the woman continued to flirt, the boy's eyes, glaring at her, shed a cold silver-grey glow.

"So, are you going to claim that the illiterate gravedigger's wife drew a complicated summoning circle and summoned a high-ranking demon? Come up with a proper excuse before you get your throat cut right now. "You disgusting devil worshipper."

468. Remarks (8)

A vivid scene from the past that would have been impossible to observe was passing through the eyes of the boy, Nate.

The gravedigger's wife screams while hugging her son's body. A woman in black robes approaches her and whispers her sad words as if to comfort her.

The grandiose demon summoning ritual they carried out in the Primrose entertainment district, and the deaths of countless people caught up in it.

Yes, because of the woman right in front of me. That woman completely corrupted the soul of the poor mother who lost her child, causing her to accumulate heavy karma from which she could not be saved.

Slurp.

Nate slowly pulled out his old longsword.

Unfortunately, it was impossible to change the future, which was completely fixed. However, it would be possible for him now to at least condemn the culprit of this situation and that passionate subordinate.

"No way, you..." ... ?"

At that time, the woman seemed to realize something and muttered.

"Those mysterious eyes! Ah, you are the boy the archbishop was talking about! "Because he had a disadvantaged childhood, he imagined himself as a much smaller and weaker child."

In an instant, the atmosphere changed. The woman, who had erased the tension that had wrapped around her body, took a step towards her Nate, neatly adjusting the hem of her black robe.

"Let me formally introduce myself. My name is Taiara Hao, and I am the parish priest of Dunstan Territory. Could you please take away that sword? "Our devoted brothers are by no means your enemies."

"... .."

"I don't know if you believe it, but the Archbishop of Love has been saying for a long time that you would visit this place. And I have prepared quite a few things to welcome you as a brother."

It was an unpleasantly friendly demeanor.

When Nate frowned and raised his sword straight, Taia stopped and smiled awkwardly.

"I repeat, I am not your enemy. Just following the archbishop's wishes, I went back and forth from time to time at the orphanage, eagerly waiting for you to show up here. What do you think? "Did you like the gift I prepared for you?"

They were a tribe that would have been unpleasant to cut down with a single sword, but even Nate couldn't help but react to those words.

"... gift?"

"That's right, it's a gift prepared for you by the Archbishop himself."

"... .."

I thought it was just one of the evil things that devil worshipers do on a daily basis, but was there really another hidden story?

Nate concentrated his mind and looked at Taia carefully. Then, the strange journey of her life that she has been through so far quickly passes before her eyes.

The ability to fully insight into human life was the power of the oracle.

Meanwhile, she had just become bishop of Dunstan and had just welcomed a new archbishop.

Crackling-!

Suddenly, there was a faint noise and Nate's vision became blurred. It was a sign that it was sensitive information that directly affected his future.

"... ..!"

Nate quickly looked away from the scene. It wasn't that difficult for him to just peel off that thin veil.

but-

-Remember, Nate. The most effective way to purify sewage is to simply leave the impurities to settle down on their own. If you hastily put your hand to correct it, the water will turn into even more muddy muddy water due to your light gestures.

okay. Mama always said that.

Nevertheless, if you try to look into it without thinking, at that moment you will attract even worse possibilities and become a powerful wedge that fixes the future.

Blink.

He blinked once to distract himself and chose the most basic way to get the information he needed. It was to hear the story directly from the person involved.

"Explain. "What do you know about me?"

Then Taia responded obediently with a happy face.

"I just received some information about you from the archbishop. They say he is a descendant of a secret clan and a valuable key to preparing the future of the underground sect."

"key? "What does that mean?"

"I don't know the details either. All I can say is that your presence is more important than anything else in order to welcome the person the underground church is waiting for."

"... "Then why is the passionate archbishop trying to drag me into an underground cult?"

"To protect you at all costs. The Archbishop said that it was all about [Payment]. So put away your sword and come with me. "We will protect you wholeheartedly."

I don't even know exactly why. Is he just doing what the passionate archbishop tells him to do?

A feeling of discomfort crept inside me.

"Then what is the 'gift' you prepared?"

"It's over there, right? As you can see, a great high-ranking demon is having fun destroying the monastery. Aren't you truly a minister?"

"How can summoning a devil and disrupting the world be a 'gift'?"

Then Taia's face became filled with deep joy.

"It is a gift beyond doubt! Strictly speaking, it's a gift for everyone here, including you. iced coffee! "It is also the utmost love of [passion] for this world full of worldly desires!"

As Nate's face faintly distorted, she urgently poured out an explanation.

"Of course, I completely understand the confusion you feel. Ordinary people do not easily understand the deep meaning of sorrow, and sometimes seriously misunderstand Him. But I can assure you that [Payment] is no different from all the love in the world."

"... .."

"So he responded to us, as he always does, in a loving way. He responded with love to the human longing for his life, and he also responded with love to the sorrow of a mother who lost her child."

"... So she sold her soul to the devil and led him to commit massacre?"

"That is a misunderstanding. All of this was going to happen someday anyway. It's just that Ae-yeol personally intervened to advance the time a little and greatly reduce the number of people who would be caught up in the fate of holocaust."

"... .."

"The archbishop said you would probably understand everything."

okay. That was the strange part.

Originally, most people in the monastery, including orphans, would not have escaped death.

However, in that certain fate, there was a cause and effect that I could have a little bit of insight into. How on earth?

As soon as a question arose, the oracle's intuition immediately picked up the answer in his head. It was Dasha's face smiling brightly at him.

-Priest Gustav! Priest Gustav sent you here!

In fact, the only person who would survive until the end in that orphanage was the Barsha girl I met during the preliminary investigation.

'Ah, did you say it wasn't Warsain?'

But the moment he met that girl, Nate was able to realize that she had somehow deviated from his predetermined destiny and was twisting his future in a dangerous way.

If it were not for this incident, Dasha would have left the orphanage after about a year and joined the assassination organization.

It is a well-known fact that until then, the abbot would have continued to sell poor orphans to the red-light district.

Then, the gravekeeper's wife, who finally figured out how to make a

contract with the devil, attacks the monastery, and everyone there loses their lives to the devil at once. That was exactly what should have happened one year later.

"Do you understand now? "That the response Aeyeol sent was nothing else but 'love'?"

Taia asks with a strange smile.

"... .."

okay. At least Nate had no choice but to admit that one fact.

The future changed by [Aeyeol]'s intervention is more positive than expected. By encouraging her to summon a demon in advance, she saved the lives of countless orphans who would have been sold to her entertainment district in the future.

So, what happened to Dasha?

It is true that she also has a significant stake in this changed future. Thanks to the girl's struggles alone, Priest Gustav found the guild, and he invited himself, who happened to be a new mercenary, here.

And by engraving a simple congratulatory message on the abbot's soul, he was able to create a gap that could save the lives of the orphans.

"Then maybe that girl named Dasha is also among you... .."

"Dasha?"

"... "No, it's nothing."

Nate, who was deep in thought for a moment, nodded.

"good night. "If the gift your archbishop has prepared is the lives of orphanage children, then I will gladly accept it."

"Ah, is he finally understanding our true meaning? "This is such a joy!"

"Isn't it too early for that? If we allow the erosion to continue like this, those children will all die sooner or later. "It's a gift in its own way, and if you prepared it, you would have come up with a proper way to purify the children's erosion, right?"

In order to save the life of someone who should have died, you have no choice but to make them go through an experience equivalent to death instead. That was the reason why Nate could not hastily evacuate the children far away even though he had predicted today's tragedy.

'Besides, if things continue like this, the damage will grow uncontrollably. 'Because the strength of me and the Astros mercenaries alone will not be able to stop that high-level devil.'

A well-trained group of Holy Knights, or equivalent priests, are required to have divine power.

However, causality did not allow Nate to make any further adjustments, and for some reason, Nate's intuition also felt that that level of preparation was sufficient.

'why?'

As Nate looked down at the ruined monastery grounds with worried eyes, Taia, who noticed that his vigilance was not the same as before, took a step closer and said,

"There are plenty of ways to save them. The Archbishop of Love will be happy to give you an answer. So, come quickly and go to the church with me."

"... .."

"It seems incredible. Well, the archbishop said it won't be easy to convince you. So, if you don't feel like it, I told you to tell me this as well."

Taia approached with a somewhat eerie smile and whispered in Nate's ear, her voice a little muffled.

-The stigma that is oppressing you is engraved in a place you can

never see.

"... ... !"

Whick!

A sharp sword touches the back of my neck like lightning. At the same time, Taia, facing the boy's sharp eyes, flinched in surprise and raised both her hands.

"Wait, wait! Don't be angry with me! "I am merely a messenger conveying the Archbishop's words!"

"Say what is right. "Where did you hear that information?"

"So, you've been saying it since a while ago, right? "These are all words that the Archbishop of Joy ordered me to tell you!"

Nate frowned.

stigma. There are only a handful of people who have even a vague guess about its existence. At least the people who know the exact nature and location of the stigma are all dead and no longer in this world.

'Passionate Archbishop...'

What on earth is he? How is it that we can't easily get a glimpse into that woman's past, and now we know things that no one should know?

Trying to keep his cool as much as possible, Nate gently applied force to the tip of the sword pointed at her.

"okay. "What other nonsense did the Archbishop of Love talk about?"

"No, that's bullshit...""

"If this is not nonsense, how on earth can a person engrave a stigma on a place that cannot be seen?"

Nate's increasingly sharp momentum was quite threatening. Because

of this, Taia lost her composure for the first time since she faced him and panicked.

"What I conveyed is absolutely not empty words. The Archbishop spoke clearly! "The reason you have not been able to find the location of the stigma until now is because it is engraved on your soul, or Bion, not your body!"

"... ..!"

"So, come to the Underground Church and become our brothers. "Only the Archbishop of Passion can lift the heavy restrictions engraved on your soul and unleash your true power!"

... Bayon.

Yes, that was it.

Nate fell silent with a complicated expression. And after a while, a soft laugh came from his mouth.

"Ha ha ha ha ha... .."

Taia was confused by the sudden reaction, but Nate withdrew his sword from her and let out a sigh.

"Yes, not the lives of orphans. "I guess this is what the archbishop meant as a gift to me."

"... ..?"

"You were used by him."

Nate finally realized it fully.

That woman's mission was not to take her to the Love Church. She was merely a means of conveying the location of the stigma hidden within her.

[Ayeol], who intervened in the future in a subtle way, would have already known. The fact that Nate would never spare someone who mentioned 'stigma' in front of him.

So even with his insight, he cannot see the future of that devil worshiper. Because that woman has no future left anymore.

'It is probably true that the stigma is engraved on the bayon.'

Nate knew it intuitively.

The only thing that concerns me is how the Archbishop of Love knew that fact and for what purpose he approached me.

'But at least this much has become clear.'

Who should clean up the erosion and save those children? Who should punish the superior demon who is destroying the monastery?

Why did his premonitions whisper that everything would work out just like this, despite his obvious lack of preparation?

"... "I don't really like this method."

There is no time to find another solution.

After making his decision, Nate held his sword backwards and raised his arms high.

"... ... ?"

Taia, who had been watching the scene blankly but not fully understanding it, belatedly realized the meaning of the action and slowly opened her eyes.

"wait for a sec? What are you doing now... ... ?"

But before she could finish speaking-

Phew!

A sharp sword loaded with aura pierced Nate's solar plexus and came out from behind his back.

469

469. Remarks (9)

One of Nate's greatest misfortunes was that the Oracle's power prevented him from forgetting any of his painful memories.

He remembered all the sounds he heard around him right after birth. Even though he had not yet learned to speak, he had stored the syllables of incomprehensible sounds in his head.

So in the future, he was able to reconstruct the cold voice of Bethsheba that whispered to him as a newborn.

-Don't blame me too much, baby. This is all for you. For you now, this power is nothing short of poison. If people discover your divine power, you will become a living icon of the Holy Emperor's family and be exploited and treated as a fountain from which divine power gushes for the rest of your life.

Perhaps the 'stigma' was engraved right after that. The only reason Nate couldn't remember its location was because he immediately lost consciousness due to the excruciating pain that cut through his soul.

On the other hand, one of Nate's greatest fortunes was that, thanks to the power of the Oracle, he was able to remember even the faintest auditory hallucinations he had glimpsed.

On the day the stigma was engraved, Nate remembered someone's voice urgently calling out to him.

-wait for a sec! do not do that! There might be another, better way! therefore... ... !

It was a fleeting moment.

However, amid all the thoughts that poured out through the decision to make a decision, the clear voice that particularly caught his ear remained in Nate's memory for a long time afterwards.

After learning the language and fully understanding its meaning, I understood that the owner of the voice was trying to stop Bethsheba with all his might for his own sake.

So sometimes I wondered who he was. Because it was almost the only warm memory left in the dreary period before and after his birth.

From then on, I would hear that voice once in a while if I could forget it. Most of the time, it was the moment when Nate faced her desperate crisis, like when she was branded.

-You have to be careful with that new escort. I remember. Never find yourself in a situation alone with that guy!

-Use that portal. Leave the rest to me. I am now stronger than I was back then. I'll take care of everything, so don't worry about anything, just trust me!

And now-

In this situation where he was thrusting his sword into his own stomach in front of a passionate agent, Nate unexpectedly heard the same voice as before.

[What are you doing? You idiot! Are you crazy now?!]

A strange sound that makes one feel like an adult, but also like an innocent child.

It was a moment of pleasure to hear a thought that had been heard for the first time in a long time, but Nate could no longer concentrate on that voice for long. Because she felt an excruciating pain that went beyond her body and ripped through her soul.

[No, why are you doing that? Why is everything you do so different?]

The voice was mad as hell, but the only emotions conveyed there were worry and affection. Even as Nate broke into a cold sweat at her

pain, she was making excuses for him without even realizing it.

'Even if you can see through everything with your spiritual eyes, you cannot see your own soul until you die. In other words, while I am alive in the flesh, I will never be able to determine the location of the stigma. But I need to get rid of the stigma attached to me right now.'

[So you were going to die first? Does that make sense? yes?]

'No, that's not it. If I were to die like this, wouldn't it really mean nothing? I was simply trying to remove the stigma that was engraved somewhere in my soul, by finding its likely location and cutting it out entirely. Just damaging part of the stigma will be enough to loosen the constraints that are constricting the soul.'

At the very least, if he could pinpoint where the obstruction was in his soul, then Nate could create a detour to avoid the stigma. Moreover, there must be a force strong enough to fill that detour!

[...] No, that doesn't make sense. her... This guy is really hitting the nail on the head...]

The voice that mumbled in a lost manner for a moment finally spoke to Nate as if it had made up its mind.

[Shit! great. I understand! There is no other way for me either. It is impossible for me to change the self-harm event that you have already observed and confirmed. In the first place, the direction of time we run in is very different!]

'then...'

[But at least I can help you end this madness a little faster.]

The voice tried to calm down its agitated emotions and began to convey the information it had gathered to Nate as quickly as possible.

[The stigma engraved on you is very large. It covers everything from the back of the neck to the lower back. In addition, the structure is extremely complex, so even a significant amount of damage will not stop it from functioning.]

To some extent, Nate also guessed the identity of the stigma. The worst punishment handed down by the Heresy Tribunal. It is a terrible stigma that represents a 'devil worshiper'.

I heard that the complex pattern was designed based on the laws of the normal world. Therefore, once the brand was engraved on the body, even a healthy priest lost his divine power in an instant.

Perhaps it was the best way to prevent his enormous divine power from flowing out into the real world.

[Of course, there are some weak points in that stigma. Right nearby, there is a pattern with 9 layers of concentric circles tightly wrapped around each other. The codes are so sensitive that it would be possible to shatter all 9 codes with one sword, right? All you have to do is rip just one span from where the sword pierced through to the upper right room.]

span.

Considering that the internal organs along the same path will be cut together, the distance cannot be said to be short even with empty words.

Still, it was quite encouraging news for Nate. Originally, she had planned to relentlessly attack her body until the stigma lost her power.

'span... ... '

Nate gritted his teeth and strengthened his trembling hands.

Quad deuk!

There was tremendous bleeding and pain that was so intense that it made me lose my senses.

However, amid the pain, his mind became sharper than ever before, and his rapidly expanded field of vision allowed him to simultaneously grasp many things he had never seen before.

"What the hell are you... ... "

The powerful divine power that had been suppressed for a long time is released, and bright beams of light burst out in all directions as if exploding.

In that dazzling light that seemed to blind her, Taia lost her soul and shed tears.

"... Ah, Bethelah!"

How can I describe that scene in words? Holiness that goes beyond the limit is a violence that devastates the soul.

Would it be like this if the great saints of old, or even another incarnation of the main god, returned to the world?

"My love! God incarnate! "This lowly servant has finally seen with his own eyes the evidence of your presence and presence in the world!"

For the first time in her life, Taia, the parish priest of the Affectionate Church, sobbed as she felt the fullness of faith welling up from her soul.

But that happiness is short-lived.

Sigh!

Soon after, her head was blown off by Nate's long sword, which was swung like lightning.

* * *

Rattling rattling.

"..."

When Dasha came to her senses, the whole situation was already over. They had been cleansed and placed on a wagon heading to Asin.

As I lay dazed, feeling the vibration of the shaking carriage, I heard the sound of mercenaries bickering in front.

"Oh, let go of this! Don't stop me, Paula! This time, I won't leave that guy alone, Bart! How dare you fool Justin Astros!"

Despite his thick voice, he was a man whose manner of speaking seemed extremely frivolous.

And then a calm woman's voice is heard scolding him.

"What kind of crazy talk is that? "Why does the captain say something like that even after seeing with his own eyes what kind of performance our rookie rookie has done?"

"Of course, he contributed to some extent in exorcising the devil... ... !"

"You have to say it right away. The newbie did it all by himself. "Are we so afraid of erosion that we dared to go near the devil?"

"... ... !"

"And who was it that cleaned up all the poor children caught up in the erosion?"

The man was silent for a moment, as if he had been caught off guard, and then protested in a weak voice.

"But we've suffered a lot of damage because of that guy! How can you save lives and exorcise high-level demons for such a small commission fee? What kind of wasteful effort is this without any reward? If only he had properly reported the results of the investigation to me... ... !"

"Of course, the new employee did a thorough preliminary investigation and submitted a neat report. "We proposed several special provisions to prepare for unexpected situations, so we reflected them in the contract, but have you read the contract?"

"Oh, I read it. I read it roughly... No, wait, Paula. "What kind of weirdo would put such a complicated special contract into a simple, low-level request?"

"Then you must be happy. Fortunately, our new recruit was a strange

guy who put such a thing in, and if the contract was properly fulfilled, our mercenary group would get a huge amount of money for free."

Then the man looked surprised and asked.

"what? we... "Did you make money?"

"yes. You earned a lot, Captain Justin. If you were being picky, you were going to formally request the Holy Knights from the Empire, but you just brushed it off in favor of our mercenary corps, right? Perhaps there will be money left over even after collecting all the rescued orphanage children? "Our newbie is really an object."

The man looked taken aback for a moment by the outpouring of praise from the woman called Paula.

"... So, you're saying it would be a good idea to sign a formal contract with Bart?"

"I feel like I want to do that. But the new team refused to sign a formal contract with us."

"what? Why again!"

"Bart doesn't want to treat someone like Captain Justin so deferentially as his boss."

"... "No, what?"

I can feel the man huffing and disappearing somewhere. I'm probably going to argue with that friend named 'Bart'.

At the same time, on the other side of the same carriage, another conversation was heard in a low, muffled voice.

"Father Gustav. "Are you out of your mind?"

In response to the woman's soft voice, the man, whose throat was locked, stammered a question.

"... Oh, the kids... What happened to the children?"

"Everyone is safe. The erosion phenomenon disappeared and stability was found. "It's all thanks to the priest's hard work."

"Ah, Lord!"

The sound of a man sobbing was heard along with a small prayer.

"I couldn't do anything. Yes, it was no problem. With just my meager divine power, I would have lost my children helplessly! "It is truly the Lord's guidance to send us great mercenaries like you at the right time."

"Shh. Don't worry too much about the past and get some rest. "The priest has used up too much of his divine power."

"Thank you. Thank you so much!"

After hearing that, Dasha slowly closed her eyes, feeling a deep sense of fatigue.

Bart...

Priest Gustav...

These are people who originally would have had no contact whatsoever in her life. Maybe that's why her names were somehow familiar, but strangely felt infinitely vague.

... Cool.

As her consciousness faded, the familiar names faded from her mind, leaving behind a faint reverberation.

470

470. Remarks (10)

Dasha, along with other orphans, was moved to a temporary shelter on the outskirts of Asin.

"Now, you can rest here as much as you like until you decide where to go, little ones! Our Astros mercenaries will gladly look after you! Hahaha!"

Justin, a man who identified himself as the leader of a mercenary group, confidently assured the children and patted his chest.

Dasha couldn't help but be impressed. Isn't this a rare and kind mercenary group that would go out of their way to buy a new building for orphans?

'Special deal! If a temporary building is provided by the estate due to the collapse of monastery facilities, a special agreement allows you to purchase the building first at a low price in the future!'

That wasn't all. The orphans were provided with clean clothing and quality food by the mercenaries, and for the first time in a long time, they were able to fill their bellies.

'Special deal! If you perform some of the functions on behalf of the monastery, a special agreement is made to transfer a significant amount of donations received during the period!'

What was most surprising was that the erosion that had invaded the children's bodies had completely disappeared. I heard that to properly cleanse the erosion, you have to ask for a high-ranking priest and pay a huge fee to the church for it.

'Special deal! A special contract that allows you to charge the lord for

all cleaning and treatment costs for erosion at market prices! But Bart purified it in one fell swoop, right? 'This is so bad!'

The sight of the man grinning frivolously seemed a little suspicious.

But no matter how smart he was compared to his peers, Dasha, who was much younger than him, had no way of knowing what was going through Justin Astros' head.

As they enjoyed unprecedented abundance, the orphans gradually began to forget the aftermath of the accident.

There was just one thing that I couldn't understand: none of the children at the orphanage, including Dasha, had any proper recollection of the accident that day.

The same was true for Ramira, who lost part of her right arm.

"... 'A building pillar collapsed on my arm?'"

"Yes, Paula from the mercenary group said that. They say you were trapped under the monastery building. I think my arm was probably cut off at that time..."

"okay. I see..."

Ramira looked at her shortened right arm with a slightly depressed expression. Perhaps because she had received divine power treatment for purification, the girl's severed arm had healed and new skin was growing.

"But they say it's fortunate that the amputation is below the elbow. 'If the upper part of your elbow is blown off, it will be much more difficult to use a prosthetic hand, and your daily life will be much more inconvenient.'"

Dasha carefully offered consolation rather than consolation. Of course, it is unclear how much comfort those clumsy words would have been to the girl who suddenly became a one-armed girl.

Fortunately, Ramira smiled at Dasha with a calm expression on her face.

"Heh, I see. I heard that a very strong demon appeared in the monastery, right? "You're saying it's a miracle that we survived there?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then that's enough. "At this level, I was very lucky."

"huh... .."

Dasha trailed off and avoided eye contact. She became short, and as she continued to look at Ramira's arm, she felt strangely strange.

Anxiety and emptiness, as if I had somehow forgotten something important. Frustration and embarrassment that seems impossible to grasp. And, a little longing that I can't understand... ..

However, even after thinking and thinking for several days, Dasha could not figure out anything about what happened that day.

* * *

As a result, the selective amnesia was a very fortunate thing for the children of Dashana Orphanage. Not long after, the Holy Knights dispatched from Delcross visited the temporary residence.

They were a pair of inquisitors, a man and a woman dressed in stiff uniforms, who called the orphans into the room one by one and interrogated them in detail about the day's events.

"so. "Are you saying you don't remember anything either?"

"Yes, I remember the building in the east building suddenly exploded. At the same time, my eyes were covered with black fog. "I don't remember anything after that."

Dasha was quite nervous as she answered. It has to be that way. If you make a mistake, you might be taken to the infamous Heresy Tribunal.

"okay. Well then, let me ask you one more question. "Tell me everything you know about Abbot Mathieu."

"... yes?"

Dasha paused for a moment.

Is it because of my mood? I felt like I had some complicated feelings about the abbot.

But strangely enough, when I try to bring it out, I end up feeling completely dazed, as if my mind is wrapped in fog.

"well... I don't know? We rarely got to see Director Mathieu in person. "He was the person in charge of the monastery, so he must have been very busy."

"But didn't we meet every week during mass?"

"well? The orphanage children were not allowed to attend formal mass because they were dirty. So, Father Ellison, who mainly cared for us, celebrated a simple Mass in the kitchen."

"... .."

The male inquisitor who was interrogating Dasha looked quite dissatisfied.

But when there was no room for more information to come out, he turned to the female Inquisitor leaning against the wall, as if asking permission. Then he quickly turns to Dasha and nods her head.

"Okay, I understand. "You can go now."

Dasha stood up and bowed her head politely to the man.

And as he left the room, he also said hello to the young woman standing in the doorway. I was thinking that compared to her smiling face, she had eyes that had a strange coldness to them.

widely!

When the door closed like that -

"This doesn't come out too well, so it's rather suspicious. "What do

you think about taking all the surviving children to the Inquisition?"

The male Inquisitor asked the female Inquisitor who was deep in thought. Although he was already approaching middle age, he was showing an extremely polite attitude towards the Inquisitor who was much younger than him.

"Please, please. Inquisitor Sophia."

Why not-

The red-haired Inquisitor with a carefree face was actually a master of cruel torture and a hidden powerhouse of the Inquisition.

"... .."

The Inquisitor called Sophia looked at the man for a moment and then smiled brightly. Of course, her cold eyes did not have the slightest hint of laughter.

"That is impossible. We have come here to uncover the truth about the demon summoning. "The Inquisition's mighty power should not be poured into the useless task of torturing children."

"then... .."

"Orphans are released like this. "It didn't seem like he was lying."

The man was not very pleased, but he did not dare to disagree with her.

On the surface, Sophia was an ordinary Inquisitor, but she was someone who received orders directly from the Cardinal, not the Knight Commander. Considering the real power she possesses, it is safe to say that her status is equivalent to that of the Knights of St. Marsyas.

"... "What about the priest?"

"A priest?"

"yes. "He is the one who first asked the Astros mercenaries to

investigate the abbot."

"Ah, that low priest."

Sophia remembered the priest she had interrogated not long ago. He was a man with a rapidly withered body and dark eyes.

It wouldn't have been unreasonable. He is said to have unleashed divine power beyond the limits of a lowly priest to prevent the encroachment of his orphans.

"It won't be of much use. I've seen someone like that a few times before. Those who borrow divine power from the Lord at the cost of burning their own souls. "There is no way the Lord would allow such power to someone associated with the devil, right?"

"But other than that, there are no clues..." ... !"

"If we tortured them further, they wouldn't be able to endure it for long and they would die. "He doesn't have much time left to live anyway, so just leave him alone."

Unbeknownst to Dasha, a gruesome fate narrowly missed her and Father Gustav.

* * *

After a short period of time in their temporary home, the orphans were moved to a new orphanage run by Grand Duke Assin.

Dasha and several children were excluded. This is because he happened to be noticed by a man looking for talent and joined the assassination group 'Hand of Oberon'.

The person who selected them was Breman, famous as the 'Tiger Instructor', and at the time, some hair still survived around the ears and the back of the head.

"Goodbye, you black Barça catch. "I often contact you whenever I have time."

"You're doing well too. Now stop digging and eating the dirt. "You

miserable Anatolian ground dog."

"Hey, Mr. Lee! Who said they dug up the dirt and ate it? who?"

Dasha, who had a rather affectionate farewell to Ramira, devoted herself to learning assassination skills from Oberon.

And soon, she discovered that the job of an assassin was a better fit for her than she thought.

A technique to hide one's presence and sneak away. A murderous technique that annihilates people with a single blow... . The time spent refining them was a very desperate and precious opportunity for the once helpless orphan girl.

First of all, the large amount of information they handle.

Secret and powerful information that ordinary people are not easily aware of and that can sometimes influence the way the world is governed.

For Dasha, handling them was like sticking her neck out above the stuffy surface and taking in a handful of air.

And, once a creature can breathe properly, it can never return to the dark bottom of the water again.

Ten years passed by so quickly.

Most assassin groups had quite strict rules, but despite this, Dasha enjoyed her great freedom and happily roamed under the night sky.

Thanks to that, I gradually built up my performance, and was the only one among the same jockeys to be given a 'number'.

"You should not be conceited just because you received a number at a younger age than others, number 13. I think this is just the beginning, and I need to continue to hone my skills and work hard...
... ."

"Puh-ha! There's no need to act solemn, Breman. In fact, you think I'm a genius. "Right?"

"... .."

Then, sometimes, a faint voice, unknown to who left it, would appear in her mind.

- Dasha. Remember clearly the scent of death. And entrust your fate and all the missions that fate has entrusted to him.

But Dasha would ignore that voice and ignore it. She was so young that she doesn't remember much anymore, and when she heard it, she thought she had no idea what it was talking about.

Then one day it happened. Dasha received an unexpected call from Breman and visited the monkey watchtower.

"... Exclusive informant? "So suddenly?"

"okay. "A request from His Majesty Mores has been received."

"Then there are many other jockeys under me. "Why do I have to do this?"

Of course, Dasha also understood that she could not send someone away. The imperial palace's invisible security system was famous for being very strict even among assassins.

Besides, isn't it a job to assist the royal family right by their side? It was clear that it was a task that a person of considerable skill could not handle.

"Still, Breman. "I'm too talented a person to be tied down to one person all day!"

"Is that so? But it seems that the excellent staff is at its most leisurely here right now. "Can't you move to the imperial palace right away before you get hit for the first time in a long time?"

"Ugh... ..!"

Dasha had no choice but to reluctantly get up from the tiger instructor's words, which were still being corrected. Because it is Monkey Watchtower's rule to immediately assign an informant when

there is a request from the prince or princess.

'Still, I don't really want to go full speed...'

Once you become someone's exclusive informant, you have to be tied to that person until you die.

Look at our seniors who are still wandering around the world and have not been able to return to the imperial capital. What about No. 9, who was stuck in the southern region with his nose pierced by 1st Prince Owen?

Unlike them, Dasha wanted to work more properly at the center of the organization and handle information.

'And then...'

Whoever sees me now, doesn't he look like Barçain? No matter what his abilities were, there was no way that people as high as the royal family would welcome his presence.

Dasha, who touched her smooth brown cheeks for a moment, put on a mask and meticulously covered her face just before entering the Pearl Palace.

Until then, Dasha had been negative about meeting Prince Mores.

From what I heard, you take after Empress Lizabeth and have a temperament even at a young age, right? Perhaps, the moment he sees her face, he will get annoyed and demand to change his informant right away?

But Dasha had just landed lightly on the balcony of the Pearl Palace. She was completely lost in her strange scent that stimulated her sense of smell.

'Good scent...'

okay. A faint scent of roses wafts from the prince's room.

At the same time as she recognized it, fragments of memories that had been forgotten for a while in her mind came back vividly to the

surface of her consciousness.

-Don't worry. Let me give you a little congratulations. So that one day you can safely reclaim your name.

iced coffee. The elegant gesture of her hand stroking her own cheek, and the rich scent of roses that wafted out as if her flowers were flowing.

As if possessed by something, Dasha opened the window and entered the prince's room.

"... ... !"

Prince Mores was there.

The young prince noticed Dasha's skillful auror concealment like a ghost and was staring at her with his nutcracker aimed straight at her.

"uh? "The knight commander said he was especially careful, but I never thought the prince himself would find out."

His attitude is so sharp that it's hard to imagine that he's a boy who just turned 15.

Dasha was inwardly impressed and raised both hands up.

"Don't worry. "I am not the enemy."

"Do you think it would be persuasive if you said something like that while wearing a mask?"

"Haha, that's right."

Dasha showed an overly bright smile and pulled on her mask. Just moments ago, she was afraid of revealing her face, so she carefully wrapped her mask.

"..."

Surprisingly, Prince Mores was not very surprised when he saw

Dasha's face. I'm just calmly observing what she does and gauging who she is.

Beneath the seemingly fierce eyes, light gray eyes shine with intelligence.

But those sharp eyes felt strangely familiar to Dasha. So Dasha finally took off her mask and greeted me warmly without even realizing it.

"Hello, prince. "I brought you Breman's reply from Monkey Watchtower."

And instead of using the code name No. 13, he gave this introduction.

"My name is Dasha. "I am the prince's exclusive informant sent by Breman."

The young prince, who was observing her with mysterious eyes, called her name as if it was natural.

"okay. Hello, Dasha."

It was a greeting to welcome a seed that had wandered around for a long time, deviating from its designated orbit, and had finally settled safely in its new home.

471

471. Remarks (side story) - Gustav

"Brother!"

Quang!

Gustav looked back at his younger brother, who violently opened the door, with a calm face.

"Tobias."

"What does that mean all of a sudden? Atrium ministry? "Brother, are you out of your mind now?"

Tobias Gustav.

He was a brother slightly older than Gustav, and was a young man currently attending the Theological Academy. His natural divine power is great, and his personality is also active and sociable.

Thanks to this, Gustav always thought about this every time he saw Tobias.

'I ended up being an insignificant low-level priest, but this guy could probably rise to an important position in the Orthodox Church. Maybe I'll be hired by the lord on good terms.'

He is a proud younger brother who has a pretty solid future ahead of him.

However, he was now very excited and was raising his voice at Gustav.

"When are you talking about visiting ministry? Is your brother some kind of saint Grazie? "Who these days provides such old-fashioned

service?"

It was not unreasonable for Tobias to react this way.

'Visiting ministry' refers to the act of a priest wandering around the world aimlessly to serve the Lord.

Since I don't have a church in particular, I have no way of receiving much protection even if I walk around naked. In other words, it meant sacrificing one's life and serving for one's faith.

"It's not your fault the devil was summoned in the first place! Rather, it played a big role in resolving the situation. But why are you willing to take such a dangerous path?"

"Shh! Kill your voice, Tobias. "What are you going to do if someone hears it?"

"under! Is there anyone here who doesn't know about Dunstan's Incident? Everyone is hissing, but there are already rumors all the way to the imperial capital about what that damned Mathieu did! But what does that have to do with you?"

Gustav kept his mouth shut for a moment, then opened his mouth, waiting for his younger brother's wild excitement to subside a little.

"No matter what, you can't fool your conscience. Tobias, it was my fault."

"Oh, kinda! Wake! "Why is it because of you that that crazy gravedigger's wife sold her soul to the devil?"

"Because the church had to save her first before that happened. And then I was definitely in a position to help her."

".....!"

Gustav spoke calmly to his wide-eyed brother.

"Tobias. "At that time, the person who summoned the devil was just a poor woman who had lost her child."

"Do not be ridiculous! That woman is a devil worshiper. "She is a criminal who killed people!"

"I wasn't a devil worshiper from the beginning. He just had no other way to endure the extreme sadness and anger. Because all she could do to get her revenge was to summon her demon. Then, who actually gave her up to her devil?"

Tobias was speechless. I wasn't influenced by Gustav's distorted self-blame. I just read the deep-rooted guilt in the brother's detached eyes that would not disappear for the rest of his life after he had finished organizing his mind.

"Do you understand? Tobias. "It is all my mistake for ignoring the opportunity to prevent that tragedy, and it is the church's fault for appointing someone like Mathieu as abbot."

"brother... .."

"So, if you have any sympathy for that poor woman, please pray with me that she can reach God even in death."

"....."

After a while of silence, Tobias spoke in a depressed voice.

"okay. I understand why my brother is blaming himself. But nothing changes now. Even if my brother commits a useless penance now, a person who has already sold his soul to the devil will never return."

"Yes, it's inevitable now."

"But why would you make that choice?"

Then Gustav's expression became subtle. Coincidentally, I had recently heard this same question from someone completely different.

-Why would you make that choice?

That day, Dunstan's historic monastery was destroyed by the devil.

In a desperate situation where children were dying from erosion and

mercenaries were trembling because they could not reach the upper-class devil, a boy miraculously appeared and cut down the devil with a single sword.

Then I suddenly asked Gustav, whose eyes were wide. Why do you make that choice?

-... yes?

When Gustav did not understand and asked again, the boy stared at him with deeply sunken eyes and asked again.

-No matter how hard you struggle, your efforts will not bear much fruit in your lifetime. But why do you want to push yourself into such hardship?

How crazy is this? Gustav thought so for a moment.

However, as I looked at the boy's absolute presence and the mysterious light in his eyes, I unconsciously became polite.

-excuse me... I'm not sure what that means...

But the boy kept his mouth shut for a moment, then nodded as if he had heard an answer from him.

-Yes, I see. i get it.

-yes?

But the boy didn't respond any further, but slowly stretched out his hand and touched Gustav's forehead. As he was sitting on the floor from exhaustion, he looked strange, as if he had been baptized by a boy.

And finally, the boy opened his mouth.

-I hope that your feelings will return as a great reward someday.

-.....!

It was a voice with strange power. A magnificent sound that shakes

your head, mind, and soul.

As Gustav was reeling from the sudden shock, the boy withdrew his hand and continued speaking casually.

-I regret that I ended up neglecting you. However, if you continue to heal your soul wounds like this, you will be taken straight to the Inquisition and you will not escape his death.

-Do you heal the soul? No, wait! The Heresy Tribunal... ..

-For your information, the children in the orphanage won't remember anything. While purifying them, I hinted them to forget all the problematic things.

-Oh, a hint?

-So, it would be a good idea for you to be careful about what you say in front of the Inquisitor. If you make a mistake, your life will end in the Heresy Tribunal before your heart even sees the light of day.

The conversation with the boy ended there. This is because Gustav, who was already showing severe symptoms of exhaustion, was unable to overcome the shock and fainted.

And now, Gustav was facing his younger brother in an intense sense of déjà vu. He felt a strange sensation, as if he had just been asked a question by the boy that day.

"I know, Tobias. Her pity for that woman, her desire to atone for her, are nothing more than the self-satisfaction of her own circumstances."

"then... ..!"

"But if I don't do this, I won't be able to live in this world anymore."

Gustav slowly cupped his face in his hands. It was to hide the expression that was about to distort at any moment.

"Yes, I know. Even if I had moved a little faster, the result wouldn't have changed much. "Nevertheless, the reason I suffer so much is probably because in the past, I was so busy looking after myself that I

abandoned my conscience and turned away from the poor."

"....."

"That's why, Tobias. From now on, I will live according to what my conscience tells me."

Tobias felt the determination in his brother's eyes. The sad fact that I can no longer stop him.

"I will be able to see your face by the time you graduate. You said you wanted to go to Sigismund Territory later, right? "I heard it's a very cold place there, so if possible, I recommend that he change his mind and settle in the imperial capital."

That was the last conversation the Gustav brothers had while alive.

* * *

As a result, Gustav's 'visiting ministry' ended without any results.

Not long after he went to serve, he was captured by Rohan bandits who attacked the village.

'... 'I'm embarrassed.'

I decided to spend the rest of my life helping those in need. But now I'm being dragged around by bandits who are preying on people, and I have to help them?

-No matter how hard you struggle, your efforts will not bear much fruit in your lifetime.

okay. It really happened as the boy said at that time.

Fortunately, Gustav had a colleague in a similar situation to himself.

"What is this? The completion of my thesis is just around the corner, but I came to look for a precious herb that grows deep in the mountains..."

Alvin Seymour.

The talented pharmacist, who claimed to be the rising star of the Adelheit Plague Society, lamented that he was dragged away by bandits while preparing a thesis that would shock the world.

"I promised to return with lots of presents, but my little Jibril must be waiting for me so desperately right now... .."

The two sat down together and exchanged deep disappointment. If things continued like this, it was obvious that I would be exploited in a den of bandits for the rest of my life.

However, even for two people whose lives were completely messed up, as the years passed, one joy arose.

It was to take care of young Aslan.

Aslan was a kid who had been living with a bandit group for some time. He was so gentle and smart that it was quite rewarding to teach him.

Thanks to this, Seymour, who had been immersed in the role of a teacher for the first time in a long time, was so excited that he would pass on all his knowledge to the child.

"Just wait and see! "This kid will one day become the most famous pharmacist on the continent!"

However, Gustav had no skills to teach the child for his future.

So instead, he told Aslan various stories. About the main god they serve, about correct religious life, and about the natural conscience that people have.

"Do you understand? Aslan. "A person must always live according to his or her conscience."

"Conscience?"

"okay. So, you too, stop imitating bandits. Don't even swear. "There is nothing you can learn from them."

Then little Aslan grumbled, rubbing his red cheeks from the cold.

"But Gustav. What would I do if I knew that? "Anyway, I will be living in this mountain with bandits for the rest of my life."

"Well, Aslan. "No one knows what will happen later in a person's life."

At such times, Gustav would think of the intelligent Warsaw girl who had once offered him a piece of old cloth.

okay. Those people are the ones who can carry out their will toward the world. Driven people who never let go of their goals and values and never turn away from what needs to be done, even in difficult situations.

So Gustav spoke to Aslan as if he were praying every day. I sincerely hope that this child's life will be different from my own.

"Aslan, I hope that one day you will get out of here and live a proper life."

* * *

Gustav's life came to an end not long after that. In the end, Rohan's punitive force came and cut off his head along with the bandits.

It was truly an unremarkable life. He didn't achieve anything much, and his life was full of regrets.

So when Gustav opened his eyes after death, he was not surprised by the desolate scene that unfolded before him.

'okay. Was my place ultimately hell?'

While I was bitterly convinced, I suddenly heard a soft mocking sound from above my head.

[Hell. It's a fairly normal feeling. Someone told me this nonsense, that this was heaven...]

voice. No, it wasn't exactly a voice, but a thought.

That thought, full of authority and coercion, had complete control not only of Gustav's soul but also of this endless space.

Feeling an instinctive awe at that terrifying presence, Gustav cautiously asked him a question.

[Who are you? Are you by any chance my god?]

[I have no intention of impersonating God. Even after all this, there is a separate church in Delcross that serves me.]

this! Is this a heresy served by an underground cult?

Gustav quickly bowed his head towards the thought. Rather than succumbing to his power, I placed a glimmer of hope in his strangely innocent attitude.

[If you do, please send me. I am a person who serves the will of the Lord. Even after death, I have no intention of committing myself to an underground cult.]

[hmm... ..]

In response to Gustav's plea, the Master of Thought instead of getting angry sent a subtle wave.

[But that's difficult. The moment you leave this place, your soul will end in an instant, right?]

[...] yes?]

I can feel the gaze of the being looking down at me moving away somewhere.

Gustav followed him with his spiritual eyes and soon saw terrible scenes unfolding far away on the far side of the universe. Souls that constantly scream and terrifying evil beings that gleefully prey on them.

[.....!]

As Gustav's soul froze in shock, thoughts spoke softly as if to soothe it.

[If there is a place called heaven in the world, I want to send you

there too. But as you can see, it's all like that outside.]

[.....]

[Of course, if you choose to disappear on your own, I will not particularly stop you. But I hope you don't do that as much as possible. At best, it's not worth getting up and bringing you back.]

Gustav felt the waves of truth coming from his thoughts.

Did that powerful being really bring him here himself? Naturally, this question could not help but arise.

[...] Why?]

[That's right, there's a rather familiar saying engraved on your forehead.]

[A quick speech?]

[okay. Can't you feel it yourself now?]

True to his words, Gustav was able to detect a flash of white light on his forehead. His spirit, freed from the limitations of the body, immediately realized where the exhortation came from.

-I hope that your feelings will return as a great reward someday.

iced coffee! That time... ... !

Gustav's soul is in shock, and his distant gaze returns to this area. Even though he was just staring at himself, Gustav felt a heavy spiritual pressure, as if his soul was being crushed flat.

[...] Well, I think I know why you came here.]

What are you looking at? After some time had passed, the spirit turned its gaze away from Gustav and said so.

[reason... You mean?]

[okay. Now that I have a general understanding, I will gladly make a place for you here. From now on, you can rest comfortably here. As

you may have seen just now, it is dangerous to leave this area.]

[...] Why are you trying to be so kind to me?]

Gustav eventually had no choice but to ask him.

[I am neither your believer nor your servant. Even if I stay here, my soul will never praise your presence. But why... .. !]

[I'm not saying you should abandon your faith.]

Sadyeom responded calmly.

[There is no need to do anything more there. Because I just believe that your life itself is valuable enough to exist in this world.]

[value... yo. this?]

[okay. I'm very happy to see it.]

After responding like that, Sasyeom paused for a moment and continued speaking.

[For a person to achieve this position with his bare body, he must overcome the filth of the world. In that case, it is easy for everything such as morality and humanity to be lost somewhere. In that sense, I probably won't be much different from my friends over there.]

... person?

[But sometimes, when I look at people like you, I get the feeling that it wouldn't be a bad idea to respect the virtues that everyone says they value, right? Just by causing me to feel that way even for a moment, it means that your life has enough value.]

[.....]

[Or you can think of it as a simple reward. I feel like your life is a little messed up because of people who are important to me. Because you are one of the few victims of the world we have changed.]

victim? A world that has been turned upside down?

Even though Gustav was free from physical limitations and found mental freedom, it was difficult for Gustav to understand what he was saying.

But at least Gustav could sense that he was telling the truth. Because it was a conversation between souls that could never tell lies to each other.

[...] thank you I'm not sure about my own value, but I feel like I'm feeling a little more at ease.]

[Yes, thank me profusely.]

He seemed unusually smug.

[Okay, now the conversation is over. I need to rest a little more, so you should try to get some sleep too.]

Now no one will disturb your rest. After those whispers, the presence that seemed to be pressing down on her head disappeared without a trace.

[.....]

Only then was Gustav able to look around with greater ease.

This was a cold, dreary, gray world. The endless rows of tombstones reached all the way to the horizon, and at their feet, unknown people were sprawled out, lifeless.

'also... 'This must be hell, right?'

But why? All of them had a peaceful expression on their faces.

Gustav was a little relieved by this, and soon he quietly laid down on the handful of land given to him.

472. Loser of the North (1)

Seongjin, who had been looking through documents until late, stretched and turned his head. The day had already set, and there was a red sunset outside the window.

Dasha, who thought she would wake up soon, is still in a deep sleep. It looks like she really suffered from severe aftereffects.

'I guess it would be impossible to leave today?'

So, Seongjin roughly finished the documents and gave instructions to No. 21, who looked somewhat nervous.

"My father is probably away now, so let's stay at Tere for one more day. "Be prepared to leave for Regina tomorrow morning."

Then No. 21 looked at Seongjin with a puzzled look. A rough interpretation of his expression was as follows.

-Why bother waiting for them to wake up? Wouldn't it be okay to just put it on the wagon and go?

Seongjin was dumbfounded. How dare this child treat his father like a burden just because he is a homunculus and not his real self?

"I'm not pressed for time, so why should I bother someone who is well-rested? Anyway, I don't have any sympathy. "Even if I don't see how you usually treat your father, it's nice to see."

"... .. !"

Number 21's face is distorted with resentment. He opened his mouth to protest anything.

However, his expression soon became serious and he closed his mouth, because the incredible deeds he had committed in the past quickly flashed through his mind.

The thing about roughly picking up a homunculus and carrying it around. It was something that was stored carelessly in a coffin and walked around. He even threw it to the bandits as bait and ran away!

'what? 'Have I served Your Majesty properly so far?'

Number 21 was greatly shocked by this new realization.

"What are you doing? Why don't you go and have a look?"

"... "Yes, I understand, sir."

Number 21 stumbled and left the inn.

The wagon prepared by guild leader Greta was still standing there.

After untying the mules to one side and feeding them fodder, No. 21 worked hard to tidy up the interior of the wagon.

'It's not enough to serve Your Majesty. Should I at least make a cot in the corner?'

Then, something strange caught my eye.

Four dots in a triangle. Under the sign of the free underpass engraved on the corner of the carriage, there is a small note that was not there before.

Number 21 felt a strange sense of discomfort and tore off the note.

-Isn't it time to relax? You should never forget where your hometown is.

No. 21's eyes darken after reading the short message written on the note.

okay. At this point, it was time for his news to reach the human's ears. This is why he wanted to open this place as quickly as

possible...

'Of course I don't forget where I come from. But I'm not going to do it the way you want me to. never!'

Quack.

The small note was crumpled under my tightly clenched fist.

* * *

When Dasha came to her senses, it was after complete darkness had fallen on the inn.

"... here is?"

"senior! Are you okay?"

"Ah, Dasha! "Are you out of your mind?"

Seongjin, who came to check on her at the right time, looked pleased and snatched the bowl of stew that No. 21 was holding.

"Then get up and listen to this. "You didn't eat or sleep all day, right?"

"Lowering..."

But Seongjin could no longer recommend food. This is because Dasha, who had staggered out of her seat, kneeled down in front of him.

"Lowering! please... Please forgive me!"

"Dasha?"

"I was unable to die in time and was captured by the enemy and became a burden to my family. "For making such a big mistake, I am no longer worthy of serving you!"

Number 21 slowly took a step back, feeling shaky. Somehow she felt as if an impenetrable air was forming between them.

Percussion.

When he heard the sound of the door closing behind him, Seongjin put down the bowl of stew and opened his mouth.

"Raise your head, Dasha."

"... .."

"The bare eyebrows were brushed off. "You disrupted the information network of 'Breath of Kaya' and lured most of the main forces towards you, causing great confusion."

"... Yes, lowly. "That was my intention."

Then Seongjin crossed his arms and looked crookedly down at Dasha.

"I thought you were following me well, but why did you suddenly do something I didn't order?"

"that... This is because I felt that their number was rapidly increasing and their movements were becoming more and more organized. Therefore, we decided that it would be difficult to stay close to the Emperor without being detected, so we thought that it would be more helpful to interrupt their communication-"

"In other words, it was purely your own opinion."

"... ..!"

In response to Seongjin's cold response, Dasha lowered her head with a sad expression.

"Then just one more thing. Although it is said to have caused great information confusion, it would probably have been impossible for you to disrupt such a wide information network on your own. This would mean that a specific line was selected, but by what criteria was that selection made?"

"... The assassins led by the woman with the bare eyebrows you mentioned seemed to be exchanging information from three directions."

Dasha continued her explanation, trying to control her trembling

voice.

"The first was the far northern region where the 'Breath of Kaya' headquarters was probably located. "I was aware of the rare comings and goings of Jeonseo-gu, but I judged that it would not have a significant impact on their movements right now."

So Dasha left the Jeonseo-gu alone. If she clumsily tried to block all information, there was a possibility that their existence would soon be discovered.

"The second was direct communication in a roughly southwest direction."

The reason Dasha expressed it as 'approximately' was because the direction and time interval of their movement was constantly changing. Seongjin could easily guess that they were probably the ones chasing Seonghwang and No. 21.

"They just left it alone. Since I came and went so frequently, there was a high risk of my presence and location being discovered the moment I blocked the information. Above all, we had no idea what their purpose was, and we thought it was highly likely that their actions had little to do with our group."

"Right."

"And the third is Verdrón, the old brewing city where your Majesty first used the express carriage."

When Seongjin met Giovanni in Verdrón, Dasha could not get close because of the assassins tightly guarding the city. So, I had no idea that Jayu Underground had already guessed the identity of Seongjin and his group.

However, a short time later, the wagon carrying the prince left the city under the guard of assassins, and separately from them, an additional messenger was captured running straight south from Verdrón.

Even to Dasha, who knew nothing, their movements did not seem to be a very good sign.

"So I mainly targeted that line... .."

"Yes, it is."

"Rather than half-heartedly knocking on the entire wall, they decided to knock down just one pillar supporting the roof."

Seongjin nodded. That's why the Minja Eyebrow gang belatedly figured out the movements of Seongjin and his group and became confused.

"There wasn't much basis for judgment, but he did something quite reckless. Besides, that was entirely your opinion."

"... .."

Dasha quietly bowed her head. Although she seemed quite calm on the outside, Seongjin's keen gaze did not miss Dasha's slightly trembling shoulders.

"Well, it was a pretty bold and clever strategy. In the end, it is true that it was a great help to me."

Seongjin continued speaking in a slightly softened voice.

"But that wasn't a judgment or action that an exclusive informant would make. "You know that better yourself, right?"

"Lowering... .."

"Dasha. There is one thing I realized while going through this incident. "I've been using people wrong all this time."

"... ..!"

Has it finally come?

Dasha closed her eyes tightly. She finally found someone worth serving, and she was finally getting recognition for her abilities, but she ended up being thrown away like this?

However, contrary to her despairing predictions, Seongjin's next

words were completely unexpected.

"Dasha. Don't you plan on quitting your undercover work at the Monkey Watchtower and just get a full-time job at the Pearl Palace?"

For a moment, Dasha did not understand properly and asked back.

"... yes?"

"At this point, you're going to be my secretary. I'll treat you the best! I will create a proper rank and lower the status to semi-nobleman along with the last name."

"yes?"

"Your salary will also be provided comfortably as long as Jinju Palace's budget allows. Once the business is on track, we will set proper performance bonuses."

Looking at Dasha, who had an unusually blank expression on her face, Seongjin suddenly thought. Perhaps she had been predicting this day would come from the moment she publicly introduced her to Sir Martha In and her Captain Bruno?

In Seongjin's opinion, Dasha was a person whose presence could not easily be hidden, no matter how much she buried it in the dark. She is a great jewel-like talent who should shine brightly in the center of the crown, not just decorate the outskirts.

"So from now on, don't waste your time doing inefficient stealth work. I commute to Jinju Palace while taking a proper rest. Or, I'll give you a nice room, so you can just stay at Jinju Palace like Sir Martha."

"... .."

"The secretary's job will probably mainly be managing and gathering information. In order to do that, it would probably be better to continue cooperation with Monkey Watchtower, right?"

"... .."

"Oh, so, I'm thinking of requesting a new dedicated informant there and putting it under you to manage it. What do you think about that?"

Dasha couldn't answer anything. Because her Seongjin proposal was a possibility she had never even thought of in her dreams.

Maybe it's because it's so unrealistic, but his voice and each word seem to be vividly stuck in my head.

"If I achieve a bit, I will ask my father to give me a succession title instead of semi-noble. "There will be times when you have to act as a face for me at public events, so I think Dasha needs a certain level of status as well."

"B-but you! I am... ..!"

Dasha looked up at Seongjin with violently shaking eyes.

"As you can see, I am Barshain! "Everyone will ignore me, so how can I become the face of the royal family?"

"hmm?"

This time, it was Seongjin's turn to tilt his head at an unexpected possibility.

"What the hell is the problem? Dasha is talented and makes a great impression. "Is there a better talent to bring to the forefront as my representative?"

"... .."

"Oh, didn't I tell you before? Dasha is a rare beauty with an impressive smile. "I'm already half way through my first impression of her, so who on earth would dare to disrespect Dasha?"

Seongjin answered confidently, and in the end Dasha's eyes became slightly red.

"Thank you, sir. Instead of kicking me out for making a big mistake, he gave me a new opportunity... .."

Dasha could not continue speaking and quickly lowered her head. Seeing that she was very touched, Seongjin scratched her cheek, overcome with a slight sense of guilt.

'Well, since he's capable, I was going to keep him by his side and give him a proper pat on the back, but is this really something to be happy about?'

I'm worried that you might resent me later. There's so much work to do in the future...

* * *

"Olivier."

Dominic Scarzapino opened the door and walked in, calling out to the woman who was lying helplessly on the sofa.

It was his fiancée, no, it was the name of his collaborator who was disguising himself as his fiancée.

"Dominic."

Then Olivier stood up and panicked.

"Oh right! We decided to go to the logistics relay station together! wait a minute! First, draw some eyebrows..."

Dominic sighed softly.

"Arthur. "You can't go out like that, right?"

As he said, Olivier's face was currently swollen and in disrepair. This is because, after being beaten by a ghost armed with a club, he hurriedly fled to Regina as soon as he came to his senses.

"Is it really like that?"

"There will be rumors that the Archduchess of the Scarzzapino family regularly assaults his fiancée."

"Tsk... ... !"

Dejected, Olivier sat back down and buried his face in the cushion.

"Dominic, comfort me like a fiancé. "She barely saved her life, but instead she heard a terrible curse from a cute boy!"

"Useless talk... .."

Dominic's eyebrows twitch. It meant that I felt very uncomfortable.

"But will you be okay without me? What we decided to discuss with Branch Manager Schmidt was mainly the dry goods area. Even after all this, I am the owner of 'Lamari Clothing Store', which leads Rohan's dry goods business?"

"I can easily manage the volume of such a small business on my own."

"hmm. okay... .."

Olivier tilted his head and looked up at Dominic. The sharp eyes beneath his glasses seemed cold at first glance, but strangely enough, there were times when Olivier felt that he was kind.

"... Dominic."

"What else?"

"As expected, out of all the people we have prepared, I trust you more than anyone else. So please be a great king."

"... ..?"

"got it? "Do you have to survive until the end no matter what happens?"

Olivier faced the man's hard face and smiled.

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473. Loser of the North (2)

The next day, Seongjin prepared to leave Tere early in the morning.

"Here, take this. "Oliver."

"... "What is all this?"

"Documents to be submitted to the imperial palace. "This is a report on the first sale of Teosinte and a detailed future business plan."

Seongjin's meticulously worked out business plan was flawless.

Not only does it involve sharing profits proportional to the initial investment amount with the imperial family, but it also includes a plan to rent out fields owned by the imperial family at a high price.

Perhaps the administration will be the first to adopt it? Because it can be seen at a glance that the national treasury will increase significantly.

"And here, this is a letter of recommendation to Branch Manager Schmidt. "It will be difficult for you to start a big business on your own from the beginning, so go to him and get introduced to trustworthy personnel."

"and... ! "You're the branch manager of a logistics relay station, so you have such amazing connections?"

A simple young man was shuffling through complicated documents with a curious expression.

Well, this guy doesn't know much. In fact, this is actually Branch Manager Schmidt's 'great personal connection'. You should be truly blessed to meet me here.

It was at a time when Seongjin's arrogance was reaching its peak. Oliver asked Seongjin with a somewhat stupid expression on his face.

"Hey, but... What is this? "Is there a strange guard here?"

What Oliver pointed to was an expense statement with 'security expenses' written on it.

"Uh, that's it... .."

That's because you really have a dedicated person protecting you. Last night, Dasha urgently requested assistance.

I had no intention of leaving the plump goose, who was going to lay golden eggs every day, alone in this desolate northern area teeming with hungry animals.

Be grateful? No matter what anyone says, they are high-quality personnel dedicated to the affairs of the imperial family. Of course, I was the one who received all the security expenses.

"Besides, what is this...?" Business consulting fees, free tasting fees, promotional event fees? What are these and do they account for most of my expenses?"

Uh-huh, write! If you give too much detail, you will get hurt.

After saying goodbye to Oliver, Seongjin and his party boarded a small wagon pulled by two mules. It seemed like No. 21 prepared in a hurry last night.

The wagon was simple, with no separate seats, but it felt cozy as the group sat together.

No. 21 and Edith were placed in the carriage seats, and at the end of the luggage compartment were Bartosa, Giacomo Milo, and the biological dolls taken from Kaya's breath.

On one side, there is even a soft bed for Priest Bart, who is very weak(?).

Tap, tap, tap.

So the group headed to Regina in a fairly peaceful atmosphere.

Of course, it was a problem for a while that the Homunculus left behind became excessively peaceful while the Emperor was away for a morning political meeting -

"excuse me... Are you really sure that Priest Bart is okay? I can't sense any Aura activity from that person? Moreover, there was no breathing or vital signs... .."

"Oh, you don't have to worry, Brother Masain. It's not like it was yesterday or today that he was sleeping like he was dead. I'm always surprised every time I see it."

"yes... .."

"But when you wake up again, you wake up fine? Ha ha ha ha ha!"

As Owen boasted that he had seen him for several years in the South, Martha couldn't help but nod hesitantly.

So the group sat in a circle and chatted while forgetting about the food Owen had provided. It was the perfect time to share and gather information from each other.

"So, newbie, what you're saying is that in a place called 'Kaya's Breath', you're randomly chopping off people's heads? And then you put some suspicious rocks in it and sew it back up?"

Owen looked back at the biological doll with a bewildered expression.

"No, how can you be alive if you split your head open?"

"So, it's a wicked act that borrowed the power of the devil. We must properly investigate the inside of their organization and, if necessary, thoroughly punish them."

The reason why Seongjin can say this with confidence is because he was an official inquisitor who was granted the right to investigate and prosecute by the Seonghoe.

If he points out something that is suspected of being the work of the devil, it is considered to be the work of the devil until it is proven innocent through a heresy trial. And heresy trials rarely result in acquittal.

Oh, that's really good! Public power that can be controlled by hand. Of course, Dasha will take care of all the detailed research.

"If you do it, you will be degraded. If that's what you said, at least we don't have to worry about the medicine cart spreading through the Freedom Underground's base anymore, right? "It means that there is a more reliable way to plant a salt crystal directly into the head."

"That's not necessarily true. Lord Masaine."

All of the living dolls Seongjin saw had flame crystals of similar size. The same was true for the soul stones of the head tower that No. 21 destroyed.

However, as written in Dacian's secretary, it is not easy for flame crystals to grow to a certain size.

If so, that is.

"They might be harvesting a large amount of flame crystals somewhere, enough to be able to pick out some that are of moderate use. "Whether those seedbeds were livestock or people."

That was the reason why Seongjin tried to greatly expand the teosinte business. If medicinal teas were spread throughout the North in any form, it would not be easy to find and eradicate them in a short period of investigation.

"We have to search even remote areas where there is not much traffic. And we supply teosinte to all of them."

Dasha will also take care of selecting and managing such areas.

"There is another problem. Wouldn't it be difficult to secretly distribute certain goods in large quantities without the eyes of local lords? So, regardless of whether they know the truth about Yakcha or not, we must respond by considering them to be tentatively

accomplices."

Fortunately, there is a solution for this as well. Under the pretext of searching for the whereabouts of the criminal Giacomo Milo, they are ready to turn the northern territories upside down.

Of course, Dasha will also do the work of concealing Giacomo Milo's new recruits, which have already been secured, and manipulating his false actions to attack the territory. Because our Dasha is capable.

"..."

Then Dasha's expression becomes somewhat subtle. It seemed like she was finally starting to realize the enormous task she was about to undertake.

[Lee Seong-jin, you evil employer...]

shut up! Everyone tells people to do it because they are capable!

"Anyway, there is something a little surprising, sir."

After gathering her thoughts for a moment, Dasha cautiously opened her mouth.

"It's about the leader of the assassins."

"Uh, bare eyebrows."

"yes. Why did you just let go of those bare eyebrows? "If you completely neutralized it, it would have been better to capture it and get more information."

"hmm. That's a bit difficult to explain..."

In fact, some immoral devil had buried something similar to a pellet mine in her soul. I didn't think it would be a good idea to touch it hastily, so I had no choice but to take simple measures and then release it.

But since he couldn't explain everything straight away, Seongjin just explained it like this.

"Wouldn't it be better if the other person was someone you knew even a little bit about? Don't worry, Dasha. She'll have to meet that woman again soon. "I have a strong feeling like that."

"Yes, I hope so."

A gentle spark flashed in Dasha's eyes as she clenched her fists. As she remembered all the hardships she had gone through because of her bare eyebrows, her resentment towards her deepened.

"Olivier, you owe her a debt. If we ever meet again, if I don't show up properly this time... ..!"

"... what?"

Olivier? As Sungjin blinked her eyes, Dasha quickly added an explanation.

"Oh, of course that doesn't mean that's your real name. "Once upon a time, that woman introduced herself to me like that, so I inadvertently-"

"ah!"

Rattling!

The wagon shook violently. This is because Seongjin suddenly screamed and jumped up from his seat.

Thanks to this, No. 21, who was driving the mule, looked back with puzzled eyes, but Seongjin ignored everyone's gaze and once again expressed his admiration.

"ah!"

"... Lowering?"

"I get it! Now I know who the straight eyebrows are! "I've only seen it once on the imperial capital!"

Then Dasha's eyes widened.

"Is that true? "Who on earth is that?"

But what actually came out of Seongjin's mouth was the name of a completely different person.

"Dominico. Dominic Scarzapino!"

"The Archduke of the House of Scarzzapino? Why did he... .."

"That bastard's suspicious fiancée's name was Olivier!"

For some reason, I kept thinking I'd seen it somewhere before!

I couldn't recognize him because his eyebrows were completely gone, but now that I think about it, he's the same person, just with a little powder on his face! Why did I only realize that now?

* * *

I never knew before that the presence or absence of eyebrows had such a big impact on a person's impression.

Where is that? As an assassin, he proudly runs a business, and even fools veteran hunter Lee Seong-jin! There was truly nothing to be ashamed of.

So, as soon as Seongjin arrived at Schmidt's villa, he shouted loudly at him out of urgency.

Jump up!

"Schmidt! Branch Manager Schmidt! Get all the information about Dominic Scarzapino right now! It's all about his fiancée Olivier! hurry!"

"... yes? Are you here now, sir? But this suddenly?"

Branch Manager Schmidt, who was dazed for a moment, hurriedly summoned a low-level devil and started cracking down on the employees.

[Come on, everyone, look into my eyes. You guys are happy. Prince

Mores has been in this villa the whole time, so I'll forget everything I just saw...]

Then, the eyes of the employees who were whispering to Seongjin suddenly turned hazy.

good. You're doing your job well, Meemee.

"Oh! And now that I'm thinking about it, I'd like to tell you, please be happy, Branch Manager Schmidt. I hired a very talented secretary this time, right? So, your workload will be significantly reduced in the future."

"yes yes. All right. I understand everything, so please do something about their clothes first! Even now, the number of people who need to be hypnotized is increasing in real time!"

"ah."

Once Seongjin had roughly completed his return, Branch Manager Schmidt finally took a breather and loosened control of the mansion.

"I will prepare the materials you mentioned right away, sir. In the meantime, why don't you first visit the annex in Huwon? "Director Bruno and the resident knights have been waiting there for a few days."

"okay?"

"yes. "As people's speculations about my whereabouts have become more and more severe, I have invited all of my companions to come here as well."

Seongjin nodded in satisfaction.

okay. Well done, branch manager. Sharp as always.

"Well then, while I'm leaving, I have one more favor to ask of you."

"yes. "Please speak."

"Actually, among the group that came with me, there is a famous

person named Priest Bart... .."

As soon as the word 'priest' came out, Schmidt, the devil with numbness in his feet, tensed up and listened.

"I'm just letting you know, but he is actually my father, right?"

"... yes?"

"Oh, of course it's not my father's true body. "It simply means a homunculus, an artificial life form in which the father's spirit resides once in a while when needed."

Then, the color slowly drained from Branch Manager Schmidt's face as he slowly pondered Seongjin's words.

"... omg?"

"So, I don't need to tell you how well you should treat him, right? First, give me the best room in this villa, and take special care to ensure that nothing is neglected."

Schmidt's eyes shook violently as if they had been hit by a storm.

"yes? "Yes?"

Seongjin could fully understand his reaction.

Why not? Right in front of the devil, who had succeeded in taking over a human body, he brought in the best priest who could defeat the devil species in one fell swoop.

"Hey, uh... Lowering?"

Schmidt begins to tremble like an aspen tree -

"Ah, there he comes."

Just then, No. 21, who had finished organizing the cart, carefully picked up the homunculus and carried him on his back, entering the mansion.

"he... .."

A holy reverberation felt from it.

Although it was now an empty shell, the mid-level demon sensed the overwhelming divine power remaining in the doll and let out a shrieking cry.

"Heeeeeeeek!" help me!"

474. Loser of the North (3)

Although he fairly(?) took over a human body according to a contract, Schmidt's true form is a mid-level demon called Glumgos. In other words, it means that there is no way to withstand even a moment in the face of powerful divine power.

So, even if there was an important event such as a birthday party, they did not go near the imperial capital at all.

'Lord, I'm dying! I'm really going to die this time!'

Glumgos felt a strong urge to escape to the demon world right away. If I were to abandon my human body and run away even now, wouldn't the Holy Emperor come after me all the way?

If it were like before, I wouldn't know. The current prosperity, which is heavily constrained, has no good reason or necessary cause and effect.

'iced coffee! But now I have a wife like a rabbit and a child like a fox!'

For demons, 'family' was a rare relationship that could only be achieved by acquiring a human body. It is difficult to give up on them easily now.

In addition, Prince Mores, whom the Emperor loved, was also a big variable. Even if he manages to escape safely, what will happen if this innocent yet evil prince makes this request to the Holy Emperor?

-father. One of my subordinates, whom I used well, ran away to the demon world without fear. I'm annoyed. Could you please scold me?

-Okay, I got it.

This is enough to satisfy the reasons and causes.

And then comes the prosperous descent into the demon world!

'Aaaah! shit! 'There's nowhere to run to!'

Rattling.

When Schmidt, who was usually cool-headed, fell into a state of panic and gritted his teeth, Sir Martha, who was nearby, looked at him with puzzled eyes.

But as soon as he lost his composure, there was someone who did not miss the opportunity: the devil sitting on the old lamp. It flew into captivity like a wet swallow and fizzled before Schmidt's eyes.

[haha! Have you seen this ugly guy? You're scared of everything! So, this guy is a half-penny!]

After experiencing a series of recent events, the Demon King had overcome, to some extent, his fundamental fear of success, half of his own accord. So it hovered over Schmidt's head a couple of times and shouted triumphantly.

[Mmm hahaha! If you are so afraid of him, then this great demon lord himself will take care of you! So offer me a precious plate in return! hurry!]

"plate... .. ?"

[okay! plate! I ask for a porcelain plate with a nice picture on it, or a pretty glass plate with colorful work!]

Since Seongjin had been cosplaying as a poor man, he seemed to be dissatisfied with having to rest in a shabby lamp.

* * *

After barely soothing Schmidt, who was in a panic, Seongjin headed to the annex where the group was staying. There, the resident

knights, including leader Bruno, were waiting for Seongjin with a rich dinner in front of them.

"Lowering!"

"Hey! "Are you here now?"

"oh! Edith, you're safe too!"

Sir Claudia and Sir Kurt come running out with joy. Behind him was Lord Calmen, who looked somewhat embarrassed.

Seeing everyone's faces glowing brightly, it seemed like they had a good time in Regina and had a good rest.

[Idiot!]

The Demon King shouted happily and flew towards Leader Bruno. He seems happy to have met someone he can communicate with other than Seongjin after a long time.

"Red is Niei!"

Director Bruno also welcomed them with open arms. He had been so worried all this while that he was the only one in the group whose complexion had worsened.

[We've only been away for a few days, but why am I so happy to see you, idiot! But how many times do I have to tell you that I'm not red for you to understand? huh?]

"I thought you and Red were dying because I was worried about you! But just for your information, my name is not Idiot! Ha ha ha ha ha!"

Forgetting Dekaron Knight's pain, Leader Bruno danced in the restaurant with a small flame.

"... .."

Seongjin, who felt ashamed on his behalf, glanced at Dasha, who was standing behind him.

Somehow I feel a bit shameless. Director Bruno isn't really that kind of personality, Dasha.

After chatting amicably for a while, they sat together in front of the table. And soon, Seongjin was able to hear various updates from Manager Bruno that he had not previously received.

"Subdue Cyprus' maritime demons? 'It's already over?'"

"Yes, I heard that. It is said that control of commercial ships has been lifted and fishermen have resumed fishing."

Seongjin blinked at the unexpected news.

No, of course, this is the work of our 70-year-old Sword Master Logan, but I wonder if he can handle it all on his own, but isn't the work finished too early than expected?

"It is not unreasonable for you to think so. For various reasons, the departure itself was delayed, and I heard that the sea magicians' base was in the distant sea beyond the Cravat Islands in the first place."

"okay. 'I thought so?'"

"But when we actually set sail, we heard that there were more sea monsters concentrated in the coastal waters than expected. Moreover, for some reason, they all lost their senses and went on a rampage, so it looks like they were easily eliminated with a single secret weapon prepared by the Navy."

Manager Bruno added the explanation while playing with the tip of his mustache.

"hmm... .."

Seongjin furrowed his brows slightly.

"okay? That's right... .."

If that's true, it's a good thing that Logan and Sisley will return to the imperial capital early.

But why do I feel so uncomfortable? It doesn't feel like anything has been resolved at all?

Seongjin, who was lost in thought for a moment, muttered inadvertently.

"I guess it's about time I stopped by there."

"... yes?"

Director Bruno asked back in confusion.

"I stopped by, where do you mean?"

However, Seongjin did not answer him, but just stared somewhere in the distance with slightly unfocused eyes.

* * *

A dark morning before dawn.

A stablekeeper entered the council building with a long yawn.

Hairy hair.

He was pulling a small cart with one hand, which was filled with raw, bloody meat that at first glance had nothing to do with stable work. It was food for a wolf dog that had been living with the horses for some time.

The Delcross Imperial Family's pet dog, Max.

When the dog first appeared in Cyprus, the council's guards were greatly embarrassed. This is because the dog's appearance resembled a huge wolf raised in the wild, rather than a pet dog of noble people.

Wong wong wong!

Perhaps knowing that people were terrified whenever they saw me, the dog happily ran around the council without any hesitation.

-Can you please do something about that dog? There have been more than one occasion when the guards mistook it for sea water and

almost attacked it!

The commander of the security guard made a desperate appeal.

Then, His Majesty's noble paladin, Blue Lily, leader of the Liliium subjugation force, Logan said:

-Is it difficult to distinguish them from wild wolves? If you do that, you can just keep tying the imperial insignia around Max's neck. Maybe he won't be so hard to recognize anymore.

The security guard was shocked. What are you going to do with the imperial insignia, which is so beautiful that you even dare to look straight at it?

No, when I asked what to do with that damn dog, he elevated me to a status where I couldn't even touch it! Let alone the dog wandering around randomly, who and where will take care of it? Where do you sleep?

Then, as a small grace bestowed by the Lord, the saint who possesses the soul of St. Marsyas spoke with sparkling clear eyes.

-Brother Logan. Wouldn't it be okay for Max to stay in the stables with Roxana? I think their relationship has become quite good, perhaps thanks to their shared joys and sorrows in the Sigismund Territory.

This time, it was the stablekeepers' turn to take charge.

Wait a minute, take care of the dog in the stable? What on earth are you asking us who have lived our whole lives to eat only horses? Isn't it impossible to feed that dog the fodder that is given to the horse?

Then, this time, didn't Councilor Ambrose, the son of Chryses and a rising star on the council, give a bold order?

-In that case, our family will provide good meat! Is that meat a problem for the people who saved my life? Please take as much as you want!

Holy shit! Why are high-ranking people so thoughtless!

So the poor stable keeper was forced to take the best meat from the kitchen and take it to the stable every day. The more I think about it, the more angry I become.

'If it's the dog raised by the imperial family, it's Danya! Well, he's just a bastard, but I can't believe I have to give him such good meat that even humans can't eat!'

He arrived at the stable grumbling, pulled a cart and moved to the largest stable in the stable. This was where Prince Logan's beloved horse, Roxana, lived.

Purung!

As soon as you open the door of the stable and enter, a white horse as beautiful as a picture comes into view. This noble and gentle horse was standing against the wall on the right side of the stable as always, glanced at the stable keeper and immediately looked away without notice.

And on the other side, on the left wall of the stable, a large wolf dog is sitting in a comfortable position on a soft straw mat.

If you look closely, it doesn't seem like the two are on such bad terms, but I thought it was unusual how they subtly kept their distance.

Sniff!

The wolf dog sniffs the meat and looks at the stable keeper. However, he didn't run straight away like other dogs; he seemed to know that the stable keeper would automatically bring food right in front of him without him having to do anything.

'이놈의 개새끼가 아주 상전이지, 진짜!'

Seeing that relaxed appearance, the stable keeper suddenly became grumpy.

'okay. Let's see if you have the same attitude even after having your meat stolen from me!'

It is a beast that cannot speak anyway. If that damn dog hasn't been fed for a day, how would the higher-ups know that fact? Even if you steal the meat home like this, no one will care.

After thinking that far, the stable keeper quietly pulled the cart back while looking at the dog.

It was right then.

Purr!

Suddenly, he felt a strong snort from above and something bit his hair hard. It was Roxana, the owner of the stable.

"Aaaah!"

The stable keeper, who was suddenly shaking his hair back and forth, screamed in panic. I couldn't figure out why the noble horse, which had been ignoring his comings and goings until now, was suddenly acting like this.

"Let go! "Let go of this!"

The stable keeper struggled for a long time, swinging his arms like crazy, and was only able to get away from the horse after losing a handful of his hair.

'Hey, you damn beasts!'

The very angry stable keeper huffed and picked up the horsewhip hanging on the wall.

Even though it was a precious horse owned by the imperial family, it could not be allowed to go on like this, being humiliated by the animals it cared for.

So I thought I would hit a few horses as an example. As long as you take care not to get seriously hurt, the higher-ups will probably not notice.

But as soon as he raised his whip upward-

Wow!

When he got closer, this time the wolf dog bit him hard on one of his legs.

"Kwaaah!"

Due to the unfamiliar pain of the long fangs digging into him, he foolishly lost sight of his only weapon, the whip. As he looked down in astonishment, he saw bright yellow, wild eyes glaring at him, emitting a colorful light.

Growling!

"Huh!"

Of course, for Max, this would have been nothing more than a light bite.

Isn't this the guy who freely runs around the demonic world full of demonic beasts? If Max had decided to bite, the stablekeeper's humble shin might have been ripped out of his knee in one fell swoop.

But just that bit was enough to scare the stable keeper, who had lived in the city all his life.

"Save people! "Wolf bites people!"

He rolled on the floor and screamed. When Max finally let go of his legs, the stable keeper kicked the ground with his limbs like an animal and ran wild.

"Aaaah!"

"What?"

"What's the fuss!"

The guards heard the commotion late and rushed to the stable, but-
Purung! Mumbling.

Tsk tsk tsk.

What they found was a stable door wide open, and beyond it a peaceful scene of horses and dogs eating side by side.

"... "Why is the door open?"

After finishing the plentiful meal and drinking a bowl of cool water, the wolfdog looked at the still dark western sky. A distant direction where the owner's presence can be faintly felt.

[Max.]

At that time, a welcome voice came from inside my head.

Wong!

The wolfdog vigorously slapped its tail and jumped up from its seat.

475. Loser of the North (4)

Tap, tap, tap!

The sound of lightly hitting the stone floor echoes through the cool morning air.

The owner of the footsteps was a majestic wolfdog, with a noble imperial insignia draped around its neck. Its shiny gray fur gently waves in the salty sea breeze.

He occasionally stopped and looked up at the sky. Instead of the yellow eyes typical of wolves, they were strange eyes, like the gray sky that had just dawned.

After running for some time, the wolf-dog arrived at a training ground with a clear view of the sea. Coincidentally, there, the Inquisitors who had recently returned from a short voyage were engrossed in morning training.

"Rear type 2, turn around!"

"Huh!"

Boom!

A heavy piece of iron creates an intimidating cracking sound.

"Left bottom, second meal, take a picture!"

"Hey!"

Kuaang!

As the flails struck all at once with the command, thick dust rose and

the soil of the training ground was deeply dents.

The wolf-dog stopped and looked closely at the little white girl who did not fit into the hideous sight.

Sisley was an amazing girl who created a particularly wide and deep crater even among sturdy Inquisitors.

"Good work! Group 1, take a break! Group 2 is preparing the land in the meantime!"

At the declaration of his adjutant Lumiere, a white teddy bear, as if waiting for him, toddled over to Sisley holding a bowl of water.

The doll, equipped with a high-performance growth-type AI, had lived with the little saint and had learned quite a lot of information to take care of the child.

"Al~la~view."

"ah! Thank you, Labyu."

Sisley smiled happily as he hugged the small teddy bear. She had a bright and innocent smile, befitting a girl of that age, without any trace of her serious training.

Then, she noticed a familiar wolfdog staring at her from a little distance away.

"Oh, Max? "What's going on here this morning?"

The wolf dog's tail wagged happily as I greeted him with a friendly smile.

"... huh?"

But at that moment, Sisley felt a strange sense of discomfort and tilted his head. Doesn't her wolf dog, who usually runs up to her and rubs against her body when he meets her, look particularly dignified today?

'Max... Something has changed in the atmosphere?'

Sisley, who was puzzled, put the teddy bear down on the floor and approached the wolf dog. Then, as always, he reached out his hand and tried to lightly stroke the wolfdog's head.

However, just as the small hand was about to come up to her head, the wolf dog lightly twisted its neck to avoid her hand. And then-

-Uh-huh, where!

He proudly placed his front paw on the girl's arm, as if he was reprimanding her.

chuck!

Thanks to this, the wolf dog's gray mud paw prints were clearly visible on the girl's white training uniform.

"huh? "What's wrong with you all of a sudden, Max?"

Okay.

"... "You don't want me patting your head today?"

Okay.

"Um, okay..."

As Sisley obediently withdraws his hand and sits down on the floor, the wolf dog also gently puts his front paws together and faces the girl.

The corners of the mouth were slightly curved upward as if smiling, and the sharp eyes shining with intelligence had a noble dignity, like a king with his own territory in front of him.

"egg! la! View!"

At that time, the teddy bear toddled over to their side, emitting a short electronic sound. The child seemed uneasy about having a large animal near him.

The wolf dog, who had been watching the movements of the doll as if

alert, was-

Lightly.

After clapping its tail as if to say hello one last time, it turned and quickly ran towards the council building.

"hmm? "Max, you're really strange today, aren't you?"

Sisley tilted his head for a moment and looked at the wolfdog's back, then immediately hugged the teddy bear and returned to the training ground.

* * *

After that, the wolf-dog continued to wander around the council, pounding the ground diligently.

For example, next to Deputy Lumiere, who was scolding the young Inquisitor during a training break.

"Didn't I warn you, Inquisitor Boris? "How many times have I warned you to do things in moderation?"

"But I swear to the Lord, I didn't do anything wrong."

As the young man called Boris protested like that, Lumiere's beautiful eyes flashed behind his glasses.

"That's shameless. "Are you saying that the move to create factions within the Knights is not wrong?"

"When you say faction, you misunderstand. I simply wanted to better serve Saint Sisley, who received the title of [Apostle] at a young age, so I gathered people who were like her..."

"If that's not a faction, then what is? Are you really planning to create a second [Lilium] within the Knights of Saint Marsyas? "Why do you try something like that while watching what those idiots in Bastian are doing around Prince Logan?"

Then Inquisitor Boris narrowed his eyes and spoke passionately.

"That's exactly what I want to say! How disgusting it was to see those Bastian bastards condescendingly praising Logan as a blue lily. But, doesn't we have Saint Sisley, who is as blessed as a white peony, no less powerful than His Majesty Logan?"

"What's wrong?"

"So, at this point, we're making one too! The peony that surpasses Lilium, its name is [Peony] Punitive Force! How are you feeling?"

"ah! "Peony, that damn peony!"

Inquisitor Boris. The wolf-dog gave the eager young Inquisitor a glance, then quickly walked into the council building.

"Lord Sharon. "Wasn't the movement of the sea monsters strange?"

At that moment, two Holy Knights were walking in the hallway. Behind the slowly moving, crow-like exorcist, a sharp-looking paladin dressed in Saint Bastian's livery is following behind him and impatiently urging something.

"His Majesty Logan is also very concerned about this. "Have you reported this fact to His Majesty separately?"

"Hmm? No, Sir Ely. I am just a knight who happened to join the punitive force. This means that we are not in a position to officially report to the imperial palace. But why are you asking me that?"

"Lord Sharon!"

"The person in charge of the punitive force is Logan. If it were the imperial palace's position, it would have already been properly addressed to His Majesty Logan. "Hehe."

Then a faint look of concern appeared on Sir Elie's face.

"Lord Sharon. I am not asking for the official position of the Imperial Palace through the Holy Assembly and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "I just want to know His Majesty's true feelings."

"So why did you tell me that... .."

"Isn't this a fact that everyone already knows? "Sir Sharon is His Majesty's direct line, receiving orders directly from him."

"Huh. Yes... . That's right, but..."

The exorcist, who was sleepy and half-hearted, suddenly notices a wolf dog passing by and his eyes widen. This is because I recognized the auspicious silver energy in his eyes.

"... Ugh?"

Wow!

-If you're here, do your job properly!

The wolfdog barked briefly at her as if scolding her, then lightly turned around again and this time ran to the restaurant where food was being prepared.

At that moment, the chefs there were struggling with the imperial saint in front of them.

"excuse me... "I don't know what kind of food you're talking about, Seo Yi-seo."

Then the saint narrowed her golden eyes and gave them an order.

[It is a food ingredient called rice cake. Go ahead and make it and offer it to me! I said that all you had to do was cook the grains until they were soft and grind them into powder.]

"that... "Are you saying to boil the grains with water?"

[okay. Cook it well to create a chewy texture. Then, you can make it long, put it in a sauce called red pepper paste, and boil it.]

"chili pepper paste... What else is that..."

[It is a red and spicy sauce. Make sure to make it red and spicy. That is the core of the food called tteokbokki!]

"float... Poppo... key?"

It's a pitiful act to make trivial demands on powerless subordinates.

The wolfdog howled its neck softly as if uncomfortable, and then barked fiercely at her head.

Growling! Wow!

-Ah, do it in moderation, man!

[...] hmm?]

Seo Yi-seo, or rather the gluttonous Cadmus, looked back one step later, but by then the wolf-dog had already completely disappeared.

* * *

Crack, crackle!

After running for a while again, the last place the wolf-dog arrived was a large conference room.

There were two people there who had been struggling with the chart open since early morning: Prince Logan, who led the Delcross punitive force, and General Lysander, the commander of the Cypriot Navy.

"It's the second departure. "Do you really think this is not the end?"

"Yes, that's right, sir."

"However, the Cyprus Council's opinion seemed to be slightly different."

In response to Logan's question, the old man looked at the chart with dark, sunken eyes. As fishing has already resumed, the prevailing opinion among the council members was that the punitive force, which costs a huge amount of money to stay even for one day, should be sent back quickly.

However, they were unable to let down their maritime alert posture because General Lysander, the head of the Navy, continued to strongly advocate for a second departure.

"I beg your pardon, sir. "The sea monsters will definitely come back soon."

"Do you have any basis for thinking so, General?"

"I'm sorry. There is no clear evidence yet. However, the feeling of an old man who has dealt with sea monsters for a long time tells me that this is definitely not the end."

Logan slowly nodded at the wise old man's words.

"Since the general says so, there is one thing that bothers me too. It's a little further southeast from the point where we fought earlier... ..."

"Are you talking about the Cravat Islands?"

"Yes, right there. Actually, when the subjugation of demonic beasts was in full swing, I sensed a strange energy there... hmm?"

Logan couldn't finish his sentence. This is because the wolf dog suddenly rushed into the conference room, jumped up from the floor, and landed easily on the chart spread out on the table.

The delicate chart, filled with small islands and reefs, was instantly ruined by the dog's muddy paw prints.

"Oh no, Max!"

Prince Logan quickly grabbed the wolfdog and pulled him under the table. Then, the wolf dog, unable to avoid the Sword Master's quick touch, was trapped in his arms and snored as if dissatisfied.

king!

"Your name Logan. "What about that dog?"

"Ah yes. Sorry, General. "This is a wolf dog named Max raised by the Delcross Imperial Family."

"Hoo. A wolf dog... Are you a northern hunting dog? "This guy looks very dashing."

"haha... .."

Logan smiled sheepishly at the old man, then silenced his voice and lightly scolded the wolf dog in his arms.

"You guy, what are you doing all of a sudden?"

In fact, Logan had already sensed the sign of a wolf dog running from afar. The only reason the response was a little late was because the dog's movements were fast enough to catch the Sword Master off guard, but most of all, it was because the dog's presence was different from usual and he was very confused.

'Is it an illusion...? ... '

However, no matter how much he looked, the guy he was hugging was Max, the wolf dog. I guess it's just my mood that makes me feel that the subtle magical energy emanating from him is unusually stronger than usual.

Struggling!

At that time, the dog that was being held in the air by Logan began to twist its body wildly as if its posture was uncomfortable.

Logan, who put the dog down on the floor, unconsciously reached out and tried to scratch the wolfdog's neck as usual.

I did-

chuck!

Suddenly, the wolf-dog puts out its front paw with a serious expression and stops Logan. A solemn attitude, as if he would politely refuse to be treated as a cute pet anymore.

Thanks to this, the large dog's muddy paw prints remained dark on Logan's white sleeves, which had been stiff and spotless.

"... .."

I guess something is strange? Logan searched for the wolfdog with

slightly deepened eyes and carefully called out its name.

"Max?"

Then, wow! A short sound returns, as if in retort. Logan opened his eyes wide at the clear waves vibrating through the air.

'... lie?'

I never would have thought that such waves could be felt not only by humans but also by animals. No, but now even more than that... ... !

"wait for a sec. You, Max... "No?"

Again, wow!

The wave felt this time is the echo of undeniable truth.

'You're saying it's not Max? No, that can't be possible...'

Logan was extremely confused. But as he tried to stay calm and thought about it, it wasn't really the first time he'd experienced something like this. Hasn't there been a time before when someone you knew well gave off a sense of discomfort as if the person had changed in an instant?

okay. For example, he once saw the soul of the Holy Emperor come into the body of another person. At the time, the target was Sir Sharon, a paladin, but if something was possible for a human, there would be no reason why it would be impossible for an animal.

'Especially those eyes...'

Logan, who was suffering intensely as he looked into the wolfdog's strangely silvery eyes, called out to the person who came to mind with a quiet feeling.

"... By any chance, do you drink Abama?"

Then the wolf-dog's face became distorted to the point where it could be seen at a glance. The guy was snoring loudly, as if he was reprimanding Logan.

king!

-Are you out of your mind right now?

Logan continued his thoughts, trying to ignore General Leander's puzzled look. but. If this place was truly prosperous, Logan would have been able to sense his powerful divine power from afar.

'But I just feel the familiar magic energy from Max, as always.'

Magi...

Then, naturally, the name of another person he knew came to mind.

No, no way. I don't think that will ever happen though.

"... Seongjin Lee?"

Wow!

Fortunately, this time a quite strong answer came back. Carrying an infinitely stronger wave of truth.

"... Seongjin Lee? really? No, but how..."

With a puzzled face, Logan looked at the wolfdog's tail, which was swinging in satisfaction.

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Although the waves Logan sensed were quite accurate, they did not always indicate the truth. This is because the subject of the wave is information that has been distorted through one's own perception and subjectivity.

In that sense, he couldn't believe the wolf dog's confident answer. It may be that he simply reacted pleasantly to the name of his owner, 'Lee Seong-jin'.

To make an accurate judgment, a more thorough verification process is needed. So Logan sat the wolfdog in front of him and began a serious conversation.

"First, let me ask you some questions that would be difficult for you to answer if you were Max. "Can you answer this?"

Twisting?

"As you well know, there is a famous passage in the Gospel of St. Bastian that goes like this. 'Forgiveness is the fifth finger of the Lord. How can He not renew your heart and be generous when you ask for it?' "How many chapters and verses is this verse?"

Then the wolf dog's expression becomes somewhat mysterious. Logan, who misunderstood the meaning, quickly added an explanation.

"Of course, I know that it is not convenient for you to answer right now. "Could it be possible to express it by barking as much as the number?"

Kyung!

Instead of answering, the wolf-dog snorted and turned its head. Only then did Logan suddenly recall an important fact and was greatly embarrassed.

"ah! sorry. In my haste, I forgot for a moment that you don't read the scriptures at all. "Then let me ask you another simple question."

Kiing.

"Do you remember when you first decided on the stake in 'Bertrand & Lee' with me? You can answer that right away, right? Now, what was the total amount of my share specified in the contract?"

Kiyiing.

"... Oh, is the unit too big? "It will take half a day for you all to bark and respond."

The conversation between the two could not continue from there. General Lysander, who was listening from the side, looked increasingly strange. If this continues, sooner or later the rumor that the 2nd prince of the Holy Empire is crazy may spread throughout Cyprus.

"General. Isn't it time to attend the meeting? "Let's talk about this again next time."

After roughly organizing the chart, Logan hurriedly fled the scene, taking the wolf dog with him.

* * *

And now -

Logan was sitting on a high cliff overlooking the sea with his wolfdog. Because it is not easily accessible to the public eye, it has recently been often used as a secret training place.

slam!

Along with the cool sound of the waves, Logan's eyes caught the view of the lively Port of Cyprus.

The early morning sunlight becomes a long twinkle that extends to the horizon, and fishing boats that have resumed fishing are busy chasing schools of fish.

Because it is so everyday, it is a sight that comes with an even more extreme sense of reality. These questions naturally flooded Logan's mind.

'... 'What am I doing with a dog that can't speak?'

A look of deep agony appears on Logan's neat face.

Gael Bertrand in his previous life was a person who always pursued logical thinking based on facts.

However, for some reason, ever since he was reincarnated in the Holy Emperor's family, his once extremely rational world has been falling apart. It was the fault of the Holy Emperor, the representative of God, and his brother Mores, who was surrounded by all kinds of irrationality.

Miracles and contradictions beyond human understanding constantly occur around them. As I continue to encounter them, I am now able to accept it even if my normal brother suddenly turns into a dog.

'Maybe my brain was broken somewhere long ago... ... '

Sniff.

Even in the midst of his agony, this guy, confused as to whether he is Lee Seong-jin or Max, is looking around the cliff while making a pleasant nasal noise. Perhaps because he became a wolf dog, his expression looks particularly brighter than usual.

Logan was caught in a slightly complicated mood and called his name again.

"Lee Seong-jin."

Wow!

A wave of truth that can still be felt.

"Is it really Seongjin Lee? How on earth did you... .."

However, Logan, who was about to ask something in detail, immediately kept his mouth shut.

After all, dogs have no means of communication other than barking. I probably won't be able to get a proper answer from him.

'Well, it might not mean much to ask now.'

The strange things happening around Lee Seong-jin, or Mores, definitely included the problem of this wolf dog. Unlike other dogs, it naturally exchanges auras with its owner, and when it receives auras, it grows like a bear.

For this reason, it is known in the world that this wolf-dog is a divine beast that helped Saint Bastian, and that everything is a miracle caused by him.

However, Logan knew better than anyone else that this guy was not some kind of 'divine beast' given by the main god.

Magi.

This guy exchanges auras with his owner and often emits a weak magical energy, just like Mores did when he was young.

Logan had a complicated expression on his face, but the wolfdog nudged his arm with the bridge of its nose, as if urging him to do something.

"huh? what's the matter?"

Wow!

"I'm not asking you to hang out like usual. "Are you hungry now?"

Kkkkkkkk!

"Oh, isn't that it? Then, let's play... .."

Whoa!

"Oh, sorry, sorry. Don't be so angry. "Honestly, right now I'm not sure if you're really Seongjin Lee, and I have no idea what you want to say to me."

As Logan becomes discouraged, the wolf-dog also snores softly with an expression of frustration.

Wow-

But after a while, something surprising happened. The wolf dog suddenly got up and looked like it was picking at the dirt, but then it put its front paws on the floor and started scratching out something resembling letters.

Scrunch-

".....!"

Logan looked at the sight in fascination. Because the wolfdog seemed to perfectly understand the meaning of the elaborate work he was doing.

Whimper.

The dog seemed to be having a lot of trouble, perhaps because it was a movement that the dog's body was not used to. However, after patiently scraping the dirt, the letters that were finally completed were-

-as. case.

Although it was a little crooked, it was clearly Logan's own name written in the Imperial language.

"... Seongjin Lee!"

This time, Logan called his name with confidence.

"You are, of course, Lee Seong-jin!"

But after a moment of apprehension, Logan suddenly came to his senses and looked around. If someone saw this scene, even from afar,

they might report him to the Heresy Tribunal as a dog possessed by a devil.

'Besides, this guy really has demon energy!'

Of course, it was so weak that it was difficult to notice unless you were a fairly high-ranking priest. But now that he has become Lee Seong-jin(?) and emits even more distinct magical energy... ..

But, perhaps aware of Logan's worries, the wolf-dog raises its muzzle high in the sky in a very proud manner.

Logan, who felt strong pressure from that unspoken request, opened his mouth in a daze.

"okay. well... I did it."

Wow!

The wolfdog responded excitedly and confidently started scratching the dirt floor again.

As some time passed, another clear sentence was engraved under Logan's name.

-Tell me.

"Speak... "What?"

Scrunch.

-You keep worrying.

The sentences the wolfdog made were all overly concise. Apparently, it is not that easy to make letters with a dog's front paw muscles.

In the end, the wolf-dog, who struggled to create the third sentence by using his demonic aura, sat down on the floor with a slightly exhausted face and quietly licked his front paw.

Tsk tsk tsk.

But that was enough to convey what he wanted to say.

"Lee Seongjin, you... "Do you want to tell me that you came to ask me because I seemed to be worried about something?"

Then, wow!

The wolf-dog slaps its tail violently and looks up at Logan.

"okay. I see... .."

Logan was silent for a moment and played with Arjuna's handle. I felt dumbfounded and a little moved at the same time as to why this confusing situation occurred.

Above all, my heart was heavy at the fact that Wolfdog Lee Seongjin's comments were not informal.

"... Actually, you are right, Seongjin Lee. "There has been one thing that has been on my mind ever since this voyage ended."

Kiing-

"haha. okay. "To the point where it was clearly visible to you, I guess I still have a long way to go."

In reality, Logan's concern itself was very simple. Should the punitive force be withdrawn to the empire like this, or should a second departure be forced?

Of course, General Lysander continues to insist on setting sail. However, as most of the council members' opinions were already focused on disbanding the punitive force, Logan understood that his opinion would be more important than anything else in making this second departure a success.

"The previous subjugation of the sea monsters was very successful. Maybe we wouldn't have to ask the Empire for help. Contrary to expectations that they would attack their home base, they were gathered in large numbers in the coastal waters where ocean currents meet."

The fleet, which was moving smoothly eastward on the cold current, was able to naturally reduce its speed when it reached the point

where the Cravat warm current mixed.

There, we found demonic beasts who had lost their senses, and as planned, we sent a ship loaded with 'ancient fire' to them.

Hahahaha!

The fire spread at an incredible speed. The sea monsters were engulfed in the 'ancient fire' that covered the sea in an instant, and they died helplessly without even having a chance to escape.

So everyone was happy and celebrated the victory. Aside from the one ship gifted to the demonic beasts, there was virtually no damage to the fleet.

"By the way, Seongjin Lee."

To the wolfdog, who was concentrating and pricking his ears, Logan, with some difficulty, revealed the secret he had been hiding.

"Actually, I encountered a huge, unidentifiable monster at that time and there."

At the time, the distance between it and the fleet was so great that no one noticed its existence.

But Logan was different. He could feel its enormous size through the vibrations of the rocking ship. From the sound of the waves crashing against the boat, I could hear the turmoil its wings were causing in the abyss.

And above all-

That powerful presence that made the Sword Master's senses tense up, even if only for a moment.

'It's dangerous for him to encounter the fleet like this!'

Logan instinctively realized that fact. The fact that the fleet might suffer damage close to annihilation by this guy.

So, keeping completely silent about its existence, the fleet returned to

Cyprus.

"I didn't even discuss a word with General Lysander. Because I couldn't delay even for a moment. "If we hadn't left immediately, the fleet would have come face to face with the thing circling towards us."

If he had tried his best at that time, maybe Logan could have taken him down. However, it was impossible for him to protect the entire fleet behind him with his strength alone.

"I don't regret my decision back then."

Whip.

"But I can't help but wonder these questions. Was it okay to leave that mysterious, ominous monster wandering the waters off Cyprus as is? "Couldn't my hasty judgment have put the people here in even greater danger?"

Kiing.

"However, it is also problematic to reorganize the fleet and set sail according to General Lysander's wishes. "There is a high probability that you will run into him on the road to the Cravat Islands."

After saying that, Logan grabbed Arjuna so hard that the blood drained from the back of his hands.

"But if I still want to plan a proper strategy and go after him, if I want to sacrifice the fleet, isn't that just a pointless greed on my part?"

Logan has never hesitated to put himself in danger for the sake of people.

However, operating a small detachment and operating an entire fleet were very different in terms of the number of lives taken. Since he cannot protect the entire fleet alone, he will not be able to avoid great losses for his allies.

Perhaps this concern may be a topic that encompasses even his past life. Wasn't Logan himself the one who had once become one of the

pillars of the civil war, drawing in countless Orthonains like moths to fire?

"Besides, as you know, simply maintaining a punitive force for a long time is a waste of budget and national power."

So, is there a need to endure a lot of loss for a risk that has not yet been visualized?

Wouldn't it be better to disband the punitive force right away and move only a separate force to subdue Hae-su?

Even as I am wasting my time like this, the poor refugees of Ortona must be suffering from the sea creatures.

"What am I...""

At that time, the wolf-dog suddenly stood up from his seat and started writing new letters on the dirt floor.

-Logan.

The wolfdog, who had painstakingly engraved his name again, this time began to create longer sentences than ever before.

-What will happen will definitely happen someday.

"What happens happens..."

As Logan looked at the words with shaking eyes, the wolf-dog snorted lightly and carefully wrote another sentence.

-And what needs to be done must be done sometime.

What needs to be done must be done at some point. Logan asked with a trembling voice, feeling as if that sentence was stuck in his heart.

"Lee Seongjin. "You think I should set sail there?"

Wow!

"Even if my decision results in great sacrifice for the punitive force."

Wow!

The wolf-dog agrees with Logan's words by striking its tail vigorously. It was an extremely powerful answer, filled with strong waves of truth.

"ha ha ha... .."

Logan, who felt much at ease, let out a soft laugh.

"okay. "I think you're right, Seongjin Lee."

It was truly amazing. With just that simple sentence, all your worries can melt away like snow, and new resolutions and plans can take their place.

"Still, I think I should discuss it with General Lysander first. "I'll think about it a little more."

Wow!

"okay. If we are to set sail again, we will have to make thorough preparations this time. "It would be a good idea to ask around to see if there is anyone who knows about this guy's identity."

Wow!

"ha ha ha."

Logan looked down at the blue, undulating sea and raised his hand in a friendly way toward the wolf-dog. And then-

chuck!

Suddenly, I was pressed by the front paw of the guy with a straight face, and dark dirt paw prints were left on my sleeve again.

477. Loser of the North (6)

It hasn't been that long since I got to know Logan properly.

However, in Seongjin's opinion, he was overly accustomed to carrying other people's burdens. Your past life must have been so different.

So sometimes, you have to have someone beside you to ask you what the problem is. Otherwise, that foolish bastard would willingly sink into the sea, carrying all the suffering of the world on his shoulders.

"Anyway, Seongjin Lee, how are your front feet? "It seemed like you were overdoing something."

So, seeing Logan looking much more relieved than before made me feel a little relieved.

"No, there's something a little strange about me calling you a paw... .
"But I'll treat you first. Will you show me?"

Seongjin willingly put forward his front paw and received a share of divine power. And while enjoying the enormous amount of information provided by the dog's sense of smell, I felt the cool sea breeze for the first time in a long time.

'As expected, I think it was a good idea to postpone training and come take a look.'

It would have been nice to have talked to Logan a little more like that. However, Seongjin's concentration could no longer be maintained. This is because someone nearby called Seongjin.

"Lowering."

When it seemed like I was waking up unusually late, it was Lord Masaine who came to the room in person.

"Get up now, sir. Everyone is waiting for the degradation."

"uh..."

With that voice, the view of the peaceful port disappears, and the bedroom ceiling with its colorful canopy comes into clear view.

Seongjin rubbed his eyes with a disappointed look on his face.

'Oh my, I didn't even say I was going yet.'

I was worried about Logan, who must have been embarrassed by Max, who suddenly came to his senses(?).

Max seemed to want to show off his charms to Logan earlier. Anyway, I guess we should do it in moderation.

I wanted to say hello properly, but the accumulated fatigue made it difficult to fully concentrate on my subordinates again.

"... Okay, I have to get up now."

Seongjin stood up and stretched greatly.

'Well, I'm sure it will end well on its own. 'Logan is such a ghost that he can detect changes in presence.'

The reason Seongjin attempted to contact Max through connections within his family was because of a strange experience he had recently.

I can't remember now how it started. But at the time, Seongjin felt a strange sense of unity, as if he had become Max, and did what he had to do.

As if possessed by something, I dug into the ground and found something very important - unfortunately, I don't even remember what it was. And I handed it to Logan in a half-asleep state.

Only later, after I completely came to my senses, did I realize that it was a miraculous harmony that occurred through 'connection between clans.' Then naturally this curiosity followed.

'As I became more familiar with this connection method, I became able to exchange Auras with Max more easily. Then, wouldn't it be possible to practice in a similar way and induce that sense of unity myself?'

In the end, it was half a success. First of all, since there was no resistance from Max at all, Seongjin was able to move the wolfdog as freely as his own body. I was able to see the world through his eyes and obtain information using all of his senses.

But unfortunately, it was impossible to shoot out thoughts at others like Louise did. I guessed that this might be because Seongjin's flame crystals are usually in an inactive state and asleep.

Thanks to that, I ended up using the wolf dog's front paws for no reason just to talk to Logan. I still feel like my arm is throbbing.

"Hmm... .."

As Seongjin carelessly massaged his arm, Lord Masain asked worriedly.

"Lowering. "You took a break from your morning practice. Are you feeling unwell?"

"no it's okay. "It's just my mood."

Actually, it's probably Max who really has sore feet, but hey, since Logan's with him, he'll probably take good care of Max, right?

* * *

"Sir, are you here?"

Upon arriving at the reception room after a quick bite to eat, Dasha and Branch Manager Schmidt greet Seongjin. For now, it would be safe to say that these are the core working-level staff controlled by Sungjin.

Squeak.

Oh, and Manager Bruno, who follows Melbourne from the side.

"Today, I prepared flavored Melbourne, a specialty of Anatolia, Your Majesty."

Seongjin drank top-quality Melbourne with a happy expression. I've had a hard time drinking Edith's bile tea these past few days.

-Why do you insist on drinking that tea even though it doesn't taste that good?

Even though Owen asked that. Do you guys understand? Now that I'm completely used to living in Delcross, I can't even imagine life without Melbourne cars.

As he was feeling the feeling of his polluted tongue being completely purified, Dasha brought a stack of well-organized documents in front of Seongjin.

"Sir, I have selected the items you would like to consider first."

Dasha took off the stealth suit that was her identity and put on a neat everyday gown. The sight of her with her long hair styled up neatly gives off the air of a professional office worker.

"The document on the front page is Giacomo Milo's search plan. "I think it would be a good idea to start from the nearby Marquis de Benso and slowly move north."

"Hmm, good."

Dasha was already organizing the things Seongjin had done one by one. Ah, how much easier life becomes with just one such talented assistant by your side.

"And the back page is about Baron Brodiskaya's sergeant major. "All the necessary documents have been completed, and now we can send it to the imperial palace and await His Majesty's official approval."

Dasha looked a little embarrassed as she explained it that way. Why

not? This 'Baron Brodiskaya' is the name that refers to Dasha herself.

From the moment she decided to accept Seongjin's offer, things went smoothly. On her own, she prepared her employment documents for the imperial palace, and later even came up with a fancy new identity as 'Darina Brodyska.'

What did they say? Are you a collateral descendant of a fallen nobleman in Carthage?

Of course, since it is an identity purchased with money, there is no proper right to inherit the title, but the resistance people feel between becoming a nobleman from a commoner and receiving a new noble title as a relative who already has noble blood will be different. Perhaps Dasha could more easily blend in among the zodiac leaders?

In particular, Carthage is said to have had a lot of mixed blood with southerners since ancient times, so Dasha's slightly exotic appearance would not be a big problem.

After completing the rough approval and looking into the Ortona economic reconstruction project, Dasha opened her mouth with a somewhat serious expression.

"Oh, and there is one matter I need to report to you separately."

"huh? What?"

"Actually, there's a strange rumor going around Regina these days."

"rumor?"

"yes. 'It's still just a rumor, but-"

After a brief pause, Dasha glanced at Branch Manager Schmidt before continuing.

"There is a rumor spreading among some leaders, including the Merchant Union, that the third prince of the empire is plotting a terrible plan to devour the entire North."

... huh? stratagem?

"why?"

"That is... I think it may be because of the economic reconstruction project you are pursuing... .."

Seongjin looked back at Branch Manager Schmidt with an expression demanding an explanation. Then, Branch Manager Schmidt, whose face had become increasingly depressed over the course of a day, opened his mouth in a hushed voice.

"Maybe it's because of the clause on payment. There may be detailed agreements for each territory, but the main gist of the project is as follows. 'Aren't you planning to import food from the South cheaply through the 'Bertrand & Lee' merchant and receive the payment in imperial currency or precious metals of the same value instead of the existing currency?'"

"It did."

"For this, northern lords must melt down the Ortona currency they hold and create new gold or silver bars. Or you have to sell them to Hayden Bank and receive the remaining amount in Tessa notes or Payka currency after deducting a large commission."

Of course it is. Delcross's currency, Tessa and Payka, are all issued by Hayden Bank.

"However, the lords and merchants seem to have accepted that clause as an ambition to subjugate the entire northern economy to the empire."

"... .."

Seongjin was dumbfounded.

No, what kind of bullshit is that? So are you telling us to take Ortona's money, which has already gone bankrupt? Why are you so anxious that you can't argue with these fair conditions?

"Furthermore, the construction of mines owned by several fiefdoms is

also a problem. "You said you would send a working-level officer from the top to the area where you made the transaction and receive continuous reports on the amount and purity of metals mined, right?"

Isn't that obvious? You should keep a close eye on factors that can have a significant impact on the empire's currency supply, such as gold or silver mines.

"Doesn't that mean you're going to keep the North in economic subjugation?"

"Uh-huh!"

Branch Manager Schmidt! What do you think of people?

"This is business, not charity, right? "It is just a basic provision that needs to be presented in order to take care of our common interests."

If the northern economy becomes active, the situation and economy of the entire continent will likely fluctuate. So shouldn't we provide basic safety measures to prepare for this?

Of course, the value of the existing Ortona currency may plummet, and the value of the empire's currency may rise slightly. The economic position of the northern lords will be greatly weakened, and their authority as a long-standing indigenous power will also fall. There may also be a side effect in which northerners prioritize transactions with 'Bertrand & Lee' over other merchants.

But these are only extremely minor problems that must be endured for the economic revival of the North.

"... "Have you already guessed it all?"

"No, whatever. I wonder if it will go that way someday... .."

Then, Branch Manager Schmidt's mouth fell open. Judging by the expression... ..

-The devil! That person must be the devil!

It was obvious that he was having such ungodly thoughts.

Hey, be careful, branch manager. If you even say something like that out loud, our Lord Masain will never leave you alone.

"Why are you looking like that, branch manager? "Is something uncomfortable these days?"

"... "No, it's nothing, sir."

"I guess it's nothing? I happen to know a great priest. What do you think? At this point, if you ask Priest Bart to take a look at you-"

"Hehehe!"

While I was happily berating Branch Manager Schmidt, Dasha seemed to have suddenly remembered something and added something.

"Oh, and you."

"huh?"

"Actually, Prince Leonard of Rohan has expressed his intention to visit."

"... Why is that bastard all of a sudden?"

"I heard he's staying in Regina on a sightseeing trip."

Seongjin's expression crumpled.

No, when I was in the imperial palace, I was very concerned about what my father would think, but now that I'm outside, I have nothing to worry about anymore, is that it?

"Oh, I hate it! "I'm busy right now, so I'll see you later when I have time!"

"But I received word that we had already left here."

... what?

* * *

Leonard, the damned bastard I hadn't seen in a long time, was still the same. A truly exemplary(?) kind of brat, dressed sloppily and smelling of foul perfume.

As soon as that guy sees Seongjin, he smiles and says hello.

"Bethelah."

"... .."

Seongjin was dumbfounded. Does this guy have no intention of hiding his relationship with the Dark Church? What kind of guts do you have?

But this guy was said to be next.

"I already heard everything. "You're trying to become the loser of the entire North?"

"... what?"

"Everyone is not making a fuss about that now. Oh, I'm really sorry. How can we, Rohan, who has recently exerted great influence over the northwest, including Regina, try to devour the North all by himself?"

I was so dumbfounded that I stared at him in silence, and Leonard smiled meaningfully and lowered his voice.

"So what do you think? If possible, let's share that good thing with me. huh? "Let's rule this vast northern region together."

Seongjin's face inevitably rotted away.

Why are we suddenly in the northern part of the country? What about Rohan? You bastard, don't you have much to do when you're a royal?

478. Loser of the North (7)

2nd Prince of Rohan, Leonard Donard Verdia.

Seongjin was currently treating him as a useless person, but at least his status in his country was a little different.

Leonard was known as a person born with particularly strong blood in the Verdian royal family, which had a long history of murdering relatives.

A neat appearance that perfectly resembles the previous kings, a strong body that contrasts with the first prince, and even a lethal charisma that literally captures the people around him.

Therefore, he had already been predicted as the next king among the rulers of Rohan for a long time.

However, contrary to this public perception, there were several difficulties in Leonard's installation as crown prince.

First of all, the biggest problem was that Lucas, the weak first prince, was monopolizing the current king's love.

Alessandra, King of Rohan, very much cared for her son, who had a soft temperament that was not like Verdia's. So, fearing that his younger brother might harm his older brother, he hid Lucas deep in the palace and surrounded him with knights to protect him.

It was also problematic that some high-ranking nobles were strongly supporting the first prince. Having lived through the Verdian royal family for so many years, causing bloodshed for generations, it might have occurred to me at this point that I would like to elect a gentle king rather than a powerful tyrant.

Lastly, it was also problematic that one of Leonard's secret safe houses was recently discovered by the public. The shabby safehouse where he committed a clumsy murder and buried the body secretly when he was still young.

Romain quickly took action to prevent the rumor from spreading widely, but rumors were already secretly circulating among a number of wealthy circles that the second prince might be a murderer thirsting for blood.

- Leave it alone. Killing someone without raising a word would be an ability that a royal should have.

Fortunately, the current king did not make much of an issue with the agenda, because she was also a typical 'Verdia' who murdered all of her brothers and sisters and ascended to the throne.

Of course, it goes without saying that because of that incident, the current king's overprotection of the first prince became even more extreme.

For these reasons, Leonard desperately needed a successful church. Just a few generations ago, there was a time when the life and death of all royal families on the continent was in the hands of the Emperor.

By the time the current emperor was in power, his mild foreign policy had made him fall into disrepute, but the power of the empire, which once controlled the internal affairs of all countries, was still intact.

'But, I didn't know that Seonghwang would hate me so much... ..'

At first, while I was attending the birthday party, I planned to flatter him in front of me and get some church information. However, for some reason, he was repeatedly denied an audience, and even when he occasionally met Seonghwang in public, he only received cold stares.

Didn't we have no contact whatsoever before? Leonard could not understand at all where the strong hostility of Seonghwang came

from.

'I won't keep getting hung up on something that doesn't work.'

So Leonard next turned his gaze towards Princess Amelia. Until last year, she was that innocent and beautiful girl who had been looking at herself with longing.

If he succeeds in capturing her heart and marrying her, Seonghwang will have no choice but to lend his support to his son-in-law. It was such a shallow calculation.

but.

-If it's okay, would you please dance the next song with me?

When he met Princess Amelia again, she turned out to be a completely different person than he expected.

How can the sweetness of a rose and the strength of a steel sword coexist in one person? Despite her extremely young age, she already exudes a strong presence that surpasses that of the wise king of Rohan.

Strangely enough, the red dress the princess was wearing looked as if it had been completely stained with the blood of the enemies she had defeated.

'This won't be easy... ... '

If you continue to live like this, your own blood will soon be spilled all over the place. That sense of crisis came over Leonard strongly.

-How about Princess Annette of Brittany? She is a virtuous and seasoned politician, so she will definitely be a worthy companion for Leo. Marry her with her and borrow that power from her.

Even though Romain encouraged him to do so, Leonard could never give up on Amelia. By any means necessary, somehow, she wanted to get that beautiful girl into her own hands.

So the final target for Leonard's attack was Prince Mores.

A bastard prince who receives a lot of affection from the Holy Emperor and Princess Amelia, but at the same time clearly has antipathy towards the empire.

-He is someone who is effectively hiding his identity, and he is someone who will one day reveal his sharpest teeth to the Empire.

Romain said so.

Also, one day, he told me about the prince's true identity.

-Leo, that person is probably not the real Prince Mores.

--- what?

-The real prince must have died for some reason. In any case, what is currently occupying his body is an evil spirit imbued by the Dark Church.

Romain said that he was clearly an evil spirit that had attached itself to the prince through a ritual called 'Baptism of Rest.'

-Baptism of rest? what is that?

-It is said to be a ritual that semi-separates the soul from the body. It is said that if believers perform this ritual, they can see the dead with their own eyes. Not only is it possible to separate a soul, but it is also possible to transplant a completely different soul into that body.

Leonard couldn't quite understand, but Romain's point was this anyway.

Prince Mores is a vessel that the Dark Church has been preparing for a long time. The person currently in possession of the vessel is an evil spirit prepared by the Church of Rest, and he will slowly eat away at the empire from within.

-Anyway, it's surprising. Holy shit, that scary guy is letting evil spirits into the imperial palace.

-That means he is quite a useful horse.

-Still, he's your son?

-In other words, wouldn't it mean that he was pushed into such a corner that he even had to use the evil spirit that had taken over his son's body?

okay? Anyway, Prince Mores is an undisputed member of the Dark Church, right?

'In that case, I will first try to maintain my friendship with the prince and continue to find a way to meet Princess Amelia through him.'

Thus, while sitting on the ecliptic, Leonard began sending gifts and letters to Jinju Palace. In other words, it can be said that Prince Mores, who had only received gifts without any special response, had contributed greatly to his becoming a helpless person.

In any case, thanks to Leonard's unusual efforts over a long period of time, he and Prince Mores were currently exchanging greetings on a regular, albeit dry, basis.

Well, as for the contents of the letters they exchanged so far, roughly-

-When will I be able to see your face? If possible, I would like to have a place together with Princess Amelia.

-Oh, I have something to do this time, sorry. I'll find some time soon, so just wait a little longer on the ecliptic.

It can be summarized to that extent.

And at this point, Leonard also couldn't help but notice Prince Mores's shameful intentions, who were poisoning him and causing him to continue wasting time.

When I realized that fact, rather than being immediately angry, I started to have doubts.

'Does Prince Mores hate me? 'Why on earth?'

And now-

Leonard, who entered the drawing room after being guided by an attendant, was able to confirm that fact again as soon as he met Prince Mores' face.

'Look at this, you really hate me, right?'

Leonard has seen Romain's incredible abilities for a long time, and is still reaping the benefits.

However, even so, the statement that Prince Mores was not the real son of the Holy Emperor could not be trusted, because Prince Mores' eyes, which stared straight at him with a cold hint of hostility, were exactly the same as the Holy Emperor's.

"Bethelah."

In any case, Leonard was not very discouraged. Since he wasn't really interested in people's hearts, the other person's intentions weren't that important. He just cares more about what he wants from the other person and what he can get from them.

"I already heard everything. "You're trying to become the loser of the entire North?"

If that's true, we can't just let it go like that. Didn't Romain say that once too?

-Leo. I gave you everything I have. You will one day become the true loser of Rohan and the entire North. And finally, he will collapse the empire and become the last emperor to rule the continent.

okay. This vast northern region was Leonard's future territory. So, if you're going to sneak in there like a thief, you should at least do it with your permission and in front of yourself.

"If possible, please join me, okay? "Let's rule this vast northern region together."

However, when Prince Mores heard those words, his face became strangely distorted.

"I wonder what kind of nonsense everyone is talking about from

earlier... . "I'm just trying to do some business, so why are you coming up with such wild ideas?"

"exactly? "Aren't they using business as an excuse to lay the foundation for governance?"

"Absolutely not!"

"Is that so... .."

Seeing the strong denial makes me feel like I need to interfere even more. So Leonard proposed to him with a coy smile.

"Then how about this? "Couldn't I invest at least part of your business?"

"... .."

Leonard thought the prince would be disgusted and refuse. But the prince, who was looking at him blankly as if he was assessing something, suddenly asked this in a blunt voice.

"okay? "Do you have a lot of money?"

* * *

There is no sin in money. I really don't like Leonard, but I'm not so narrow-minded that he even hates his money. No problem.

"This is a wasteland reclamation project."

Seongjin spread out the map he received from Dasha on the tea table.

"It just so happened that we needed a new base connecting Sigismund and Rohan. As a side note, they also settled Ortona refugees here. However, it was quite far from the major territories in the north, so it was difficult to find new investors. How about this business?"

"It's reclaiming wasteland. It doesn't seem like a business with particularly high profits compared to the investment... .."

"Don't worry about that. 'Bertrand & Lee' will build basic roads and

security, all you have to do is spoon in there. "In fact, you will be able to dramatically save your initial investment."

"Anyway, isn't this land too close to the western mountain range?"

"And he's very close to Rohan. "As the top goes up, the sea subjugation will become more active, so it will be a big benefit to Rohan in the long run, right?"

"hmm..."

Leonard looked deeply troubled.

Why not? The main purpose of this is to work for civilians, not a business that seeks extreme profits.

"I have one question. "If we share the profitable portion, what benefit will 'Bertrand & Lee' gain from this business?"

"I don't have anything in particular."

"What? "But why are you pursuing it?"

"You said it before, right? "We are not in business to make a profit."

okay. Because the top player in 'Bertrán & Lee' is Logan. He would probably get down to business without hesitation.

Why not? He was already pouring his pocket money endlessly into the North, but now he can help them by pursuing proper profits through business.

The money earned can be reinvested to continue employing Ortona refugees, maintain business expansion to some extent, and make a big profit in the long run?

"Then what does this business have to do with your plan to rule the North?"

"Oh really! As I said before, the purpose of this is not governance."

Seongjin frowned and added an explanation.

"Well, I don't think you will believe me, so I'll tell you this. A person's economic influence also corresponds to his or her governing power. "If you want to properly control the North, as you said at the beginning, there is no other way than to invest more money here."

"Why is that so?"

"Think simply. Whose words are closer to the people? Is this a ruler whose face it will be difficult to see for the rest of his life, and who sometimes gets beaten up when he is unlucky? Or is it a ruler who will make a living today by putting a piece of bread in his mouth?"

"hmm..."

Although he looked a little puzzled, Leonard seemed to understand Seongjin's logic.

"how is it? "Do you want to invest?"

"As long as the benefit is clear, yes. "Good."

He nodded with difficulty, accepted the business investment plan presented by Seongjin - which he had planned to forcibly hand over to Margrave Sigismund - and began to read it carefully.

"... Anyway, it's surprising. A rule that rules over money. "I thought you were the same type as me."

"..."

"Don't you think so too? "There is no faster way to deal with people than violence."

The two are of the same type. In a sense, what Leonard said may be true. Ever since they first met face to face in the living room, their minds were full of thoughts of killing each other.

While explaining the business, Seongjin continued to worry.

'You bastard. Should I just cut it down right here and now? If Dasha and Branch Manager Schmidt take good care of themselves, I think we can bury them like this...'

If Branch Manager Dashana Schmidt had found out, he would have been shocked.

However, even if it is a pile of dirt where not a single blade of grass grows, it can become a stepping stone for someone to step on and fill the ocean. Seongjin had a premonition that there were still gaps left for Leonard to fill in the distant future.

And Leonard had been thinking about this as well.

'You may have gained a lot of fame recently, but you are still a child. Don't you think you could easily twist that neck with just one hand? If only Romain had been by my side at least once... ..'

If Romain had known, he would have been furious and stopped him. Leonard, who was not a warrior, had no way of properly understanding the prince's strength.

Moreover, the moment he exposes his murderous nature directly, it will end up giving the Holy Emperor the cause and effect to eliminate him.

Seongjin thought as he held up the contract.

'You bastard. I saw blood recently too. Why does Rohan let someone like this become a member of the royal family? 'Are you crazy?'

Leonard thought as he accepted the contract.

'Prince Mores knows the taste of blood. He is a man who already has a lot of blood on his hands in ways that others do not know.

That bloody dream continued even when I signed the contract.

'I really want to destroy that guy with one sword. If I do that, I think my heart will feel relieved.'

Seongjin thought so as he kindly held out a quill.

'I really want to strangle that neck. The blood of the noble royal family on these hands, it must be truly enchanting.'

Leonard thought the same thing as he obediently filed the documents.

And the two smiled broadly at each other, as if celebrating a successful contract.

'I want to kill him.'

'I want to kill you.'

479. The Loser of the North (8)

Leonard didn't stay long. This is because the more we came face to face with him, the more uncomfortable the air became.

Seongjin, who had kicked him out without any kind treatment, narrowed his eyes as he watched the carriage moving away.

'It's strange... ..'

There are many cases where people have taken their lives involuntarily, both on Earth and here. However, in Seongjin's own opinion, he did not have a tendency to prefer killing compared to other people.

If it doesn't threaten your own safety, you don't necessarily want to hurt others. Because I didn't have a special sense of justice like someone else who would eradicate evil and correct the world.

but.

"Leonard of Lohan."

What a strange thing. I hadn't even met him in person before the birthday party, so why did such a strong killing intent rise up from deep within my heart?

Why is that like that?

I'm curious.

I would like to know.

I'm really curious... ..

Rustling.

At that moment, Sungjin's consciousness, which was about to deepen, was quickly pulled to the surface. This was because he sensed a small sound coming from afar.

The best room in this villa was where the Holy Homunculus was currently staying.

'... father? 'Isn't it time for a political meeting?'

I listened carefully, just in case, and the presence became quiet again, as if it were a lie. Because it was such a subtle sound, Seongjin began to become confused as to whether it was a real presence.

'Was it just an illusion...?'

Sungjin's thoughts turned back to Leonard. However, perhaps because he had already lost focus once, the strange feeling of foreboding from before had completely disappeared from his mind.

hmm.....

"Is it because my eyes look bad? "When I look at that bastard, I feel like even normal people become psychopaths."

While I was muttering that, I heard a small snort from next to me. It was the devil who had been sitting at the tea table pretending to be an ordinary lamp from earlier.

[You're funny. Who said you were sane? Don't worry, Lee Sung-jin. You're already a great natural born psychopath.]

"What, Inma?"

[Think about it carefully. Don't you secretly enjoy seeing others suffer? Otherwise, you wouldn't have teased the branch manager like that, saying you'd bring his father.]

"no..."

Seongjin couldn't deny those words.

[Cynical, only moves for profit, but that's not all. Once a decision is made, it is pushed through without mercy, regardless of the outcome, and the mind is always busy calculating or analyzing something. Wow, he is a typical example of a psychopath.]

"Oh, shut up!"

Seongjin got angry and shook the lamp around. Then the devil clings to the bottom of the lamp and screams in horror.

[Oh, be careful! Handle with care! This is my favorite lamp!]

It was a beautiful lamp that Amelia had given her as a gift, and after returning to Regina, the Demon King had been staying inside this lamp as if he was having a hard time.

As Sungjin's hands slowed down a little, the demon king, who was riding on his momentum, began to whimper sadly, his flames fluttering.

[Sniff! Stop shaking me like that, you psychopath! My precious plate collection is already completely destroyed... ...!]

"uh....."

[Sniff!]

Seongjin quietly put the lamp down on the floor. Then, the crystal decorations hanging from the lampshade began to jingle, casting a beautiful reflection of light onto the tea table.

As if the brilliant movement of light had stimulated his nerves, the Demon King's whimpers grew louder.

[Sniff!]

"Well... Calm down for now, Demon King. I'll buy you another plate... .."

[Whew!]

"Ah, really! Hey, stop crying! You're the Demon King of a certain

dimension, and you're talking so shamelessly!"

In the end, Seongjin, unable to bear his prickly conscience, ended up stealing an expensive plate for the devil.

In the process, poor Branch Manager Schmidt suffered once again, so in a sense, the devil's analysis may have been accurate.

[Hehehe!]

Anyway, after acquiring the new collection, the Demon King stopped crying as if it were a lie and sat down on the plate.

'This bastard, isn't he secretly acting pitiful these days and taking various things from me?'

Isn't it? Is it my imagination?

Seongjin took a copy of Leonard's contract with a slightly uneasy feeling. Then the Demon King, who was looking at the documents from the side, asks.

[That contract. Wasn't that what you originally said you were sending to Margrave Sigismund?]

"Oh, right."

[But why? Why did you give it to that guy earlier? Didn't you say that it was the most boring business, and that you would definitely pass it on to the Count?]

"hmm. I was like that... .."

I never thought there could be a child in this world more disliked than a changeling count.

As Sungjin swallowed his words, the Demon King stretched out and flattened himself on the plate.

[Well, what if he gets ripped off a little too much? That guy seems to be quite rich. He has a bunch of magical items on his person that most people would struggle to even have.]

Seongjin blinked at those words.

...huh?

"Magic items?"

[Yes, magic items. Ah! In other words, items that have the laws of the sphere world? Why, you have those, right? Things like the fireplace stone or the flare stone you have.]

Eh?

Seongjin was embarrassed and lifted the demon king's plate.

"wait for a sec! "Why didn't you tell me that earlier?"

Then, the Demon King, with a puzzled expression, fired a small spark.

[Why do I have to say that? It's not that unusual.]

"Isn't that unusual?"

[huh. It's the same in the ecliptic and the Sigismund Territory. Most nobles usually have at least one magic item for self-defense, right? I thought he had too much, but maybe he was just too worried about his health.]

"....."

[And that kid, he's a prince? Then he must have grown up preciously. But seeing as he came here alone without any proper escort, I wonder if he was wearing some kind of security gear all over his body?]

Ah, somehow!

'I feel like I want to get rid of it, but I'm strangely reluctant to use my hands... ... '

Seongjin felt very uneasy and stared for a while towards the empty garden where Leonard had already left.

* * *

Slowly, slowly.

Same time. Like Seongjin, Leonard, who was sitting in the carriage, was contemplating some uneasy feelings.

'Am I caught up in Prince Mores' rhetoric? I guess I was in too much of a hurry to sign the contract... ... '

After thinking for a moment, he took out an old metal plate from his pocket. It was an emergency communication port left by Romain to contact in case of emergency.

"Romaine! Romain, are you there?"

I tapped the board and shouted, and a human voice came out from there as if it was a lie.

[Yes, there is. What's the matter, Leo? Is something troubling you?]

Oh, Romain!

Leonard responded without hiding his joy.

"No, just. "I called you because I was curious how you were doing these days."

[...] Since this is a technique that the Orthodox Church considers taboo, I have repeatedly told you to use it in emergencies. What are you going to do if someone sees it? No matter how royal you are, you cannot avoid the Heresy Trial.]

"So you came out like this without any escort. "The driver also happens to be deaf, so you can rest assured about that."

Then, Romain's deep sigh was heard.

[I'm not saying that you should go out alone and risk it, but...]

"Oh, okay, let's just skip over it. By the way, how are things going? Is everything going well in Cyprus?"

Romain had recently left Leonard behind in the Zodiac and traveled

to Cyprus alone.

Did Sigurd Sigurdson say that he would intercept the previously prepared items before he made a full-fledged move? He said hopefully he might get something important called a [key]... ..

but.

[Unfortunately, I am a little late, Leo. When I arrived, the head tower was already completely dismantled, not a single stone left.]

"Oh! Did Sigurd Sigurdson's last doll get tampered with?"

[I think that's probably the case. But it's strange. The 'controller' of the buried tower is nowhere to be seen. I thought it would take him a while to find it on his own.]

"Then it's all over?"

[Don't worry, that's not necessarily the case.]

In any case, Romain added that no matter how Sigurd Sigurdson was, he would not be able to use the tower's controller without his help.

Of all his previous puppets, only Romain was able to truly understand and control the controller's code.

[So instead, I'm going to try using the remaining artifacts on the Krabat Islands. It'll take some time to arrange a ship to get there, though...]

"Right. First of all, there's no problem there, right?"

Leonard, who skimmed over the progress report, told Romain the story of his recent meeting with Prince Mores.

[...] You invested money in a new business?]

"okay. According to the prince, it is a completely profitable business."

[You were hasty, Leo. You know, we don't have much money to operate.]

"I know, Romain. I've got all the money saved up for emergencies! And in the long run, we need another source of income, right?"

As long as the crown prince's appointment was delayed day after day, there was a limit to the wealth that Leonard could draw from the Rohan royal family. ... If I had known this would happen, I should have made the An family a little more moderate.

"In that sense, what other source of income could be as solid as the business guaranteed by the Delcross Imperial Family?"

[Yes, it is a barren land in the north. It doesn't seem like wasteland reclamation is a very profitable business.]

"no way! Still, it is more profitable than putting it in Hayden Bank and only receiving interest. Besides, Prince Mores said this to me."

Leonard frowned and traced his fading memories.

"What... is that? Economic power is power? Money power is more important than violence? If you want to control people, first give them bread... .."

[.....]

Roman was silent for a moment.

"Anyway, as you said, I will one day become the conqueror of the North. If that's the case, Romain, wouldn't it be better to make my name known in the North and gradually exert influence over the people?"

[...] Hey, Leo.]

After a while, Romain opened his mouth cautiously.

"huh?"

[So the business is being carried out in Leo's name?]

"... "Wow!"

Leonard gaped blankly.

When I thought about it, it was like that. No matter how much investors cling to it, what good is it all? Anyway, 'Bertrand & Lee' will be the ones to do all the superficial saving of face.

[But how on earth do people imprint Leo's name as a ruler?]

That was when Romain spoke up to that point.

"Huh?"

Suddenly, Leonard stumbled and dropped the communication device on the floor. This is because the carriage suddenly shook violently and then stopped.

Shake!

[Why are you doing this all of a sudden, Leo? Leo! Leo... ..!]

Leonard slowly got up, leaving the noisy communication port alone. When he opened the carriage door and stepped out, he saw the coachman lying on the ground, bleeding, and a group of poorly armed bandits.

"See, didn't I tell you? "This is definitely a carriage belonging to a rich family!"

When a young man dressed in classy clothes appeared, the thieves started flirting with excitement.

"That's true. But why aren't there any escorts?"

"Well, I don't know either. Are you from a poor, rich family?"

"Idiot. What about the poor rich family?"

"Ah, fuck! What does it all matter? "If we just take off those clothes and sell them, we'll make a lot of money!"

As much as they were delighted with the sudden appearance of easy prey, Leonard was also very pleased with their appearance.

Is this how a monk must feel after escaping from a time of bone-chilling asceticism and finally facing the corrupt world of the world?

"Whoa-!"

When Leonard suddenly let out a cool breath and smiled brightly, the bewildered thieves soon became angry.

"what? Is this kid smiling? "What's so funny now?"

"Kill him! Let's see if he can still laugh like that even if a knife is stuck in his stomach!"

But it was just as the one in the lead was swinging his sword.

Empty!

When the sword reached Leonard's chest, it stopped in midair as if it had been blocked by something invisible.

"ok? Uh oh... ... ?"

The thief's eyes widened in confusion.

He felt that his arm was still moving, the sword still swinging downwards with great force.

But why does this sword seem to reach that young man, but cannot?

When the thief opened his eyes, Leonard, who was looking at the sight with amusement, explained cheerfully.

"Haha, you were surprised, right? "I was quite surprised when I first experienced it."

"this... "What is this!"

"My friend said that the laws of the world of rules are always like this. No matter how strong a person is, he or she can never force open a space that is closed by conditions. Every phenomenon has a condition that goes with it. If it's right, it's right, and if it's not, it's not."

"Iik?"

"That means unless you know the password to unlock my [protection], you can't attack me no matter what. "Because the space between you and me will not last forever like this."

"... Well, what kind of crazy thing is that... ... !"

But unfortunately for the thieves, the result was a little different the other way around.

Leonard lightly swings his arm -

Crack!

With a loud crash, the thief's neck snapped back.

The thief, who had suddenly been slapped, blinked his eyes with a blank expression.

"Oh, by the way, my attack has the [Ignore protection] and [Increase indirect damage] options. So even after [Protection] is activated, it is possible for me to hit you like this."

As soon as the explanation was over, Leonard's fist struck the thief's face once again.

Bam!

"Ugh!"

The thief's face was completely crushed by that blow. The thief died instantly and fell to the ground, blood spraying everywhere.

dump!

".....!"

When one of their comrades suddenly lost his life, the confident thieves turned pale and retreated.

"What the heck? What the hell is that guy?"

"How is it? Does the power look a bit good? Haha, it has to be that way. These include [High-Speed Movement], [Focused Attack], and again, what did they say? Oh yeah! [Weight charge] is also attached, right?"

Paat-

Leonard, who moved his body lightly while explaining, was already blocking the thieves' escape route.

"omg... ..!"

"That's why it's difficult for an opponent to follow you with their eyes, and even if they see you, it's difficult to avoid them."

The thieves simply could not understand the current situation.

But there was no time or space to think any further, as Leonard's fists continued to strike the thieves' bodies.

Bah! Wow!

"Oops!"

"Ugh!"

"Plus, once you hit an opponent, they won't be able to move for a while! There's also a [stiffness] effect attached. Haha! Isn't this option really cool? Isn't it?"

After that, it was truly a one-sided assault.

Boom! Bam! Crack!

Blood splatters and bones break. The despairing gaze exploded along with the eyeballs, and the desperate screams were crushed along with the vocal cords.

When most of the bandits had been reduced to flat pieces of meat, Leonard finally let out a satisfied sigh and closed his eyes.

"Haaaaaah... .."

Ah, it feels like all the desires I had suppressed while staying in the ecliptic are being relieved all at once.

This thrill! This elation! This omnipotence!

"Hey!"

The last surviving thief crawls on the ground, struggling with his weak limbs.

Leonard looked back at the bastard with eyes sparkling with joy and thought absentmindedly.

The last one... Yes, I'm going to strangle you. Thinking back to the unfulfilled desires of that time, which Prince Mores couldn't bear to try.

So Leonard took a long time and a lot of effort to strangle the thief.

"Ugh... .."

But after some time, his body started to cool down.

".....!"

Suddenly overcome by a strong sense of foreboding, Leonard looked down at his hands, which were shaking slightly.

"It's strange. I clearly remember strangling someone like this at some point... .."

A simple and plain room. The soft warmth that wrapped around both hands. And the clear gray... .. looking up at you.

"What is that... "When was it?"

Leonard stared blankly at the sky.

A heart-poundingly sweet and ecstatic memory-

Who on earth was it when they strangled it?

480. Departure (1)

Meanwhile, Romain, whose communication with Leonard had suddenly been cut off, stared blankly at the communication port.

"... "Leo?"

It seemed like he was walking around alone with such vigor, but I guess there was some kind of accident?

"....."

But I wasn't particularly worried about Leonard's safety. Romaine was the one who plastered all kinds of self-defense codes all over his body, but wasn't he himself?

There are probably not many people on this continent who could directly threaten Leonard's life.

'okay. Unless the Holy Emperor himself comes forward, or a powerful being at the level of a high-ranking demon king... ... '

But they don't really have any reason to harm Leonard.

Romaine, whose thoughts had gone up to that point, put his mind at ease and grabbed the communication port. What was important to him now was not Prince Leonard, but the whereabouts of the Cypriot Tower and its 'controller'.

'The storyteller, Sigurd Sigurdsson, does not deal with code as directly as I do.'

Roman thought, looking up at the now empty hill where the tower once stood.

The storyteller probably also has a rough understanding of how the tower works and how to control it. Since he had once treated himself as a puppet, it was not unexpected that that level of knowledge would flow to the station.

However, to properly activate the codes that lost their functionality long ago, more detailed tuning and supplementation by experts are required.

'That's probably too much for a storyteller. Perhaps, rather than controlling the head tower, the purpose may have been greater to intercept it before it gets into my hands.'

But there was something that didn't seem right to me when I just thought about it that way.

If he had found the controller first, would there have been a need to completely destroy the head tower like this?

Isn't this an extremely crude action for Sigurd Sigurdsson, who values methodological 'aesthetics'?

'... This is definitely strange. Did something go wrong with the thing taking over the doll's body?'

If so, it's not a bad thing. Now, in this world, only you can fully understand and control the code of the normal world. A confidence that I had never felt before rose within me.

'ruler. Look, senior. This ability that you said was not the least bit interesting has now become such an important power.'

Romain slowly walked towards the Port of Cyprus, bragging to someone who could no longer hear.

"You're here."

When Romain arrives at the port, an old man with a pipe greets him. She was a shipowner who was willing to sell her fishing boat at the generous price offered by the stranger.

Although fishing has only recently resumed, there are some ship

owners who have been unable to endure the gap. The old man was one of those people. He had already let go of the sailors under him and was now managing the ship alone.

"Did you bring the money?"

"Here it is. I'll give you an additional fee when you reach your destination."

But when Romain paid the balance, the captain's attitude suddenly changed.

"As I said before, it will take a considerable amount of time to reach the archipelago on this ship."

"I know very well."

"Besides, my boat is too small to go out to the open sea. "If you are unlucky, you may encounter a storm and sink along the way, or you may run out of food while drifting in a windless area."

"... I don't know about the storm, but at least I don't have to worry about food. I don't need to eat separately."

In this case, it was convenient because it was the body of a homunculus rather than the original body. Although he has the disadvantage of being somewhat dulled, his soul and body are safely protected elsewhere even if he is in danger of death.

"And the problem is that there are no sailors to join us. Even though it is a small fishing boat, it basically requires two navigators and an assistant helmsman who will take turns at the helm."

... wasn't there anything like that said when you gave the deposit?

But Romain didn't bother asking again, because soon he felt the ominous atmosphere surrounding them.

As he realized what was going on, his long, half-masked eyes narrowed even further.

"... Well. Are there really no sailors who would go with you?"

The captain smiled wryly at Romain's point.

"haha. "Did you notice?"

"....."

"Then it will be easier to talk. Now, masked stranger. Leave all your money behind and get out of here."

As the captain spoke, men with fierce expressions and clubs in their hands slowly approached us.

But Romain wasn't at all flustered. He was so grateful that they had gathered within earshot of his voice.

[In that place-]

As Roman's mouth opened again-

[Stop!]

Jjing-

A strong wave spread through the air. The eyes of the captain and crew, swept away by the force, suddenly become blurry.

[Everyone, lower your weapons and slowly kneel down.]

Tuk! Fight!

One after another, clubs fall to the floor, and the sailors slump down in their seats as if possessed by something. There are at least seven or eight of them, so they are more than enough to set sail.

After looking around at them for a moment, Romain leisurely took the pipe out of the captain's mouth.

"From now on, smoking is prohibited, old man. What would you do if a fire broke out on the ship in the open sea?"

Romain, who had been blandly teasing the captain, smiled wryly and patted his shoulder.

"But the truth is, even if we reached our destination, I had no intention of just sending you back. I should have at least one way to return, right? That means you were going to die anyway, even if I didn't do this."

But other than that, I didn't want to cause any unnecessary casualties. So I tried to save as few people as possible...

It seems like things have to work out this way for the generous assistant navigators to come to me on their own.

"So, accept the consequences. You were the ones who tried to attack me first, so this is the retribution you deserve."

Tuk-tuk.

Romaine, who had shaken off all the tobacco leaves on the floor, handed the empty pipe back to the captain and gave an order.

[Okay, then shall we all go to the Krabat Archipelago together?]

* * *

While staying at Branch Manager Schmidt's villa, Sungjin had some free time for the first time in a long while. That means he focused all his energy on his swordsmanship training and Auror training that he had put off for a while.

Sir Kurt, who was worse off, asked irritably.

"Don't you go sightseeing separately?"

"What are you talking about? "We are here to work, Sir Kurt."

When I told him that we would soon all join together in the search for Giacomo Millo, Sir Kurt beamed and said:

"Hey, are you finally able to move your body? My body has become very sluggish from playing and eating in Regina while waiting for Hae-hae to arrive. "This will be my chance to sharpen my skills!"

At those words, Seongjin blinked his eyes in confusion.

"huh? "Why are you looking for such an opportunity outside?"

"yes? Well, didn't Lord Maria become stronger that way too? So, in order for me to build my skills properly like that friend... .."

"What are you talking about? To build your skills, you need to practice consistently. "I came here and already created a new Auror floor."

Then Sir Kurt asked again.

"... yes?"

"I made it, Auror 9th floor."

"yes?"

"9th floor."

Sir Kurt, who did not understand those words for a moment, soon let out an inappropriate scream.

"Huh?"

No, what's the fuss about? This guy has been getting along well with Lord Haven, but has Lord Haven moved?

"No! When on earth! How did that happen?"

It was no wonder that Sir Kurt was so excited. If you are a 9th level Auror, you can be considered a high-level knight in name and reality.

In other words, should I say that I am on the same level as Sir Marsain or Sir Maria in terms of the Auras I possess? Oh, of course, if we really fight, I will win.

"Lowering! When did you practice like that? "You were sick until recently, and even after leaving the imperial capital, you didn't have time to properly practice!"

"Um, well... .."

Yeah, we had a bit of luck. The amount of aura increased

dramatically when we burned down the Furiano sewers.

Also, I recently practiced sending Aurors to Max in Cyprus, and my Auror proficiency increased quite quickly.

In addition, the unique nature of Seongjin's aura also played a part. If you don't control it even for a moment, Gehenna's fire will continuously burn your body and try to burn the surroundings.

As a result, it seems that stacking Aura has become relatively easier.

"Oh no! This is, this is a scam aaaaaaa!"

"Stop complaining and start training, Sir Kurt."

Even while Sungjin was resting, a plan to conquer the North under the guise of searching for Giacomo Milo was being prepared under Dasha's direction.

Of course, the real Giacomo Milo is well and truly imprisoned in Schmidt's villa. The living environment is quite comfortable, and the three meals are delicious.

So, it's definitely not my fault that Giacomo ended up like that.

"Ah, I have received His call. With these eyes I have seen His holy countenance, with these ears I have heard His stern command. All the iniquities of the world shall be consumed before Him, and His grace shall at last save my soul. On that glorious day when He shall come as Judge, I will gladly be a martyr and do His will. Bethelah! His glory alone is my purpose, His salvation alone is my hope... ."

As Giacomo continued to mutter with unfocused eyes, Branch Manager Schmidt looked back at Seongjin with a suspicious gaze.

"What on earth have you done to the author, Your Majesty?"

"I didn't do anything in particular."

"....."

"Oh, it's true!"

Seongjin felt very wronged for the first time in a long time.

"That bastard, there's been something strange about him ever since I met him in the underpass. "It just got worse on the way back!"

"yes yes. "I guess so."

""

Seongjin's eyes became fierce. Schmidt, aren't you getting more and more disrespectful towards me these days?

"Anyway, I will be taking good care of him, so please take care of the lords safely, my lord."

Schmidt was quite active in this plan. Those northern lords were the biggest obstacle to the Ortona economic reconstruction project he was leading.

Of course, his subordinate, Mememe, also played a huge role in secretly confining Giacomo. He was busy capturing every single servant coming and going from this room and hypnotizing them.

[Okay, everyone, look into my eyes. What you see here will be forgotten the moment you leave the room. There is no one in this room... ..]

Awesome, meeme! Are you secretly useful?

"By the way, your Majesty."

While Sungjin was happily looking at the goat demon, Schmidt opened his mouth with a serious face while looking through a folder.

"As you said earlier, do you really expect the Cypriot fleet to go ahead with its second departure? As far as I know, the majority of council members, including Elder Chryses, are calling for the disbandment of the punitive force."

Cyprus is the largest maritime trading nation where all the merchant ships of the continent gather. So, depending on their movements, the entire continental economy will certainly fluctuate greatly.

As Branch Manager Schmidt is the head of this logistics relay station, he has a duty to prepare various economic plans in advance to prepare for it.

But at the same time, he is also a scapegoat who must be criticized if Sungjin is to blame. Since most agenda items require prior approval before moving forward, Sungjin's expectations and intentions are more important to him than the situation on the continent.

Fortunately, Seongjin was able to give a cool answer to his worried gaze.

"Yes. The Cypriot fleet will be sailing soon. So let's make all future plans accordingly."

"....."

Perhaps sensing something in Seongjin's words, Branch Manager Schmidt's eyes, which had been looking anxious, hardened.

"Yes, I understand, Your Majesty."

"huh."

"But you. Having listened to you, may I ask one more question? "This is an essential question for the future Ortona reconstruction project and the long-term operation plan of 'Bertrán & Lee.'"

"okay. what? say it."

"What on earth are you looking at? How far does your plan go? How long will it take for the empire to completely engulf the north?"

In the end, Seongjin got angry at him.

"Oh, no! Seriously!"

481. Departure (2)

-I don't want to rule the North.

Seongjin denied it several times, but most people did not believe him at face value.

The Ortona economic reconstruction project is a large-scale plan involving numerous merchants affiliated with the Merchants' Union, in addition to Bertran & Lee.

So, all of those upper echelons wanted to meet the Third Prince, the commander-in-chief of the plan. And they tried to give meaning to every word and action of his.

- Hey, how was it meeting the prince in person? Did he give you any hints about the future course of the empire?

-Wearing the Knights Templar uniform even in private? Could it be that Prince Mores is indirectly expressing his will that even commercial activities should be conducted within the doctrines of religion?

They also did not believe the explanation that they had come to search for Giacomo Milo. It was widely interpreted as an intention to use force to pressure the northern lords who did not listen to their instructions. Surprisingly, it was an inference that was quite close to its essence.

-Berseus Dashiano, I thought that arrogant bastard would taste bitterness at some point!

-You will be able to have quite a bit of fun in the County of Castile, sir. The Andres Plain near the county is the only granary in the

northeast.

Everyone thought that the Third Prince would threaten the northern lords and extort money. At this point, the desire to really cause trouble was welling up in them.

But that wasn't all. As time passed, strange followers also began to appear.

-Ha Hae's insight into the overall economic trends is truly amazing! So, the rapid growth of 'Bertrán & Lee' is already overwhelming the market. Of course, it is a bit surprising that the overall business you are currently pursuing is not pursuing profits as efficiently as expected... ..

-No, I am just following the wishes of Logan, the owner of the merchant. Because he wants to help Ortona refugees in the long term.

-aha! Are you prioritizing the growth of the market itself and taking into account the large returns in the distant future? indeed!

-Besides, you gave up your place as head of the upper class to Prince Logan and gave credit to him! All of your actions are truly admirable. Ha ha ha ha ha!

I treated them roughly whenever I had time, and it seemed as if a strange admiration and desire was growing in the merchants' eyes.

Accordingly, Seongjin's dissatisfaction grew.

"Why hasn't there been any news from Dominic yet? The person who asked to come didn't come, so why are useless flies hanging around and looking at people?"

In fact, there were two main reasons why Seongjin took time out of his training to meet merchants.

One was because he felt a sense of responsibility as the person driving this huge plan, and the other was so that he could naturally face Dominic Scarzapino. Since I found out that his fiancée 'Olivier' was a member of an assassination group, I couldn't let things go like this.

Of course, I also told the working staff to investigate Dominic.

However, neither Branch Manager Schmidt nor Dasha seemed to find anything particularly unusual about his past. All they knew was that he had studied abroad in Brittany when he was young, and that he met his current fiancée there.

No matter how broad the staff's reach, there must have been limitations in investigating events that occurred in other countries in the past.

'Okay. Then I can just meet him face to face and tell him what happened.'

So, I deliberately sent an invitation to Dominico asking him to come with his 'fiancee' Olivier -

-It seems difficult to change the schedule for leaving for Rohan on business, Mr. I am truly sorry, but I will come and greet you as soon as I return from work.

All I got was this polite rejection letter back.

'Dominico, you know the identity of your fiancée. 'It's awkward to confront me, so you're avoiding me on purpose!'

Even while dealing with various things like this, time passed steadily, and before we knew it, the day we were to depart for the Benso Marquisate had arrived.

There is no other reason why Seongjin chose the Marquis de Benso as his first destination. Not only because it was quite close to Regina, but more importantly, because I could no longer endure Sir Valerie's anger asking me to catch the 'mad sage'.

Sir Valery, who is in the middle of a church audit in Cyprus, has been sending letters to Seongjin literally every day.

-Lowering! Please hurry and investigate that 'wise man'! If you don't punish that apostate as soon as possible, you will have no honor standing before the Lord as an Inquisitor who upholds the Lord's will!

Originally, I had planned to ignore it until the right time came. However, arresting Giacomo turned out to be easier than expected.

The guy who was expected to be hiding deep within the Penitent Church was surprisingly wandering around the refugee camp, plotting to harm the continent.

'If we had been just a little bit late in finding him, we could have been in big trouble.'

It was a truly fortunate thing for Sir Valerie. And for the citizens of Regina, who were on the verge of being struck by an unprecedented disaster.

And the evidence of the enormous conspiracy planned by Giacomo Milo was now safely in Sungjin's hands.

"So you brought this to me? "Proof that Giacomo Milo is in cahoots with the devil?"

Sir Robert asked while looking at the black elixir that Seongjin held out.

"No, rather than evidence... .."

Actually, I didn't know how to handle this. You can't just throw it away or bury it in the ground... ..

If by any chance they seep into the water or soil and contaminate the surrounding creatures, there is no way to know what kind of danger they will pose to the continent in the future.

"So before we leave, I thought we should somehow deal with this. I think we'll probably have to [purify] it. If even a single drop of this elixir leaks out, it'll be a disaster for the city."

"Does this elixir have such evil power? I can sense a bit of magic, but I don't think it's that strong."

"Owen and Lord Martha have seen the results together. Creatures exposed to this elixir literally become walking corpses. They say that the soul will be bound to the body forever without being able to die

properly."

"Is that so... .."

Sir Robert's face became serious.

"Well, it's possible that my divine powers are so weak that I can't properly sense danger."

He carefully took out the gyro compass from his pocket.

"If we find out from this-"

But it was no use at all.

Whirling-

The top's needle returned straight toward Sungjin with a slight wobble, just as before.

"... .."

"... .."

Hmm.

Sir Robert was so embarrassed that he threw away the gyro.

"I... am ashamed, Your Majesty. I have been a bit negligent in consecrating my tools recently... .."

"Uh, it's okay. "You just have to be careful in the future."

Seongjin accepted his apology with a nonchalant expression.

"... Then, we will begin the purification."

So Sir Robert hurriedly set about purifying the place.

First, they carefully sweep the surrounding area with the blessed branches, then they create a sacred circle with signs inscribed with scriptures.

After carefully placing the elixir in the center, Sir Robert recited a final prayer and sprinkled holy water on it several times.

but-

"... For some reason, it doesn't seem to be purified well."

Sir Robert frowned as he looked at the bottle that still exuded magic energy.

"Maybe it's because there's some kind of magical treatment there."

"Magic... right?"

"huh."

Of course, the 'magical processing' that Seongjin meant was the laws of the normal world. When I looked at the elixir through my spiritual eyes, this text would inevitably appear in the air.

□TY□E_o_po□i□n_no73□4□

□err! Unable to confirm appropriate object!□

□err! ge□Ah!\$2┘The server cannot be confirmed.□

□err... ... □

The laws of the world of rules have always been like this. Because they always go against the laws of the real world and cause problems.

For example, like the dinosaur statues that the Seonghoe gave to Seongjin to prove the power of [Destruction].

Still, there was at least an option called [Delete]...

'I don't know how to do this. 'It's so damaged that you can't even read the text.'

What on earth was the identity of the magician in the underpass who mixed the laws of this unstable world with magic to create a potion?

"Lord, please cut off the root of evil and purify it with your righteous

blade."

Sir Robert did not give up and once again sprinkled holy water on the elixir.

But that was then.

Pipit-

A faint noise was heard from somewhere.

Seongjin, who had a bad feeling, quickly tried to dissuade the exorcist.

"wait for a sec. You'd better stop being conscious, Sir Robert. "Why does it seem like the bottle containing the elixir is cracking little by little?"

"ah! It really is. "It was damaged during the purification ritual. Isn't this container also just a glass bottle?"

However, Sir Robert was just about to take the bottle out of the sacred barrier.

Crispy!

Suddenly, the glass bottle shattered into pieces, and its black contents spilled out onto the table.

"... ... !"

The thick, viscous elixir spreads strangely quickly and covers the table.

It seemed to hesitate for a moment as it touched the sacred boundary, then soon began to emit a hissing sound and a black mist.

Heheheehehe!

For a split second, Seongjin seemed to see distorted faces waving in the black fog.

"I, your Majesty! The magic is getting stronger... ...!"

Swoosh!

As Sir Robert said, the magic increased in an instant, completely melting the symbols forming the barrier and finally being released freely.

The black smoke that turns everything around into undead just by touching it spreads out in all directions without hesitation.

"Damage, Sir Robert!"

Seongjin quickly pushed Sir Robert back and unleashed a dark red aura. It was a powerful fire shield that expanded the range of defense as much as possible, using the trick of 'opening a small sword screen' that I had learned from Logan one day.

Grumble!

The flame of Gehenna released from Seongjin's body soon began to burn with excitement, engulfing the demonic energy.

* * *

"... huh?"

Branch Manager Schmidt felt an unfamiliar demonic energy and raised his head.

"What? There's no way another demon would show up in my area."

He rose carefully from his seat.

The situation was already uncomfortable, with not only the Homunculus of Seonghwang but also the Exorcist staying at his villa recently.

So I was on edge trying to avoid encountering them as much as possible, and it was killing me.

but.

'This magic is clearly coming from the abode of the Lesser Mores.'

After contemplating for a moment, Schmidt eventually walked reluctantly towards the place where he could feel the magic energy. If something were to happen to Prince Mores, then he might have to face the pure anger of the Holy Emperor head-on.

"Lowering!"

And what he soon discovered was a very absurd situation. The sight of the young prince blocking the path of Sir Robert, who was unable to protect himself, and doing his best to block the demonic energy.

"Your Majesty! You must get out of here!"

Sir Robert belatedly shouted at the prince while emitting divine power, but even to Schmidt, a mid-level demon, the amount was truly insignificant.

Since all the exorcism tools were left behind in the black smoke, it seemed like there was nothing he could do to help.

'No, what on earth is all this about...''

It was when Schmidt was in a state of mild confusion that a sacred aura sent shivers down his spine, and he turned his head away, creaking as he turned pale.

'Hee... Heeeeeeeek!'

There it stood.

Homunculus.

The prosperous homunculus who has been lying quietly until now-

"... "Stay back."

With the soft Ortona language that follows.

Hwaaaaaak!

A divine power so powerful that I couldn't even open my eyes burst out in all directions like a storm.

482. Departure (3)

The sacred pure white energy surges like a tidal wave. The excessively strong force is not so much 'purification' as it is a primal violence that enforces order in the world.

Gulp!

Branch Manager Schmidt was unable to overcome the mental shock and fainted on the spot. Fortunately, a clear sacred barrier was surrounding his body.

Kiyi...

Thanks to this, the black fog that had spread beyond Seongjin's shield was swept away by the storm of divine power and evaporated in vain.

"Father...! Father Bart!"

Seongjin gathered his aura and ran towards the homunculus, delighted.

"You're here! "Thanks to you, I survived!"

"....."

"I almost got into big trouble, right? "I was so lucky to have a priest here, hahaha!"

Then, Seonghwang opened his mouth for a moment as if trying to tell Seongjin something.

However, he could not speak easily because Sir Robert and some other servants were watching them with wide eyes.

Plus-

"Oh my god!"

"It's a newbie!"

"Your Majesty, what is the matter! Are you okay?"

Sir Masain, Owen, and the resident knights were also running frantically from the other side. The entire mansion was suddenly engulfed in white light, so even those who couldn't sense demon energy immediately noticed the anomaly.

Finally, Seonghwang let out a soft sigh and answered Seongjin in Ortonian.

"It seemed like we were racing against time, so I intervened. Mores, if you had had enough time, it wouldn't have been impossible for you to be purified."

"uh..."

Seongjin blinked. What came out of Seonghwang's mouth was an extremely unfamiliar foreign language, but somehow he was able to understand what he was saying.

That unique way of speaking, the hint of concern hidden in the calm tone, and even the faint enthusiasm as if he wanted to teach me something, it was all there.

"Is that so? But no matter how much I try to burn it with Aura, it doesn't work."

When Seongjin obediently asked a question, a detailed answer came back as if he had been waiting.

"That demon energy was protected by the laws of the normal world. The reason the first purification ritual didn't work properly was because it was like hitting a solid castle wall with your bare hands."

"I see. so..."

"But it's not like there were any loopholes that could be explored. As you may have already guessed, the laws of the normal world that protected the demonic energy were incomplete. In other words, it was a sturdy outer shell with lots of holes here and there."

By then, Sir Martha and Owen had arrived nearby and looked at each other with bewildered expressions. Because I witnessed the strange sight of two people who had no contact at all before, talking amicably in different languages.

'Brother Marsain. Did New...Mores ever learn Ortona before?'

'No, as far as I know, there is none. Lowering.'

Meanwhile, Seonghwang's explanation continued.

"Of course, even if it is an imperfect outer wall, if the inside is already filled with other energy, it is difficult to invade it easily. However, what would have happened if you had not tried to burn the demonic energy from the outside from the beginning, but had confined them in one place and poured out a strong force all at once like I just did?"

"yes? then..."

"When the difference in density between inside and outside becomes significantly larger, the two energies will naturally mix without you forcing them."

"aha!"

Following Seonghwang's explanation, Seongjin created a brief image in his mind and immediately understood the principle.

"So, the method you used earlier is a kind of high-pressure injection?"

A method of quickly replacing the internal material by applying strong pressure to a specific structure with an outer shell.

"Yes, what you understood is correct. Of course, depending on the compatibility of power, it may have taken a bit more time at first than with divine power..."

"But once it got mixed up, it must have accelerated. "The place where my auror burned would have become a complete vacuum, which would have even more strongly attracted external aurors."

"okay. That's right."

Seonghwang, who was slowly raising his hand as if he was satisfied, soon put his arm back. It seems like he wanted to pat Seongjin on the head and praise him, but there were too many people around him, so he just gave up.

"But Priest Bart. "There is one problem with that."

He completely understood the method. However, Sungjin still felt strong doubts about whether he could have solved the accident on his own.

That's because the auras they had were insufficient to cover the rapidly spreading fog with the trick of 'opening a small screen.'

Before the magic of the elixir became widespread, when it was still contained in small bottles, let's say you could do something about it.

However, like before, I still did not have the confidence to immediately contain the rapidly spreading magical fog.

"Besides, there's also the problem of confining the magic like that. Also, don't you have to pour out a large amount of aura all at once to fill up that area?"

How many Aurors do you have to beat up? It's not the 9th floor Auror, and even if I were to become a Dekaron Knight tomorrow, I'm not sure if that would be a possible feat.

Of course, I don't know if Sungjin can bring out all the 'potential' he has... ..

"okay... .."

Seonghwang, who had been silent for a moment, slowly nodded his head. It seemed as if he had already guessed what conclusion Seongjin's thought process had ultimately led to.

So he answered a little cautiously.

"Then don't be too hard on yourself and bring everything to me. Whatever it is, it will be purified."

"....."

Seongjin shut his mouth and looked up at the tall silhouette of Seonghwang that was way above his head.

Even though he was covered by a thick hood, would it be too much of an assumption to feel that there was a hint of loneliness in his gaze as he looked at himself?

"... Yes, I will never overdo it."

So Seongjin nodded more vigorously and answered.

He desperately hopes that the small promise he is making now will relieve him of some of the burden on his mind.

"I will definitely bring the magic that seems difficult to handle on my own to the priest. "Of course."

* * *

After resolving the situation, the successful homunculus soon returned to his room and fell into silence.

But that brief commotion also had some positive results for Sungjin and his group.

First, let's look at Sir Robert's case. He was very discouraged because all the exorcism tools he normally used were consumed by magic.

But soon after, he was quite bewildered when he discovered tools that radiated divine powers of a different dimension than before.

'... what?'

Contrary to expectations that he would be busy with purification and consecration work for a while, his tools were now perfectly prepared.

No, it doesn't just radiate divine energy, it even gives off a subtle glow!

'Maybe it's because I was exposed to the divine power of Priest Bart earlier? No, no matter what...'

Sir Robert picked up a shiny token and quietly broke into a cold sweat.

'Wait a minute. But is it possible that all of these have become sacred relics? No way? No way?'

And the same was true for Branch Manager Schmidt. When he came to his senses shortly after everything was over, he was startled to find a faint halo surrounding his body.

Now, a new demon was born, following in the footsteps of the Demon King and surrounded by a sacred barrier.

"Rejoice, Branch Manager. Now that you have the Holy Boundary, you can freely travel to and from the Imperial City, unlike other demons."

However, even with Prince Mores' congratulations, Branch Manager Schmidt and Glumgoss could not simply rejoice. Not only was he unable to fully exert his demonic powers, he was now in a state where he could not even return to the Demon World at will.

'If other demons see me wearing the Holy Seal of the Holy Emperor... ...!'

Ah, it's over. It's all over!

As I was wrapping my head and feeling deeply frustrated, the prince tilted his head and asked.

"What's the problem? Why don't you just continue working under me instead of going back to the Demon World?"

"... How long, Your Majesty?"

"well? "Forever in the future?"

"What do you mean by that?""

"So maybe forever?"

"....."

Glumgos looked at the prince, who casually said 'eternity' in his human body, with a slightly strange expression.

* * *

Same time.

A suspicious guest visited the castle of the Marquis of Daciano, a place rarely visited by outsiders.

"... what? Wizard?"

"Yes, Marquis."

"Kick them out."

Berseus gave an order nervously. The entire territory was already in turmoil due to rumors that the imperial prince was planning to conquer the north, and there was no time to deal with such a rabble.

"But Marquis, he was truly a strange man. At first, I thought he was a fraud and tried to send him away, but he quickly overtook the guards and entered the castle walls. He seemed to be possessed by something."

"....."

Hearing the butler's unusual report, Berseus ended up walking down the corridor with reluctant steps. If he dares to engage in petty tricks in old Dacia, he will have to be killed with a single blow with his own hand.

As Bertheus arrived in the reception room, a woman wrapped in thick robes bowed her head respectfully to him.

"I meet the renowned Marquis."

He looks very shabby in his old robes. Nevertheless, her gentle movements gave off a strangely aristocratic impression.

"You found me all the time, right? why?"

"Because you are qualified to obtain the mysteries of the world. Dacianus, a direct descendant of the greatest lycanthrope in the world."

"....."

Berseus felt a somewhat contradictory feeling in her words.

Until now, every time I saw Nebraska's bloodline showing off, I was filled with jealousy.

But when he actually meets someone praising his ancestor Dacianus right in front of him, he is overcome with a feeling as if some twisted desire has been fulfilled.

but-

"Let me introduce myself first. I am the great Dacian-"

"gibberish!"

That doesn't mean you can say whatever you want in front of him.

Wood crack!

Berseus' thick hand firmly grasped the woman's slender neck.

"Ugh!"

"It's absurd. Did you think you could control this Berseus Dashiano with such low-level flattery? Know your subject, you lowly swindler!"

Yes, he probably would have just strangled her, if it weren't for the extremely unfamiliar sensation he felt in his hands.

Kwak! Kwak! Kwak!

Berseus, who heard a hard cracking sound like a piece of wood

crunching, threw the woman to the floor and asked.

"You... aren't human?"

"Hoo hoo hoo."

The woman stood up unsteadily. Her half-broken neck hangs upside down in the air, drawing a grim smile.

"What sad words. "I am just a pitiful human being struggling to escape the cruel shackles of fate."

"Even after doing something like that?"

"This is because I happened to come across a precious mystery of the world. Do you, Marquis, know about the 'Immortal Secretary'?"

"....."

"You don't know much. I recommend that you read it as much as possible. "It is one of the most famous books written by Dacianus."

What kind of immortality is that? Damn immortality.

The original Berseus would have dismissed it all as nonsense and immediately kicked her out of the castle.

However, the self-proclaimed 'wizard' proved the truth of those words by surviving intact even after having his throat half torn off.

If you do that, it won't be that difficult to find some time.

"... First, let me hear what your business is."

483. Departure (4)

In this way, Berseus and the wizard were finally able to establish a proper dialogue, although one of them was clutching a sharp axe, while the other was looking strangely anxious, trying to keep his dangling head upright.

Eventually, the wizard gave up trying to maintain his balance, ripped the head completely off his body, and hugged it to his chest.

"My name is Sobie. Sobie of the Black Forest. But Lord Dacianus has always nicknamed me 'the Wise Owl.'"

She introduced herself as 'Dacian's last disciple.' It was a sound that could easily be dismissed as a bluff, but the other person was a real wizard who showed the ability to move unharmed even when his head was cut off.

Berceus asked after staring at the cross section of Sobier's shattered cervical vertebrae, torn muscles, and neck without any blood flowing at all.

"Then you must actually be from a long time ago. You don't look that old, but what era are you from?"

"well. The Black Forest is such a remote place that I was ignorant of its history and situation even while I was growing up there. "After I properly entered the mysteries, I didn't really count my age."

"... .."

"But even after I went underground to conduct research, it seemed like the empire had changed rulers for at least seven generations."

Since the era of Dacian goes back at least to the reign of the 4th Holy Emperor Constantine, this meant that the wizard was an old monster who had been at least hundreds of years old.

"So, you succeeded in creating the 'Soul Wall' based on the secret recipe left behind by your ancestors?"

"Yes, Marquis d'Arciano. "It was a long and arduous process, but it was well worth it."

The answer came from the cradled head, but the wizard's severed head also shook back and forth in response.

The sight was so unpleasant that for the first time, Berseus regretted his cruel hand.

"Then what happened to your ancestors who taught you?"

"Unfortunately, Dacianus did not stay by my side for very long. "Before I could complete 'The Wall of the Soul,' he suddenly left one day, leaving behind all my research materials and legacy."

Sobi touched her head in her arms in a somewhat sorrowful gesture.

"But I believe that he still lives somewhere on the continent. Just as this insignificant disciple did, the great wizard has finally achieved immortality by forming the 'Wall of Souls'."

Well, guess what.

Berseus did not completely believe her when she said that she alone had perfected the secret to immortality. From the sight of her holding her fallen neck, she was far from being in a normal living state, and above all, a weak magical energy had been detected in her from the beginning.

And that feeling became complete certainty when I saw the item that Sobier had brought out, saying it was the 'elixir of immortality.' That black potion bottle was apparently oozing ominous magical energy.

"Wizard. "You borrowed the power of the devil."

"... .."

"There is absolutely no way to explain this magic otherwise."

Berseus radiated ferocious energy and tightly gripped the ax on his lap.

"I don't know how you manage to keep your soul alive after your death without being dragged to the Demon Realm. But you didn't obtain 'immortality' in the way your ancestors sought. Didn't you?"

Hahaha.

Sobiye let out a soft laugh.

"As expected, I cannot fool the descendants of the great Dacianus. Yes, that is correct. My secret arts are still imperfect, so I have barely managed to extend this worthless life through irregular means."

"But how can you help me, when you barely survived thanks to the power of the devil? "For what reason?"

"My secret art is very powerful even though it is not yet perfected. And based on the research left behind by Dacianus, we are still continuing to develop."

"... .."

"Oh, you asked why I want to help you? It's simple. In order to perfect my secret art, I absolutely need the help of his descendant, the Marquis."

Swish.

Sobi, who had been speaking up to that point, brushed back the hair covering her face and smiled with a charming smile.

"Marquis D'Assano. Do you happen to know the whereabouts of the dragons that were defeated by the Demon Dragon at the end of the Age of the Three Dragons?"

* * *

[...] The dragons defeated by Typhon fled to the ends of the world.]

That day, Seongjin had a strange dream.

As I floated in the air, feeling a light floating feeling, I heard someone's voice reciting an old story echoing in the air.

The moment he absentmindedly listened to the sound, his consciousness automatically shot towards the place where the story was coming from.

[Dragon of the Earth, Schwarzwald. He dragged his dying body to the edge of the continent, in the frigid land, and buried himself there. As time passed, large coniferous trees covered the land, and his grave became, as its name suggests, the 'Black Forest.']

I don't know how far Seongjin flew, but he arrived at the border of a shabby level. No, it was an extremely fragile curtain made up of vague images that was embarrassing to even be called the boundary of a dimension.

Let's slowly push our consciousness into it, and the small salt dimension accepted Seongjin's consciousness without any resistance.

[And the dragon of the sea, Galazia Thalassa. He hid himself in one of the deepest trenches, nursing his wounds. No one seeks the abyss beneath the vast ocean, and no one has seen him since that day.]

As I entered the interior, my vision suddenly became brighter and the sight of a gorgeous living room came into view. Fluffy curtains, quaint bookshelves, and a beautiful tea table with delicious refreshments... ..

On the other hand, one wall is filled with modern home appliances such as a TV, coffee pot, and oven. It was the perfect place to spend time alone.

[Finally, the dragon of time, Duser Parbat. He was so scared that he flew over and knelt down in front of the Lord. And he desperately prayed that his life would be spared. It was a truly unsightly little creature that could not be considered an ancient dragon that dominated an era.]

And there were two people sitting there, a man with a handsome appearance and a woman dressed in white. Among them, the woman had a face that Seongjin was familiar with.

'Saint, Seo Yi-seo...'

In that case, that guy is probably-

Seongjin crossed his arms and carefully observed the man's appearance. A shiny face, old-fashioned clothes, dark blonde hair that resembles Lord Martha, and the eyes of a wild beast that radiate brilliance...

It was true. That bastard was the thousand-year-old carnivore who couldn't even die, Cadmus.

[So the Lord ultimately told this body to slay the demon dragon, Typhon. My side was much more trustworthy than the ancient dragons that supported the world.

In other words, this body is the true hero who ended the age of myth and opened the age of humanity, the age of the millennial kingdom...]

... This is my first time seeing someone brag about himself so grandiosely.

It seems that Seongjin was not the only one who felt that way. Seo Yi-seo, who had been listening patiently until then, finally let out her long yawn and grumbled.

[Oh, Mr. Cardmos. Please be more moderate! Whenever you get drunk, you start talking about that again and again. If that isn't drunkenness, then what is it?]

[what? No, what did this insignificant creature say to the great demigod just now? Drunk? Such arrogance... hmm?]

Cadmus, who finally sensed Seongjin's presence, growled and turned around.

[What kind of guy are you, trespassing here without permission!]

Although he had a rather ominous demeanor, Seongjin raised his hand in a relaxed manner to let him know that he had no intention of attacking.

[It's okay. I'll do it, Ancestor.]

[...] you!]

Kayak! Darkness 2 has appeared here!

Leaving behind Seo Yi-seo's meaningless scream, Cadmus glared harshly at Seong-jin. The elongated pupils are constricted to the limit, ready to attack at any moment.

[This is wrong! How did you find out about this place?]

[Well, somehow... ..]

[Then get the hell out of here before I kick you out! As the king who rules this dimension, I can no longer allow people like you to pollute this space!]

It's a shame that you discriminate against people so much.

Seongjin, who was feeling sorry, ignored him and walked briskly towards the tea table.

'Oh, there's all the ice cream here? Did Seo Yi-seo imagine it and create it?'

I haven't seen it since the Gehenna Gate opened. How many decades has it been since then? This winter, I wonder if I should try making shaved ice and start a big ice cream business.

Yum Yum. As I was thinking about that while tasting the ice cream, ugly scale patterns began to appear here and there on Cadmus' body as he glared at Seongjin. It was proof that he was extremely upset right now.

[How dare you ignore my warning! You guys until the end... ..!]

But there was a part of Sungjin that believed in everything. He put

the ice cream bowl down on the table and snorted softly.

[I don't really have anything to say if you hate me that much. Aren't you embarrassed to be yelling when you're not even the landlord?]

[...] what?]

[If you want to expel him, then try it. Anything is possible for the King of Dimensions. But, Ancestor, isn't that impossible for you?]

That would be the case.

[You're not the master of this dimension anyway, right? So where are you acting like a king right now, huh?]

[... ..]

You're clinging to Seo Yi-seo's weak temple and making a fuss, and now you're talking so loudly about something so great. It's ridiculous.

Cadmus became dumbfounded by Sungjin's sharp remark. Only Seo Yi-seo, who created the salt dimension without knowing anything, was bewildered as he listened to the conversation between the two.

[Huh? Huh? Huh?]

okay. Surprisingly, the owner of this clumsy flame level was Seo Yi-seo. As soon as I came here, I could tell that fact at a glance.

Seeing her create such a realistic environment and edible foods, she must have been a very imaginative person.

'But we still don't have enough control.'

Perhaps it is because the overall understanding of dimensions is poor.

And as he was unable to completely control his own thoughts, there was a high possibility that other people's consciousness would intrude into them. Like right now.

[This is wrong. I really want to see the end here!]

Krrrrrr... ..

The scales on Cadmus' body stand upright, and a brilliant golden aura flickers.

However, if it is a world of images that clearly reflect people's imagination, Seongjin also had his own appropriate way to respond.

Grumble!

As soon as a crimson flame appeared and circled around Seongjin, Cadmus flinched for the first time and looked at Seongjin.

Why not? The destructive power of this Demon King No. 2 is enough to make even the goddess Justitia of the Pangea Chronicle bow down.

[Now, what would you do? Are you going to have a fight with me like this and burn your soul? Or will you just get along well with me without causing trouble?]

[that... ! Wow, what a mess!]

Cardmos slowly backed away with a tired look on his face. Then, realizing belatedly that he was scared, he suddenly got irritated at Seo Yi-seo for no reason.

[Ah, you rascal! What are you just staring at so stupidly? If you have time, hurry up and get me that 'ramen' food!]

However, even the seemingly stupid Seo Yi-seo had ears that could hear everything.

[No, wait, wait!]

Yeah.

She frowned and waved her hand at Cadmus.

[So now, in this dimension... In other words, I am the owner of this space, right? Then don't tell me to do this or that anymore, Mr. Cadmus!]

[What... ...!]

[And the same goes for you, Mr. Black Curtain 2.]

Seo Yi-seo placed her hand on her waist and made a request calmly.

[You are not invited. So, can you please get out of here?]

But Seongjin had no intention of just leaving like this. He had a special purpose, and he came all the way here to confirm it.

so.

[Don't be so hard on yourself. It seems like you've been suffering from Cadmos for a long time. Should I make you something delicious?]

[...yes?]

[This is salmon cream pasta, and it has a lot of spinach in it, so it's good for your health. And this is salmon papillote. It's a new product made for a limited time at our salmon specialty store. Just try it.]

The characteristic of the world of salt painting is that it reflects strong images as they are. This means that it is possible to perfectly implement food from memory into reality.

[oh...]

Seo Yi-seo's eyes lit up as she saw delicious dishes she had never seen before.

Maybe it's because I've met only the worst men since I arrived in Delcross, but for some reason that kind prince's face seems to glow brightly!

[They say that if you do well, you'll become the best Benz man, and it really is!]

Well, I'm glad you like the dish.

... But what is a Benz man?

484. Departure (5)

I don't know why Seo Yi-seo suddenly called Sung-jin a 'Benz man'.

However, once he received her recognition as the Dimensional King, he felt the spiritual pressure that had been secretly oppressing Sungjin's consciousness begin to decrease. This world no longer rejected his existence.

On the other hand, Cardmos, who had become a relative 'shit car', had no choice but to quietly shrivel up in a corner of the room under the sudden strong pressure.

[What the...! You damn thing! Why did you suddenly show up and ruin everything!]

Well, isn't it that you've solved it rather than ruined it? How dare you think of eating the King of Dimensions? You should know shame, you thousand-year-old carnivore!

Anyway, Sungjin thought as he leaned back comfortably on the sofa he was occupying.

'While I'm at it, should I try to get along with Seo Yi-seo from now on? I have a feeling that I'll be needing help from here from time to time in the future.'

So Sungjin made Seoyi Seo a few more dishes. From the most basic salmon steak, to salmon salad, and salmon rolls that could be eaten easily.

[Wow... ... !]

Seo Yi-seo's mouth became agape. She tasted various foods, and soon

she was dancing with happiness, shaking her shoulders.

'Hmm, is this enough food?'

Next time, I thought about making some flowers to go with it. But Seongjin couldn't help but hesitate...

Because, although it was attempted with confidence at first, the flower image only flickered like a faint illusion and then simply disappeared into the air.

'... Huh? Why?'

Seongjin, who had been pondering for a moment, realized that there was no specific image of the flower in his head. He had received so many flowers from Lady Chloe, but why were their shapes and scents so vague? In the case of the salmon dish, he could vividly recall even a single piece of parsley.

Perhaps, because he tasted each one and adjusted the taste before taking it to the king, it seems to have remained in his memory more clearly.

'Then what about things like weapons? Like a nutcracker or... . . . '

As soon as I thought that, I felt a heavy weight on my waist, as if it were a lie.

Seongjin laughed as he touched the handle that had become his own body. Wow, Yeomsang is really amazing.

[Hey. Thanks to you, I had a nice meal for the first time in a while. But what are you doing here? How did you get into this space? Mr. Benz, the black curtain.]

Seongjin blinked at Seo Yiseo's sudden question.

Oh, right. This isn't the time for me to be practicing making salt.

[Actually, I came here because there was something I wanted to see.]

[What is that something?]

[I don't really know. I just had a strong feeling that I would see it if I came here.]

[...Eh?]

Leaving the bewildered Seo Yi-seo behind, he took a good look around the living room, and somehow his eyes were drawn to the large TV placed in the corner. As he was drawn to pick up the remote control, Seo Yi-seo stopped him.

[Oh, that would be useless. I tried several times and couldn't get any channels. And since there's no Wi-Fi, there's no OTT service either...]

Blink.

Seo Yi-seo was startled when the TV screen lit up as if by magic along with the power button.

[What, what is this? How did this happen?]

It must be a characteristic of the world of salt images that reflects the mind as it is. It seemed to be a phenomenon that occurred due to the combination of the TV's characteristic of picking up invisible signals and a certain salt image created by Seongjin.

slam!

The TV screen showed a dark night sea scene. Looking at the deep blue sea with no trace of land, it seemed like it was probably a deep sea far from land.

In the center of the screen, a small sailing ship with only one mast was sailing along the constellations. It's hard to see on the screen, but judging by the taut sails that were being blown by the wind, it must be gaining speed quite quickly.

[Wow. Is this a documentary?]

Seo Yi-seo was glued to the screen with food in her mouth. Even though it was just a dull scene with her stomach moving, it seemed like it was fun to see the TV screen after such a long time.

[...]

Seongjin, who had been staring at the sight for a moment, changed the channel again.

Click.

Then the night seascape disappears, and this time, pitch-black darkness covers the entire screen.

For a moment they thought the TV had gone off, but soon they could see a faint glow in the corner of the screen. Upon closer inspection, they saw that it was a small deep-sea fish with glowing antennae on its forehead.

[What a strange looking fish. I think this is National Geographic.]

Perhaps because Seo Yi-seo was distracted, Cardmos, who had escaped the heavy pressure, slowly approached the TV. After secretly checking Sung-jin's expression, he sat down next to Seo Yi-seo and began to watch the TV screen intently.

[...]

Seongjin stared at the dark shadows hidden beyond the dark screen and changed the channel again.

Click.

This time, dozens of dolphins washed up on the shore. The soft moonlight was gently flowing down on the skin of the pitiful, dying animals.

Click.

There is also a view of a bare hill. Judging by the brightly lit council building in the distance, this is probably the coast of Cyprus.

Click.

The back of a large man passing by, pouring a glass while looking out at the night sea. At first glance, he seemed to be a sailor, but the

hand holding the glass was covered not with human skin, but with blue scales.

Click.

A dark stable, with horses and wolfdogs fast asleep inside, flash by.

Click.

Click.

Click...

And finally, Seongjin found the sight he wanted, stopped changing channels and stared at the screen.

[Huh? That guy... ...!]

Seo Yi-seo blinked when she recognized the man's face on the screen.

He was a man with light blond hair that was tinged with gray. He was a very handsome young man with sharp features, except for the distorted burn marks on his neck and chin.

[Ambrose of Helios...]

As expected, Cadmus' pupils constricted vertically as he recognized him.

[What the hell is that thing doing?]

* * *

Elder Cruse returned to the mansion late at night, having been busy with council business.

But as soon as he opened the front door, there was a huge pile of rocks in the middle of the garden that had never been there before. He frowned and looked for his servant.

"Spiros! Spiros! What are all these?"

"The remains of a dismantled tower, Father."

Startle.

Cruses was greatly surprised by the unexpected voice that suddenly came out.

But soon, he skillfully pretended to be calm and looked at his 'son' who was slowly approaching him.

"... A tower? Why is it here... .."

"You didn't know? It's been quite some time since they started dismantling the head tower. Well, my father has been quite busy these days, trying to persuade the members of the National Assembly to gather public opinion against the departure."

"... .."

"But isn't it a shame that it's a landmark of Cyprus, and that it's left in such a shabby state? The majority of the members of the National Assembly agreed to the plan to repair the tower. So I didn't bring it up as a separate agenda item, and I quietly worked on it alone."

Elder Cruse glared warily at his son, who was already taller than him.

"... It wasn't even brought up as an agenda item? Then how was it possible to execute the budget?"

The council was already suffering from severe financial pressure due to the long-term suspension of fishing and the operation of the punitive force. Isn't that why Cruses wants to disband the punitive force as soon as possible?

Then Ambrose answered with a somewhat amusing expression on his face.

"Well, it wasn't hard to convince the council members. I had no intention of using up the council's budget in the first place. When we at Helios said we would share in the costs, they passed the work on to me without a word."

"what?"

Cruz burst into a roar.

"You should have told me about such important matters in advance!"

"I couldn't help it. I didn't get to see my father's face while he was being treated for his burns at the council."

"Oh, right! Since we're on the subject, I'll ask. Why didn't you immediately return to the mansion to recuperate after such a big accident? Do you even know what the other council members are gossiping about us right now?"

Then, Ambrose, who had been smiling brightly despite Chryses' strong reprimand, paused for a moment and answered calmly.

"Isn't that natural? I'm afraid that this time my father will kill me, so how can I return home with peace of mind?"

"...what?"

"You didn't plan on killing me naturally while you were at it? You've been really uncomfortable with [the puppeteer's] presence lately."

"... ..!"

"Or is it just that this unfilial son misunderstood his father's wishes?"

At the young man's answer, Elder Criss realized that one of the worst possibilities he had ever wanted to imagine had become a reality. He hesitated and stepped back, his face pale.

"...Ambrose!"

"Yes, that's right. That's right, Father."

"You... when on earth did you turn back into 'you' again?"

"Hahaha!"

In the desolate garden, illuminated only by pale moonlight, the young man's hollow laughter echoes loudly.

"I see. You already knew! Even though you knew exactly what would

happen to me, you still sold me to that old bastard when I was little! Hahahaha!"

Ambrosius, who had been laughing for a long time while shaking his shoulders, soon completely erased his smile and glared at Chryses. In his ice-cold sky-blue eyes, a deep hatred that had been growing quietly for many years was surging.

"Because of that father, I have lived in hell all my life. You cannot even imagine. How horrible it is to be trapped in your own body, your mind still intact, and your body completely controlled by someone else."

"... .."

"I couldn't even dream of the future, and I didn't dare to think of having someone in my heart. I was so deeply despairing that all this suffering came from none other than my own blood relatives, and I just cursed and cursed everything in this world."

"Oh, son! I... ..!"

"So don't you dare call me son with that mouth!"

Ambrose growled for the first time, revealing his hostility in plain sight. His aura was sharp as a dagger, and the very air in the garden seemed to freeze.

"You've had some fun in return for selling me out. With the puppeteer's help, you've built a family, and with his power, you've defeated your enemies and enjoyed unprecedented power. But in all that success, there was no place for your poor son!"

"That, that is... .."

"But what can we do about this? Unfortunately, the puppeteer is not coming back anymore. He is completely under the delusion that he has met his death."

That day, the day the 'Ancient Fire' exploded in the Council Building-
The puppeteer's soul was caught in the explosion and suffered a great

shock. Sigurd Sigurdson, who had been barely able to rise to the surface while suppressing Ambrosius's unusually strong ego, gave up control of his body due to the accident and fell into silence.

The puppeteer, who had been convinced that even the last doll had died, could no longer predict when he would wake up.

"You are a very foolish man, Cruses."

Damn it.

Ambrose slowly approached the unsteady-backed elder.

"You were swayed by the fanatic Galeno's words and tried to make me into a 'reserve'. And when that failed, you used my body as bait to lure the puppeteer into your family. And with that power, you dreamed of the family's revival and of power that was not befitting of your station."

Thud, thud.

"But look, what was the use of it all? Now everything you've accomplished will be mine."

Ambrose, having said this, looked down at the elder and smiled a deep, triumphant smile.

"In the end, I won over you."

485. Departure (6)

Perhaps the beginning was the sister of Grand Duke Assein, who had just married into Cyprus.

-Have you ever heard of the 'reserve'?

-A reserve? What is that, ma'am?

To Cruse's question, the young wife answered with her beautiful eyes sparkling like stars.

- He is said to be the true ruler that God has prepared for the new era. He will come like a comet, cutting through the darkness, uniting the divided religious groups and leading us to the new truth. All things in the world will kneel at his feet, and true harmony and peace will be found under his rule.

-... ..

At first I thought, what the heck is this?

But soon after, his wife introduced him to a man named Galen, and his wife's preconceived notions that he was a fanatic with bad taste melted away the moment they first met.

- It is impossible for all the conflicts in the world to disappear at once. However, we can solve the problems that are piling up before us one by one based on reason and wisdom.

The Galenus whom Cruses met was an extremely rational and wise man. His voice never rose, and his carefully spoken words were always imbued with the providence of the world.

- Our earnest desire for the 'prepared' is not simply due to our

weakness in seeking salvation. Rather, it comes from our deep trust in the infinite potential of human beings. All of these things are nothing more than an effort to find a strong center that can unite human faith and will.

-Trust in humans?

- Yes, Helios' Chryses. We must not be mistaken. The power of the 'reserve' is our own power, and the mercy he shows is the sum total of good will in each of our hearts. What we wait for him for is ultimately to draw out our potential to the fullest and create a true utopia.

Ah, perhaps that is what a true fanatic looks like. A prophet with unwavering faith in his eyes and calm words guiding everyone.

Cruses soon became deeply attracted to his knowledge and character. Naturally, he also became very interested in the 'prepared ones' he spoke of.

So, he entrusted his firstborn son, born the following year, to Galen without any doubt, hoping that his son would become a kind of key to rule over all the world.

but-

-I'm sorry, but this child is not enough.

Despite a series of rigorous training courses, Ambrose ultimately failed to meet the criteria for what Galen calls a "prepared man."

Of course, Cruz was disappointed, but his wife, who had high expectations for her son, was also very disappointed.

- It's over now! The 'prepared one' will probably be born in the Principality of Asain. My brother is a meticulous person who can prepare all conditions without any gaps. In the end, he, who is greedy, will take over everything in this world!

Cruse's misfortunes did not end there, for not long afterwards the bitter retaliation of Grand Duke Assein returned.

Helios began to decline economically, and Chryses found himself on the defensive to the point where even his membership in the council was in jeopardy.

But at that time, a helping hand came from an unexpected place. It was Richelieu, the Brittany ambassador who happened to be visiting the Council of Cyprus.

Richelieu was a strange man who always wore a half-mask, but despite his suspicious appearance, he was able to win the hearts of the council members with surprising ease.

One day, as he was slowly blending into the Cypriot high society, he approached Chryses and made this secret proposal.

-Would you please hand over your son to me? I am looking for a disciple to whom I can pass on all my knowledge, and your son seems to be a good fit. I will help you solve the various problems you face, even if it is not your place.

The intention behind the proposal was questionable, but at least Richelieu's influence was certain. He not only brought back the departing merchants to Helios, but also calmed down his enemies who were desperate to attack Chryses.

The dumbfounded Cruz couldn't help but ask:

-You're going to all this trouble to have a disciple? And why my son of all people?

Then Richelieu smiled and answered like this.

-There's no particular reason. I just really like the child's 'name'.

-Your name... is that?

-That's right. Besides, I like my son's personality quite a bit.

Cruse couldn't believe it. He had been having a hard time with his son recently.

Ambrose, who had undergone Galen's extraordinary 'training' since

birth, was now so eccentric that he was almost uncontrollable at home.

Do you really like that deep hatred and rebellion that can never be controlled by beating someone?

But Richelieu dismissed Cruse's worries with a laugh.

-Since ancient times, in order to easily accept new teachings, a 'deficiency' of equal magnitude is needed.

-... Deficiency? Are you saying that kind of thing really helps in teaching a child?

-That's right. You could think of it as a kind of free space where 'knowledge' can settle down.

It was only for a moment that he left his child in such a half-hearted manner, and the change that Ambrose showed in just a few days was extremely dramatic.

The hatred and venom that had been gushing from his eyes disappeared, and in their place was ancient wisdom and composure.

Instead of picking a fight with everyone with his childish rebellion, he became an ideal son who knew how to give them a calculated smile.

But at the same time, Cruz couldn't help but realize.

That 'that thing' was no longer his real son. That it was nothing more than a sullen monster, crouching in his son's guise.

* * *

"I, I really didn't know it would turn out like this, Ambrose."

Cruz continued to stammer his excuses in a trembling voice.

"Richelieu, I never imagined at the time that he was a [puppeteer]. And when I found out... everything was already irreversible."

Yeah. I thought it was already beyond my control and gave up on everything.

And the consequences of that cowardice were now before his eyes, with the deep-rooted hatred that had been building up over the years.

"At that time, I had no other choice."

But the eyes of Ambrose looking down at such a crusade were cold.

"No, that's not it. You had the opportunity to kick Richelieu out several times later. But you didn't."

"that....."

"Because the puppeteer's assistance was so sweet. You knew very well what he would do in the future to solidify 'my' position."

"... .."

"You must have expected that he would continue to give you political power. You must have also guessed that he would prioritize the prosperity of Helios over any other city."

After saying that, Ambrose paused for a moment, then lowered his head and looked straight into Chryses' eyes, baring his teeth.

"So you had no regrets at all. By that time, you had two more sons to take my place."

"... ..!"

Ambrose's voice was cold and calm, but that did not diminish the murderous glint in his eyes in the least.

"Hey, hey! Is there no one around? Spiros! Thasos!"

The terrified Cruses backed away and called out the servants' names. He had been having a bad feeling since a while ago.

but-

[Come out.]

Soon, with Ambrose's soft command, those he had been desperately searching for appeared behind him. Chryses' eyes widened.

"...Spiros? Thasos?"

"Were you looking for these guys?"

"Why are they following you?"

"It's nothing. The long memories of my life as a puppeteer are still intact within me. It's just that freely displaying his abilities isn't that easy."

Thanks to that, I needed time to get used to the power. Otherwise, I could have gotten back here a little sooner.

Ambrosius muttered as he slowly approached Chryses, accompanied by his loyal servants, whose expressions had completely disappeared, like dolls.

Damn it.

"Wait a minute! Let's talk... let's talk, son!"

Damn it.

"I will give you everything I have! This mansion! The seat of the Council Elders! Even Helios! Everything!"

"No. Even if you don't, it's all mine already."

chin.

Ambrosius, who had finally come close to them, put his hand on Chryses' shoulder and smiled brightly.

"Your presence is now nothing but a nuisance to me. You continue to block the second departure by manipulating public opinion in the council. What kind of atrocity is that?"

"Second... departure? Why is that... ..?"

"Why? Because I need to get the people out of Cyprus as soon as possible. Only then can I have time to properly explore that 'top'?"

Ambrose, who had kindly added an explanation, patted the elder on the shoulder and gave a soft order.

[So now please shut that useless mouth of yours, Father.]

Jjing-

A powerful wave that shakes the soul.

Cruse, who had a blank expression for a moment, soon fumbled with his neck with a puzzled expression. What kind of harmony is this? No matter how hard he opens his mouth, no sound comes out!

"ugh.....!"

Ambrose, who had been leisurely looking down at the pitiful sight for a moment, soon nodded his head at the expressionless servants.

[Catch him.]

* * *

The image on the screen finally came to a complete end, with Elder Cruz being dragged along helplessly.

Crackle! Crackle!

Seo Yi-seo swung her sword fiercely at the screen that was now not receiving anything.

[I, I! I'm such a bad son of a bitch!]

It didn't seem like I had really empathized with Elder Cruz. I guess I just felt like I was watching an exciting soap opera.

As evidence, she had even made popcorn and was munching on it.

[... ..]

On the other hand, Cardmos' reaction was a little different. He spoke

with a complicated expression, unable to take his eyes off the noisy screen.

[... Every time I looked at it, I felt something was off, but it turns out that Sigurd Sigurdsson failed to completely take over the doll's body.]

Seongjin looked down at him coldly.

[You really didn't know?]

[Yeah, I didn't know. Am I trapped in that woman's body right now?]

Cadmus made an excuse, groping for food on the table.

[The only way I could tell Sigurd Sigurdson's doll apart was because of the peculiar, sinister aura his soul gave off. However, that alone was no way to tell whether his soul was active or asleep.]

And yet, before he knew it, he was eating each and every one of the salmon dishes that Seongjin had made.

Seongjin had noticed it long ago, but he pretended not to notice it for the sake of Cardmos, who was already at a loss. He didn't even bother to refill the empty plate of salmon papillote.

[So, does this confirm everything you wanted to see?]

[Maybe.]

Ambrose of Helios.

To be honest, the fact that the puppeteer was pushed out and his ego was revealed to the surface was a completely unexpected outcome for Sungjin.

An unexpected turning point that would never have occurred originally, caused by the clash between the two oracles, Seonghwang and Seongjin.

[But why is your expression like that? You're not going to sympathize with that guy's situation now, are you? After all, they're all the same guys. They're just cold-blooded people who won't hesitate to harm

their own flesh and blood for their own desires.]

[No, isn't that at least not something you should be saying?]

Seo Yi-seo, who had been listening to their conversation, suddenly interrupted and raised an objection.

[The one who incited his descendants to bloodshed? And that's not all. Even these days, whenever he gets a chance, he's always trying to take over Sisley's body!]

[What? What is this insignificant thing saying to this great demigod?]

[Oh, don't yell at me! If I, the owner of this place, am a small thing, then what kind of bug are you? A cockroach? Or a water flea?]

[I really want to see this crap!]

Leaving them behind while they bickered, Seongjin sat silently lost in thought.

Do you sympathize with Ambrose? I still couldn't quite figure that out myself.

It's just frustrating to think about how it must have been for him to not have a single blood relative in this world that he could trust, and to have even his father, who was supposed to be his strong shield, betray him.

If by any chance I were in that situation, just imagining it would make my heart ache.

[... Hey, what a weird place, you're a sloppy guy.]

Cadmos glanced at Seongjin as he pushed away the raging Seo Yi-seo with one hand.

[By the way, I think I know why you guys came all the way here.]

This was a small space created within Delcross, barely existing based on Seoyeo's delusions.

But even so, the fact remains that it is a new dimension with minimal conditions.

In other words, for Seongjin, this was the place where he would be least affected by the karma.

[Besides, you didn't see the things you wanted to see with your own eyes. Didn't you just 'accidentally' catch a glimpse of everything through the objects created by that little creature?]

[Yes, well...]

[... Such a clever thing. There were really various ways to avoid the causal reaction.]

Cadmus muttered under his breath. But his expression as he spoke was not as grim as before.

[Yes. That kid keeps calling me son, son, and he definitely takes after his father in terms of cleverness.]

[...what?]

Seongjin, who was usually able to tolerate most things, eventually lost his temper at those words.

No, who is this millennium-old carnivore calling clever now? Yes?

486. Departure (7)

[No, where in the world is there a person with such noble character as our father who would make such a rash remark? Please show proper courtesy to the representative of the Supreme God!]

[You rascal! What kind of character can you find in a brat who only knows how to fight around like you! And who was the one who ate the food first? I am the distant ancestor of Seonghwangga!]

[You're funny! You didn't even treat me as your descendant before, and now you want to treat me as your ancestor? People, have some shame!]

[What? Let's see if this is real... ... !]

Cardmos, who had another heated argument with Seongjin, quickly backed down when he saw red flames rising around Seongjin. It seemed like he was afraid that Demon King No. 2 might be summoned again.

Oh, but don't be too discouraged. You have to be a strong shield that protects Logan and Sisley.

So before leaving, Sungjin prepared a few more plates of raw salmon for him. Since ancient times, there is nothing better than food to appease a carnivore.

He also didn't forget to warn Seo Yi-seo, who was becoming increasingly arrogant.

[Even after I leave here, try not to clash too violently with Cardmos. If that human gets really angry, this world of flames will probably disappear without a trace.]

There must be a reason why he calls himself a 'demigod' without hesitation. Despite having such power, he is surprisingly quiet and reserved, which is strange.

Perhaps the reason Demon King No. 2's threat works so well is because he's worried that this small salt world will burn down completely. That carnivorous insect seems to have some affection for this place.

[In fact, Cardmos is the one who can protect you the most. So, even though his personality is a bit strange, don't hate him too much and try to get along well.]

The world of Seoyi Seo's salt chamber is a place that can be used usefully in the future. So, if possible, we should preserve it so that it doesn't get damaged.

But Seo Yi-seo's reaction to hearing those words was unexpected.

[Well, it's not that I particularly hate that guy, Mr. Benz. Mr. Cardmos is handsome.]

Uh...what?

As Sungjin was dumbfounded, she playfully rolled her eyes and glanced at Cadmus.

[Of course, sometimes I get so arrogant that I get upset. But then, when I look at that face again, my anger goes away without me realizing it.]

[... ..]

[Oh, by the way, isn't that guy pretty cute even when he's angry?]

... What is this? This ultimate lookist.

[Ahem.]

But what Cardmos did was even more amazing. He pretended not to hear their conversation, coughed in vain, and brushed his hair back in a fancy way.

'That's a strange combination that goes well with anything... .. '

But is there no need to worry about the survival of this world anymore? Sungjin concluded hesitantly and tried to wave his hand at the faint dimensional boundary to slowly leave this place.

But that was then.

[...Look here.]

Cardmos awkwardly calls out to Sungjin, avoiding eye contact. He doesn't call him by his name properly, but it seems like he's made great progress since he no longer criticizes him as something bad.

[What is it?]

[So, what are you going to do now? What are you going to do with that Ambrose of Helios?]

[I don't do anything in particular. I have other things to do right now.]

In fact, I'm not even sure how much of it I'll remember when I wake up.

[Then why on earth did you come here?]

[At least you've confirmed his identity, right? So I'm hoping you won't be fooled by someone pretending to be Sigurd Sigurdsson, and that you'll take good care of Logan and Sisley.]

Maybe those sights were meant for Cadmus and not for me.

At Seongjin's calm answer, Cardmos frowned for a moment, then took a step closer while narrowing his widened pupils.

[That's only natural. Those children are my precious descendants.]

Oh, right. So I'm still not your descendant.

[But, you know.]

[yes?]

[I'm asking because I don't feel any impure intentions from you yet, but you know very well, don't you? This state of anxiety can't continue forever.]

As he spoke, Cardmos looked straight into Seongjin's face for the first time. He had an unusually serious attitude for a mediocre carnivore.

[Sometimes, there are things in the world that can never be overcome with willpower alone. No matter how much you care for each other, there are definitely relationships in the world where your intentions are toxic to the other person. And that's just your nature.]

[...]

[Do you understand? Your meaningless efforts will only make the child who is barely holding up the world more anxious. So you can't acknowledge and accept this reality?]

Seongjin clenched his fist without realizing it.

No, that will never happen. I won't let that happen. Because.

[It's okay. I'll help my father well.]

Although there was no reason for my throat to become sore as I was not being restrained by the flesh, what came out were murky thoughts that seemed to be split somewhere.

Then Cardmos suddenly got angry at Seongjin.

[Helping? That's ridiculous! How can the work of a Dimensional Guardian be easily shared? And even if it were possible, it would be a problem! If you try to exert your power in the gap while still a spirit, you will eventually... ... !]

[...]

[at last.....?]

Cardmos, who had been shouting in an upbeat manner, found something and his eyes widened. Before he knew it, a dark gray landmark had appeared in Seongjin's hand and was emitting a

brilliant light.

A mysterious bridge that bridges the gap between ideals and reality.

Another possibility created by the will of the Oracle.

[That, that is... ...!]

He could guess what Seongjin was trying to say without even having to listen, but he couldn't overcome the shock and stammered.

[Now... Are you really crazy? Are you going to do something with that?]

Why? There's no way you can't do it, right?

It was all thanks to this milestone that Sungjin was able to separate his consciousness from his body without much noise. With this, he could connect reality to the world of ideas at any time.

So, if you use this well...

[You think you can interfere with the world of ideas while possessing a real body? You dare say that you will bear the limitations of a human body and fight against threats coming from the gap? That is ridiculous... ... !]

However, when Seongjin did not respond, Cadmus' eyes darkened.

[... You, you're serious.]

Now Cadmus' gaze had changed from seeing something unpleasant to seeing a great madman.

He bit his lip for a moment as if he was displeased, then quickly turned his head away.

[Ah, that's enough! Now this body really doesn't know! You rich people who just leave can do whatever you want!]

Yeah, that's what it was like anyway.

So, I'm telling you to mind your own business.

* * *

Seongjin left the small world of salt and flew into the dark night sky.

As I flew through the sky for a while and returned to my body in Regina, I heard the familiar voices chattering in my ears.

[Mores, are you coming now?]

[Mores, where have you been?]

But Sungjin didn't have the presence of mind to answer that question. As his consciousness began to return to reality, memories from the night began to flow out like an ebb tide. It was a feeling that wasn't so unfamiliar anymore.

Blink.

Seongjin opened his eyes in a dazed state. Judging from the dimness outside the window, it seemed to be still early in the morning.

'My head feels a bit heavy. Did I have a nightmare or something...?'

Most of the memories had already been washed away, but at least some of the intense memories left some traces in my mind.

'Ambrose of Helios... . And, the head tower... ... ?'

What the heck? What the heck was I dreaming about?

Seongjin stretched and got up. Then, suddenly, he realized that he wasn't the only person in the room and opened his eyes wide.

"...father?"

When I came in, there was a homunculus of the Holy Spirit sitting on one side of the room as if it were a lie.

He nodded slowly at Seongjin's call.

"Yes, Mores."

Since the Homunculus of the Holy Emperor had no aura activity at

all, it had the characteristic of not making much of a sound. So, if he stayed still and didn't move, it was quite difficult for even Sungjin to sense his presence.

"When did you come?"

"I just got here. I stopped by for a moment before preparing for the state council meeting."

...just now?

Seongjin looked at him with a sense of discomfort. It was not that he was not feeling it, but rather that he felt a strange sense of time from the way he was glued to the chair as if he were a piece of furniture.

[It's all Mores' fault. He just disappeared somewhere without warning.]

[Your presence suddenly fades away, so Dad Peha can't help but be startled and run over.]

If Sungjin's salt crystals were active, he would have been able to hear the twins' thoughts circling around his bedside.

But since that wasn't something that would happen often, I just thought that maybe Seonghwang had some urgent business.

"Why didn't you just wake me up instead of making me wait for nothing?"

Seongjin, who was just about to get out of bed, suddenly realized that he was holding tightly in his hand the milestone he had made himself a while ago.

Seongjin quickly threw it into the bedding. For some reason, he felt it would be a bit awkward to show it to Seonghwang.

"... .."

Of course, there was no point in hiding it, and the gaze of the saint followed the milestone exactly.

'Oh, yeah. I thought Dad would know anyway. But this is just a matter of feeling.'

Seongjin glanced at the demon king who was holding his breath while clinging to the lamp, then slowly approached the Seonghwang.

"Well, that's a good thing, Father. You haven't been here for the past few days, have you? There was something I wanted to confirm with you before I left for the Marquisate."

"check."

"yes."

Seongjin pulled up a chair across from him and sat down, speaking in a gentle tone.

"Don't follow me this time."

"... .."

"Anyway, it's not like Father can enjoy his trip comfortably. He'll end up spending most of his time lying down, so there'll be rumors that the prince is forcing the priest, who is too sick to even get up, to come along."

Seonghwang stared blankly at Seongjin without answering.

"I've secured Giacomo Milo's new recruits, so you don't have to worry about me anymore. I'm not going to fight anywhere, right? And Sir Marsain and Captain Bruno are with you."

"... .."

"First of all, Father, if things continue like this, I feel like your identity will be revealed soon."

Lately, people who know Seonghwang well seem to be feeling a little uneasy. In particular, Sir Marsain is said to be looking at Priest Bart with suspicious eyes whenever he meets him.

Above all, this situation was not good for the Emperor himself. It

couldn't be easy to randomly force a sane soul into the laws of the world of rules.

But these days, isn't this guy going back and forth between his true self and homunculus as easily as eating?

However, Seonghwang, who had been silently listening to Seongjin's lengthy explanation, tilted his head and then pointed out the main point.

"You're not going to fight?"

"Um... yes, well... .."

Seongjin avoided his gaze as his feet started to feel numb. However, even in this situation where he was at a loss for an answer, Seongjin knew one magic word that could stop him.

as soon as.

"Anyway, what I'm trying to say is that I can handle the business trip on my own. Or is it that you don't like me that much, Father?"

"... .."

Well, I guess it's a little lethal.

Fortunately, the emperor, who had been silent for a moment, nodded obediently.

"Yes, I will. If that is your decision, then perhaps it means that I need to stay in Regina a little longer."

"then....."

"I'll wait here. Please be careful on your way back."

As he spoke, Seonghwang slowly got up. Watching his light, silent movements, Seongjin felt a strange sense of anxiety as if he might disappear into thin air at any moment.

"It may be my greed to keep you in my sights. Everyone has been

leaving the palace one by one, leaving me with a lot of free time to meet you, so I guess I've been feeling a little lonely lately."

"... .."

And then suddenly this question occurred to me. I had taken it for granted so long that I wondered why I was only thinking about this now.

therefore-

Since when have you been my father?

* * *

Seongjin left for Benso Marquisate with his party early that morning.

"Have a safe trip, Your Majesty. Your Majesty... I will be by your side to assist you in every way possible, Father Bart."

As he said that and saw him off, No. 21's face strangely brightened up more than before. That bastard, the more I look at him, the more I hate him.

Then, Seongjin saw his dedicated maid boarding the carriage carrying a large warhammer on her shoulder.

"Edith, what is that?"

The geometric patterns carved into the handle, and the shape of animal tendons wrapped around the wedges, are quite familiar.

Come to think of it, didn't that guy have that since we met at Terre?

"Ah, it was given to me by Prince Owen."

"Owen?"

"Yes. It's loot I acquired in the South a while ago, but I don't think there's any use for it."

But when I actually held it, it felt good in my hand. It's also good for leveling the ground before making a campfire, and for making

drainage when pitching a tent.

"Besides, when I hold this, somehow Mr. Bartoza becomes more docile."

"... .."

Seongjin glared at Bartoza for a moment, who was glancing over at him with a timid face.

'A son of a bitch who gives nothing for nothing.'

Yeah, it's a bit too much of a hassle to just hand it back to him.

I think it would be better to let Edith play around with it. Although I do feel a sense of crisis that she is moving further and further away from her normal dedicated maid appearance.

In this way, Seongjin and his party embarked on a smooth journey for the first time in a long while.

And two days later, just as he was arriving at the Marquisate of Benso, Seongjin heard from Dasha the news of the death of Chryses, the elder of Cyprus.

487. Departure (8)

The death of Cruses shocked Cyprus.

He was a politician who was very active at the time. People could not easily believe that he, who was young and healthy even among the elders, had passed away so suddenly.

"Assassination?"

"They said there were no external injuries."

"Any traces of poison?"

"We need to investigate further, but according to the congressman, that too is unlikely."

The cause of death of Cruses was shrouded in mystery. No wonder, for who in the world would have guessed that he had been ordered to 'hold his breath' and had voluntarily closed his airway until he died?

With no trace of the conspiracy known, people's attention turned to his political legacy. Chryses was the leader of Helios, the greatest city in Cyprus, and a politician who enjoyed power rivaling that of a king.

Naturally, his son, Ambrose, who was called the 'Prince of Cyprus', was considered -

"I am still recovering from the aftermath of the fire. On top of that, I was so busy taking care of myself that I didn't take care of my father's health. The sadness and guilt still weigh heavily on my heart."

He respectfully declined the position of elder, hiding his sadness with dignity.

"It is unworthy for someone like me, with such shortcomings, to become an elder. I ask that you, the members, deliberate carefully and elect an excellent member who will continue my father's legacy as an elder."

In this way, Ambrose was able to avoid the suspicious gaze of some who thought he was the one who instigated the murder.

The Cyprus Council was in a state of unprecedented excitement over the sudden election of its elders.

A fierce public opinion war raged among several promising candidates who were being pointed out as potential future elders, and the council gradually recovered from the shock of losing a big name in politics.

* * *

On the other hand, there were some who were not happy about this situation at all -

"I really didn't know things would turn out this way."

It was none other than the elder Teresilla, known as Chryses' political opponent.

The sultry woman moaned and tossed her hair in front of Logan and General Lysander.

"How could it be so twisted! The more I think about it, the angrier I get and I can't stand it!"

Teresilla of Rhodes. A capable elder who is said to have led Rhodes, which was in decline, to a second revival.

Recently, she had been in a tense standoff with Elder Crises in the Council over the issue of the second departure. To this end, she often made time for conversations with Logan and General Lysandros.

But now that Crises is dead, the meeting that was supposed to emphasize the importance of the second expedition has now degenerated into a place for Teresilla to lament her fate.

"I don't want to blame the deceased, but why did that author, Krystes, have to die at such a crucial time?"

"... .."

"What a terrible author! To continue to block my path like this until the very end... ..!"

General Lysander looks back at Logan with an anxious expression. It seems that he is secretly embarrassed that a prominent politician of his country is bowing down before the prince of the empire.

"Calm down, Lady Teresilla. This will help to ease the council's opposition to the second departure-"

"That's the bigger problem, General Lysander! There are those who suspect me of being behind the assassination, having opposed Chryses on every issue up until now! And if we push ahead with the departure like this, what will become of my position?"

"no....."

Logan looked at Elder Teresilla with a slightly complicated expression.

Although she was a seasoned politician and quite easygoing, the fact that she lamented her situation to that extent was proof of how dire her situation was.

Elder Teresilla has been consistently advocating for a second expedition in the Council, assisting Prince Logan and General Lysandros.

However, she did not truly think that it was necessary to set sail, as she expected that if she fought Crucis and stalled for time, the punitive force would naturally disband.

There was only one reason she insisted on re-launching: to directly oppose Cruses's opinion.

The council members will strongly perceive her as the second-in-command of the council, for daring to raise her voice against Cruses.

Politically, there was no burden at all. If the sea demons ran wild again in the future, then all the blame could be placed on Elder Crisses.

But now that he has died, it has become difficult to push hard for a second expedition. If things go wrong this time, they will have to shoulder the full responsibility for the failed expedition and the worsening financial situation.

"Now that we've come to this, I'll be honest with you. Your Majesty Logan. General Lysander. Let's end our meeting here. The political risk I have to take is too great to continue to lead the way and create public opinion for a second expedition."

"No, Lady Teresilla! If you say something like that now... .."

General Lysander looked back at Prince Logan with a trembling look.

But contrary to his expectations that he would be greatly disappointed, the prince's face remained calm. That was understandable, because Logan had seen from the beginning that Elder Teresilla did not truly sympathize with them.

"Lady Teresilla."

Logan opened his mouth calmly.

"Rhodes is the most remote island city in Cyprus."

"Yes. It's a fact that everyone on the continent knows."

"It is also the final port of call for the punitive force heading out to the open sea."

Teresilla, sensing something unusual in the prince's words, raised her head, straightening her disheveled hair.

"...What on earth are you trying to say?"

"If the seaborne demon subjugation continues like this, the fleet will have to travel between Rhodes and the Krabat Islands to receive a steady supply of supplies."

"... .."

"If another ship is damaged, its repairs will also take place at the port of Rhodes. The movement of goods and people between the mainland and Rhodes will become more active than ever. Perhaps Rhodes will go beyond its second revival and become a stepping stone to become a city that surpasses Helios."

Teresilla looked at the imperial prince with new eyes. She had thought of him as just a young man burning with a sense of justice, but his attitude of never losing his composure was closer to that of an experienced politician.

"And I may have to request technicians from Rhodes to secure a steady supply of Helios' secret weapon, [Ancient Fire]. Unfortunately, there may be an accidental leak of technology during the manufacturing process, but I think the council members are willing to tolerate it for the safety of Cyprus."

"... ..!"

"Well, what do you think? Isn't this something worth pushing forward while taking some political risks?"

General Lysander looked at Prince Logan with wide eyes.

And perhaps Teresilla's expression was not much different from his. She swallowed, moistening her dry throat, and asked the prince in a slightly trembling voice.

"You said it was a bit of a political risk, Your Majesty Logan. As you know, if this expedition fails... .."

"How can a mere human being predict all the events that will happen in the future? We can only do our best in each situation and wait patiently for God's answer."

Logan continued speaking calmly with a faint smile.

"So no one will dare hold Elder Teresilla responsible. The reason you predicted the success of the second expedition is because the current situation is such that it is likely to happen. With the renowned Liliu

and the youngest sword master on the continent together, who would easily predict the failure of the punitive force?"

"... .."

The youngest sword master.

Prince Logan was now admitting with his own mouth what had been secretly heard only as rumors. In other words, he was saying that even if the second expedition failed, he could take full responsibility for it.

Elder Teresilla's eyes fluttered slightly.

"Why on earth are you like that... .."

"The subjugation of the maritime demons is a task that must be accomplished for the safety of the people. Seonghwangga does not hesitate when faced with a task that must be done."

"... .."

"And my position in the Empire is not so narrow that I cannot afford to fail at just one or two expeditions."

Teresilla stared blankly into the prince's eyes, which were as calm as the deep sea. It was too much to think of it as just the childishness of a young boy, and even she, a mature politician, felt overwhelmed by his confident demeanor.

Elder Teresilla, who had been lost in thought with a complicated expression for a moment, finally let out a long sigh.

"... Good. I will continue to support your opinions. In fact, I have been so excited about the second departure so far that it doesn't seem right to change my mind now."

She looked back at Lysander, roughly ruffling her messy hair.

"Please keep one thing in mind, General Lysander."

"What are you saying, Teresilla?"

"The fleet's movements only go as far as the Krabat Islands."

Elder Teresilla gave Lysander a stern warning, emphasizing each word with sharp eyes.

"No matter what happens, never, ever, go beyond the [horizon of perception] that the Lord has allowed you."

* * *

As discussions about a second departure gained momentum, another unexpected development was approaching Cyprus.

It was a sign of a typhoon that was out of season.

"Mr. Sisley, you should probably go back to your accommodations now. A typhoon is coming."

At Inquisitor Boris's words, Sisley looked up at the darkening sky. As he had said, the waves were higher and rolling than usual, and the wind was getting stronger.

"Typhoon....."

Large and small fishing boats hurriedly returned to the port. The merchant ships were busy quickly moving their loaded cargo to the warehouse, and some had their sailors hide it under the holds.

Sisley naturally had these concerns.

"Inquisitor Boris. We may be setting sail again soon, but will the fleet be able to go out to sea in this weather?"

"It will probably be fine. The people here say that typhoons aren't that strong during this season. It will probably clear up completely tomorrow, my lady."

Meanwhile, the rain starts to get heavier little by little.

Eventually, Sisley had no choice but to stop his volunteer work and hurriedly return to the inn with his party. It was a large inn where he had recently been staying with the Inquisitors.

"You worked hard today. Now get some rest, Sisley."

Inquisitor Boris felt sorry for the soaking wet girl as he handed her a large blanket.

I would have liked to immediately send a maid to take care of various things, but Adjutant Lumiere's gaze was not kind.

The adjutant didn't particularly dislike Saintess Sisley. On the contrary, recently, there were many times when he couldn't hide his expression that he thought she was so cute.

However, since the saint was no ordinary girl, it seemed that he intended to wait and see how far she would keep her oath to live like a normal Inquisitor.

"Thank you, Inquisitor Boris."

Fortunately, Sisley was already quite accustomed to the life of wandering around foreign lands while visiting the atrium.

She sorted out the armors on her own and changed into clothes soaked in the rain. She bravely lit the fire in the stove and hung the wet clothes out to dry. At first glance, it was a life force that you would never guess was that of a precious princess of the Holy Empire.

'I saw Sister Ursula do it before and remembered it all. This is easy.'

Looking around the cozy and neatly arranged room, Sisley wore an unexpectedly confident expression.

Although she hadn't noticed it herself yet, Sisley had recently found herself unconsciously mimicking the facial expressions of one of her brothers.

"huh.....?"

But when I cautiously looked out the window to see how far the typhoon had come,

Sisley spotted a suspicious figure sitting on the roof of the building

across from him, getting rained on. He was a large, distracted man, holding a large bottle of liquor in one hand.

Bam!

Sisley opened the window through which rainwater poured in and shouted at him.

"Hey! A typhoon is coming soon! What are you doing out there instead of taking shelter?"

Could it be because of the strong wind? Even though she had transmitted the sound using her aura, the man's body did not move at all as if he had not heard her voice.

No, is it possible to hear sound in the first place?

Although it was obscured by the heavy rain, a closer look revealed that the man had no body part that appeared to be an ear.

A face visible beneath two sharp eyes staring intently at the sea. A snout too sharp for a human, and blue-green scales. And what is waving beneath a long cloak? Could it be... .

'tail?'

... Is he really human?

For a moment, such a question occurred to Sisley, but he soon leaned out of the window. For some reason, he had no idea that he was a dangerous person.

WHEEK-!

As she kicked the window with her aura-laden foot, the saint's small body was soon carried by the wind and flew lightly into the sky.

Knock knock.

Sisley, who had jumped over the building so easily, reached the suspicious man and called out to him once again.

"Look here."

His body, seen up close, was much larger than I had imagined. He was so tall that he could look down on Sisley even when he sat with his back bent.

"... .."

"It's dangerous. Hey, are you listening?"

As I spoke again and lightly touched his cloak, he finally met Sisley's gaze with a somewhat embarrassed expression.

"you.....!"

The man, or rather the last Draconian left in this dimension, scratched the scales around his two eyes awkwardly and asked.

"No way... Little Miss, can you see me right now?"

488. Departure (9)

... can you see me?

Sisley tilted his head at the man's absurd question.

"What do you mean? Of course I can see it. Or are you saying that you are a ghost?"

"... ..!"

Then, Draconian panicked and rummaged through his clothes in a panic. He was checking to see if the 'amulet' was damaged.

The amulet he had was an item from the psychic world known as a so-called 'magic item'.

The main purpose is [isolation].

It is an item that protects the wearer from all kinds of external environments, including bad weather. As proof, even in this fierce wind and rain, the hem of Draconian's clothes did not get wet at all.

Moreover, the 'isolation' was not limited to physical things. It distorted the perspectives of others and strangely hindered their perception, making it impossible to detect anything strange.

So, originally, it was normal not to recognize him properly even when you saw him. This is because you wouldn't normally imagine someone sitting peacefully on a beach during a typhoon.

But how?

"... Are you okay?"

Draconian, who had been looking back and forth between the amulet and the girl with a blank expression, adjusted the amulet to greatly expand the range of [Isolation]. He could no longer sit by and watch the little girl get soaking wet again in the heavy rain.

Shuyung-!

Then a transparent curtain covers Sisley's head and the pouring rain stops.

In the midst of the increasingly violent typhoon, the two faced each other in an unprecedented silence.

"... That's amazing. Is that a magical item?"

As the barrier blocking his perception disappeared, Sisley was finally able to examine the Draconian's appearance in detail.

He looked more like a bipedal reptile than a human.

A long, lizard-like face, and sharp, shark-like teeth in layers. Dark blue-green scales like rusted bronze... ..

Moreover, its size was so large that if it were to straighten out its hunched body, it would be estimated to be about 3 to 4 meters tall.

In the first place, I couldn't understand why I thought he was a 'man', or why I was confused about whether he was human or not. Of course, that was also the effect of the 'talisman', but there was no way Sisley would know that.

"... You're quite a reckless kid. As you can see, I'm not human. But aren't you afraid of me?"

Draconian looked down at the girl who was examining his appearance with clear eyes, as if he was curious.

"You're a heterodox, aren't you? I read that in a book once."

"book?"

"Yes. I have read that somewhere in this world, there exists a race of

aliens with a much more advanced civilization than Delcross, which is not well known."

Sisley looked with interest at the exotic cloak he wore and the beautifully crafted jewelry he wore.

"We, the Draconian race, have a book here? No way... I haven't heard of it yet."

"Because it's not a book that anyone can easily read."

"The Chronicles of Delcross' is a book that exists only in Sisley's dreams.

"That would be true. Even if such things actually existed in Delcross, wouldn't the closed-minded theologians have banned them all? I have no idea how a young lady like you came into contact with such a book."

Gulp, gulp.

Draconian turned his gaze away from Sisley, took a few sips from the bottle, and looked out at the distant sea.

"And kid. Anyway, you need to be a little more careful from now on. Even if you have knowledge of the alien race, you shouldn't approach them like this. Aliens are usually not very friendly to humans."

"... .."

"The same goes for me. I'm pretty full right now, but if I were starving, I would've swallowed you in one gulp."

Sisley looked up at the Draconian, who was baring his sharp teeth and snarling.

Is he scary? Should we be on guard?

Well, if you look at the fact that he pretends not to care and blocks the rain and even gives advice, you can say that he is quite polite and kind by nature.

Above all, the Draconian's gaze toward the sea was stained like a scar with age-old sadness and loneliness. So, somehow, Sisley felt that he should not leave him like that.

"I'll think about that later. For now, I'm much more scared of typhoons than you are. If I stay here any longer, I might be swept away by the winds sooner or later, and we might fly away to the distant sea together."

"... .."

"Are you very drunk? If you have trouble walking, I can help you. I'm still very strong."

The Draconian looked at the girl with bewildered eyes as she clenched her slender arms into fists.

"It's okay. I have a magic talisman. No matter how strong the typhoon is, it won't blow away or anything."

"Oh, I see."

The girl surprisingly easily convinced him and sat down next to him.

"But don't drink too much alcohol. It's not good for your health."

"... .."

Draconian looked down at this strange girl with bewildered eyes. Just a moment ago, he had threatened to eat her, and now she was approaching him so calmly?

But the girl's delicate face, which I glanced at out of the corner of my eye, seemed full of good intentions, but by no means reckless or foolish.

In any case, it would be difficult to separate them right away. Draconian decided this and took another sip of his alcohol, sighing.

"This is different from the alcohol that humans drink, child. The moonshine brewed by the Draconians is very precious and not good for your health."

"Where in the world is there a drink that is good for your health? And it smells so bad?"

"It will feel different if you actually drink it. This is a very sweet liquor made with honey."

"Is it sweet?"

"okay."

He noticed Sisley's curiosity and winked playfully, handing her a glass.

"Why, are you curious? Would you like to have a taste?"

Sisley obediently accepted the glass. He admired the rippling golden waves for a moment, then carefully brought it to his lips.

sniffing.

"Run... .."

Surprisingly, his words were true. After the sour and bitter taste, you can taste the sweet flavor of honey. It is not a strong sweetness like sugar, but a subtle and complex taste with a floral and fruity scent.

gulp.

As I roll it in my mouth and down my throat, a moderately warm heat slowly flows down my esophagus.

"It tastes strange."

Sisley blinked.

"Do you like it?"

"I don't know, but it's not as bad as I expected."

"Then you can drink more. Since you're soaked in the rain, it might be a good idea to warm up your body a little with some moonshine."

When the Draconian poured another glass of moonshine into his

empty glass, Sisley drank it down in one gulp this time.

Gulp.

The girl's cheeks turn red.

However, this did not mean that Sisley got drunk, because her abundant aura and gushing divine power immediately blew away any intoxication.

'Well, it feels moderately pleasant.'

Sisley felt curious and held out a glass in front of him again.

"... .."

Draconian hesitated for a moment this time, then took a few deep breaths and poured only half of the drink.

One by one.

sniffing!

"... .."

One by one.

sniffing!

After a while of snatching and drinking the liquor like that, the Draconian's large bottle of liquor was eventually more than half empty.

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

He looked at the remaining alcohol for a moment as if he was dumbfounded, then burst into laughter, revealing his teeth.

"Wow! The little girl already knows how to enjoy alcohol! I think you'll grow up to be a better drinker than anyone else."

...drinker?

Sisley looked up at him with a trembling face.

"Is that... a compliment?"

"Well, that's a compliment! It's the best compliment!"

He shouted cheerfully for the first time in a long while, then quickly suppressed his laughter and added with slightly hazy eyes.

"At least for our people... .."

"... .."

Sisley looked at the Draconian, who was quickly sinking into deep sorrow, and covered his scaled hands with both of her own. Soon, a bright light poured down from the girl's hands like a waterfall.

Hwaaaaaak!

"...Divine power?"

The Draconian blinked his transparent veil.

"It's okay. This divine power will help you, even if only a little. I will relieve your pain a little."

"what?"

The girl's words seemed very unexpected to him. But the promise of treatment was not completely empty words, and his heart, which had been tingling, strangely felt relieved!

Such a miracle would not be possible for an ordinary person. Draconian, who had thought that far, looked at the little saintess carefully again.

Clear gray eyes filled with divine power and able to see through some of the laws of the celestial world. Delicate facial features that seem to have been painstakingly created by a god...

Naturally, the face of someone he knows flashes through his mind.

"Wait a minute! Are you perhaps... ..!"

The Draconian lowered his toothy jaw as he considered the gruesome possibility.

"Hey... Hey?"

"yes?"

"By any chance. It's a one in ten chance, but your father... of the... Holy Empire... ."

"Oh, do you know our dad and mom?"

"... ..!"

Ouch! This is a big problem!

The last Draconian felt a life-threatening crisis. He looked around carefully and stepped back, then stammered a request to Sisley with a trembling voice.

"Well, so... little miss. The fact that I gave you some strong moonshine as a child... um, would you at least keep it a secret from your father?"

"... ..?"

Please save me.

* * *

Cyprus was completely affected by the typhoon.

Wheeeeeee-!

High waves roar and crash against the shore. Fishing boats rock up and down with the waves, and broken trees and light objects are blown here and there by the wind.

But that enormous natural disaster had no effect on the two sitting on the roof. Draconian and Sisley occasionally glanced at the poles and objects flying past their heads as they drank together.

"You travel around the world on a ship? So, is Mithra a sailor?"

The two had already finished exchanging their names.

"No, that's not true. Actually, my main occupation is a blacksmith. And a very famous blacksmith at that."

The Draconian now had a look of resignation on his face. He knew what would happen if Nate got really angry. If he were a person, he would sweat so much that his clothes would get wet.

However, as a cold-blooded animal, he had no other way to relieve his tension, so he would only occasionally raise the scales on his body.

"Really? I guess Mitra is quite skilled."

Slurp.

When Sisley asked, filling the glass with wine, he took the bottle back and filled the girl's glass halfway again.

Choke.

"Good. At least I am the best blacksmith in existence in the Delcross dimension. I even forged the strongest sword in the world with my own hands."

Having explained it up to that point, he felt a little relieved. Perhaps it was because he was thinking that he might soon be killed by the hardest sword he had ever sharpened.

"Then this time, your timing wasn't good. You happened to encounter a typhoon as soon as you arrived."

"No, it doesn't really matter. I'm not here for sightseeing."

Mitra looked down at the rusty statue-like face reflected in the tinkling goblet.

"... I hope we can see clear skies soon. I plan to stay here for a while to mourn my friend."

"Are you sorry?"

"okay."

Mithra, who had been mumbling slowly, turned his head towards the distant sea that was now barely visible due to the veil of clouds and rain.

"My old friend is dying now, probably with a poisonous substance that is killing him from within, struggling alone beyond the [horizon of perception]."

489. Departure (10)

[Perceptual horizon].

This curious name comes from the sayings of the ancient theologian Granius.

He traveled the world on adventures in his later years, and is said to have said this while writing his representative work, 'Exploring the Strange Continent'.

- Go on an adventure. And explore! As we learn more about the world, our senses and thoughts will develop rapidly. Through the advancement of perception, humans will be able to rediscover new worlds that they have never seen before. A new horizon of perception is opening!

However, his words, which were intended to overcome the limits of perception, are now, absurdly, being used as words that clearly indicate the distinct limits of perception.

As a result of the adventurers' diligent exploration and navigation over the past hundreds of years, surprisingly, there really is a space beyond this world where human 'perception' becomes meaningless.

The boundaries of the world that were known to be unexplorable until now were as follows:

The Northern Magical Realm beyond the Black Forest and the Snowfields.

The western mountain range is so rugged that it almost pierces the clouds.

The southern rainforest teeming with all kinds of poisonous insects and sea creatures.

And finally, there is the tectonic horizon that divides the eastern ocean into long sections.

If you sail about half a day further east past the Krabat Archipelago, you will come across a deep sea where the water suddenly turns a dark color.

But for some reason, if they cross that boundary even just a little bit, the ships immediately lose their bearings and are never able to return.

The needle is broken, the wind is wild, and most of all, the sense of space and time itself is turned upside down.

Also, among sailors, there was a secret rumor that the [Perception Horizon] was the birthplace of sea demons. That was understandable, because colonies of demons that had not been seen before would suddenly appear as if they had moved from somewhere.

And those guys tend to be clustered around the horizon of perception.

so-

"My old friend is dying now, probably with a poisonous substance that is killing him from within, struggling alone beyond the [horizon of perception]."

In response to Mithra's heavy lament, Sisley could not help but naturally raise this question.

'I wonder if that guy is a sea demon?'

Of course, she had the courtesy to not ask that question out loud. However, Mitra, who was quick-witted, saw the girl's awkward expression and immediately read between the lines.

"Oh, you want to know if my friend is a demon? No, absolutely not. He is another species that humans do not know much about. He is a

rather gentle and elegant sea tribe."

"I didn't think of anything so rude."

"....."

"Really."

"hmm....."

Mitra let out a soft groan, picked up the bottle and drank the moonshine like water. It seemed like he wanted to forget his stuffy feelings through alcohol.

"Well... in reality, it might be meaningless to distinguish him from the devil. He was losing himself so quickly that now I'm not even sure what he's turning into."

The pain that cannot be hidden in the Draconian's eyes is evident.

Sisley again held onto one of his scales as if to console him, and poured divine power into him. He guessed that his dying friend must have suffered from a serious illness.

"Is there any way to cure him?"

"It's not like it doesn't exist at all. It's just that the person involved doesn't want it."

Mitra calmly confessed that his friend had accepted his fate, and that those who loved him were also ready to accept reality.

"But I'm not. I'm angry at the absurd fate my friend has to bear alone for the sake of the species, and I'm also angry at the fact that everyone else takes it for granted. At the same time, it feels like I'm the only one denying the reality I'm facing, and it's a little confusing."

"....."

"Well, that's not something you should be telling a little girl."

Having said that, Mitra pulled out the scales that had been caught by

the girl and stood up. The Draconian, who was over 3 meters tall, stretched out his body, and it seemed as if the already dark sky had suddenly become dark.

"But it's already too late to turn back. I've been talking nonsense. Drinking this much moonshine would probably make even a drinker like me a little drunk."

He turned the bottle upside down and emptied it. The large bottle that seemed impossible to empty was emptied so easily just by a little girl joining in.

"Let's stop talking, kid. It takes a special magic to share your innermost feelings with someone who doesn't know you very well. But we're out of that magic potion."

"Where will Mithra go now?"

When Sisley asked, handing him back the empty glass, he nodded, tucking it into his cloak along with the bottle.

"We need to find a place to rest while the typhoon is blowing. So you should hurry back to your lodgings. It seems like someone is coming to pick you up over there."

When I looked up at Mitra's words, I saw that there was indeed someone standing under the building. It was a young exorcist with a completely black appearance like a crow.

"... Sir Sharon?"

Sisley blinked at the appearance of an unexpected figure. An exorcist from the demon squad, why was she here now?

"Okay, go ahead and take a look."

Mitra gently pushes Sisley's back.

As the girl took a step outside the talisman's boundaries, the exorcist looked straight up at Sisley as if he had been waiting for her.

"Mr. Sisley. Are you in a place like that? It's dangerous, so please

come down."

It was a voice that felt much calmer than usual. It seemed as if a faint silver light had passed through his black eyes.

I looked around just in case, but she didn't seem to notice Mitra standing next to me. Perhaps the 'magic item' he had was working properly.

Sisley felt a little relieved. It would not be good for the knight to have discovered the existence of a foreign race.

"Then I will go, Mitra. It was nice meeting you."

The girl whispered a goodbye and jumped down from the roof with her aura on both feet just as she had when she came.

But that was then.

WHEEING-!

A sudden gust of wind knocked Sisley out of balance and she was hurled into the air. The wind was enough to roll even the large rocks on the beach, so the small girl's body was not equipped to withstand it.

"uh?"

In the blink of an eye, Sisley flew to a height three times higher than the building, then was soon enveloped in another movement of alien air and stopped in place as if by magic.

".....?"

It felt as if the girl's surroundings had become a completely different space. Sisley was enveloped in a calm and warm air and fell down gently.

And then, Sir Sharon, who had been waiting below, lightly embraced the girl.

widely.

"The wind... how did it suddenly come about?"

The exorcist explained in a calm voice, lowering the bewildered Sisley to the floor.

"That's fortunate. It seems we got caught in the eye of the typhoon at just the right time."

".....?"

No, isn't that wrong? Sir Sharon, even now there are all kinds of things flying around us... ..

"Anyway, I'm really glad you're safe."

The exorcist added as he soon spread out the hem of his black uniform and covered the girl's head to keep her from getting wet from the rain.

No matter how I look at it, Sharon is so different from her usual self.

When Sisley looked up at her with strong suspicion, to her surprise, the exorcist had returned to his usual, relaxed appearance.

"Hehehe."

A strange laughter flowing out slowly. It was an extreme change, as if the person had changed in an instant.

But Sisley never got a chance to ask her anything, as the exorcist lightly patted her as he led her to the dormitory.

"What on earth are you doing out in this weather? Sir Sisley, the smell of strong alcohol is everywhere."

Sisley blushed. No matter how caught up in the atmosphere, it was not a good attitude to engage in a grand performance with a stranger on the street. As a saint, and as an Inquisitor, it was not a good attitude at all.

"Fortunately, the other Inquisitors haven't noticed yet. Now, let's go back to our quarters and rest. I've already told the innkeeper to

prepare a warm bath for you."

"... I will. Thank you for your concern, Sir Sharon."

Sisley followed her lead and walked obediently to the inn. And before the inn door closed, he took one last look at the building across the street.

On the roof, the Draconian's figure is still visible, somewhat blurred under the influence of the amulet.

'Hello, Mitra. I hope we meet again someday.'

When Sisley gave a small nod, Draconian, who had somehow noticed the greeting, quickly raised his hand.

After the girl disappeared into the building-

"....."

The Black Exorcist's mood shifted once again. Now her bright grey eyes were staring straight at the Draconian on the roof.

[Mitra.]

A gleaming silver light that instantly sees through any obstacles, even talismans.

[Would you like to talk to me for a moment?]

The frightened Draconian bowed his head flatly before him, forgetting even his dignity.

"I was so wrong, Nate! I deserved to die!"

* * *

I was worried that he might start a nutcracker fight at any moment, but surprisingly, Nate didn't get too angry at Mitra.

He simply emphasized several times that his daughter was still a young girl and not at an appropriate age to be exposed to the debauched tastes of adults.

And after a while, he started saying some surprising things.

[Draconian moonshine is a special drink. They say that just tasting it once will bring good luck, so maybe good things will happen to Sisley soon.]

"That, that's right... ..?"

[First of all, the child really liked the taste of moonshine. It might not be such a bad thing to have this kind of experience once in a lifetime.]

"Well, of course that's true... .."

[It may be the right responsibility of parents to lead their children to a good life, but it is not right to force them too much. If you want to develop the ability to judge good and evil on your own, wouldn't it be okay to just turn a blind eye to such minor deviations?]

"....."

The atmosphere was flowing strangely. Mitra, feeling uneasy, frantically moved her eyes around.

'Hey, Nate. I'm really scared. Not only are you not as angry as I thought you'd be, but why do I feel like you're defending me from someone I can't see? Huh?'

In any case, it seems unlikely that he will die immediately from the sword he made.

Mitra, who had made that judgment, asked the god's representative whom he was meeting for the first time in a long time a favor that he would not have normally made.

"Nate, can't you save that guy right now? Nothing is impossible for you, right?"

If this guy can take the position of Dimensional Guardian in a human body and perform various miracles with ease... ..!

Then Nate stared at him for a moment with unreadable eyes and

slowly shook his head.

[Of course it is not impossible. But you know better than I that that is not what Lord Manta meant, right?]

"Yeah. I know. I know that, but... .."

[Then stop it. What you are about to do will instantly render meaningless all the effort and suffering she has endured so far.]

"....."

Draconian bowed his head gloomily, torn between wanting to save his friend and wanting to fulfill his friend's wish.

[The typhoon will die down soon.]

The exorcist, who had caught a glimpse of Mithra with a gloomy expression, turned his head and looked out toward the distant eastern sea for a moment.

The rain was weakening as the typhoon quickly lost strength, and the outline of the once hazy horizon was gradually revealed.

[If you find it difficult to make up your mind, why not try following the Cyprus fleet for now? You won't be able to decide your own future, but at least you'll be able to stay by Lord Manta's side at a crucial moment.]

The Draconian, who had guessed his intentions, let out a hollow laugh.

"Haha, look at you. Are you telling me to help your children right now? Unfortunately, as a member of the Council of Six, I also have a duty to preserve a certain amount of causality."

But the answer that came back was resolute.

[No. This is purely for your own safety, Mitra. At least you wouldn't want to end up in a bad mood getting hit by a sword you made, right?]

".....!"

Mitra felt a cold chill run down his spine.

Oh, right. As expected, the nagging from earlier wasn't the end. Are you hiding something from me now? Are you?

490. Departure (11)

"...Lowering."

Seongjin, who had been taking a short nap, woke up to someone's call and frowned without realizing it. This was because he could smell a faint scent of alcohol in the air.

"Your Majesty, please wake up."

When he opened his eyes, Sir Kurt was looking down at him.

"The messenger I sent to the Marquis has returned. Shall I bring him into the room?"

"Huh? No. I'll go down. Is everyone gathered here?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

Seongjin got up and went out into the hallway with Kurt. He slowly walked a few steps, then suddenly turned around and asked.

"But, Sir Kurt?"

"yes?"

"You sure you didn't drink while on duty?"

"... .."

Kurt carefully observed Seongjin's expression.

Of course, it was true that I had a light drink with lunch. But wasn't that something I'd always done? Auror users don't get drunk anyway.

Moreover, despite his laid-back impression, Kurt was actually quite serious about his duties. That's why he never drank too much while on duty, and he would lightly dispel the hangover by turning on his aura the moment he finished his meal.

'You probably won't be drunk at all now, so why are you saying that? Oh, can you really smell the aftertaste of alcohol? Well, if you have such keen senses, you shouldn't be unable to detect the faint scent of alcohol on your collar...'

Still, it was too sudden a point. Most of the resident knights of Jinju Palace are drunkards, and Your Majesty has never said anything about drinking alcohol before. Why are you suddenly making an issue of this?

"Answer me, Sir Kurt. Have you drunk?"

Kurt, sensing that Sungjin's mood was not normal, quickly tucked his tail between his legs.

"Yes. I'm sorry, Your Majesty."

"Yes. I'll let you off easy, Sir Kurt. Starting today, you're not allowed to drink for three days."

"... ... !"

Sir Kurt's eyes widen at the unexpected punishment.

Seongjin kept nagging at him.

"You know, drinking alcohol at every meal is an addiction. You know that?"

"Addiction... right?"

"Yes. Addiction. It's a lethargic mental state that you must absolutely guard against as an unmanned being. Why don't you try making dopamine in your brain in a healthier way than alcohol? There are many more novel and fun entertainments in this world."

"What's wrong with my brain?"

"Dopamine in the brain. If nothing comes to mind, consult me. I think I can help you train and feel a fair amount of thrill."

"... No, no. Down!"

Kurt responded hurriedly. That Dopa... I don't know what it is, but somehow the prince's help didn't sound very good. His survival instinct, honed through years of subduing demons, was now sounding the alarm like crazy!

"I'm sorry! I'll fix it right away!"

"Yeah. That's a good attitude. I'm saying this for your health."

"Of course, there is a possibility!"

Seongjin glanced at the sharp-tongued Sir Kurt, then muttered softly enough for him to not hear.

"Anyway, drinkers don't know the limit, the limit... .."

Seongjin and his party were currently staying at a large inn in the Benso Marquisate.

Contrary to initial expectations, the Marquisate was not such a closed territory, as it was relatively close to Regina and there was frequent trade between merchants.

The problem is that I haven't been able to meet Marquis Benso for several days since I entered the territory. I sent messengers to the mansion to ask about the Marquis' whereabouts, but I just kept getting replies saying that he was inspecting the outskirts of the territory.

"Well, what if they didn't stop us at the entrance to the territory? There's no rush, so let's just wait for the Marquis to return to his quarters. In the meantime, let's do some things that need to be done in advance."

Seongjin divided the group into two teams.

Owen, Sir Robert, and Bartoza were instructed to gather as much

information as possible about the rumored 'wise man'.

And the resident knights, including Captain Bruno, ordered a public investigation into the whereabouts of Giacomo Milo.

Of course, he is currently living a comfortable life as a prisoner in Regina, so this was simply a measure to pressure Marquis Benso.

After dividing up the work like that, Sungjin shut himself in his room alone. And for the past few days, he spent his time quietly, staying in his room except during meal times.

The resulting concern for Masain was considerable.

"Edith. Don't you think you've been taking a lot of naps lately? Are you feeling unwell?"

"Well? There didn't seem to be any major abnormalities when I looked at him from the side. Oh, he would occasionally snore during his naps... .."

"sleep talking?"

"Yes. Every once in a while, he would mutter in pain, 'Ugh, raw meat... I really hate raw meat.'"

...you don't like raw meat? What kind of nightmare is that?

In any case, considering the prince's usual lifestyle, it is not something to be overlooked.

"Sir Kurt. You were guarding the lower body yesterday, weren't you? What do you do during the day?"

"Oh. Nothing much. She was either taking a nap, talking to the fire fairy, or looking through the papers she brought."

"okay....."

Then, this morning, Masain's worries finally reached their peak. The prince, who skipped his morning training, which he rarely missed even while traveling, was sleeping all the way until daybreak!

"Something is strange, Commander Bruno! Something must have happened to you! Otherwise, you wouldn't be taking a break from training like this... ..!"

Captain Bruno, who couldn't stand to watch, reassured him.

"Don't worry too much, Sir Marsain. I've been keeping a close eye on your condition for the past few days, but I haven't noticed any major abnormalities in your aura's activity."

"Is that so... .."

"Yes. It will soon be time for His Majesty to have tea, so I will take a closer look while I bring in Melbourne."

But despite Bruno's repeated urging, Martha's worried gaze could not easily leave Sungjin's room.

"It's really frustrating. If I had known this would happen, I would have brought Father Bart with me, even if it meant going to great lengths... .."

* * *

Same time.

Dozens of sailing ships were gathered in the port of Cyprus, waiting for the signal to set sail. As Teresilla of Rhodes began to voice her opinion, public opinion in the council quickly turned in favor of pushing ahead with the second voyage.

In the midst of all this bustle throughout the harbor, a man holding a club quietly snuck into the council stables.

"Damn you! I will never leave my damn beasts alone!"

He was a stable keeper who had recently been severely punished. He had been caught daring to harm animals raised by the Imperial Family of the Holy Empire, and was kicked out without receiving even a single penny of allowance, let alone medical expenses.

"Damn it! I'll kill you. I'll kill them all!"

With his eyes blazing with resentment, he walked towards the largest stable. He planned to take advantage of the confusion to dispatch the insolent animals, then steal a horse and ride off north.

But, just as he was about to grab the crossbar of the stable.

Krrrrrr...

With a soft growl, sharp fangs pierced his leg. It was the healthy leg that had not been bitten before.

"Ahh?"

He had only planned a surprise attack, but had never imagined that he would be counterattacked. The stable keeper was greatly surprised by the wolf dog's attack, and jumped back, unable to bear the shock and pain.

But unfortunately, my back got caught on a loose beam, and I ended up falling over upside down.

"Ugh!"

And soon, what appears in the reversed view is a beautiful white horse emitting strong breath.

Hehehee!

A pair of strong hind hooves, accompanied by a fierce roar, came crashing down in front of my eyes. These were the merciless hooves that had always stood at the forefront of the punitive force, trampling on the sea creatures.

Boom!

The man who had been kicked so hard in the chest was thrown out of the stable without even being able to scream briefly.

"What!"

"what's the matter?"

The guards who came running to the sudden commotion exchanged awkward glances when they found the man convulsing slightly.

"Why is this guy here? Didn't he get cut off a while ago?"

"I've been completely taken by the military horse. I can't do anything about this... .."

"Oh, what bad luck! This kind of accident happened on the day the fleet set sail. They're just going to cause trouble for us up there!"

The two, who had completely dealt with any possible aftereffects, looked into each other's eyes as if they had made a promise. The golden eyes of the wolf dog looking up seemed to be bidding her a quiet farewell.

-I'm going now.

Roxana also looked down at Max gracefully. Her deep eyes seemed to convey a silent request to the wolf-dog.

-Please take good care of my master on my behalf.

Boom!

After barking loudly as if to confirm this, the wolf-dog turned around and quickly left the stable.

Ding ding ding ding!

At that moment, along with the loud sound of brass bells, the sailors' shouts could be heard from afar.

"Departure!"

"Let's set sail! Raise anchor!"

* * *

About 20 sailing ships begin to slowly accelerate.

Among them, the flagship "Wings of Glory" located in the center of the fleet was the latest sailing ship of the Cypriot Navy.

A huge sailing ship with an unusually long bowsprit, a sleek, streamlined body, and three masts glides through the waves.

From the stern of the beautiful ship, Prince Logan quietly gazed out over the distant harbor.

"... .."

General Lysander, who had just come out of the cabin to find him, forgot his business for a moment and stared at the prince as if he were entranced.

A gentle yet well-organized prayer, befitting the reputation of a 'Knight given by God'. Especially, the side profile soaked in deep sorrow is like a painting, and it is understandable that the knights who fanatically follow the prince live in groups.

Moreover, strangely enough, the old General Lysander sometimes felt that this strong and noble prince was like a friend of his own age.

"... Ahem."

He cleared his throat and shook off his thoughts, then slowly approached Prince Logan and spoke.

"Are you still worried about that 'monster', Your Majesty?"

"General Lysander."

"Don't worry, Your Majesty. I have inquired among the sailors as Your Majesty instructed, but no one has yet seen such a gigantic monster. Of course, I don't think Your Majesty would be mistaken."

"... .."

"By the way, would you like to go to your cabin for a moment? I have something to discuss with you about the route... .."

But then, Prince Logan's expression suddenly changed, and he turned his head and stared at the cliffs on the distant shore.

"Your Majesty? Why are you doing this?"

"... Max?"

"yes?"

But soon, General Lysander also realized what the prince had sensed.

Woof woof woof!

Because the sound of dogs barking in the distance was approaching them at a fast speed.

"...dog?"

Soon, a large wolfdog wearing the insignia of the palace appeared on the cliffs by the seaside. It was a dog that was quite familiar to Lysander, as it sometimes ran around the council building alone.

"Isn't that the royal dog? What is that dog doing there so dangerously?"

"... .."

But Prince Logan just looked at her with a stern face.

"Huh? Wait a minute!"

Soon, the other punitive force members and sailors also noticed the dog and began to grumble.

"Look over there! A dog is jumping off a cliff!"

"Dangerous!"

As he said, the dog took a few steps back, but then ran fearlessly towards the edge of the cliff. For a moment, it seemed as if a faint flame was flickering on the dog's hind legs.

Phew!

"ah.....!"

"It's falling!"

But contrary to everyone's expectations that he would fall straight into the sea, the dog leaped an incredible distance, kicking the air and flying straight towards Prince Logan.

"Max!"

Taat!

The wolfdog, who had lightly landed on the deck, wagged its tail with a proud expression and barked at Prince Logan.

Boom!

"Max. Why are you here... .."

Woof woof!

"Wait, you're lying? No way... You're Lee Seong-jin?"

General Lysander, who had been blankly staring at them, suddenly came to his senses.

"Your Majesty, I think it would be best to send the dog back. Isn't it a precious dog raised by the royal family? It's still close to the shore. If you lower the boat now... .."

"No, wait! Please wait a moment, General Lysander!"

Prince Logan stopped him with an urgent voice that did not respond.

"Before that, there's something I need to check."

"yes?"

"This guy, he might not be Max. I know a way to easily tell who this guy is, so could you just wait a moment?"

"...yes?"

Prince Logan, who let out such an incomprehensible sound, slowly reached out his hand towards the wolf-dog's head with a face full of tension.

OK-

chin!

The wolf dog strikes the prince's arm with a serious expression. The prince's neatly ironed uniform is imprinted with a black wolf's footprint like a stamp.

"... Haha! Then that's right."

Prince Logan, who had been blankly staring at the footprints, soon burst into a refreshing laugh.

"General Lysander. I don't think we need to disembark the boat. I'll take the dog with me."

"Yes? Your Majesty... .."

Leaving the dumbfounded general behind, Prince Logan headed to the captain's cabin with the wolfdog.

Then he pointed to the area where, as expected, there was a large, muddy mark of a dog's paw on the map spread out on the table.

"It looks like he's already set his course, General. We're stopping briefly in Rhodes, and heading straight for the Krabat Islands as planned."

491

491. Stranding (1)

The fleet sailed for two full days and arrived at the port of Rhodes.

"This is Rhodes... .."

Sisley leaned over the railing of the ship and looked out over the exotic harbor.

The sudden appearance of a large fleet has caused the docks to be busy and chaotic. Merchant ships are hurriedly loading their cargo, and fishermen are hastily unloading their nets and pulling out their fishing boats.

The port of Rhodes was not that small compared to the port of Cyprus. Because it was an island so far from the mainland, the development of a port was essential for survival.

However, it was not enough to accommodate the dozens of sailing ships that suddenly appeared. As a last resort, small boats were busily going back and forth to transport water and sailors.

While at anchor, the expedition force was not permitted to disembark, except for some of the crew, since most of the supplies had already been filled up on Helios. After replenishing some water and food in Rhodes, the fleet was scheduled to depart for the Cravat Islands.

'If we had arrived during the day, we could have seen the port in more detail... '

Sisley felt a little regret as he swept back his silver hair.

Now the sun had completely set, and the wind had changed direction

to a land breeze. Sometimes, sailors carrying water jugs would come and go, and they would be startled when they saw a white girl standing on the deck.

"Poem, poem, poems..."

At that moment, Seo Yi-seo, who was almost dying, crawled out onto the deck and called the girl. She had been lying sprawled on one side of the cabin due to severe seasickness, but it seemed that she was finally coming to her senses.

"I... I really feel like I'm going to die like this..."

No, am I still a long way from coming to my senses?

"Ms. Seo Yi-seo."

Sisley quickly ran to her and poured divine power into her.

Motion sickness is a perfectly normal reaction of the balance organ, so even divine power cannot relieve the symptoms. It can only slightly improve the condition of the body that has been exhausted from not eating properly for two days.

Thanks to that effort, Seo Yi-seo's pale complexion seemed to improve a little. Then, she held onto Sisley's sleeve tightly and complained with a pitiful face.

"Uh, can't we ride on the 'Wings of Glory' like before? Maybe it's because the ship is small, but it seems to be rocking back and forth more than before..."

Sisley and Seoyis were currently aboard the warship 'Judge'.

The Judgement is a small, old sailing ship that doesn't live up to its grand name, and the comfort on board is the worst of any ship. As a result, half of the Inquisitors on board are suffering from severe seasickness.

Unlike the first time he set sail, General Lysander tried to evenly distribute his forces throughout the fleet this time. Since the purpose of the expedition was to thoroughly subdue the Krabat Islands, it

seemed he was considering the possibility that he would have to split the fleet later.

"If you can't stand it, board the 'Wings of Glory' alone. General Lysander will be happy to welcome you, a saint, aboard."

"I will never be separated from you, Sisley!"

"But I can't leave the Knights and act on my own, Seoyeo-ssi. Or how about asking Cardmos-sama to take over for me for a while?"

"Ugh! I asked you earlier! But you only run away at times like this and don't even pretend to listen to me!"

Seo Yi-seo trembled at the betrayal that had been creeping up on her for a long time. Forgiving someone by tearing at their face was only for a day or two! That person, as a cohabitant living in the same body, doesn't have the basic attitude!

"If I had known this would happen, I would have just pretended not to accept that son of a bitch's offer."

"Huh... what?"

"This is Ambrose of Helios."

Recently, while all the council members were busy electing new elders, Ambrose, the son of Chryses, showed an unexpected behavior. As soon as his father's funeral was over, he tried to contact Seoyseo.

It is said that he met Seo Yi-seo just before departure and made this secret proposal.

-Maritime demons have already been mostly eradicated in the first expedition. The second expedition will also be successful without any problems. So, how about the saintess just staying in Cyprus?

-You want me to stay... alone?

-Yes. I'm sure the others will understand. It seems General Lysander is taking his time to thoroughly search the open seas, which will be a tough schedule for an inlanderer unaccustomed to sailing.

So Ambrose said that he would invite Seuss to his mansion - which had until recently been the mansion of the elder Chryses - and that he would treat her as an honored guest until the punitive force returned.

Of course, the reason he made this suggestion was because the process of exploring the tower alone with his incomplete memories was extremely tedious. So he intended to trick Cadmus and borrow his strength and insight.

Seo Yi-seo couldn't guess what Ambrose was thinking. Fortunately, perhaps the incident that happened recently had made her a little wary of him.

So she flatly rejected the offer.

-That'll be hard. I have to stay by Sisley's side.

But Ambrosius still did not lose his relaxed attitude. He smiled and stared at Seo Yi-seo.

- Then, what is the intention of His Majesty the First Emperor?

-...yes?

- He who is with you. Is he willing to undertake that lowly and arduous voyage? Or is he willing to be treated with the utmost honor in the grandest palace of Helios?

-Cardmos? No, how could you... ...!

- The saint received a blessing at the ceremony of the Holy Emperor's coronation. If so, it means that she has clearly seen the true appearance of His Majesty the First Holy Emperor and is still with Him. Now, what does the greatest Holy Emperor, who founded the thousand-year-old Holy Nation, say to you now?

The expression on Ambrose's face as he asked that question was confident, as if he had no thought of Cadmus' rejection.

No wonder, Sigurd Sigurdson is one of those people who has known the longest, a personality-dead demigod who cares nothing but his own glory and comfort.

So, Ambrosius, who was once his puppet, could not help but know Cadmus' wayward personality.

But Seo Yi-seo, who had been rolling her eyes for a moment, answered Cardmos's answer after a while and replied to him like this.

-Um... Mr. Cadmus told me that he has nothing to talk to you about, other than Sigurd Sigurdsson.

-... .. !

For the first time, a crack appeared in Ambrose's relaxed expression.

-What? No, but I... .. .

-Oh, and you want me to tell you this too? If you bother me again, I'll take out all the grudge I've had for 700 years locked in a coffin on you?

-... .. .

So, he coldly rejected Ambrose's offer and boarded the ship with the punitive force.

And this was the result. After vomiting to death, I was lying helplessly on the deck. I belatedly regretted not having just pretended I couldn't win and accepted his offer.

"Yeah, that's it... .. ."

On the other hand, Sisley's mind became complicated after hearing that story.

'Ambrose of Helios... .. .'

Sisley also felt an indescribable awkwardness when he first met him. Even though it was our first meeting, he strangely felt like someone I had known for a long time, but that wasn't a very good feeling.

Moreover, one day, when she was overcome by a strong premonition and her mind became unstable, Ambrose deliberately lured her to the tower and tried to do something to her.

'Seo Yi-seo handled it well. He is an untrustworthy person.'

But despite such a strange antipathy, there are basic lines that a saint must uphold. A bastard? Is that something that someone who has been canonized as a living saint by the Orthodox Church should say?

So Sisley gently rebuked Seoyiseo.

"Mr. Seo Yi-seo. Senator Ambrosius recently lost his father. You shouldn't insult someone who has gone through such a difficult time."

"Why? I don't even want to call someone a son of a bitch who hurt their own parents!"

"The rumors of his involvement in Elder Crises' death are nothing more than groundless suspicions. If a saintess of the Holy Empire were to openly talk about such suspicions, it would surely cause big trouble later on."

But for some reason, Seo Yi-seo was confident.

"It's not an entirely baseless claim, Sisley! I saw with my own eyes that Ambrose was dragging Elder Chryses somewhere a while ago. The rift between them seemed quite deep, so it was clear that he had harmed the elder!"

...you saw it?

"If it weren't for that incident, I would have pretended I couldn't win and stayed in Cyprus! Eight! It's just that Mr. Benz's black curtain showed me that... Ugh!"

Seo Yi-seo, who had been sighing and vomiting like that, spoke to Sisley with a face that seemed to be dying after a while.

"I guess I can't do this. I'll go down and lie down for a little longer...
... ."

Sisley didn't have time to ask anything. Seoyi-seo, with a pale face, crawled back down to the cabin.

"... .."

Sisley, who had been looking at the pitiful back for a moment, leaned against the railing again and looked out at the darkened sea.

slam!

With the sound of waves crashing against the ship, possibilities that had been ignored until now slowly rise to the surface of consciousness, armed with a sense of reality.

'...Ambrose of Helios killed the elder Chryses.'

Why? Although he had not heard a detailed explanation from Seo Yiseo, Sisley had a strong feeling that her words were true. Even though he knew full well how foolish it was to believe groundless rumors.

Woof woof!

A dog barks in the distance. It feels as if it is affirming him at the right time, and Sisley is suddenly overcome by a strange feeling.

'Max, huh? I wonder if that guy gets seasick? Of course, Logan, who's with him, will take good care of him... '

In any case, Sisley renewed his vigilance against Ambrose.

'First of all, I have never read anything about him in the Chronicles of Delcross.'

[The Chronicles of Delcross] has provided Sisley with a lot of information about the future so far. Although it has been twisted here and there by Mores Oraboni, the basic value of the information that is fundamentally laid out in the background of the novel has not faded.

As evidence, Logan Oraboni is here to subdue the sea monsters, even though it is a little late.

But nowhere in this thick chronicle, spanning three volumes, is there any mention of Ambrose, which is strange, considering that he was such an important figure, called the "Prince of Cyprus."

'Does that mean that he, like Mores Oraboni, will become a huge variable that will change the future? Could it be that the death of Elder Crises, which was not recorded in the Chronicles, was also something that happened because of his involvement?'

Woof woof!

Then the sound of a dog barking is heard again.

Sisley smiled faintly as he felt that Max had been answering his inner questions for some reason.

But maybe it's my imagination, but somehow I feel like the barking is closer than before...

Sisley tilted his body towards the sea, which was heading towards the port, to find the 'Wings of Glory' where Max would be.

But it was just then.

'...huh?'

The girl's eyes caught a strange sight. Far away, on a ship anchored midway between the Wings of Glory and the Judgement, she saw something strange yet familiar.

A draconian three times larger than the average sailor, sitting on the deck of the ship and drinking carefreely.

'Mitra?'

Even though I'm looking at him with my eyes, I can still feel his presence vaguely, so perhaps the amulet he has is working properly.

As expected, the sailors seemed completely unaware of his presence and did not even glance at the forecastle deck.

'How long has it been there?'

Why is he here when we had already parted ways at the port of Cyprus?

Naturally, I had such a question, but then I suddenly remembered the story of his friend who was dying alone in the distant sea. Maybe he was going to follow the fleet to the [Perception Horizon] and meet his friend.

'I don't particularly feel like he's a threat to the fleet. Still, he's an unauthorized stowaway, so I'll have to warn Brother Logan about him when I get the chance.'

It was just when Sisley had that thought.

Woof woof woof!

The sound of dogs barking is heard closer.

This time, it really wasn't Sisley's mistake. When he turned his head to follow the sound, he saw that in the distance, a really large wolf-dog was getting closer and closer.

The wolf-dog ran across the deck and jumped over the stern railing of the 'Wings of Glory', landing on the small whaling ship anchored in front of it with its four paws wrapped in fiery aura.

Dadadadada!

After running at such a fast speed across the deck of the whaling ship, he leapt up again and this time stepped onto the large ship, the Sea Lion, which was no less than the Wings of Glory.

Taat!

"It's a dog! It's the royal dog!"

"How can a dog jump farther than a knight?"

The sailors' commotion grows louder.

Sisley, too, could not take his eyes off Max's strange movements.

'Max, where the hell are you running off to?'

The wolf-dog clearly seemed to have a clear destination in mind, as it

ran in a straight line, jumping over the ships as if they were stepping stones.

Blame! Dadadadada!

Meanwhile, Max jumped down onto the small whaling ship in front again. He jumped over the 'Mighty Tail' and the 'Blood Dawn' one by one, and-

Grorrrrrr... ... !

Finally, when they reached the 'Harpoon of God' that Mithra was riding, he growled loudly, baring his sharp fangs.

"... ... !"

Until then, Mitra had been living leisurely, relying only on the effects of the amulet. Only after meeting the silver eyes of the wolf, glaring with hostility, did he finally sense something ominous.

Draconian stood up awkwardly with a puzzled expression. But it was already too late.

Eww! Woof!

The wolf rushed at Mithra like lightning, sinking its fangs into his struggling arm and shaking its head mercilessly.

As if the flimsy protection of a talisman was nothing. So easy, so natural.

Thud!

As the sharp teeth of the wolf wrapped in aura brushed past, the hard scales covering Mithra's arms fell helplessly to the ground.

"Huh? Kyaaaaak!?"

Because of that, the great leader of the race, who had been in pain for the first time in a long time, forgot all about his dignity and screamed for the ship to sail away.

"Eww! Let go of it! Hurry up and let it go!"

492. Stranding (2)

"... General Lysander. What is all this?"

Logan, who had disembarked for a while and returned, could not help but be astonished at the sight before his eyes.

He was on his way to the port of Rhodes to get food for Max. Since the boarding of the Wolfdog was entirely his own decision, he thought it would be difficult to deplete the fleet's food supplies.

But just as I was returning with high-quality raw meat and preserved meat, the wolf-dog caused a huge accident. It was running wild through the entire fleet on the bridge carrying the auror, startling the sailors.

Plus, he caught a suspicious stowaway!

This is what happened the moment Logan's powerful controlling power disappeared.

Logan was at a loss for words for a moment, looking back and forth between the large man - the amulet was still taking effect - and the wolfdog dangling from his arm.

"....."

At that moment, the stowaway, looking very embarrassed, held out his left arm, which was hanging from the dog.

"Excuse me... Could you please do something about this dog?"

You might wonder how someone of such an imposing size could possibly be so incompetent at handling a dog, but Logan, who was sensitive to Aurors, could quickly sense the problem the current

stowaway was facing.

'I guess I can't move the auror rashly.'

First of all, the smuggler was a considerable Auror user. He was so skilled that it made you wonder why he wasn't well known on the continent. If it had been a normal dog, he would have been able to take him out easily with his abilities.

But the problem was that the wolf-dog hanging from his arm was also Lee Seong-jin, whom Logan recognized as a genius in Auror operations.

Grrrrrr...

Although it looked like it was hanging still, the werewolf was currently moving its aura densely inside its body. It was ready to explode with aura if anyone touched it.

At the same time, the outside air is densely permeated into the stowaway's body, centered around the forearm that was inserted. By interfering with the stowaway's natural aura flow, it is like a fuse has been entangled in his body.

"We tried to pull it off, but even the slightest touch caused hot flames to burst out from the dog."

The knights cautiously elaborate from behind. That was the reason why they could not even properly capture the stowaway and barely brought him to the flagship.

'Yes. Considering the nature of the aura that Lee Sung-jin possesses, it's not unreasonable.'

Logan naturally wondered:

'Why are you so wary of the author?'

So he carefully caught the wolf-dog and asked.

"Lee Seong-jin, why are you doing that?"

"...omg?"

The knights instinctively stepped back in panic, expecting Prince Logan to be engulfed in flames just as they had been.

".....?"

But surprisingly, nothing happened. The wolfhound simply stared at Prince Logan with meaningful eyes, then glared at the stowaway again and growled.

Grrrrrr... ..

"Okay, I get it. You're telling me to be wary of the author?"

Logan nodded and slowly began to expand his gaze.

Then his thoughts began to extend to all the places his perception could reach. The air flow gradually slowed down, and even the smallest dust particles floating in the air sank to the deck under his control.

".....!"

The power Logan wielded was completely invisible. Nevertheless, it was so powerful that everyone in the vicinity felt his will and were overwhelmed by his presence. It was the Sword Master's ability to control the breathing of surrounding creatures and even the flow of air at will if he wanted to.

After wrapping his thoughts tightly around the stowaway's son-in-law, Logan finally gave the wolf-dog a gentle nudge.

"Okay. It's okay now, Lee Sung-jin. I'll keep a good eye on him."

"....."

Only after hearing Logan's confirmation did the wolf-dog finally release its jaws and fall away.

And then-

Kekeke! Kekeke!

He sat on the floor and retched several times. He had been biting Mithra's forearm for so long that he had accidentally swallowed a few of his scales.

"But what are all these scales?"

General Lysander looked at the large scales the dog had spat out on the deck, and made a face of bewilderment.

* * *

Meanwhile-

Mitra, the unlucky stowaway, was distraught at his worsening situation.

I was bitten by a strange dog and was completely controlled by it, but when I finally broke free, I was suddenly controlled by a little kid, down to my every breath!

'... This boy is Nate's son!'

He knew it the moment he laid eyes on Logan. Even if he didn't know that the son of a Dimensional Guardian was leading the fleet, the two of them looked so alike that he would have recognized him at a glance.

Moreover, unfortunately, his son also had the same ability to manipulate his thoughts as Nate.

The cold thoughts that extended from the boy reached the tip of the scales like sharp awls. Thanks to this, Mitra was now feeling a terrible pressure as if his entire body was touching the tip of a sharp weapon.

'Ah, Nate! Why on earth did you tell me to follow this fleet!'

In any case, it was his own fault for accepting the Oracle's words without any doubt.

Mitra rolled his eyes urgently, trying to figure out a way to escape.

'Key! If I could even manipulate the key, I could jump to the elder's space right now... ...!'

But when he tried to move one hand slightly-

Sreung!

Arjuna's sword blade is pulled out in an instant and lands precisely on the tip of Mithra's chin.

Considering that the power of the 'talisman' prevented his true form from being properly recognized by outsiders, it is surprising that the boy aimed so precisely at his weak point.

"Don't even think about talking nonsense."

Logan's sunken eyes cast a cold glare.

The appearance also resembled someone he knew very well, so Mitra felt his will to resist gradually disappearing.

'Oh, I don't know anymore! If there's a problem between me and his son, wouldn't Nate intervene before that happens?'

In the end, Mitra had no choice but to be taken to the interrogation room after a thorough body search.

In the midst of all this, it's a blessing in disguise that the amulet that fell off my body is still functioning.

"Then let's hurry up and talk before we set sail. I have to decide whether I should kick you out to the port, execute you here, or drag you on like this."

Logan said, sitting across from him.

In the hastily constructed interrogation room in the cabin, only Mitra and Prince Logan were present. Everyone else was having a hard time withstanding the sharp aura the prince was emitting.

Keying.

Oh, come to think of it, there's one more thing. The prince had a dog.

The wolf-dog lay stretched out in front of the pile of Mithra's belongings on one side of the interrogation room, guarding them - precious bottles of wine, small hatchets, amulets, even the clan keys.

Mithra had new doubts.

'What the heck is that dog?'

How did he penetrate the power of the talisman, see through his presence, and draw people's attention to him, making his presence known to the outside world?

How did he know that he had a secret escape route and how did he bind the Auras so that they could not be manipulated?

How on earth could a representative of a great race be so helpless...?

"You really have a great dog."

As he muttered that absentmindedly, Logan glanced at his arm, where there was a clear scar, and said.

"Yeah, that's great. But it seems like he's been pretty forgiving. If Lee Sung-jin really wanted to hurt you, there wouldn't be a trace left on his arm by now."

".....!"

When Mitra turned around with a surprised expression, the wolf-dog bit his lip in displeasure and snorted softly.

Keng!

If that sight somehow feels annoying, is it just my imagination?

"Okay, then let's look at them one by one."

Logan asked, dipping the nib of his pen into the inkwell.

"First of all, who are you? What is your name and age?"

"My name is Michel. I haven't counted my age lately, but I think I'm around 50. I'm just a lowly wanderer, wandering the world without a destination."

Then Logan's eyes sharpen. He immediately realizes that it is a hasty lie.

"What is your real name?"

"... That's... I'm sorry. Actually, my name is Bart-"

"What is your real name?"

"... Mithra."

"good night."

Four-legged race.

Prince Logan writes the first line of the interrogation report in neat handwriting.

"Age is?"

"So, probably mid-50s... .."

"age."

"....."

"age."

"... 189 years old."

"... Hmm? Well, okay."

Prince Logan tilted his head for a moment, then raised his voice slightly and wrote down his age again.

'No, I told you an age that is absolutely impossible for a normal human, so how do you know that's true?'

The Draconian felt a spine-chilling tension for the first time in a long time.

"What is the purpose of smuggling?"

"Ahem! I just heard that the fleet rarely goes that far, so I thought I'd go take a look... .."

"purpose."

"....."

"purpose."

The prince asks again in a calm voice. Without a hint of impatience, without raising his voice at all.

But Mithra felt vividly on his skin that there was a cool anticipation hidden in that calm, sleep-like prayer.

Eventually, he could not overcome the pressure and ended up revealing the truth without realizing it.

"I thought... I'd like to meet an old friend... .."

"....."

Logan furrowed his eyebrows for a moment, but then nodded and filled in the next line of the interrogation report. He didn't seem to doubt the sincerity of her answer, even though she said she was going to the ocean to meet a friend.

Mithra was now beyond nervous and almost bewildered.

'Nate, what the hell is this boy! Why aren't any of your children normal?'

So Mitra was thoroughly exposed to Logan's interrogation for a while. He could not tell a single lie. Whenever he tried to cover it up, the prince would dig into it like a ghost, so he could not hide anything.

Eventually, Mitra was forced to confess that he was a member of a

different race called the Draconians, that he was currently hiding his true form with a magical item, and that he was the only one of his kind left.

"I see. You lost both your people and your country... .."

Logan nods and begins filling out the interrogation form.

But was it just Mitra's illusion that the boy's spirits softened slightly as he said those words?

"Do you believe everything I just said?"

"Of course, I still keep in mind the possibility that you are either insane or a delusional person who believes his own lies. Personally, I hope that the story about losing all of your kind is not true."

"....."

"But at least I believe that you are sincere in your words. That you have no intention of harming the fleet."

Mitra felt a strange sense of comfort. The boy had not said anything comforting to him, but he felt that his serious expression and orderly speech deeply sympathized with his pain. It was truly strange.

"So, can you remove the effects of that 'amulet'? If I'm going to believe you're a different race, I guess I'll have to see you in your true form."

"Oh, that's possible. So, over there... .."

But before he could finish speaking, the dog guarding the belongings rummaged through the items, picked out the exact 'talisman', and brought it back to him!

Mitra accepted the amulet with a dumbfounded face. That dog is really, really strange... ..

So Mithra hesitated for a moment, then removed the amulet and revealed his true form.

"You really are a different species. The scale that fell off earlier is also yours."

"That's true... .."

It would be quite surprising to see a foreign race for the first time, but the prince showed no signs of being disturbed. Could there really be something in this world that could shake up that deep and calm sea?

"By the way, the wound is bigger than I thought. I can't just leave it as is, so I'll treat it for now."

"....."

Mitra was possessed by something and was treated by the prince.

Then, after a while, the situation was resolved in an unexpected way. Sisley, who had witnessed Mithra being taken away, came to the Wings of Glory himself with a worried look on his face.

"Logan, brother. I know Mitra."

"so?"

"Yes, he is a member of a different race called Draconian, and it seems that he is well acquainted with Your Majesty."

"I see. I understand."

With those words, the air begins to melt like ice melting in the spring breeze.

"Very well. I hereby authorize your temporary embarkation to the Krabat Islands, Mitra."

"What, what... ..?"

"But I cannot just take out the resources stored in the fleet as I please. So at least get the food yourself."

"....."

He was a prince who was strangely loose and strangely old-fashioned.

493. Stranding (3)

Prince Logan allowed Mitra to remain hidden, as he did not want the sudden appearance of the Draconians to throw the entire fleet into chaos.

"Surprisingly, you accept other races easily. Aren't you also a knight who believes in the Lord?"

Logan's eyebrows furrowed slightly at Mitra's question.

"The existence of a different race doesn't seem that strange to me. There was once an archaeologist in Ortona who only studied traces of the different race."

"... Ortona?"

"Yes. Not only that, but heterodox races often appear in Orthona's classical literature. I'm talking about the exquisite fantasy literature set in the era of the Three Elder Dragons."

"....."

Even so, aren't you an imperial person?

Even if some of the cultural heritage of the fallen nation remains, it has long been designated as banned books, so how on earth... ..

Mitra naturally had doubts, but he did not dare to speak them out loud. This was because he felt a strange sadness in the calm expression of Prince Logan.

The age and sadness in this serious boy's eyes may have been even deeper and heavier than Mitra's. That's why Mitra secretly treated him as someone of similar age to himself, and he didn't feel any

discomfort about it.

In any case, Mitra was promoted from a stowaway to a guest, and all of his stolen belongings were returned to him: his precious bottle of moonshine, his hatchet, and various magical items, including amulets.

"There is still some time before departure. Would you like to go to the port to get some food?"

"No, it's okay. I have a magic bag stocked with food."

The only exception was the 'Race Key', because the moment Mitra reached out for it, a wolf-dog quickly intervened, bit it, and ran away.

".....?!"

As if the dog's initial fierce wariness of Mithra had been an illusion, its mind was now completely focused on the key.

Could it be that he had guessed that the moment he got his hands on the race key, he would be able to escape to another dimension?

"Lee Seong-jin."

When Prince Logan, unable to stand watching, called out, the wolfdog came closer, hesitantly. Then, he gently placed the shining silver disc on the prince's hand, not Mithra's.

Then he stands between the two and growls loudly, as if he will never let this thing be taken away from him.

"....."

Prince Logan, who had been watching the scene for a moment, quickly guessed the dog's intentions. He said as he put the tribal key inside his coat.

"It seems like it wasn't you that this guy was wary of, but this thing."

When things turned out this way, Mitra was quite bewildered, as

there was no way to seize the key from the powerful Sword Master with his own strength alone.

"But that thing is very important to me and to the world. I must get it back."

"I will keep it for you only while you are on board. I will return it to you as soon as this voyage is over."

Prince Logan, who had responded strangely, looked down at the wolf-dog and cautiously asked for consent.

"Is that okay, Lee Seong-jin?"

OK-

Boom!

As if he understood what was being said, the wolfdog responded vigorously and wags its tail.

"Okay, I understand."

All these sights seemed so strange to Mithra. The wolf-dog who had sensed and stolen the most important belongings like a ghost, or Prince Logan who, as the highest commanding officer of the fleet, was asking the opinion of a mere dog.

Whether he was aware of the strange gaze or not, Prince Logan spoke while straightening his flawless uniform.

"It's late at night, so you can rest now. I'll give you my cabin as your accommodation first."

The logic was that he could not demand others to vacate their cabins on his own. As a result, General Lysander ended up giving up the captain's cabin to the prince.

So Mitra was assigned a fairly spacious cabin.

Of course, given the Draconian's natural physique, it couldn't be said to be comfortable, even in vain. Still, considering that he had been

hiding in a narrow whaling ship warehouse until then, it could be seen as a great improvement.

The problem was that, unfortunately, it wasn't a place I could use alone.

"Oh, Logan, while you're here, would it be okay if I leave Seo-seo here? She got really seasick on the referee's boat."

"Yes, I understand. Take it to my cabin for now. I will ask General Lysander for permission to board."

"Thank you, brother. Then, Mitra, see you later."

After waving absentmindedly to the little saintess who greeted him warmly, Mitra was left alone in the cabin with a human woman.

Ugh! Ugh!

Mitra muttered blankly, looking at the woman who was vomiting like crazy.

"... How did things turn out like this?"

* * *

Meanwhile, the final outcome faced by the wolf dog, the mastermind behind all this, was not so easy.

I followed Logan into Captain Talletalle's cabin, and there, in the middle of the room, was a pile of fresh raw meat.

Beef slaughtered that day, still emitting a faint smell of blood. It was a generous gift prepared by General Lysander for the wolf-dog.

"General, what is all this?"

Logan stood in his way and stopped him, but-

"You can't feed the food on board the fleet to dogs."

... The wolf dog, no, it didn't seem to sympathize with the concerns that Seongjin felt.

And unfortunately, the old general Lysander knew how to gently persuade the old-fashioned prince.

"Your Majesty. This is a just reward for a dog."

"A reward... you mean?"

"Yes. Didn't this smart dog catch a smuggler on his own when no one knew about it? As an admiral leading the fleet, if I don't give him an appropriate reward for this, discipline will be shaken."

"Oh, I see. In that case... .."

Ironically, Logan was too easily persuaded by the idea that he had to uphold fleet discipline.

"What a great piece of meat. It turned out really well. Isn't that right, Lee Seong-jin?"

The wolfdog looked up at Logan's brightly smiling face. Then, as if he had given up, he slowly brought his snout to the food bowl.

Swish... swish swish... ..

"Hoo... .."

General Lysander was impressed. Compared to the energetic and energetic people who were running around stirring up the entire fleet, the wolf-dog's meal looked very tame.

Is it true that noble dogs raised in the royal family are different no matter what?

It was only natural that Prince Logan looked upon the sight with great delight.

"How is it? Is it delicious?"

Ugh... ..

The wolf-dog didn't really answer the question, but as the main body's mood rapidly deteriorated, its wagging tail couldn't help but

droop a little.

"Ugh... .."

And that reaction directly affected the state of the main body.

"... raw meat... really not good... ugh... .."

Prince Mores, who had been asleep since early evening, frowns and mumbles in his sleep.

Edith turned around, neatly straightening the disheveled bedding.

"Now, look, Sir Marsain. Am I right?"

"... That's true."

Masain, who had been watching the scene with concern, stumbled with a very serious expression on his face.

"Your Majesty, you hate raw meat so much that you have nightmares like this every day. Without even knowing it, we must have been too careless in serving you undercooked steaks."

Then, Captain Bruno, who was nearby, also pulled at his mustache and chimed in.

"Don't worry, Sir Marsain. I will tell the cook to pay more attention from now on."

So, only the poor chef ended up getting the warning to 'cook the meat properly.'

* * *

After leaving Rhodes, the fleet slowly sailed northeast.

This was a slightly off-course route, as attempting to sail in a straight line to the Kravat Islands would have meant sailing head-on against the turbulent current.

"It will take too much time considering the distance."

As Logan kept looking at the map in frustration, General Lysander burst into laughter.

"Haha. It's just that the weather has gotten colder and the wind direction has changed a bit, my lord. If it were summer, I would have been pushed around by the current and couldn't overcome the headwind."

So they slowly moved northeast for five days, then turned south-southeast and sailed for another three days. Until then, all they could see was the horizon, an endless horizon.

Then, on the eighth day, there finally began to be a slight change in the surrounding scenery. The flow of the ocean current seemed to change subtly, and faint dots began to appear beyond the horizon.

It was the Krabat Islands.

"I can see the island!"

"That's Cosmima Island!"

The Krabat Islands, which stretch from north to south like a crescent moon, jut out from the sea like the spine of a giant dragon.

Among them, the northernmost island was called Cosmima, and was a fairly large island with dense bushes and small shrubbery.

The fleet advanced slowly across the vastly shallow sea.

"...There's a port?"

"Haha, can you see everything from this distance? As expected, the Sword Master's eyesight cannot be fooled."

General Lysander smiled as he folded up his telescope.

"But it would be difficult to bring the flagship close. Let's send a couple of small whaling ships to procure water and food."

Cosmima Island, like the other islands in the Krabat Archipelago, had a base of basalt.

The submarine volcanoes that created the archipelago have long since ceased activity and fallen asleep, and the cliffs, eroded by waves and wind over the years, form gentle curves that blend in with the sea.

The shrubs that covered the black cliffs in thick layers were shining a vivid blue even in this season, perhaps due to the influence of the turbulent currents.

"How is it? Your Majesty. At first glance, it looks so beautiful that it's hard to believe it's a den of sea demons."

But just as the fleet passed the harbor and rounded the corner of the island, Logan's eyes suddenly narrowed into a serious expression.

"But, General. What is that...?"

General Lysander lifts his telescope and looks in the direction he is pointing, and sure enough, he sees a row of black masses stretching along the island's coastline.

At first he thought they were parts of rocks or cliffs, but General Lysander soon realized what they were and his face immediately turned pale.

"That's... ..!"

"... I think they are whales that have come out onto land, Your Majesty."

The navigator standing nearby answers on behalf of General Lysander, who is unable to continue speaking.

"Whales can't survive long out in the ocean. Their skin dries out quickly, and they can't breathe properly because of the weight. If we leave them like this, they'll probably all die."

Logan, who had been looking more closely at the shoreline at the navigator's urgent explanation, soon shook his head with a regretful expression.

"It seems too late. I can't detect any aura from them."

The sailors exchanged glances with anxious faces.

It was a strange and gruesome sight, the likes of which they had never seen before in their long voyage. Why were there dozens of whales lying dead on land, right in front of the sea where they could breathe easily?

"What the heck?"

"Surely you were chased by a sea monster... .."

There were only two people in the fleet who were calm.

Saint Seo Yi-seo, who just barely escaped seasickness-

"Oh, that's it! Isn't that the scene that Mr. Benz Black Curtain showed on TV a while ago?"

It was a wolf-dog that stood with its front paws on the deck and stared intently at the island.

Kiing... ..

The wolf-dog, whose sharp gray eyes were shining, sniffed softly as it smelled a pungent smell carried by the wind.

494. Stranding (4)

The group completely abandoned their plan to replenish their water supply at Cosmima Island. After confirming the mass death of whales, they could not just set their boats out into the sea.

A situation where you can't even guess what kind of serious danger might be lurking around you.

"I don't feel any particular presence of the sea demon... .."

Despite Logan's assurance, the cautious General Lysander shook his head.

"It doesn't have to be this island, Your Majesty. If you go a little further south from here, you will come across Peridero Island, the second largest island in the archipelago."

Peridere Island was a place where naval forces patrolling the open seas would sometimes stay, as it was a good location for observing the movements of sea monsters.

Given the circumstances, the island has a small port, as well as simple outposts and basic facilities. It was thought that there would be no better place for a fleet to stay for a day.

"But General, isn't that place too close to the den of sea demons? It seems dangerous to move with such a large fleet."

"It'll probably be okay now, Your Majesty. The number of demons seems to have decreased considerably."

This was a route that would have encountered sea monsters many times. However, since nothing has happened so far, most of the

monsters were probably killed in the first expedition.

So the fleet reorganized its formation a bit and headed south again.

After passing a row of large and small islands, we proceeded for some time until the sailor hanging from the masthead announced loudly:

"...Ah! I can see the island, General!"

Soon, the thick, half-folded pancake-like shape of Peridereo Island could be seen with the naked eye from the deck.

It was said to be the second largest island in the archipelago, and indeed, it was so large that the opposite end of the island could not be seen at a glance.

however-

"The whales..."

General Lysander, who had been looking straight ahead for a moment, muttered with a slightly dejected expression as he folded up his telescope.

"There are dead whales over there too..."

As he said, the situation at Peridereo Island was not much different. On the long sandbank shaped like a crescent moon, there were many more whales stranded in a row than before.

Most of them were small dolphins, but occasionally there were large humpback whales and young sperm whales mixed in.

Skins dried out and tattered from exposure to the sun. Deep scars from the scraping of waves and rocks.

The various marks carved into the black hide made us guess at how horrific and desperate the series of processes the whales had to go through before they died were.

"It seems like quite some time has passed since that happened. There are no living whales left."

Logan shook his head with a serious expression.

Then, suddenly, he noticed Mitra looking at the beach with a very serious face. At that moment, a strange intuition flashed through the Sword Master's mind.

"Mitra? Do you have any idea?"

"... I'm not entirely sure, but I think so."

Draconian hesitated for a moment and then answered truthfully. Even if he hid something, Prince Logan would find out everything anyway.

"Then tell me. What is all this about?"

"hmm....."

Then Mithra glanced at General Lysander and whispered to Logan in a low voice so that he could not hear.

"Actually, somewhere among these volcanic islands, there exists an Ionian relic from the era of the Three Elder Dragons. My guess is that it may be an influence of that... .."

Ionia.

Logan had heard vaguely about his destroyed home world during his recent interrogation of Mitra.

The fact that the great legacies of civilization that came from that world were spread across the continent under the pretext of 'magic items'.

"Relics? What purpose could they serve to have such an effect on whales?"

"It's just my guess, but it's probably something that interferes with the minds of living things within a certain radius, causing them to lose their senses and wander."

Mitra briefly explained to Logan what he knew.

At one time, the Ionian races used the Delcross dimension, inhabited by inferior humans, as their prison. A prime example of this is the Northern Magical Realm, which is used as a prison for lycanthropes.

And the area around the Krabat Archipelago was said to have been used as a prison by the Manta Tribe, a superior marine race.

"But banishing them from Ionia was not the end. We could not let dangerous elements run free in this world. What if they entered the continent and harmed the poor, poor humans?"

So, except for the lycanthrope prisons where natural hallucinogens grow naturally, the Ionian races usually installed some kind of 'device' in their prisons.

It was a vicious device that delved into the minds of living things, tempting them while at the same time constantly disrupting their ability to think normally.

So that the prisoners never leave a certain area, and so that they cannot gather together and plot anything.

"But now the guards who manage the prison no longer exist."

Squeak...

As if he understood Mithra's explanation, the wolf-dog pricked up its ears and listened to his voice. Mithra glanced at the strange wolf-dog and continued speaking.

"And the Ionian engineers who knew about the device are no longer around, so it wouldn't be surprising if those delicate artifacts malfunctioned somewhat, affecting not only the Mantas but also the creatures of Delcross."

"..."

Logan looked serious and thoughtful.

Somewhere in the Krabat Archipelago lies a magical artifact that can cloud the minds of creatures. If that is true, doesn't that mean the artifact can have the same effect on the crew of the fleet?

"...I guess I have to find it and destroy it."

Logan decided that he had to disembark and find the artifact, even if it meant going alone.

"I'll go and take a look. Mithra, do you happen to know the exact location of the relic?"

"I don't know. But if you have the key, it's not that hard to find your way around by looking at the map. All of Ionia's major facilities are registered on the key."

"A map?"

"Yes. If it's okay with you, could you give me back the 'key' for just a moment?"

But as soon as those words fell out-

Grrrrrr...

The wolf dog that had been quiet until just a moment ago suddenly started showing its teeth and growling. I couldn't even guess why.

Finally, Logan looked closely at the wolf-dog's appearance and answered.

"That might be a bit difficult. Or how about this? If you just tell me how, I will personally verify that it is the key."

"It's impossible. The Delcross dimension is essentially a realm with its own laws. So, unless you are the rightful owner of the key, you cannot easily access the functions of the realm provided by the key."

"Then what should I do to become the owner of the key?"

As Logan took the silver disc out of his bosom, Mitra shook her head with a determined expression.

"It's impossible for you. You must formally receive the position of the race representative from the owner of the key."

"Then, if you could temporarily hand over that representative position to me... .."

"That's not right."

Mithra's attitude was more stubborn than ever.

"I am a member of the council of six who protect the world, and the last leader representing one race. There are certain lines that I absolutely cannot compromise on."

"... .."

"If you force me to hand over the keys, I will fight to the end. If you still want to take the keys away, then kill me here and now."

But that was then.

Squeak... ..

Suddenly, a wolfdog bites Logan's uniform hem and gently pulls him towards it.

"What's wrong? What's going on, Lee Seong-jin?"

Logan obediently bowed down to the force, and the wolfdog gently placed its snout over the disc in his hand.

OK-

sparkle!

Suddenly, the disk started flashing a faint light. I wasn't sure, but it was clear that some of the key's functions were being activated without permission.

"what?"

Mithra jumped back in shock.

"Wait! That...! What is that dog? How on earth did it get the keys without permission... ..!"

"... Well, well. It's hard to explain, but he's a guy with quite a few talents."

After responding like that, Logan looked down at the wolfdog, who was concentrating intently on something, with concern.

It was only a fleeting moment, but I thought I saw a faint red light in the wolfdog's pupils.

* * *

"There's a map... there's a map... ... ' "

Sungjin was extremely focused. It was much more difficult than he had expected to exercise his spiritual eyes through his distant relatives.

Fortunately, the effort is not in vain, and soon numerous text windows appear before your eyes.

Unlike the lycanthrope key that was formally handed over to me by my elders, the menus on this key were extremely blurry.

Fortunately, it wasn't to the point where it was impossible to identify, and Sungjin was able to confirm that the menus were the same as the previous key.

[Preferences =

[vote:

1. 6-person meeting
2. Temporary agenda meeting
3. Workshop Executive Meeting (unspecified)... ... ☐

☐ Race (not specified):

1. Overall notification
2. Designated Notification

3. Full control

4. Object Control

5. Group designation... ... ☐

As the feature is not locked, some fairly complex and detailed sub-lists emerge.

Even looking at the sub-lists of 'Object Control', it was nothing special.

[Stolen consciousness], [Inducing paralysis], [Designating prohibitions], [Designating actions], etc... Aren't there a ton of items pouring out that seem to be giving up on personal rights?

'Well, considering Berseus used to treat lycanthropes like his own people, isn't that so strange?'

It seems that the representative of this race has much greater influence over his own race than expected.

Of course, these functions are now useless to Mithra. You called yourself the last Draconian, right?

Seongjin lowered his gaze and scanned the menus, which were so detailed that they were almost messy.

Unlike the key he had received, there were also many properly activated portal menus here.

☐Portal☐

☐-Temporary residence☐

☐-Temporary Blacksmith☐

☐-Temporary warehouse☐

☐-Parvat Elder☐

☐-6 person conference conference☐

□-Zodiac Gate□

□-Asein Workshop Street□

□-Cyprus Port□

⋮

□-House: Specific Impossible□

□-Blacksmith: Specific Unavailable□

□-Temple: Specific Unavailable□

⋮

□-Lakeside: Specific Unknown□

□Creating a new portal□

⋮

A few portals down, I see a huge number of 'unspecified' items. I'm guessing they are now-defunct Ionian locations.

and-

'Parvat... sir?'

When you say old man, are you perhaps referring to the owner of the niche you visited with your father?

Seongjin stared at the name he remembered hearing somewhere for a moment, then quickly started scrolling down the menu again. And finally, the menus he was looking for appeared before his eyes.

[map =

□Plane coordinate system: Specific unavailable□

□Plane coordinate system (Delcross):

1. Location-based surrounding information

2. Continental Evangelism

3. The main zodiac... ... ☐

☐Spherical coordinate system: Specific unavailable☐

☐Spherical coordinate system (Delcross):

1. Galactic coordinate system

2. Horizon coordinate system

3. ☐

☐Creating a new coordinate system☐

:

'... Planar coordinate system, location-based surrounding information. This looks useful.'

As I selected the menu, a small map suddenly appeared before my eyes.

Image of Peridereo Island with a simplified coastline and contour lines, and a single red dot shining at the southern tip of the island.

I looked up at the sky just in case, and saw a red streak of light rising clearly in the far southern sky.

An effect similar to augmented reality or a game screen. The location shown on the map was correct.

'Probably somewhere over the cliff over there...'

Seongjin, who took some time to get a rough map in his head, pushed the silver disc towards Logan again.

"Lee Seong-jin? Did you find out something here?"

Boom!

To Logan's question, Sungjin answered vigorously and wagged his

tail.

* * *

Meanwhile, on the cliffs south of Peridereo.

There was a man hiding behind a rock, sweating profusely. It was Romain, who had just been comfortably handling the relics.

He rarely concealed his embarrassment and clutched the hem of his robe tightly.

"What is this? Why is the Cypriot Navy suddenly flocking to this island?"

495. Stranding (5)

Dozens of sailing ships approach, circling the coast of Peridero Island.

The emblem on the trireme is the red weather vane, the symbol of the Federation of Cyprus Cities. And fluttering next to it is the proud emblem of the Holy Empire.

It was true. They were a punitive force comprised of the Cypriot Navy and the Knights of the Holy Empire. As soon as he realized this fact, Romain immediately had this question in mind.

'Why on earth did they come here?'

Of course, it's not that I didn't consider the possibility that the punitive force would invade the Krabat Islands. But I didn't think they would force a second departure so quickly.

Given that Helios had to shoulder a significant portion of the financial burden, Elder Chryses would not have backed down so easily, would he?

'Besides, if you really came to subdue the sea monsters, why didn't you set up a base on Cosmima Island like you always do? Why did you risk getting caught on the reefs and force your way all the way here?'

Meanwhile, the fleet finally reaches the appropriate depth and anchors its ships. Soon, a small boat is seen lowering from the flagship.

I don't know why, but they really want to come to this Peridero Island!

'What should I do? They probably don't know about the relic, but if they come this way... ... '

Romain looked back at the artifact he had just been working on with a puzzled expression.

An Ionian relic. It was a metal pillar about waist-high, its surface covered with tiny patterns that were impossible to discern with the naked eye.

At first glance, it looked like just an elaborate piece of craftsmanship. However, within those beautiful and dynamic patterns, a tremendous secret that humans could not even dare to imagine was hidden.

This was the essence of the brilliant science of old Ionia, a kind of worker's console left behind by a great civilization that was at least centuries ahead of Delcross.

'I thought I was finally getting the hang of it... ... '

As I ran my hand over the gently vibrating surface of the pillar, memories of the hardships I had endured so far naturally crossed my mind.

Controlling this console was more difficult than expected, as the artifact had not been maintained for a long time and was already malfunctioning frequently. During his voyage here, Romain had also seen dead whales scattered all over the archipelago.

There were quite a few moments that were dizzying. I accidentally pulled in a pod of whales that were passing by, and once I got caught up in it myself and almost lost consciousness.

One time, the environment around the island was suddenly disturbed. The water temperature temporarily rose, causing a sudden low pressure, and as a result, a typhoon suddenly struck the coast of Cyprus. Of course, even Romain had no idea about that.

Anyway, after going through a lot of trial and error, I was finally able to get the console to work stably...

'Should I avoid the seat? But I can't give up now, the time and effort

I've already put in is too much of a waste.'

Roman's worries deepened.

But when the time came to make a choice, someone's image appeared in his mind as if it were a lie. It was a face from a memory he had tried to erase for a long time.

-By the time you become convinced that something is truly dangerous, it is usually already too late.

One day, a senior who had cut off headquarters' communication without permission said something like that to Romain.

He quickly prepared his gear and then wiped away the traces of the campfire with his feet. Romain followed him and asked, packing his gear hesitantly.

-... Then what should I do?

-What should I do? I have to run away quickly and get out of here.

-What are the orders from headquarters?

- It's just a measure taken based on on-site judgment. Want to bet? Those gentlemen will probably be very grateful if we just come back alive.

Even though the situation was extremely urgent, he had a mischievous smile on his face. I had no idea where he got such composure.

-Do you understand? It seems like you lack the ability to sense danger, so if something feels off, develop the habit of running away quickly.

Ah, yes. Thinking about it now, I guess I was just a tasteless person who lived in a world where everyone was full of their own tastes.

But honestly, I don't think there was anything wrong with what that senior said. As a result, they were the only reconnaissance team to survive that day.

'Let's run away for now. It won't be too late to come back and bother them later after they leave.'

Once he had made up his mind, he acted quickly. After quickly hiding the relic under a rock, Romain slid down the cliff with his legs shaking from nervousness.

'At least we had to secure some food on this island! If we were to return to Cyprus like this, more than half of the sailors we brought with us would probably die.'

Well, does it matter? I was planning on killing everyone and destroying the evidence once we got to the port of Cyprus anyway.

It was just as Romaine reached the bottom of the cliff that he had that thought.

Bam.

Suddenly, a squishy lump steps on me, interrupting my train of thought.

I looked down in surprise and saw something that looked like a rolled up black sack.

'This is... ..'

Manta? Judging by its size, it's probably a younger one. Perhaps it was unlucky enough to get caught up in a test piloting the console.

""

I briefly considered taking this. If I couldn't get my hands on the Manta this time, I thought I should at least show Prince Leonard a sample.

But looking at his breath that was so rapid it seemed like it would stop and his skin that was completely cracked, I thought he wouldn't live long.

After making his decision, Roman passed the Mantas without a care and walked towards the fishing boat anchored below the cliff.

* * *

The Manta tribe that Amelia remembered was a very strange race. With their large eyes and small facial features, they looked similar to humans.

But despite their wide nasal passages, they breathed mainly through water rather than air.

They also had a separate black, long fin on their backs. On land, it looked like they were wearing a cloak, but underwater, it was said to spread out like large wings. I heard that they could use those fins to swim faster and more gracefully than any other sea creature in the world.

'Romain... When and how did he get his hands on those strange aliens?'

As Amelia was deep in thought, someone knocked lightly on the open study door and came in. It was William, the Earl of Bathurst.

"Your Majesty. This is a summary of the deliberation process."

"Oh my... Did you bring that yourself? You could have just asked the administrator to do it."

"There is a strange trend that wasn't recorded in the minutes, so I'd like to report that as well."

William Bathurst was currently working with Amelia to reorganize the commercial laws of the Empire.

Despite its long history, imperial law was very weak in many ways. Much of the judicial process depended on statutory and customary law, and officials rarely touched the law books.

Because of this, many merchants have been exploiting loopholes in the law to gain unfair advantages. Amelia and William Bathurst have been working to improve the law among these merchants, especially those that travel between Rohan and Brittany.

"I see. Could you please wait a moment? Let's quickly review the

minutes and have a leisurely discussion."

The Earl of Bathurst obediently took his seat on the sofa in his study, for he knew from experience that the Princess would not keep him waiting very long.

Click.

As the servant quickly brought out the tea, William took a sip of his high-quality Melbourne and leisurely looked around the princess's office. Then, absentmindedly, his eyes fell on a bundle of papers on the table, and his eyes widened when he saw what was written on it.

"...Laws related to different races?"

It looked like a doodle the princess had scribbled down while taking a break. But the content was nothing special.

Inter-ethnic cultural exchange regulation law, inter-ethnic commercial exchange regulation law, inter-ethnic rights protection law, establishment of specialized organizations related to inter-ethnicities... ..

In case an unknown race not mentioned in the scriptures is encountered, various devices are put in place to provide a kind of social buffering effect so that society can adapt to new environments while maintaining stability...

"...ah."

Amelia noticed William's gaze, raised her head, and smiled slightly.

"What do you think? It's quite interesting, isn't it?"

"Your Majesty, what the heck are these... ..!"

"Don't worry about it too much, Count. I was just making some assumptions for fun. If I had a decent draft, I think I could apply a similar method to the Barshins or the minor tribes in the outback."

"....."

William Bathurst looked at the princess's green smile with suspicious eyes. It had not been long since he had served her, but from what he had learned so far, she was not the type to waste time on trivial matters.

Whether she knew his complicated mind or not, Princess Amelia buried her head in the papers again and added.

"Who knows? One day, a race of aliens from fantasy literature might suddenly appear before our eyes. No one knows what the future holds."

* * *

But, surprisingly, the meeting happened sooner than Amelia expected.

Logan and his party, who had headed straight for the southern cliffs following the wolfdog's lead, discovered a suspicious creature on the shore covered with black rocks.

".....!"

Before he could even figure out what it was, Logan rushed forward, releasing his divine power in a panic. The creature's aura seemed to be on the verge of breaking at any moment.

Crunch!

Logan grabbed the mass that was being tossed around by the waves and urgently poured his divine power into it.

Squeak...

Meanwhile, Seongjin was looking out at the distant southern sea with a somewhat uneasy feeling. The emerald sea with small islands and reefs clustered together.

'I just had a feeling that someone, something very important, was here...'

What on earth was that?

I lifted my snout high and sniffed the wind, but there was nothing I could guess. All I could smell was the faint scent of people moving away from the distant southern sea.

'It's not that far. Should I chase after it now?'

I don't think it's impossible.

But Seongjin couldn't move from that spot, because a strong premonition was somehow holding his feet.

It's not the time yet. If we move rashly now, we'll ruin everything... That's the kind of strange feeling I have.

"...Your breathing has calmed down a bit. But your aura is still unstable."

At that moment, Logan let out a soft sigh of relief. Only then did he have some time to look closely at the creature he was holding.

'It's not human. But there's something human about it... ..'

The creature's entire front was covered in pale gray-white skin, and at first glance, it looked like a bloodless human. Not only did it have human-like facial features, but it also had intact limbs with hands and feet.

On the other hand, thick fins covered with a black membrane hang from the head and back, reminiscent of the fins of whales or rays.

"ah.....!"

As I thought about it that way, the next step instinctively came to mind.

'I think the problem is that my skin is very dry.'

As expected, Mitra, who arrived at the cliff a step late, gave a lecture.

"It would be best to immerse him in deep sea water as soon as possible. He may not be unable to breathe air, but it is not good to leave him with his gills dried out."

"Mitra."

Logan took his advice, picked up the little creature and asked,

"Do you know what this creature is?"

Then, the Draconian, who had been silent for a moment, nodded.

"That's right. They are a foreign race that uses this area as a prison, the Manta Tribe."

496. Manta Tribe (1)

'Manta tribe... ..'

Logan felt an uneasy ripple in Mithra's explanation, a subtle ripple that people often emit when they want to hide something.

But he put aside his doubts for the time being and began to cautiously walk towards the water, holding the small creature in his arms. Even though he had poured so much divine power into it, its breathing was still faint.

The coastline that borders the cliffs is extremely steep. Thanks to this, the water comes up to my waist in just a few steps.

Logan decided that the water was deep enough and lifted the manta ray into the water, taking great care to ensure that its gills were fully submerged.

Pogle... Pogle... ..

One by one, small air bubbles leak out from the manta's nasal passages. This must mean that water is filling up its dry lungs again.

The aura that had been stagnant and fading finally begins to circulate. Even the skin that had been completely dried up begins to gradually take on a watery sheen.

With that urgent matter taken care of, Logan's mind began to wander back to the many issues he had been putting off.

'... It was a good thing I said I would go and check it out on my own. If I had brought the Cypriot Navy here, it would have been a real headache.'

It wasn't just the fact that an alien race not mentioned in the scriptures existed in the world. Logan sensed from the somewhat anxious expression on Mitra's face that there was a more fundamental problem with the existence of the Manta Tribe.

Above all, this magic. A faint magic energy was felt from the aura of the Manta Tribe, which was becoming more and more active as it regained life.

"... Mithra."

Logan opened his mouth to Mitra, who had been fidgeting and twitching her snout since a while ago.

"Do you have something to say? If so, please tell me before it's too late."

"... .."

Then Mitra stared at Logan with wavering eyes.

"Actually... you know. The Manta Tribe has a very unique characteristic that sets them apart from other races."

"Are you saying they are in league with the devil?"

"What?!"

The Draconian was startled and quickly shook his head.

"No! Absolutely not!"

"Don't even think about hiding it, Mitra. I can definitely sense the magic coming from this Manta Tribe."

"Ugh... Yeah, that would be a problem. But I swear it's absolutely not like that. It's just a little bit of magic mixed in with the aura, and in Ionia, it's considered just one of the characteristics of a certain race."

It is said that the Ionian races first acquired their primordial racial essence about tens of thousands of years ago. It was from that time that the birth of a new race was recognized, and the Magi were

ultimately nothing more than the characteristics of the primordial creatures that formed the basis of that birth.

A good example of this is the lycanthrope race. They too are a race that exudes a weak magical energy from birth, regardless of whether the individual is good or evil.

"Of course, this concept may be completely foreign to the Delcross people. But the Mantas are not the clan associated with the 'demons' you speak of."

"You are directly denying the doctrine of the Lord. Are you saying that this magic is not evidence of evil?"

"Oh, don't bring up your troublesome doctrines! Of course, I don't deny that there are extremely evil people among the Manta tribe. But that is just the nature of some people, just like any other social group. It is not a uniform characteristic of the entire race!"

"...Is that so?"

Contrary to Mitra's expectations, Logan nodded in agreement. It was a remarkably plain attitude considering that he was praised as the most ideal paladin on the continent.

So Mitra didn't notice at all that Logan had briefly glimpsed the wolf-dog.

"Well, more than that... .."

But it seems that Mithra's business was not limited to that.

"What else is there?"

"hmm....."

Mitra, who had been rolling her eyes impatiently despite Logan's urging, soon bent down to the water's edge and began to writhe.

"But... but... there's something you should know first. Among the races of Ionia, there are some who possess very unique characteristics."

"Speciality? Is there anything greater than magic?"

"Ahem. Perhaps... that's true. So listen to what I have to say. I am saying this because I am very worried that someone like you, who holds an important position among humans, might have a great misunderstanding about the Manta Tribe."

"misunderstanding?"

Logan looked at Mitra with a serious face. Seeing him hesitate and not get to the main point, he began to think that this might be a more difficult problem than he had imagined.

"As I said before, there are races in Ionia that occasionally have unique characteristics. While there are races like us Draconians that were born as complete heterosexuals from the beginning, there are also those that are not like that at all."

After forming their race, these beings acquired new traits of intelligent life forms. A representative example of this was the lycanthrope, who could freely move between human and beast forms.

"Therefore, such people have two appearances depending on the situation. However, the original appearance of the Manta Tribe is a bit misleading to humans-"

But before Mithra could finish speaking, a dramatic change suddenly occurred in the Manta Tribe that was submerged in the water. Its body began to expand rapidly sideways, as if it was being inflated by water.

Swish-!

The skin that covered its back like a cloak spreads out widely on the water. I thought it was just a limp, hanging membrane, but when it was fully formed, it was a large fin supported by cartilage.

"... ..!"

The facial features that were initially thought to be similar to a human's are quickly lost in the swelling nape of the neck. On the face that has suddenly become flat, only a large nostril and a small mouth

remain as traces.

And that's not all. The arms and legs are hidden in the fins that spread out like a kite, and a long, straight tail sticks out from under the remaining body.

Swish, thud!

And so, what finally appeared beneath the rolling waves was a giant stingray.

The only things that remain of its previous appearance are its unusually large nostrils and the gills symmetrically arranged between the sternum.

And Logan couldn't help but recognize the sight.

"Ocean... Demon... ...?"

That's right. The form that the Manta Tribe had transformed into was unmistakably that of a sea monster.

A thick-skinned monster that cannot be easily wounded without firepower or aura. An old enemy of the sea that destroys ships and drowns fishermen.

"... So what I meant was, if you're not careful, you might mistake the Manta Tribe for a sea monster."

Mitra added belatedly, in a tone of uncertainty, but his words fell on deaf ears.

"The Manta Tribe...were marine demons?"

He became very confused.

Wait a minute, are you saying that the beings we've been thinking of as demons and subjugating up until now were actually another intelligent being? A race from another world?

No, but if that's true, then why have the demons treated humans so badly up until now... !

Twinkle.

Just then, the young Manta came to his senses and opened his eyes. The round eyes looking up at Logan were clearly those of an intelligent being, not a beast that had lost its reason.

"... ..!"

Thud! Thud!

The startled manta writhed and splashed the water with its fins. When Logan let it go, it quickly swam away, seemingly out to sea.

"... .."

But the creature stopped dead in its tracks after only a few meters, then slowly popped its head out of the water to look at Logan.

Twinkle twinkle.

The wet guy's eyes glow with a keen light. Surprise, curiosity, and a faint sense of doubt and gratitude rush toward Logan in familiar waves.

To his surprise, it was the same type of wave he felt from other people.

"you....."

As Logan opened his mouth, the manta lifted its head out of the water as if listening to his words. Then, on its completely flat face, the traces of the facial features we had seen at first appeared faintly.

"At least you're not the kind of devil I used to know."

Then, as if responding to those words, the young Manta opened his mouth towards Logan.

"Beep beep-"

"... ..?"

Logan was confused. It felt like something was talking to him, but he

couldn't understand it at all.

On the other hand, when Logan seemed to be focusing his attention on him, Manta started making loud noises at him even more vigorously.

"Squeak! Kkirik. Beep-"

"Um... sorry, sorry. I can't understand what you're saying... .."

"Bam! Bam!"

Meanwhile, Sungjin, who had been watching them with some boredom, was bewildered for a slightly different reason. Surprisingly, he was able to understand all of Manta's words. That high-pitched howling sound was really their language.

Roughly speaking, what the guy said was as follows.

-Did you help me? If so, I appreciate it, but I don't have time to leisurely say thank you.

-I'm telling you this for your own good, this place is dangerous! Run away!

-It's almost time for the prison's defense system to sound the alarm! We have to hurry!

Even though Manta cried out so desperately, Logan only received desperate messages from him and became increasingly confused.

Seongjin yawned loudly and thought.

'Well, I guess there's no other way since they're such annoying guys. I guess I'll have to interpret for them.'

Boom!

So, Sungjin confidently called Logan and then lifted his front paws powerfully toward him.

Then, soon, he flinched and stopped moving, realizing too late that

the entire coast was covered in hard basalt.

'Wait a minute, but where on earth should I write this?'

It was a truly difficult situation.

* * *

Fortunately, it seems that there was someone who saw through this whole situation.

"Oh my god!"

Not long after that, a dark exorcist came running towards them from afar.

"Sir Sharon? What brings you here to stand by the fleet?"

Then Sir Sharon smiled at Logan with an embarrassed expression.

"Hehehe. Please, Your Majesty. But I have permission to disembark from General Lysander."

Woof woof!

Seongjin greeted her with a bark, because this solved all the problems.

'I heard that all creatures in Ionia have salt crystals!'

So, Sir Sharon could have interpreted the two of them well through her thoughts. After all, she was our father!

"iced coffee....."

Sir Sharon, who had been listening to the manta's cries for a while, soon nodded and explained.

"So this child is warning us to get out of here, Your Majesty."

"Running away from what?"

Beep-! KiriKiriRik!

"Yeah, yeah. What? Oh... defense system? Defense system? Yeah, down. We have to run away from the threat that that thing is giving off. Especially in the past few days, a lot of whales have been caught up in it."

Kyaak yak! Peep!

"It always happens at similar times, so it will happen soon."

"Whales got involved? Could this be the relic Mithra spoke of...?"

Logan tried his best to detect danger around the cliff, but to the Sword Master's dismay, he could not find anything unusual nearby.

"... .."

On the other hand, in Sungjin's case, the clear signs of abnormality could be detected right away, because a strange text window suddenly popped up before his eyes.

'Oh, what is this all of a sudden... ..'

A text window from the sphere world. Perhaps it emerged from an Ionian relic hidden nearby.

☐Resonance of Restraint: Regular Broadcast Countdown Notification☐

☐Intensity 8☐

☐This resonance broadcast is a measure in accordance with Emergency Protocol 05. If you wish to stop operation, please press the "Turn Off" button below.☐

☐Unlock☐

And soon everyone realized what was happening. After a few seconds of text appearing, a loud siren suddenly started blaring from the bottom of the cliff.

Beep beep beep beep beep!

"This is... ..!"

Although it was a high-frequency sound that was beyond the audible range of humans, everyone present could hear it without difficulty.

A sword master with senses far beyond the limits of human perception, two outcasts, and half a Khorne.

Of course, it goes without saying that Sungjin was borrowing the wolfdog's hearing.

Kirik! Beep! Beep!

The manta ray, greatly embarrassed, flapped its fins desperately.

"Ah, my lord. This is the alarm! It's telling me to hurry up!"

Beep! Beep! Crack! Crack!

"Um... Engineer? Technician? Well, they say that since there is no such person, no one can do anything about it anymore. They say that there is no way for them to stop it."

Meanwhile, in front of Seongjin's eyes, the text window was steadily displaying a message.

□The countdown will begin soon.□

□10□

□9□

□8□

⋮

As the countdown begins, the sound of the siren also grows louder.

The Manta tribe's actions became more and more urgent. There was a deep despair in their round eyes, and it was surprising that they were so scared and yet managed not to run away on their own.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

- Hurry up! There's no time left! If you don't hurry, we'll all be

captivated!

"There is no time, Your Majesty!"

⋮

□4□

□3□

□2□

⋮

Squeak! Squeak!

-Ah, I guess it's over now! Cover your ears! Everyone, be careful!

"Cover your ears!"

Sir Sharon gave a final warning through the blaring sirens. Then she closed her eyes and covered her ears.

Gulp-

The manta rays also began to dive quickly under the water.

⋮

□1□

□0□

⋮

Stop.

But nothing happened. As if by magic, the siren stopped, and suddenly the son-in-law was enveloped in a heavy silence.

"....."

While everyone was confused, only Seongjin calmly licked his front

paw and thought.

What, it's easy?

I pressed 'Unlock' as it told me to, but is this really the end?

497. Manta Tribe (2)

"...Is it over?"

Mitra carefully removed the hand that had been covering his ear. Draconian hearing was extremely sensitive to noise, and he still felt the hallucination of a shrill siren blaring in his ears.

The young manta floated back up to the surface and looked around, as if it couldn't believe that the resonance broadcast had ended without any incident.

"What on earth happened... .."

Then, by chance, Mithra's gaze fell on the wolf-dog that had been maintaining a dignified posture since a while ago.

'Wait a minute... No way?'

Am I being overly speculative if I think that dog just did something again? No, but that attitude of his is so carefree all by himself... ..

He couldn't help but ask.

"It may be a bit of a new question to ask now, but what on earth is that dog? It used the race key without permission, and now it seems to be freely manipulating Ionian relics as well."

Then Logan answered calmly.

"This guy is a member of the Seonghwang family and is a great divine being who is also mentioned in the scriptures."

"God... water? What is that?"

"Well, for now, I can only describe him as an unusual dog. From now on, treat him like a human being, Mitra."

".....?"

Although it was a rather bland ending, the commotion just now did not end without any results. When the emergency protocol was unexpectedly terminated, the system in charge of it revealed the operator console on its own to receive further instructions.

Wheeing... ..

With a small mechanical sound, a pillar emitting a strange light slowly pops out from between the black columnar joints. It was a discovery so absurd that it made Romain's efforts to hide it pale in comparison.

"This is... .."

Logan approached the pillar cautiously.

It was a pillar made of dark metal. Its surface was densely covered with intricate patterns, and it reflected a strange light like waves under the sun.

Even to Logan, who knew little about craftsmanship, the sophistication of the item far surpassed Delcross's skills.

"Mitra, is this the otherworldly relic you spoke of?"

In response to Logan's question, Mitra looked at the pillar carefully and nodded.

"I think so. If you give me back [the key], I might be able to figure it out more clearly... .."

"....."

"... No, I'm sorry. Forget it."

Logan slowly brought his hand to Arjuna's handle.

In the end, nothing happened, but the sense of crisis and desperation that I had just felt on my skin was definitely not something to be ignored. For the safety of the fleet, and to avoid any future troubles, it would be right to destroy that relic right now.

Boom!

But Logan couldn't draw his sword right away, because the wolf-dog was barking softly and moving towards him as if to block his path.

"Lee Seong-jin? What's wrong?"

Ouch! Creak... ..

"Don't? Are you trying to tell me not to touch this?"

Boom!

As Logan easily figured out his intentions, Sungjin answered vigorously and wagged his tail loudly.

'Yeah. You shouldn't break it. I have a feeling that this is a very important item.'

Besides, maybe it was because of his mood. Seongjin had been having a bad feeling since a while ago.

An uneasy feeling that this isn't the end, that there's still something left...

And unfortunately, it wasn't a coincidence.

'.....!'

Sungjin soon sensed something very strange. Something was approaching from the distant sea. At an unbelievable speed and with an incredibly ominous momentum.

Sungjin raised his head and met Logan's gaze. Although they didn't express it, the brothers immediately realized that they had sensed the same movement at the same time.

"Sir Sharon, Mitra!"

Logan sat up and shouted urgently.

"Please protect that young outcast! For a moment, it might be better to take him to land!"

"Huh? Your Majesty, why all of a sudden... .."

Before Sir Sharon could even ask anything, Logan and his wolf-dog were already flying towards the shore where the fleet was anchored.

* * *

"...hmm?"

The first to notice the change was a certain navigator. He stood on the starboard side of the ship, tilting his head as he looked around at the fleet floating calmly on the calm waves.

"What just happened?"

Did you feel a sudden wave as if the deck was floating?

Phew-!

At that moment, a strange vibration was felt underfoot again. At this point, the other sailors also felt it one by one, and together with the navigator, they turned their gaze to the distant southern sea.

".....?"

And soon they saw a series of unusual waves crashing toward the fleet, waves that were not like the waves that were rolling in on the shore, but strange waves that were rolling in from the south in a perfect vertical grid.

Was it an illusion? For a moment, the color of the southern sea seemed to have darkened significantly.

Crunch!

Just then, a grid-like wave crashed into the fleet, unusually high

waves pounding the bows of the ships without mercy.

"Ugh!"

"what's this!"

The ship rocks violently as if it might sink at any moment.

The sailors were struggling to hang on the deck, soaked by the waves. Some were hurriedly pulling the rope and wrapping it around their waists. If they made a mistake, they could have fallen straight into the sea.

".....!"

And by that time, the sailors were finally able to witness the cause of the strange phenomenon for themselves: the movement of a black fin that created strong waves in succession.

Chomp!

The water splits long and a fin so large that it is hard to believe even when seen with the eyes sticks out. No, its dull surface, covered with small sea anemones and barnacles, gave the illusion that it was not a part of a living thing, but rather the ground deep under the sea was alive and moving.

And the results of that simple movement were enormous. Waves several meters high crashed in at once, causing the entire fleet to sway up and down as if it had been hit by a typhoon.

"Sea, ocean demon?"

"Oh my God! How can such a large evil exist in the world?"

Even just a small part of the fin that was revealed at first glance was already comparable in size to the largest ships. The faces of the sailors looking at it gradually turned pale.

Ding ding ding ding!

Bells ring out madly here and there throughout the fleet.

"Emergency! Emergency! A giant sea demon has appeared!"

"If we continue like this, the ship will sink! Raise the anchor!"

"Spread out! Get the ships as far away as possible... ...!"

Boom!

Just then, a demon charged straight towards the island and hit the cliff with its fin with all its might.

Thud, splash! Splash!

The hexagonal stone pillars that formed the columnar joints broke and fell into the sea without any strength, and the impact shook the entire island as if an earthquake had occurred.

And at the same time, people could hear the ear-piercing roar of the sea monster.

Piriaaa#2oa𠮟Brya%o2we𠮟ララック!

A high frequency sound that vibrated so violently that it seemed as if it were scraping the entire auditory nerve. The tremendous power of the sound was enough to send tingles through even the most well-trained knights' entire bodies.

But there was no time to be surprised. The demon, who had turned around with difficulty from the cliff, began to charge straight towards the fleet this time.

"Ouch! It's coming this way! Get out of the way!"

"Knights! Sword barrier! Quickly spread the sword barrier in front!"

"Damn it! Stop him!"

The knights hurriedly spread out their small swords, and the navigator hurriedly grabbed the wheel, but it was all a futile effort. The sea monster that approached, cutting through the high waves, was so terrifying that it seemed as if a large island was being attacked in its entirety.

The moment it collided with that thing, the fate of this small whaling ship was obvious. The sailors instinctively shut their eyes tightly as they offered their last prayers to the Lord.

But just then, a loud prayer was heard above their heads.

"Lord, protect your children!"

Followed by-

Boom!

The ship shook wildly with a violent impact.

".....?"

But it wasn't the shock they had initially imagined, that of the ship completely collapsing. The sailors slowly raised their eyelids and were shocked at the unexpected sight before their eyes.

When they arrived, Prince Logan stood there, holding up a brightly glowing hemisphere with both arms.

He alone created a huge sacred barrier that could easily protect two small boats. It was a sight that was nothing short of miraculous.

"Ah, my lord... ..!"

As the captain unconsciously made the sign of the cross, the prince turned around and gave a fierce order.

"It's not over yet! Come to your senses! Captain! Knights!"

Prince Logan, who had just completed the sacred barrier, quickly gave them instructions.

"It only collided with the barrier for a moment and sank into the sea, but it will return soon. So gather all the personnel you can, whether it be Aura or divine power, and deploy a shield around the ship."

Then the sailors, realizing that the savior was about to leave for another place, desperately held on to him.

"Ha, but low!"

"We're going too far! If we leave the ship like this, the next time we encounter that demon, our ship will definitely sink!"

"I'm not saying you should confront it head on."

Those who were only concerned with their own safety might have seemed like a sly sight, but Prince Logan did not bother to scold them.

"Because it's a small and light boat, it'll be able to ride the waves and avoid them rather easily. Before that sea monster attacks, there's always a big wave that comes first."

Logan, who had gently comforted the sailors, immediately turned around and headed to the other end of the fleet.

As it turned out, Logan's judgment was correct. The demon that had dived deep and cut across the entire fleet appeared this time in the far northern seas.

And anchored at the northernmost point was the fleet's flagship, the Wings of Glory.

"Your Majesty?! What the heck is this... ..!"

General Lysander suddenly sees Logan running onto the deck and lets out a gasp of delight. However, Logan doesn't have time to respond.

"Lord, protect your children!"

Kwaaang!

Logan, who arrived at the flagship almost at the same time as the demon, once again deployed a sacred barrier to block the demon's charge.

Choaack!

The waves that came in late with a great impact lose their strength as they hit the translucent membrane.

Knock knock...

As the ocean demon sank beneath the sea again, Logan finally managed to break the barrier and gasped for breath.

"Lilium!"

"I, my lowly self!"

"lowering!"

The knights of Lilium, who had been stunned by the sudden disaster, woke up with a start at the prince's voice.

As they were the spiritual pillars that they had truly believed in and followed for a long time, the knights instinctively moved their bodies and rushed to the deck at Logan's call. Logan looked around at the trustworthy figure and gave instructions.

"Otto Sir!"

"Yes... four! Down!"

"I want you to take control of the center of the barrier here. I want you to spread the Type 1 barrier under the ship, and completely surround the bottom of the flagship!"

"Oh, I understand!"

"You don't have to fight back against the demon. Leave the rest to me, and all of you, just focus on making sure the flagship doesn't sink!"

"Yes! I will keep that in mind!"

Logan saw the strong determination in Otto's eyes and pulled Arjuna out from his waistband.

"Sir Eli and Sir Dusang will follow me. Track the movements of the demons and protect the small whaling ships that are not yet well-defended."

"Yes, sir!"

As Logan and his entourage of knights headed for the ship's railing, General Lysander was hanging from the crack of the captain's cabin door, shouting desperately.

"Wait a minute! Your Majesty Logan! The Crimson Dawn! The Crimson Dawn is in danger! She is currently carrying a large quantity of unstable ancient fires!"

".....!"

The Bloody Dawn was an old battleship that was soon to be scrapped. And now, the old ship is in a state similar to a bomb, loaded with highly flammable materials.

If by any chance you happen to collide with a sea monster, it will definitely cause a huge explosion. And the fire that spreads from there will spread uncontrollably, burning the entire fleet.

'Ancient fire... ...!'

Logan looked up and saw an old ship in the distance.

But it wasn't a look of concern at all. As he was running towards the flagship, the wolf dog that had disappeared somewhere was heading in a certain direction.

'Lee Seong-jin!'

As expected, the wolfdog was now sitting proudly on the worn-out bow of the Bloody Dawn.

Beneath his feet, the activated aura ripples like a crimson flame, and his silver-gray eyes calmly stare down at the sea. He can unleash his aura whenever he needs to.

Perhaps those calm eyes are not missing a single moment of the movements of the sea monsters that have sunk deep into the ocean.

'Leave it to me! I already learned how to use the sword from you!'

Logan read a strange confidence in the wolfdog's face, and a smile came to his lips without him knowing it.

'Besides, Lee Seong-jin's aura is a bit special.'

Unlike regular auras, this aura, which had a distinct flame shape, could actually attract other flames and control them as if they were its own aura.

So, even if by any chance that dangerous ancient weapon were to catch fire, Lee Sung-jin would be able to control the fire before it exploded.

Logan felt a little relieved and jumped off the ship with the knights.

* * *

"Ugh!"

Meanwhile, Inquisitor Lumiere, who had come out to check the situation due to the sudden commotion, was startled by the tremendous shaking and grabbed the mast with all his might. The Judgement ship was swept away by the large waves and almost sank.

"this.....!"

Lumiere barely managed to regain her balance and sit up. But then she was left speechless by the sight that unfolded before her eyes.

"Are you alright, Inquisitor Lumiere?"

Before she knew it, a small saintess wearing a simple suit of armor was standing in front of her. Holding a flail in one hand, she was barely able to keep her balance on the rocking deck.

"That speed... ..!"

Lumiere couldn't help but feel inwardly amazed. Perhaps, as soon as the commotion broke out, the saintess had prepared according to the Knights' manual and gone out onto the deck.

An unprecedented situation where a giant demon that we didn't even

know existed is swarming the fleet at will. But a young saint who just joined the Knights Templar is ready and waiting faster than anyone else!

There isn't even a hint of bewilderment in those calm eyes.

"Ah, Saintess! Adjutant Lumiere!"

Then Inquisitor Boris came running in, panting, and sat down next to the little saintess as if it were a given.

"Uh... What is this?"

Soon after, the other Inquisitors also rushed out onto the deck. Then, after glancing around the deck, they naturally approached behind the little saint and began to line up.

The youngest member, who I thought would be a headache for the Knights Templar, has become the team's focal point without me even knowing it.

"All assembled. Please give your orders, Adjutant Lumiere."

Lumiere, who was deeply fixated on those calm gray eyes, gave instructions that she would never have given normally.

"Your Majesty. Could you please create a barrier... a Granius 1-type barrier?"

"Yes, I am well aware of the method."

In the calm girl's voice, Lumiere felt an utmost trust.

"Then, Your Majesty, would you please hold the center of the barrier here? I will take half of the knights and chase after the sea demon."

Then Princess Sisley nodded slightly and immediately unleashed her divine power over a vast area. It was the axis of a powerful divine barrier that dared not be compared to others. And the knights surrounding the girl joined in one by one and added strength to the barrier.

Soon, a powerful barrier that shone brighter than any other barrier began to form around the Judgement Tower.

498. Manta Tribe (3)

The fleet was thrown into great confusion by the appearance of the giant demon.

While some ships, such as the Judgement-Ho and the Wings of Glory, managed to build their own defenses, others panicked and had to disembark from their escape boats.

But such small boats often capsized before they could even reach the shore, unable to withstand the waves.

The biggest problem was that the command structure that controlled the fleet was of no help in this situation. It was no wonder that there was no proper countermeasure that the fleet could take against a demon that had never been imagined to exist before.

Although General Lysander hurriedly raised the blue flag, which meant "spreading," none of the captains were able to properly carry out the order. How could they move the ship when they didn't even have time to properly spread the sails?

In the end, the captains of each ship had no choice but to deploy their defensive shields as much as possible and do their best to keep their ships from sinking.

"Hey! It's Logan!"

In such a desperate situation, there was someone who was running around alone to protect the fleet, and Prince Logan was truly a ray of hope for them.

"Ah, the Lord's knight has finally boarded our ship!"

"We are saved!"

Sir Ellie, who had followed behind, gave a sharp warning to the sailors who were shedding tears of joy.

"Everyone, wake up! Everyone, brace yourself for shock!"

It was as she said. If Prince Logan was here, that meant the sea demons were heading straight for here.

Kwaaaaa-

The sailors, who had been cheering with their arms outstretched, soon found themselves blushing at the sight of the mighty sea monster speeding towards them, cutting through the sea.

"Lord, protect your children!"

Kwaaang!

Once again, the sacred barrier and the demonic beast collide violently. The impact causes the ship to rock wildly and sprays of water spray from all directions.

"Ugh... ..!"

"The ship, the ship didn't sink? How could... ..!"

"How? What? It's the grace of Logan! If you understand, then stop muttering and gather on deck! Are these all the Auror users?"

While the rear guard was checking the condition of the ship, Logan, who had put out the fire in a hurry, lifted the sacred barrier and looked around. Then, he noticed a strange phenomenon occurring on one side of the fleet and his eyes caught something.

"That's... .."

The Judgement Ship was anchored relatively close to the shore. An incredibly powerful sacred barrier started from that ship and spread out to the sides, enveloping the surrounding ships.

Its size was so great that it was enough to protect even those who fell into the sea and swam to land.

'... Sisley!'

Logan sensed a familiar divine power coming from the barrier, and a faint smile formed on his lips without him knowing it.

"Okay, throw all the available buoys into the sea!"

"You guys over there! Don't waste your energy swimming and get swept away by the waves. Hang on to the boat and save your energy!"

Not only that. The other knights of the punitive force gradually came to their senses and began to act independently. The Knights of St. Marsyas, led by Inquisitor Lumiere, were a prime example.

"Are these the only Auror users on this ship? It'll be hard for them to set up a barrier on their own."

"Then, quickly steer the boat towards the Judgement Tower you see over there. Right there, our Lady of Sisley, a little grace of the Lord, is standing!"

Only then was Logan able to find some peace of mind.

In the meantime, the ocean demon had disappeared from sight, having sunk deep into the sea again. Of course, Logan could clearly sense its movements as it swam across the seabed.

"This time we're headed back to the northern reef fields?"

If the ships are in that direction, there is no need to rush after them since they have just undergone maintenance.

Thinking that far, Logan's hand naturally reached out to Arjuna.

'If I were to take this opportunity, I might be able to aim for his weak point... ... '

But there were many things that were holding me back from taking

action rashly.

First, I had to find a way to put the guy to sleep with one blow. If the wounded demon started to really go crazy, the ships that were struggling against the waves and holding on precariously would sink helplessly.

Even for Logan, a sword master, killing a creature the size of an island with a single blow was not an easy task.

'furthermore.....'

Logan had been chasing the sea monster for a while now, and he had a constant feeling that something was off.

If you think about it, the guy was more likely to just mindlessly crash into cliffs or roll around on reefs than to directly attack the fleet. The more I see him, the more I think about this.

'Is it just me? I have a feeling that it wasn't their intention to attack the fleet from the beginning... . . . '

Come to think of it, the guy has been running wild between the reef and Peridero Island so far. Compared to that, the damage to the fleet was less than expected. No matter how hard Logan and the paladins tried.

'Perhaps, just a tiny possibility, a fleet just happened to be in his path by bad luck?'

Kwaaang!

Then the giant demon slams its head into the reef for the third time.

Logan was finally able to confirm this when he sensed the powerful waves emanating from the creature. The creature, that beast that occasionally let out a high-pitched scream that seemed to rupture eardrums, seemed to be in great pain.

@KegqmView\$ar'lRarak!

Ah, perhaps his bad habit had kicked in again. Logan, who was

keenly able to sense the aura waves that originated from emotions, often found himself suddenly sympathizing with the subject of those waves, rather than understanding them.

That was probably why Logan suddenly came up with an odd solution.

'If I could ease the pain it feels even a little bit... then maybe... ... !'

If he had been Gael, he would not have considered it at all. The lives of countless people were always on his shoulders, and those heavy chains would never be released even at the moment of his death.

But fortunately or unfortunately, here Logan was no longer the last bastion supporting everyone.

'... Sir Sharon is here. That means Abamama's hand is also present here.'

I don't know exactly how he'll do it, but if necessary, the Holy Emperor can take over her body again, just like he did with Sigismund.

'There is also Sisley who can protect the fleet in my stead.'

The huge barrier surrounding the coastline shows no sign of collapsing. He thought he knew it better than anyone else, but the potential of his youngest brother surprised him once again.

'And finally...'

Boom!

Atop a dangerous bomb loaded with ancient fire, a wolf-dog barks at him and wags its tail, as if it knows what Logan is thinking right now, its expression uncharacteristically serious.

Logan made up his mind.

'Yeah. Now that everyone's here, I guess I can handle it if I do something crazy once in a while!'

Just then, the demon that had destroyed the reef came rushing towards the island again.

Zuke^&Jaebeolreum irdkaeah#Kyaayaak!

Kuaang!

Logan deployed a sacred barrier and sent the bastard back under the sea, then leapt towards the long tail of the demon rising above the water.

"Huh! Hey, you?!"

with a plop!

With the last look in his eyes at Sir Ellie's bewildered face, Logan's body sank deep into the water along with the water.

* * *

Hwaaaaak!

A powerful divine power was released from under the sea without restraint. The enormous power that completely wrapped around the tail of the demon began to slowly rise upward toward its spine according to Logan's will.

'This place is too far. We need to go a little further up, toward the head.'

The rapidly increasing water pressure squeezed his body. Logan endured the pressure solely through his aura, grabbed the skin of the sea monster, and slowly began to climb.

Using the barnacles that cling tightly to the creature's back as support, he sometimes grabs onto the corals that rise up here and there with his hands.

Kwaaang!

Meanwhile, the demon slammed its body against the cliff of the island once again. Logan, who was almost thrown back by the

impact, quickly clung to the creature's spine and desperately held his breath.

".....!"

The divine power he was pouring out to the limit was now enough to cover most of the giant demon's body. Since he still hadn't figured out the exact problem with the creature, he could only blindly pour out the divine power here and there.

The problem is that the amount of divine power required is enormous. If this continues, Logan will soon be completely exhausted.

But despite his efforts, the devil's momentum showed no signs of abating.

Boom! Kwaang!

After hitting the rocks a few more times, Masu, still not satisfied, turns his head again in the direction of the Binggle fleet.

'Did I... do something wrong?'

Logan felt a little disappointed. He had poured out so much divine power so quickly that he was doubtful whether he would ever be able to properly cast a divine barrier again.

Meanwhile, a giant stingray enveloped in bright light moves its fins toward the water without hesitation.

'Are you planning to head west with the fleet? I hope Sir Eli and Sir Dusang will respond well... . . . '

Logan gritted his teeth as he grabbed the kelp stalks jutting out from the bastard's back.

But at that very moment, I felt like the eyes of the half-turned-over sea monster were slowly coming back into focus.

'Is there... a response?'

Was it a mistake? Logan blinked and looked into the demon's eyes.

But it really wasn't an illusion. The aura of the guy that had been tangled up in a mess was slowly stabilizing, and the speed of the demon was also gradually slowing down!

Degururu... ..

The demon turns his sharp eyes and stares at Logan.

Kkumbuk.

The fleeting moment when the whitish curtain covered and disappeared felt like an eternity to Logan.

And then the sea monster that had been staring at Logan for a moment-

Gulp!

Instead of the sharp noise of before, he shook his body gently, almost like a strange vibration. As if he wanted to shake Logan off without hurting him.

".....!"

As Logan meekly let go of the bastard's hide and fell away, the sea monster took one last glance at him before slowly sinking beneath the sea.

Then he began to swim leisurely towards the other side of the island. His movements were so different from when I first saw him, almost majestic.

"....."

Logan stared at the back of the guy walking away for a moment, feeling as if he was in a dream. Then, feeling his breath hitch, he turned around and quickly kicked his feet back into the water.

Chomp!

When Logan finally popped his head out of the water, the fleet cheered in unison.

"Whoa! Logan!"

"Your Majesty is safe!"

"His Majesty Logan has defeated the sea beast!"

Not only the knights, but even the ignorant sailors of the whaling ships who had been forcibly mobilized praised the Lord and chanted Logan.

Perhaps unaware of this, they thought that Prince Logan had used his divine powers to drive away the evil sea beasts.

But the knights who had been closest to Logan were different. They knew exactly what he had done to the sea demon.

"lowering....."

"Why on earth... ..?"

Sir Ellie and Sir Dusang looked at Logan's complex face with somewhat confused eyes.

* * *

The fleet quickly began to repair the damage, repairing the punctured hulls and rescuing sailors who had fallen into the sea.

But one sailing ship could not avoid sinking. By some coincidence, a large hole was created near the waterline.

Water began to rise like crazy from a hole that was right at sea level.

"Damn, I can't stop this!"

There was no time to do anything. The sailors, who were momentarily confused, had no choice but to pull themselves out of the rapidly sinking ship.

"Still, fortunately, the damage was less than expected."

General Lysander gathered the reports of each captain and sighed in relief.

"First of all, I am very grateful that the Bloody Dawn is safe. This is truly God's grace."

As he said, it was a stroke of luck that the demon avoided the ancient fire-laden ship. A part of the fleet that had been huddled together almost got engulfed in flames.

The damage was ridiculously minor compared to the disaster that had befallen them. It was all thanks to Prince Logan's quick response.

"Ugh... What is this? I thought I was finally getting used to seasickness, but why is even the Wings of Glory shaking like this... Ugh!"

Although Saint Seo Yi-seo belatedly crawled out onto the deck with a face that seemed as if she was dying, no one cared about such a trivial matter.

499. Manta Tribe (4)

Mithra stood there in shock.

He already thought he knew what Lord Manta was planning. He also greatly resented the Mantas for forcing his old friend to make such a harsh choice.

But understanding a friend's pain with your head and seeing that pain writhe with your own eyes were two entirely different matters.

"Beep, squeak... .."

He was barely able to come to his senses by the cries of the young manta ray. Looking down, he saw the poor little thing fidgeting and groping along the transparent spherical wall.

A talisman of the barrier. A useful item that can [isolate] the user from all external environments if desired.

It was all thanks to this talisman that they were able to survive under the pulverized columnar joints. Lord Manta had repeatedly slammed into the cliff where they were gathered with all his might.

"Okay. I'll let you go now. I think it's all over now."

As Mitra removed the amulet, the young manta quickly moved its fins and escaped outside the barrier.

But that was then.

[Wouldn't it have been nice to have used that feature earlier?]

Mitra flinched and turned his head at the sudden familiar thought.

[If that were the case, at least I wouldn't have been bitten by that child and my identity wouldn't have been discovered.]

Surprisingly, the atmosphere of the exorcists who had been trembling together just a moment ago had completely changed.

Silver-gray eyes that shine calmly, and the air that aligns with a strange density.

"... Are you here? Nate."

Well, now I'm not so surprised when this guy suddenly shows up. He's a ridiculous guy who uses his incredible abilities, which even he, a representative of a certain race, can't fathom, to take care of his children all the time.

Mitra scratched the scales around his eyes and answered awkwardly.

"Unfortunately, that was impossible. We had to hide in a small whaling ship."

In a ship with a narrow radius of movement, you want to create a physically impenetrable barrier? Even if the amulet obstructs perception, the sailors will notice right away.

"No, but why would you say something like that in the first place? If you think about it, the reason I ended up like this is because you coaxed me into following the fleet!"

"....."

"And you could have come here any time, yet you didn't mediate between your son and me at all! Are you really doing this? Huh?"

Naturally, Nate lightly ignored Mitra's protest. It was truly infuriating.

"Kkiryeok, kiryeokryak!"

At that moment, a manta ray that had been swimming far away made a splash, hitting the surface of the water with its fin and making a crying sound.

"Beep beep!"

Looking at the guy's gaze towards Mitra, it seems like he wants to tell him something.

Mitra, who was listening to the sound in confusion, soon grumbled with an embarrassed face.

"Now, look at this. There are more than a few inconveniences after having your key taken away. You can't communicate with other races at all... .."

[The child thanks you for your help. He also says it was nice to meet another Ionian race after such a long time.]

"Is that so?"

"Ki-ryak, Pira-rak!"

[And he said goodbye. He said that he would now return to his people.]

Nate's interpretation was accurate. After two slaps of its tail against the surface, the young manta ray disappeared completely.

Mitra, who had been staring at the southern sea where the guy had disappeared for a moment, looked down at Nate with a slightly bewildered expression.

"Why is the strongest guardian of Delcross acting as an interpreter for this old man? Why not just tell your son to return the key and everything will be resolved?"

But Nate's attitude was firm.

[Nothing will be resolved. So just accept the situation. There must be a good reason why my son took the keys from you.]

"... Don't you know the reason? And yet you believe your young son's immature judgment?"

[There is a bit of a misunderstanding in that statement. My son is not

a very short-sighted boy. I can see some of that, too.]

"Ahem! Well, he was definitely a boy who was above average in terms of momentum alone... .."

Perhaps the 'son' Mitra speaks of is a completely different person from the 'son' Nate thinks of. Although that mistake didn't really interfere with their conversation.

"Tell me the 'pointing point.' Why on earth did you take the keys from me?"

[Well, how can I, who has given up on getting involved in the future, fully understand the child's thoughts? If you only change your mind a little, perhaps your son will be willing to return the key.]

"Change your mind? What do you mean?"

Then, the silver eyes with a strange light stared into Mithra's eyes. It was a sharp gaze that dug deep into a person's heart and even his soul.

[For example, using the key to escape through the gap where the old person is right now.]

"omg!"

[Or use the key to disrupt the clash between the Manta and Cypriot fleets.]

"....."

[Or maybe you're thinking of using the key to thwart Lord Manta's plans.]

"Ugh, ugh... ..!"

Draconian could no longer bear his gaze and slowly turned his head away, for it seemed as if Nate was truly seeing right through his mind.

[or not.....]

Nate, who had been speaking at that time, paused for a moment and then added heavily.

[Using the power of the key to manipulate the relic, the Manta tribe's determination at the end of the war is rendered meaningless.]

"S, really... .. ?"

From Nate's words, Mitra realized a new possibility she had not anticipated.

"Are you trying to say that the Mantas intentionally destroyed that artifact? They themselves are at great risk of being caught up in the resonance broadcast, just like they were just now?"

[If not, why would the prison system, which had been functioning just fine until recently, suddenly malfunction? The Ionian engineers have built a system more sophisticated than you might think, Mithra.]

"....."

[Perhaps it was a reflection of Lord Manta's will to some extent. With her gradually losing control over her own kind, she would have no other way to prevent the prisoners from scattering into the sea.]

This is what the Oracle of Kornsheim says. It may seem like a frivolous guess, but his words are probably close to the truth.

Mitra looked down at Nate, or rather the exorcist who contained Nate's soul, with renewed eyes.

Kornshim. Presumably, they are the first Ionians to have secured the essence of the race.

The salt crystals they possessed showed distinct differences from those of other races in terms of their genesis process and function.

Ionian races usually share emotions and information through salt crystals. However, this is an imperfect form of information exchange that is only used within the race, and the characteristics of the salt crystals that connect them are not much different from those of other

group monsters.

If they had not established a separate race for systematic information processing, it would have been impossible for them to have achieved such a dazzling civilization in the past.

But the Kornsim were different. They were born with complexly structured salt crystals, which were sophisticated processing devices that transformed vague mental processes into organized information.

Therefore, they can easily accept the thoughts of other races in the form of language, and also convert their own thoughts into clear information and convey it to other races.

Look, even that half-Kornshim can freely converse with the Manta tribe without any restrictions. It was an advanced communication ability that even representatives of a race like Mitra could only demonstrate with the help of the Key.

'No, maybe that's just natural... ..'

If you think about it, wasn't this 'race key' also actually designed based on the laws of the world of rules created by some oracle?

[... but Mithra.]

Mitra, who had been lost in her own thoughts for a moment, raised her head at Nate's extremely serious tone.

"hmm?"

[Actually, there's something I've always wanted to ask you.]

"Th-what is that?"

What are you talking about now? Did you perhaps find out something new through the Oracle's insight?

But to the tense Draconian, the Exorcist shot out a somewhat blunt thought.

[I have a question about your attitude.]

"...attitude?"

[Yes. Why do you keep talking down to me while you speak so politely to my son?]

Mitra was shocked for a moment.

... Wait a minute, you. Is that the problem in this situation right now?

* * *

Seongjin heard someone singing in his sleep.

It was the humming of an old manta from the deep sea. The monotonous, high-frequency melody gently swayed like waves, enveloping my consciousness.

Boooooo- koooo- boooooo-

It's so peaceful that it actually sounds pitiful.

'Hey, are you just singing along leisurely?'

Sungjin thought about it without thinking. And his absent-minded mind made the mistake of spitting out exactly what he thought.

"... Stop it. I know what your situation is like right now..."

"Oh, your Majesty?"

Then Edith called him over with a smile. It seemed that she had just come in to tidy up the room.

Thanks to that, Sungjin woke up completely and slowly raised his eyelids.

"You woke up earlier than I expected? You said you were going to sleep late today and not to disturb me until dinnertime, right?"

"... Oh, well. That's what happened."

The fleet had arrived at the Krabat Archipelago, so they planned to stay late today. They also had a feeling that something unusual was

waiting for them.

But things ended sooner than expected, thanks to Logan's bizarre actions against the sea monsters.

'What on earth is Logan thinking, suddenly pouring out divine power?'

Besides, after the commotion died down, it seemed like Logan was going to personally prepare Max's dinner. So I just threw him out early.

'That's right. That old-fashioned guy probably believes that there is nothing better than raw meat for a dog's taste buds.'

Seongjin let out a small sigh, then got up from the bed and stretched deeply.

At first, I thought about asking Logan for the food I had cooked. But I soon changed my mind, because even though Sungjin's spirit had intervened, Max's consciousness did not disappear completely.

And Max really likes the quality meat Logan gives him.

"Are you hungry, Your Majesty? You've been sleeping all morning. Shall I serve you dinner right away?"

"No. Rather than a meal, I'd like something to nibble on... .."

Actually, the taste of the raw meat I ate for breakfast still lingers in my mouth.

"What would be good... Oh, right! Melbourne would be good."

Then, Edith, who had been asked to serve tea for a long time, cheerfully brought up the Melbourne. She was already receiving a salary without doing anything, but it seemed that she was quite bored because Captain Bruno had taken over the tea service.

At that moment, Captain Bruno was not there. While Sungjin was shut in his quarters and taking a nap, he was busy assisting Sir Marsain, who was going in and out of the Benso Marquis' residence.

'Sir Marsain. Are you doing the work you asked me to do?'

Seongjin thought as he lifted the teacup, which was an unusually dark color for Melbourne.

"Uh... Your Majesty. Are you really going to eat that?"

Sir Carmen, who happened to be on guard duty nearby, asks with a frown. It seems that just smelling Melbourn's scent brings back old trauma.

Seongjin ignored his reaction and took a sip of the terrifying poison.

Horok.

Then, the bitter taste of Melbourne, like gall, appropriately numbs the senses of smell and taste. Seongjin felt his tongue tingle and raised the corners of his lips in satisfaction.

"Hmm, it's nice to drink Edith's tea after such a long time. It somehow feels refreshing."

Huh?

Carmen backed away with a scream, not really a scream. She's actually a bit more rambunctious than she looks.

"By the way, how far will he go to embrace that foolish guy?"

Sungjin sighed as he recalled the last time he saw Logan's face. Why did that guy always seem to have such complicated thoughts after meeting the young Manta?

Surely you're not starting to care about the plight of the sea demons beyond your compatriots from your previous life? I hope not.

500

500. Manta Tribe (5)

To Seongjin, the Manta Tribe was a very strange existence.

They had a strangely annoying side. I don't have any particular grudge that comes to mind, but I guess you could say they were annoying without giving anything in return.

'No, maybe it's not just their problem. I have a feeling that if Logan gets involved with them like this, the problems that will arise in the future will be even more of a headache... '

Oh, I care. I care!

Because of that, Sungjin couldn't shake off his thoughts about Logan and the Manta Tribe even while eating dinner.

"You look strangely tired. Should I just go to bed now?"

So, the words that Sir Carmen casually said struck me quite nicely.

Logan, who knows what else he might be doing by himself right now? That's why I'm going to stick right next to him and keep an eye on him today...

'No, it's not.'

Seongjin shook his head.

Returning to the Kravat Archipelago was easy. Thanks to the frequent attempts to connect, even to the point of eating raw meat, I was now able to transfer my consciousness to Max as naturally as breathing.

But since a while ago, a strange feeling had been tugging at Sungjin's ankles. An ominous feeling that if he went there now, it wouldn't turn

out well.

So Seongjin shook his head.

"Okay. I missed the whole day of practice because I was taking a nap today. So I'm going to meditate from now on. I'm going to meditate twice as much as usual!"

Then Sir Carmen made a tired face.

"No, is that the damned cultivation again? You've already built up nine floors, so isn't it time you took a break?"

No, what are you talking about, Sir Carmen? There is much work ahead of me. That is why I must become a Dekaron Knight quickly!

* * *

If Sungjin was worried about Logan in the Benso Marquisate, there was someone in the distant Krabat Archipelago who was having similar concerns.

"Whew..."

Late at night, Sisley stopped meditating and raised his head.

Today was a very eventful day. After a long voyage, we finally arrived at our destination, but then a giant sea monster suddenly appeared and started destroying ships.

Fortunately, there were no deaths thanks to the quick response of Logan and the Knights, but there were many people who suffered major and minor injuries.

Here the little saint's activities stood out, as she was already accustomed to serving in remote areas without any infrastructure.

Sisley took care of the injured until late at night, surprising those around her. Not only did Inquisitor Boris, who had been obsessed with the girl from the beginning, feel burdened by the gaze of his adjutant, Lumiere.

But it didn't stop there, the girl returned to her cabin late and diligently completed her evening meditation.

'Mores Oraboni said that training should be a habit that builds up every day.'

And it was also said that habits that are familiar to the body never betray a person even in a crisis. Sisley smiled as he felt the aura layer moving actively in his danjeon.

'Well, at least with this level of progress, wouldn't it be something I can brag about to my brother when I return to the capital?'

The girl felt a little proud and crawled into bed. Then, as if waiting for it, a soft electronic sound was heard from beside her.

[Ala~la~view.]

A teddy bear named Labu approaches him, holding a rabbit eye patch. After learning that his owner sleeps with an eye patch on every day, he diligently moves to help with anything.

Sisley was a little moved and hugged the doll tightly.

"Thank you, Loveu!"

[... Love.]

"But I don't plan on using it tonight."

[Qyuu?]

The white teddy bear tilted its head in disbelief. After wrapping a scarf around the boy's neck, Sisley hugged the teddy bear and pulled the blanket up to its chin.

"I'm going to dream today. I think I'll have to find out more about what exactly happens to Logan Brother through the Delcross Chronicles."

Sisley has been having prophetic dreams from time to time these days. Just as he promised Sungjin the other day, he is trying to get at

least one more piece of information about the future.

"Mores Orabeoni said that I shouldn't believe everything the writer of dreams writes. He's a nasty trickster called [the Puppeteer], and he said he was showing me an unfortunate future on purpose to harm Seonghwangga."

But even so, Sisley could not completely ignore the events and backgrounds in the Delcross Chronicles. Not only do they feature real people, but the events that occur in the time period are also meaningfully related to reality.

"But isn't it strange? As far as I remember, there was no mention of the giant demon we saw today in the Delcross Chronicles. It may be because the author didn't describe Logan Brother's subjugation in detail in the first place."

In any case, the sea monster had already attacked the fleet. And according to Sisley's guess, there was a high probability that he would cause Logan trouble.

I couldn't imagine any other possibility. If it weren't for such an out-of-spec monster, how could a strong paladin like Logan lose his cherished confidants so meaninglessly?

So, I had to have more precognitive dreams while I had the time. Among the countless tragedies that would unfold in the future, there might be important clues about the current situation hidden.

"The problem is that the story has progressed too much. Isn't that right? Loveuya. In the recent Delcross Chronicles, several years have already passed since the subjugation of the sea demons."

The half-masked man in the dream has been describing the recent descent of high-ranking demon lords in a grand manner using all sorts of fancy words. He is also excitedly recording the cruel tragedies that result.

To be honest, it was just information that didn't really interest Sisley.

-The five stars will break, and their time will finally come. The city will be reduced to ashes, and the people's cries will form a great

river. Ah, amidst the despair and screams of all, they will sing a song of eternal victory.

But unfortunately, in the precognitive dream, Sisley was unable to interact with the writer in any way. He could not even talk to him or look back at his previous records. He could only sit at his desk like a doll, helplessly watching the unfortunate records he showed him.

Sisley, who had a gloomy expression for a moment, soon muttered while rubbing his cheek against the soft teddy bear's face.

"It's frustrating. Is there really no way to reread the chronicles that have already passed?"

[Qyuu... ... ?]

"Or at least... a way to... ask... the author of the chronicle... directly... or something... ."

[...]

Sisley's eyes, which had been blinking slowly, soon slowly close.

During that time, the teddy bear did not move at all in case the girl woke up, and only occasionally made small electronic sounds.

Beep, beep-!

In the silence, the doll quickly reflected on the information it had acquired so far.

Unfortunately, the guy still couldn't fully grasp the meaning and context of Sisley's mumblings, so he had no idea what he could do to help her solve her problem.

But even so, the teddy bear stored Sisley's mutterings in one corner of its memory without fail.

Although we cannot solve the owner's problem right now because of the lack of information, if data continues to pile up like this, we will eventually be able to build an appropriate decision algorithm based on the accumulated data.

If you do that, you will have a clear answer as to what you should do to help your master. So, don't neglect to collect information even for a moment.

The black mechanical eyes, occasionally flashing a faint light, stared at the girl's face, which was slowly beginning to breathe evenly.

* * *

The flagship 'Wings of Glory' was kept alight late into the night. This was because the ocean demon subjugation campaign had entered a completely new phase as of today.

"Your Majesty's words were all correct!"

General Lysander pounded the waves in a state of unprecedented excitement.

"Everyone has been accusing me of trying to move the fleet without any proper basis. There was even pressure to prepare to resign as soon as the punitive force returned, as it would be a huge waste of money!"

General Lysander had insisted on a second expedition more strongly than anyone else. However, even though he seemed strong on the outside, he seemed to have been suffering mentally without knowing it.

Why not? I couldn't blame the popular prince who came to the empire to help, so I had no choice but to harass the poor General Lysander.

"Even the elder Teresilla of Rhodes, who had supported us, could not hide her glare that we were buying useless things. But now, Your Majesty, look! The grave threat from the sea was very real!"

"General, the marine demons are actually... .."

"Yes, Your Majesty! As expected, the first expedition wasn't the end. There was an even bigger problem that was hiding under the surface and hadn't yet surfaced! So now it's clear what we have to do!"

"... .."

"It is the ancient fire. We must use this ultimate weapon to completely destroy their lair!"

The old general was excited about what he believed would be the greatest battle of his life.

However, Logan's face, who was the one who warned of the potential danger, was not very bright.

"... It's late at night. Let's talk about the details tomorrow morning."

Logan finally responded like that and left the captain's cabin with a slightly subdued expression.

Kiing-

As soon as Logan stepped onto the deck, Max came running towards him, tail wagging. The wolfdog was showing increasing affinity towards him, as he had recently been personally feeding him raw meat.

"... Max?"

Wong!

"Yes, Max. If it were Lee Seong-jin, there was something I wanted to discuss."

Whioooo!

"Well, I guess it would have been difficult to have a conversation in this condition anyway."

Logan lightly patted the wolfdog's head - it seemed like Lee Sung-jin wouldn't be coming anymore today - and walked slowly toward the boat.

When he reached the port side of the ship, he stood with his back to the railing and looked at the long shadow of the mast under the moonlight. It wasn't just Max who was waiting for Logan outside the

captain's cabin.

"Sir Sharon, what do you want with me?"

Sir Sharon, who had been standing there as if melting into the shadows, slowly emerges from the darkness and bows to Logan.

It was the same old Sharon, but Logan didn't miss the familiar silver-grey glint that flashed across her eyes.

"...Abama?"

"I'm sorry, but it's time for me to step down, Your Majesty."

The Exorcist grinned at Logan, his sinister face glowing pale and ghostly in the moonlight.

"Of course, my coming here is entirely due to Your Majesty's will."

"What does Abamama mean?"

"Yes. He told me to help him."

There was no need to ask what he was asked to help with, because soon Logan could sense a secret disturbance slowly approaching the fleet from a distance.

slam!

Against the waves that were pounding the hull, black ripples slowly rolled toward the ship. And as they got closer, the movement of the waves grew larger.

Growling... ..

The wolfdog bared his teeth in nervous anticipation.

The sound of well-groomed auras rushing in from the sea. And the unseen magic blooming within it.

"They... ..!"

As soon as I realized their true identity, black waves rose from the

surface of the water all at once, slowly revealing their faces.

They had unusually large noses compared to humans, and round eyes that shone brightly under the moonlight. They were definitely Mantas.

"... .."

Their numbers were so great that they completely surrounded the 'Wings of Glory'.

Although this horde might have seemed threatening at first glance, Logan didn't feel the need to pull out Arjuna's belt, because he didn't feel the slightest hostility from them.

and-

Beep-!

Soon, a voice that is far beyond the audible frequency of humans, that you can never get used to no matter how many times you hear it, hits your eardrums.

Kkieeee- beep beep beep!

Sir Sharon nodded after listening to the sound for a moment.

"Indeed. They came all the way here to see you."

This confirms why the Holy Emperor sent her to Logan. I don't know how it was possible, but Lord Sharon could understand the Manta language.

"Me? Why on earth... .."

"He said he wanted to talk to you directly."

...conversation?

"They say they are deeply grateful for what happened today, and they ask that you please help their great leader."

501

501. Manta Tribe (6)

The southern side of Peridereo Island is a high cliff with black volcanic rock exposed. And to the southeast of the cliff, there is a large sea cliff formed by the winding ocean current.

The concave coast, beyond a promontory jutting out to the south, was an ideal place to avoid the eyes of the fleet anchored on the west side of the island.

Logan, under the guidance of the Mantas, held his first informal meeting with the alien race at that secret location.

'It's surprising that they rejected Mithra.'

At first, Logan thought that he should bring Mithra to this meeting. The old Draconian was the only other race that Logan knew of, and from what he heard, he had been interacting with the Manta tribe for quite some time.

But surprisingly, the Manta tribe did not want any interference from other races in this meeting.

Even they looked displeased at the sight of the wolf-dog wagging its tail at Logan. The reason was that the dog, who clearly had the blood of an Ionian wolf, might already be a lycanthrope.

So in the end, only Logan and Sir Sharon were left to follow the Mantas.

As they sneaked onto the escarpment, avoiding the sailors' eyes, the manta rays that had been waiting there before finally emerged from the water.

Slurp...

The body exposed to the air naturally shrinks. The flat face develops distinct facial features, and the wide fins also shrink, changing into the shape of a person wearing a cloak.

As their appearance changed, their volume and mass, which should remain constant for all living things, also began to decrease rapidly.

"....."

Logan had already witnessed the transformation of the young Mantas with his own eyes. Nevertheless, their transformation was still a wondrous sight, for no matter how you looked at it, it was a phenomenon that so far escaped the normal laws of physics.

Crackle, crackle.

The five or six mantas in the lead then walked out onto the shore after transforming into completely human-like forms.

At first glance, their appearances all look similar. Perhaps because they are closer to fish than mammals, it is difficult to even tell the sex of an individual from their dim silhouettes under the moonlight.

However, the leader standing at the very front was particularly noticeable, as his black fur was uniquely covered with dark blue stripes evenly distributed.

'...mackerel?'

Although the thought crossed his mind, Logan dared not voice the rude thought.

"Piririk. Giririririk. Bubbururur..."

Then the mackerel manta, who had been staring at Logan with sparkling eyes, opened his mouth. It was a low voice, like the sound of a long wind instrument, rather than the one he had heard from the younger manta.

"He says he is the temporary leader of the Manta tribe, Buubur...?"

Sir Sharon chewed her tongue as she interpreted the tricky pronunciation.

Yes. Since they are a race with intelligence, they each have their own names. Unfortunately, it's confusing even when you hear how they are pronounced.

"He said that he felt deeply grateful to you for accepting all of his demands, which could be considered unreasonable, and allowing him to meet with you alone. He said that he had not expected humans to be so open to other species."

"....."

Logan nodded, feeling uneasy.

In fact, the reason Logan followed them without any escort was purely out of confidence and no other reason.

Even now, if he could just pull out Arjuna, Logan would be able to single-handedly wipe out these races. Of course, that mackerel pattern, the so-called temporary leader, seemed like a fairly strong Auror user.

Logan looked around at the countless other manta rays still staring at him from the water.

"Let's end the greetings here. I can't leave the flagship for long because of the eyes of others. I would like you to tell me what's going on as soon as possible."

"Boooo, gurgle-."

"Before we get to the main point, he said there is one thing he would like to confirm with you."

"check?"

"Yes. These are the ones in the fleet that Your Majesty brought, by any chance, that... .."

But after saying that, Sir Sharon frowned for some reason and

hesitated to interpret.

"... Sir Sharon?"

"....."

"Sir Sharon, please translate properly. For your information, I can tell the moment you hide something."

Sir Sharon, who was under Logan's strong gaze, reluctantly confessed with a slightly displeased expression.

"They are asking if there is one among our party, the one who is prepared... If he is in the fleet, they would like to pretend this meeting never happened... ."

"... The reserved one? What is that?"

Logan asked back, but this time she shut her mouth with an uncomfortable expression.

'I know, but it's hard to explain... ... '

Logan didn't press any further, but thought for a moment and shook his head.

"I'm not sure, but at least I'm not one of those 'reserves.' I've never heard of anyone in the fleet being called that."

"They say that they already know that Your Majesty is not that... You are already well known among the Manta tribe. As I have heard, you resemble the Guardian of Delcross very much."

"....."

Guardian of Delcross.

It was a name he had never heard before, but this time Logan felt like he knew who it referred to.

Holy Emperor Nathaniel Klein. Who else in the world, other than his father, could be called the protector of the Holy Empire?

"Also, Your Majesty used His divine powers directly to help their 'Lord'. It is said that such a person... could not possibly be the One Prepared. Above all, it is said that no magical energy... is felt from You."

Magi.

The moment he heard those words, the face of the brother he had seen since childhood flashed through Logan's mind. If what he had guessed was true, it was understandable why Lord Sharon was so reluctant to interpret.

But Logan tried hard to shake that ominous thought off his mind.

"But Magi? Why is that a problem for them? Aren't they the ones who actually have the magic? Why do they dislike the 'one who is prepared' for having the same magic?"

Even as he asked that, Logan suddenly thought that it might be fortunate that Lee Sung-jin had not come back here again.

"He is an uncontrollable variable, a causal storm that swirls everything around him and throws it off course."

"....."

"That is why they are very afraid that someone who is prepared might show up here and ruin all their arrangements."

Logan decided to stop asking about the 'reserve' at this point, because the already pale complexion of Lord Sharon only grew worse as the interpretation continued.

"So, what is it that you are trying to tell me while being so careful?"

Then, the gaze of the mackerel-patterned manta ray facing Logan deepens a little.

"Please, I request that you move the fleet from here. This is the old prison of the Manta Tribe."

"Get out of prison... .."

"This request is not only for themselves, but also for humans. Many creatures have already died due to malfunctions in the prison system."

"I don't think you need to worry too much about that. As you've already seen, we have a way to stop the artifact from malfunctioning."

Logan answered with Lee Sung-jin in mind, but the faces of the Manta tribe became even more serious when they heard those words.

"That's the problem. They say that they broke the device, even though they were prepared to get involved, just to relieve the suffering of their beloved leader."

... you broke it on purpose?

Towards the bewildered Logan, a soft, wind instrument-like voice added:

"Kklarak. Kirik, Kiririri... .."

"If we stop the device again, what happened this afternoon could happen again. The Lord, clouded by pain, could attack the fleet again."

* * *

When Ionia was destroyed, the only ones who were able to escape the disaster were the 'border tribes' living near the Delcross border. Even they barely managed to escape with their bodies, and half of them lost their 'essence' of their clan.

Fortunately, the Tree People and the Giant People had already prepared to migrate by stealing the essence following the Oracle's long-standing warning.

But the case of the lycanthropes and the mantas was completely different, as they had to flee to their prisons in a panic without even having the time to collect their race essence.

And the situation of these races that originated from the devil was

truly miserable.

The lycanthropes quickly lost their senses and began wandering the demon realm. In this way, they ended up becoming demons who were regularly subjugated by humans.

Perhaps the Manta Tribe would have suffered the same fate, if it had not been for Lord Manta leading them.

"It is said that their lord had to make a very difficult decision at that time."

Lord Manta realized that there was no future for his people unless he created a new race essence.

So she made the sacrifice and pledged to become the living essence of the race herself, because she already knew of a living essence that was already doing that.

It was the Oracle of Kornsheim.

"Cornshim... .."

Once again, a name Logan knew came up.

He had heard before that his grandmother was from a strange tribe called the Kornsheim, although today he had only just learned that they were a race that had migrated from Ionia.

"Pirurururu, boooooooooong-"

"They desperately wish that until their Lord completes the essence of the race, they could not be by his side to care for his suffering like today."

Logan couldn't easily answer that request.

'You want me to look after you? That giant sea monster?'

Regardless of whether such a treatment would be possible again today, it was clear that such an act would cause extremely difficult problems for Logan's position.

Even his closest aides, Sir Ellie and Sir Dusang, couldn't hide their bewilderment at what happened today. If Logan wasn't known as a faithful knight of the Lord, there would have certainly been voices within the Cyprus Navy questioning Logan's actions.

"....."

After Logan hesitated for a while, the Mackerel Manta Tribe stopped complaining, as if they knew that it was a very difficult request. Instead, with a heavy expression, he conveyed another request to Logan.

"If that is not possible, please do not disturb our relics any more, and lead the fleet away from here immediately."

* * *

Those who have unwillingly taken the fate of their clan into their own hands, what choice must they make between the safety of their clan and their own happiness? Should they willingly sacrifice themselves, thinking that this is the proper duty of those with power?

Originally, Sungjin hated having to worry about this kind of problem. But at least he knew for sure what choices some people he knew had made regarding this issue.

Gael Bertran, who died shouldering the fate of the Republican Party, and Lord Manta, who is risking his own spirit to become the living essence of his clan.

And here was another leader who came up with a similar answer.

Sungjin had a vivid dream for the first time in a long while. A group of lycanthropes were gathered in front of him, and unlike the demons he had seen in Sigismund's territory, they were talking to each other with a fairly sane mind.

"These days, the Coratla is being caught quite easily. Should we use its bones to build a new tent?"

"But, hunt moderately. Soon, all the koratlas around here may dry up."

Seongjin couldn't tell for sure where this place was. Whether it was the Delcross dimension, or another main world similar to Delcross.

No, maybe it's not the real world at all.

Anyway, the lycanthropes were gathered together in the damp grass, excitedly grooming the crocodile-like creature they had just killed.

"By the way, Bazra. How long are we going to have to stay in this swamp?"

"That's right. I want to live on dry land. How about we ask the Lord to move our camp to the southern plains right now?"

Then the one called Bazra laughs. Surprisingly, he is the very same Bazra who was manipulated by Berseus and eventually met his death at the hands of Seongjin.

"Come on. These guys will only come to their senses if they are properly hit by the horns of the angry Nurmachi."

Is this a dream?

'Oh, right. Of course it's a dream. But... ... '

Seongjin slowly looked around, feeling a strange feeling.

The tents were crowded together, and the meat was being smoked neatly on one side. It was a peaceful sight that made it hard to believe it was the home of the lycanthropes he knew.

And that wasn't all, on one side, young lycanthropes were playing with something that looked like a balloon. It was a ball made by blowing air into the bladder of a coratla they had just killed.

"Ah, it's Lord!"

Then they stopped playing when they saw a long, new figure approaching from a distance.

"Look over there! Our Lord has arrived!"

What they were looking at was, surprisingly, a being in the shape of a real human. Seongjin also followed the lycanthropes' gaze and looked at that strange yet familiar figure.

He is much taller than before, his wheat-colored hair has grown out haphazardly. On one side of his cheek, a long scar appears that wasn't there before.

What on earth happened to the time zone in this world? Her appearance, which had seemed like a pretty boy, had already become that of a mature woman in just a few months.

".....?"

At that moment, as if sensing something strange, her pitch-black eyes looked up at Seongjin. It was a strange sensation, as if they were looking at each other face to face, transcending time and space.

Of course, that magic didn't last long either, as a swarm of baby lycanthropes swarmed over, grabbing her arms and screaming.

"Lord! I just caught a huge coratla!"

"Come play with us here while the adults prepare the meat!"

Children who were clearly pure-blooded lycanthropes smiled broadly at the half-blood lycanthropes whom they should have ignored.

"Yes? Lord Louise!"

Following her, who raised the corners of her lips brightly toward the children, Sungjin also unconsciously had a bitter smile on his lips.

502

502. Manta Tribe (7)

Time in the dream passed quickly, and night fell on the swamp. The lycanthropes each went to their tents, and at some point, a quiet silence descended on the once lively camp.

'Why on earth am I here? I was going to take a quick look at the fleet, but I fell asleep... ... '

Seongjin floated above the camp and looked up at the darkening sky.

'By the way, doesn't it seem like time passes quite quickly here? It seems like this isn't Delcross after all.'

If not, Edith would have woken Sungjin up a long time ago. She had told him to wake her up right away so that she could report to Sir Marsain when he returned.

'... ... ?'

But soon after, Sungjin was able to discover a crucial clue about this dream world. As the sun completely set over the horizon, a text window opened, clearly glowing beyond the darkening sky.

☐Regional Area Debuff Notification!☐

☐A regular wide-area debuff has been activated in the Solan Swamp area. HP will continuously decrease by 0.01% per minute until the sun rises tomorrow morning.☐

☐Tip! Want to resist debuffs? Then try making an easy natural debuff prevention agent! Dry wild chrysanthemums, rose geraniums, or cinnamon to make a sachet to prevent area-wide debuffs!☐

'Ah, this is the world of rules.'

Well, I guessed that it might be so, seeing that the already dead Bazra was moving around normally. It seems that Louise had done something to his soul stone.

But 0.01% per minute... What is this vague and insignificant damage?

After a moment of doubt, Sungjin was soon able to figure out what the wide-area debuff was. Soon, the lycanthropes' screams could be heard all over the camp.

"Eww! Mosquitoes! There are swamp mosquitoes in the tent!"

"Damn it! How on earth do these mosquitoes eat? How do these tiny grains of rice manage to pierce through this thick fur?"

Oh... If it's a regional wide-area debuff, then it means that you're guaranteed to get bitten, right? I hope there aren't any mosquito-borne diseases like malaria here.

Seongjin shook his head and turned around, flying towards the largest tent in the center of the camp. It was the tent of Louise, the lycanthrope's lord. Seongjin had a feeling that the reason he had come here was not unrelated to Louise.

As Sungjin seeped into the tent like fog, Louise was having a serious conversation with Bazra.

"You've been away for quite some time this time, Lady Louise."

"I'm sorry if I made you worry, Bazra. I have plenty of water, so I went to explore the desert area."

Despite the clear hierarchy, Louise's attitude toward Bazra was polite. Her obsessively polite attitude seemed to have not changed at all since her childhood.

"But there was no trace of the Kornsheim clan there either. Instead, I managed to find a few useful crystals on my way back."

Louise took out large stones from her bosom. They were strange, translucent-colored minerals, and at first glance they looked like large salt crystals or empty soul stones.

"I got lucky while hunting a herd of Nurmachi. If I just have this, I'll be able to have some free time for a while."

"...Lady Louise."

A pitiful light flashed in Bazra's eyes. He shouted urgently, not even paying attention to the decisions Louise had made.

"I told you over and over again that it was all pointless! So why are you still chasing Kornsim?"

"Because the traces they left behind are the only clues to finding the new 'essence'."

Lycanthropes need the help of their race essence to maintain a clear mind. So Louise is currently temporarily performing the function of race essence.

She unites the minds of the lycanthropes around her own salt crystals, and continues to awaken the rationality of her kind, which is easily clouded by even the slightest stimulation.

But that was only possible because the number of surviving members of the same clan was not large.

"As you know, this situation cannot last long. So shouldn't we take the time to secure a more stable race essence?"

But Bazra's thoughts seemed completely different from hers.

"You must preserve your sanity even more, since you are the only alternative to the essence of your race! Lady Louise, it is difficult enough for you to maintain a connection with your kind right now!"

Grrrrr... ..

As emotions ran high, their sharpened momentum clashed in the air like invisible fangs.

"Don't you know? The moment we become even a little lax in our decision-making, the overflowing madness will eventually consume your mind, Lady Louise."

"But Bazra. I believe in the arrangements the Kornsim clan left for us. It was thanks to them that I was able to save the souls of my compatriots, even if only a little."

"I repeat, it is all coincidence. The future of our people has nothing to do with them!"

"Do you think that what happened that day was a coincidence? The soulstones of my people were just waiting for me where I happened to arrive, and right next to it, there was a portal leading to this world?"

"Lady Louise... ..!"

"What about this world that we have come to with such difficulty? This wonderful world where you can easily obtain crystals that clear your mind just by hunting. Do you really think that all of this is just coincidence?"

The air inside the tent suddenly became heavy. In the dark space without any lights, only the sharp gazes glaring at each other crossed, carrying more meaning than a thousand words.

"...Kornshim, I do not deny that they at least had some good intentions towards us."

After some time had passed, Bazra finally opened his mouth with a gloomy expression.

"It is true that they warned us before the disaster struck. They were willing to tell us how we could escape to a safe world while still maintaining our sanity. But we refused their offer of help. Do you know why?"

"... .."

"Because, except in some special cases, only pure souls can cross the boundaries of dimensions. So, in order to migrate my kind to another dimension as they instructed, their deaths had to come first."

So on the day of disaster, the Guardian of Delcross urged Bazra to make a decision.

-Will you kill yourselves? Or will you die by my hand?

Yes, he even made a cruel yet kind offer to take my life himself.

Of course, Bazra, who could not choose either one, ended up committing the folly of handing the fate of his entire clan over to Berseus.

"So, there's no way that the arrogant Kornsim would have prepared another arrangement for us, who had already refused help once. What Lady Louise discovered that day was nothing more than a trace of the tragedy that my indecisiveness brought about."

Bazra bowed his head toward Louise, overcome by a heavy sense of guilt.

"So please, don't waste your precious mental energy on hopeless things any longer. Only Lady Louise is our last hope."

"Bazra..."

And Seongjin, who had been listening to their conversation without missing a single word, was finally able to realize why he had come there.

'I came here to understand Louise's situation. To find out for sure what options are left for the race that has lost its racial essence.'

As I thought about it, the image of a giant stingray singing as it sank into the deep sea came to mind.

At the same time, Sungjin learned one more truth that he was not sure about.

'Besides, there was something I didn't want to know about the Manta Tribe.'

It must have been that he never wanted to remember the truth about them, or what might come out of their mouths.

At the same time, I had to leave behind memories that would allow me to indirectly understand their situation. That's why I had to

borrow the form of a dream and come to this unfamiliar dimension.

'I think that pretty much concludes the reason I came here... ... '

But contrary to my expectations, my feet didn't move easily. Perhaps it was because Louise's slumped shoulders, as if she was carrying a heavy load, particularly caught my eye.

Even after night fell and Bazra left the tent, Sungjin did not leave his spot for a while and spent his time circling above Louise's head.

'Hmm... I guess so? It doesn't seem like it'd be worth it to go back now, considering the effort it took to get here.'

Yeah. I feel like it! Since we're here, should we help Louise out a little?

Once the decision was made, the implementation was simple. The simple yet powerful idea that Sungjin had created was easily realized in the psychic world and soon transformed into a small flame.

Hurrruk!

* * *

"...huh?"

Louise was quite startled by the small flame that suddenly appeared before her eyes.

It suddenly burst into flames out of thin air, dancing and moving around as if it had its own will.

At first I thought it was a firefly. But when I reached out and grabbed the flame-

WHEEK!

It eluded Louise's quick grasp with astonishing ease.

Then it moved away and started blinking rapidly, as if telling her to 'follow me'.

Louise followed the flames out of the tent in a daze. It was the strangest thing she had ever seen, but somehow she didn't feel ominous or threatening.

Rather, I felt like I was smelling a familiar and nostalgic scent from the flames.

Blink!

The flames led Louise out of the camp. Then, suddenly, she flew up in a whoosh and soared toward the swamp. Then she stopped in place again, rapidly blinking her light.

Louise ran after the flames as if possessed, crossing black, sloppy swamps and stepping on tree roots that tangled like giant snakes.

The skilled leatherworker who had made her shoes that fit her perfectly since she was a child was no longer in this world, so Louise ran barefoot over the slippery moss as if she was flying.

Just like in the snowy fields of Sigismund's lands in the past, with the strong Schneesche wrapped around both feet.

How long did it run like that? The flame finally stopped moving completely in the middle of a grassy swamp.

"... ..!"

At that moment, Louise forgot the existence of the small flame for a moment, because she was completely overwhelmed by the magnificent sight unfolding before her eyes.

On a mysterious hill where colorful mushroom clusters shine like stars, there stood a huge tree that seemed to have forgotten the passage of time, towering toward the sky.

"I didn't know there was a place like this in the swamp... ..!"

If I hadn't chased the flame, I would never have come this deep into the swamp.

Louise looked around, feeling a little curious. Then she noticed a

flame that had been sitting on a large rock for a while, not moving at all, and she slowly approached it.

"Huh?"

But then, Louise, who had discovered something, quickly scratched the rock with her hand. Then, the rough surface of the rock that had been hidden under black moss for a long time was revealed.

"This is... ..!"

Although the sky was dark, the lycanthrope's eyes could not miss its opaque milky white glow.

A crystal that clears the mind. And it was a crystal of the largest size I had ever seen.

"With this... .."

Louise felt the surface of the rock with trembling hands. The presence of the strange flame in her head was no longer important.

"With this, I can keep my people's spirits safe for a while!"

'Okay, so now you don't have to suffer alone.'

Louise's shoulders, hugging the rock, shook slightly. The flame that had been staring at her for a moment blinked one last time, sending a faint signal before slowly fading out from that spot.

* * *

As soon as he realized that he had finished all his work, Sungjin's mind was suddenly sucked somewhere.

He was shot out faster than light. The flow of time froze, and countless spaces folded and unfolded.

After flying for a while, the chaotic world suddenly disappeared and a familiar landscape appeared in its place. It was the Delcross dimension.

The moment he realized that he had returned, he heard a lively thought welcoming him from beside him.

[Mores! Where the hell have you been?]

[Mores! How far have you gone that it's hard to keep up?]

And, as expected, the usual calm thoughts can also be heard from above.

[You worked hard.]

Although it was only a brief compliment, Seongjin felt proud and smiled brightly.

503

503. Manta Tribe (8)

Even after returning to the Delcross dimension, Sungjin couldn't wake up right away. This was because the spirit of Sunghwang had told him this.

[Mores, if it's okay with you, I'd like to talk to you for a moment.]

Seongjin was immediately transported to a temporary dimension that Seonghwang had hastily created.

Thanks to that, for the first time that day, Seongjin was able to vividly witness the moment when a new world of salt was born from nothing.

Srrrrrr...

At the gesture of the saint's hand, a blurry lattice pattern appears around them.

The regularly spaced patterns that gave off a faint glow looked like the grid lines of a perspective drawing, or the rebar grid of a construction site.

Then, the Holy Emperor clenched his fist. Then, the patterns that had been stretching out infinitely in all directions disappeared from sight, and only the small rectangular structures surrounding them remained, materializing into distinct walls.

[Wow...]

This must be the work of creating the boundary of the salt world. It seems that the Holy Emperor is trying to create a small, single-room dimension like before.

As the walls began to take shape, vague remnants of furniture began to appear inside the room.

At the same time, a red wave of disaster surged from somewhere outside, thickly covering the perimeter of the dimension. It was the work of strengthening the border so that no one other than those permitted could invade.

[Mores, you're deadly! Are you going to have a secret conversation with just Seonghwang's father again?]

[Mores, I'm jealous. You have to tell us what happened later, right?]

As it is a space surrounded by layers of disasters, it seems that Herna and Gades will have difficulty invading it at will.

But even though they grumbled in words, the guys didn't seem that upset. They clearly fully understood the reason and justification for Seonghwang's actions.

Beyond the increasingly distinct boundary, the twins' soul terminals fluttered and moved away as if waving hands.

[Hello, Mores!]

[See you again, Mores!]

In this way, the dimensional boundary is completely divided and the surrounding scenery changes in the blink of an eye.

With the new gravity pulling his body, Sungjin looked around, feeling a strange sense of familiarity.

"This place is... ..!"

What unfolded before my eyes was clearly the sight of a simple room I had seen a few months ago.

Plain pastel-colored wallpaper and a shabby bed. On one side of the small desk is a thick history book that once exploded in front of Seongjin's eyes, reproduced in its entirety.

Naturally, this question arose.

'What is this space? What does this place mean to my father?'

But I couldn't ask him rashly. Of course, I thought that the intense memories of such a strange space probably didn't have a good meaning for Seonghwang.

[I knew you'd find it someday, but this timing feels a little sudden.]

Seonghwang opened his mouth in a calm voice, patting the desk, not knowing whether he knew Seongjin's thoughts or not.

[Well, since no one expected your move, now might have been the perfect time.]

Before answering him, Sungjin reflexively glanced at his own appearance in this world.

Fortunately, he was now not Hunter Lee Sung-jin, but a young Mores. He was wearing the Exorcist uniform that he had been wearing recently, and even the nutcracker was recreated on his waist.

Only then did Seongjin feel a little relieved, and he sat down on the bed opposite him with a smile.

[As expected, the dimension I just visited was the problem. I also had many questions I wanted to ask my father about that place.]

It was a really strange dimension. It felt like a more suitable place for a spirit like Sungjin to reside than the lycanthropes that had already settled in there.

First of all, even things like 'regional wide-area debuff notifications' and 'game tips' didn't seem like information that lycanthropes would actually see.

Even Sungjin could easily open a map of the land. It was a map that contained detailed information about each region's climate, habitat, and major geographical features.

Thanks to that, Sungjin was able to easily guide Louise to the place

where the 'decision' was, even though it was his first time there.

'And then, the text stuck at the very top of the map was probably... ...
'.

□Pangaea Ultima - World Map□

Anyone who looks at it will see that it is a name that is definitely not unrelated to the Pangea Chronicles.

So, to put it simply, that world is an 'upgraded version of the Pangea Chronicles'.

[I somehow felt like the interface was familiar. It must be a game world built on the Homunculus Engine, just like Pangea Chronicles, right?]

In addition to the area named Solan Swamp, there were several unique climate zones on the world map. These were not naturally formed climate zones, but rather appeared to have been inserted just for show. This was also not much different from the world map of Pangea Chronicle.

[I once heard from Dexter that Impulse Software, the company that created the Pangea Chronicles, collaborated with Ionian engineers to create the Homunculus Engine.]

At that time, Dexter said this.

- It was only a few years ago that Ionia was completely destroyed. And it had been showing signs of collapse for some time. The Ionian engineers on the development team worked with the Earth company to safely evacuate the inhabitants from the disaster.

And those Ionian engineers, as soon as they completed the homunculus engine, created a safe spherical world and left forever.

However, Dexter never once mentioned the appearance of the Ionian engineers, which means that in Dexter's eyes, they looked no different from Earthlings.

'Among the Ionian races, the only ones who do not show any great

discomfort when meeting Earthlings are the Kornsheim clan.'

In other words, all the Ionians Dexter met were Kornsheim clan members.

Then, Seongjin had no choice but to naturally come to this conclusion.

[Pangaea Ultima. That was the 'safe' spherical world created by the engineers of Kornsheim.]

This also explains why that world had a more familiar interface to the Holy Ones than to the Lycanthropes. The Kornshim were a clan more accustomed to using their soul terminals than their own senses.

[Then it is somewhat understandable why Father is so cautious. He must be worried that the existence of Pangea Ultima might be known to the high-ranking Demon Lords.]

Then, the Seonghwang looked at Seongjin blankly and then slowly nodded.

[Yes. That is a new dimension named Amasia.]

[Amasya dimension... ..]

[As you might have guessed, this is a temporary refuge prepared by the Kornsheim clan for all the races of Ionia, who foresaw the coming disaster.]

Ready for all... races?

The moment he heard those words, Sungjin couldn't help but recall the conversation between Louise and Bazra.

-But Bazra. I believe in the arrangements the Kornsim clan left for us. It was thanks to them that I was able to save the souls of my compatriots, even if only a little.

Louise definitely said that. And boy, was she right!

Seongjin shouted with delight.

[Then, Father, it seems like we have another alternative! Even if the worst happens and the Delcross dimension falls into the hands of the high-ranking Demon Lords, we can still migrate the people here to Amasia like Louise! If we can do that... ..!]

But Seongjin couldn't finish speaking because Seonghwang, who had been listening quietly, had a faint smile on his lips.

That somewhat sad smile he gets every time he gives a wrong answer.

[uh.....]

Seongjin quickly thought about it and was soon able to guess the reason.

Why not? Just now, in the Amasia dimension, didn't you hear Vazra lamenting like this?

-Because, except in some special cases, only pure souls can cross dimensional boundaries.

Yes. Normally, movement of the material that makes up a body cannot occur between dimensions.

So, if you want to move people to another dimension, you have to first return them to their spirit state.

The answer to that was, of course, 'death.'

'... I have to kill them? With my own hands, the people I must protect no matter what?'

Seongjin tightly clenched his fingertips, which were beginning to tremble slightly.

There's no way I could do something like that. Just imagining the possibility makes my blood run cold... ..

[...mores.]

Seonghwang, who noticed Seongjin's stern expression, opened his

mouth as if to persuade him.

[Don't worry about it. Didn't I tell you this before? At least in this world, you won't be forced into such a crossroads.]

Seongjin felt a subtle nuance in his words and answered a beat slower.

[...yes.]

[The worst thing you can imagine will never happen. Isn't that why you've been working so hard?]

At his repeated assurances, Sungjin blinked blankly.

Why is it? Aside from the vague premonitions that came over me, Seonghwang's voice had the power to make people want to believe in it forever.

So Seongjin nodded vigorously towards him.

[Yes, that's right.]

[So for now, let's just focus on protecting the boundaries of the Delcross dimension.]

[yes!]

At Seongjin's cheerful answer, Seonghwang smiled and continued his explanation.

[Currently, our Delcross dimension is protected by the power of the 'race barrier' guarded by the five races of Ionia.]

The Holy Emperor briefly explained the members of the Council of Six and the five-layered barrier they were maintaining. He even mentioned that the barrier was currently somewhat weakened due to the absence of the representative of the Lycanthrope race.

[That is why we must help the alien races of Delcross as much as possible. If even one of the six main members of the council collapses, the dimensional boundary protecting Delcross will

inevitably become weaker.]

Naturally, the Manta tribe, one of the borderline races, came to mind. Their current crisis had led Logan and the Cyprus fleet to the Krabat Archipelago.

That was also why Seonghwang had told Seongjin that it was 'the most appropriate time'. Currently, all the demon lords targeting Delcross were focusing all their attention on the survival of the Manta tribe that was guarding the barrier.

[Father, can't we at least migrate the Manta Tribe to the Amasia dimension? There exists something called a 'crystal' that can replace the race's essence.]

That too must have been arranged by the Kornsim clan.

[Or, you could just send some of your race there. That alone would greatly relieve the Manta Lord of his mental burden.]

But the king slowly shook his head.

[Lord Manta has strong objections to the idea of her species being relocated there. The engineers have tried to match their biological characteristics to the best of their ability, using all the laws of the spherical world, but she is never sure if it is truly 'alive'.]

Well, it's not that I don't understand. Who else in the world besides Korn would make such a choice so easily, killing their own people who are alive and well and throwing them into a game?

[Then what about Louise...]

[That lycanthrope child had encountered his compatriots who had become soulstones from the beginning. That's why he was able to head straight to Amasia without much trouble. However, Lord Manta is said to have a more delicate personality than he looks. That's why he decided to sacrifice himself rather than drive his entire clan onto an uncertain path.]

[...]

From his lonely voice, Sungjin sensed Lord Manta's irreversible end. He also learned that Seonghwang was more affectionate toward Lord Manta than he had thought.

So, Seongjin spoke comfortingly without realizing it.

[Don't worry, Father. Lord Manta will find a happier rest than anyone else.]

[... Is that so?]

Seonghwang responded in a calm tone, but Seongjin did not miss the look of relief that passed across his face.

'Yeah, I guess this will be okay.'

If I can be of help to everyone in this way, wouldn't I be able to think positively about my role?

Seongjin absentmindedly thought about that, and then smiled brightly at Seonghwang, who was tapping his forehead.

* * *

Martha, who returned to her lodgings late at night, headed to the prince's room with tired steps.

Recently, he has been visiting the Marquis of Benso's residence on the orders of Prince Mores. Instead of the Marquis running away under various pretexts, he is meeting with his son Alberto and discussing business in earnest.

The problem was that Prince Benso was unusually timid. Whenever I tried to talk about business, he would always hesitate and change the subject, so it seemed like our conversations would go on forever.

'No matter how I look at it, it seems like a useless thing to do, but what on earth is His Majesty thinking...?'

Marsain pondered for a moment. Could it be that he was making a fuss without fully understanding the intentions of the lower class?

But when he returned to his quarters, he found Prince Mores sleeping on the sofa with a relaxed expression. After giving all sorts of difficult instructions, he couldn't possibly look this comfortable.

"... .."

Even chuckling occasionally!

As Marsain looked down with a bewildered expression, Captain Bruno whispered next to him.

"Your Majesty, it seems you are having a good dream."

"... .."

Masain, who was staring at the strange jewel the prince was holding in his hand, quickly stopped the dedicated maid who was trying to wake him up.

"Let's just let him sleep like this. You can report back tomorrow."

He loosened the collar of his uniform and asked Carmen, who was standing ceremonially beside him.

"Sir Carmen. Has anything happened to you while we were away from your quarters?"

"How could anything happen? You've been napping or meditating all day."

"Meditation... .."

"Yes. I heard you were very confident that you would soon become a Dekaron Knight?"

"... .."

In response to Sir Carmen's answer, Marsain and Captain Bruno kept their mouths shut as if they had made a promise.

Why not? One is that he is the swordsmanship teacher of Prince Mores, but he is soon to be caught up by his disciple, and the other is

that he once reached the level of Dekaron Knight, but his Aura accumulation is slower than that of the prince.

"Ahem!"

"Well, thank you for your hard work, Sir Carmen. We'll take our leave now... .."

The two people, feeling a strong sense of pressure, left the place in a hurry. They didn't say a word to each other, but it was clear that they would probably stay locked up somewhere and practice all night.

"Huh? Where are you guys going all of a sudden?"

"Tsk ts."k."

As Carmen was dumbfounded, Edith, who was tidying up the prince's bedding, clicked her tongue loudly.

"Sir Carmen, haven't you ever been told that you're usually tactless?"

To think that I would be criticized by Edith, who is known for being clueless!

"No, what am I saying!"

"The person who is said to be the least bright among us says such things without any sense."

"...What did you say?"

Carmen shouted in anger. Even without Prince Mores occasionally looking at him and clicking his tongue, Carmen had been feeling a bit stressed by the word 'brightness' lately.

"This is driving me crazy! What is this 'brightness' that Your Majesty has been talking about?"

"Well, do you know? But I do know one thing for sure: Sir Carmen has the lowest aura activity among our group."

"... ..!"

Carmen's face became blank as if she had been hit in the back of the head. Did she feel something at that time?

After a while, when Sir Claudia came to change shifts, Carmen barely managed to greet her and grabbed his sword before running down the hallway. It was in the direction of the open space that the knights used as a makeshift training ground.

Of course, Edith was there behind him, cheering him on.

"Train hard, Sir Carmen!"

"Profit! It's noisy!"

504. Manta Tribe (9)

It's still dark in the early morning.

Logan looked out over the fog-covered island of Peridereo from the empty deck. His face was soaked with exhaustion, perhaps the aftereffects of the informal meeting that had lasted the night.

Of course, it wasn't a big deal for a Sword Master to stay up all night for several days. However, the mental fatigue that came from a problem that couldn't be easily answered was something he couldn't help but feel.

'We have to come to a conclusion before noon, whatever it may be.'

This will either convince General Lysander to help the Mantas, or withdraw the fleet before the artifact is activated again. Neither of these will be easy tasks.

In fact, there was a third option, which was to stop the relic's operation completely and subdue Lord Manta, who was running wild in pain, as a demon. However-

'It's impossible after all.'

If you didn't know at all, you wouldn't know. You should have known that they have reason and emotions just like humans.

They were in such dire straits that they even sought help from Logan, who had come to subdue them. I could not bear to commit such a cruel act against them.

'Lord Mantara... ..'

Logan thought carefully about the stories he had heard from the

Mackerel Manta Tribe.

In fact, the meeting between him and the Manta Tribe itself was not that long, as the tedious process of exploring each other's intentions was completely unnecessary.

Logan could not understand the Manta language, but he could discern the truth from the vibrations of their vocalizations.

Also, the Manta Tribe can sense the general truth and lies through the interpretation of Lord Sharon. It seems that the communication method they exchange, called 'thoughts', is very difficult to hide the emotions that accompany it.

So the truth that Logan heard from the Manta tribe was all things that were hard to believe even after hearing them.

* * *

The Manta tribe has had the unique characteristic of sharing a group consciousness since birth. This characteristic has led them to higher spiritual achievements, but the side effects that come with it are also considerable.

An exchange of emotions and memories that happens without pause, even if you don't want it. A violent storm of madness that spreads and amplifies like lightning to the entire species the moment one individual loses their senses.

Because of these characteristics, they inevitably had to rely on external processing devices to maintain mental stability.

"So when they learned that they had lost their race's essence, the Mantas accepted their fate of extinction. It is said that most of them would rather face death with a clear mind than lose their wits and become beasts that harm the Delcross people."

However, their leader, Lord Manta, had a different view. If death was unavoidable, wouldn't it be better to sacrifice just one life to save the whole group?

"So, after much thought, Lord Manta decided to make himself an

'external processing device', a 'race essence'."

There was a model to refer to: Oracle.

Of course, it was impossible for her, a Manta, to create a well-developed salt crystal like the Kornsheim clan. So, in order to perform a similar role, the size of the salt crystal itself had to be extremely large.

So Lord Manta used every means at his disposal to expand his salt crystals. He continued to prey until his body grew to its limit, and he even took in the turbid consciousness of the prisoners he had previously been incarcerated with.

It was, for example, the process by which an oyster holds a pearl: a foolish method of constantly applying physical and mental stimulation to an already completed salt crystal, and then adding another solid layer on top of it.

Fortunately, thanks to Lord Manta's efforts, the salt crystal grew in size as it dug into his head.

"It was a process that involved extreme pain. However, despite the Manta tribe's earnest attempts to dissuade him, they were unable to break Lord Manta's strong will."

Somehow, just hearing it, Logan felt like he could understand how he felt.

If you think about it, haven't you had similar experiences? Running wild in a battlefield you didn't like, spreading propaganda you didn't mean to, and emphasizing the values of the republic.

All of these actions were done to make himself a symbol of a staunch republican party. He wanted to completely hide Prince Benicio and his companions, who would be left behind after his death, from the eyes of the Empire.

"... .."

As Logan's expression became more complicated and subtle, the mackerel, Boubreu?, who had been observing him closely, continued

speaking.

"Kkirak, burr, hoo... giririri..."

"But they say that an unexpected problem arose during the process."

It was okay to reconnect the exiled prisoners to the collective consciousness in order to stimulate the salt crystals.

The problem was that, with the pain increasing day by day, Lord Manta would occasionally lose control of them.

Eventually, there were cases where prisoners who had been incarcerated partially regained their senses and escaped from prison.

"Then, there have been frequent sea monster attacks in the Cyprus area recently..."

"Yes, they are all former convicts who escaped from prison."

The Manta Tribe leadership, unable to stand by and watch, tried everything they could to control the prisoners. One of the methods was to induce malfunctions in the artifacts to strengthen the mental control of the prison system.

"But if that happens, wouldn't the Manta tribe, who are not prisoners, also suffer similar damage?"

Logan thought of the countless whales stranded on the shore, drying up. Even the young mantas with weak mental defenses were almost swept away by them!

"Thanks to that, they were able to detain the escaped prisoners near the prison perimeter."

"... ... !"

Only then did Logan feel that one question that had been nagging at him for a long time had been resolved.

The sea monsters that gathered and ran wild near the point where the cold current coming from the north and the warm Krabat current

mixed.

"They were all held captive by the relics!"

Thanks to that, the first ocean demon subjugation ended so blandly. Those who were running around in confusion under the control of the prison system were swept away by the [Ancient Fire] and turned to ashes.

Unfortunately, in the process, some innocent Manta tribe members who were caught up in the control also lost their lives.

"... .."

Logan's face darkened as he listened to that. Sir Sharon, who knew the prince's gentle and upright nature well, paused for a moment to whisper comfortingly.

"They are people who will end up as mere demons if they fail to obtain the essence of their race anyway. There is no need for Your Majesty to mourn their deaths now."

Of course, there were also positive effects created by the malfunction of the relic. As the prison's mental control became stronger, the frequency of Lord Manta's seizures, which occasionally went berserk due to the pain, decreased significantly.

Although the exact mechanism is unknown, it is thought that the system's mental control dulls the sensation of pain itself.

"So if you're not going to help Lord Manta, you're telling me to just leave the relic alone and go back."

As Logan muttered, the mackerel-patterned manta slowly nodded its head.

"Pirrrrrrrr."

"This is a truth known only to a few leaders, including Lord Manta. Most of the Mantas simply believe that there are no engineers capable of repairing the malfunction."

"... That part is a little hard to understand. If you're hiding the truth because you're afraid of your own people's backlash, wouldn't it have been better to just let the prisoners go free?"

From the Manta tribe's perspective, wouldn't it be better to banish the dangerous elements to protect their innocent compatriots?

Of course, from the human perspective, there would be no such thing as an unexpected disaster, but even if there had been some damage, it would have been eventually swept away by the punitive force.

"Kiririk, boooooo... .."

"They say they cannot allow the innocent Delcross people to suffer so much because of them. They are sorry for the deaths of some of the humans, and they hope that at least they will know that it was in the best interest of the people."

"... .."

As Logan looked up into the serious face of the Mackerel Manta, its dark blue eyes also looked straight at Logan.

"Some humans, some Mantas, and some nature have suffered equally. Boubre believes that this is the only way to prevent the extreme destruction of one side and create a balance in which everyone can survive in the long run."

* * *

Phew, ugh!

A familiar figure approaches and I yawn loudly.

Logan woke up from his flashback and turned his head to find Max stretching beside him, having woken up at some point.

The guy wagged his tail happily at Logan, then sat down under the capstan and began to crunch the beef bone he had received yesterday. Even without patting his head, you could tell that this guy wasn't Lee Sung-jin.

'Lee Seong-jin... Are you not planning on coming today?'

Logan leaned against the bow and thought.

'Regarding the treatment of the Manta Tribe, or how to persuade General Lysander, Lee Seong-jin would have definitely thought of a good method... ... '

It may not seem like it, but you actually have good insight.

"...Brother?"

At that moment, a clear voice called him. Logan looked down at the sea and saw Sisley standing on a small boat, looking up at him. It seemed that he had been diligently checking on the wounded since early in the morning.

"Why are you there? Is something bothering you?"

Before Logan could even answer, the girl looked at his face for a moment, then jumped out of the boat without fear. Then, she jumped up onto the anchor rope and landed lightly next to Logan!

"... ... "

Logan was amazed again.

The more I looked at him, the more I was amazed at his talent. He had only been training in Aura for so long, and he was already showing movements that were no less than those of other knights.

"Huh, Sisley?"

Inquisitor Boris, left alone on the boat, panics and calls out to the girl.

"I'm sorry, Inquisitor Boris. Would you mind returning to the Tribunal first? I'll be back in time for the morning assembly."

After waving at him affectionately, Sisley turned to Logan with a serious face.

"Come on, Brother Logan. Brother, you're not easily tired. What's going on that makes your face look like that?"

Ironically enough, there was a hint of fatigue on Sisley's face as he asked that question. He had not been able to sleep well all night, having spent his night reading the Delcross Chronicles, which were full of shock and horror in his dreams.

"... .."

Logan hesitated for a moment, fiddling with Arjuna's handle.

'Is it really okay to confide everything to young Sisley? Aside from Mitra, she's the only one in the fleet who knows about the existence of the xenomorph... . . . '

Logan's act of helping the Mantas rendered meaningless the very purpose of the second expedition that the Cyprus Council had poured a huge budget into.

General Lysander may be convinced, but the Council will never let this matter go unchecked. If not careful, it could easily cause a major diplomatic problem between the Empire and Cyprus.

But that wasn't all. Even after persuading the punitive force, the problem still remained. Would the people, especially the Holy Assembly, readily accept the existence of a different race that did not even appear in the scriptures?

Although their appearance was different, the biggest problem with the Manta Tribe was that they were born with magical energy.

Even the royal family, Mores, looked down on this holy gathering. It would be fortunate if they didn't start making a fuss about forming the third punitive force right away.

'Yes. There's no need to involve Sisley in such a sensitive issue. I am the one who makes the decisions, and I am responsible for the consequences.'

Logan, his mind made up, shook his head slightly.

"I just thought for a moment that the world is just a frustrating place. As people live, aren't there times when you have to somehow convince someone of something they absolutely cannot accept?"

"Something you absolutely cannot accept?"

"Yeah. It's such a sad thought, isn't it?"

"Yeah, okay... .."

Sisley tilted his head, then looked at Logan with a somewhat subtle expression.

"Why is that?"

"What should I say? It may be a little embarrassing to say this, but I think I know why Mores Orabeoni always complains about his brother being foolish."

"... ..!"

Logan felt a huge hurt in his heart for a moment. Wait a minute, aside from Abamama and Lee Sungjin, why is Sisley saying that to me?

"But think about it. Brother, you already expected that the other person would reject you. Then why bother worrying about that? It's clearly impossible from the start."

"Oh, no. But-"

Logan stuttered in embarrassment.

"Still, Sisley. If it is something that must be done... .."

"No, you missed the point. This is your problem, Brother. No matter how much you put the truth in front of the other person, it won't work. Then, isn't there only one way? It's to hide the truth."

"... ..!"

Logan looked at Sisley with a bewildered expression.

Just then, the sun rose over the horizon, casting a mysterious golden backlight over Sisley's silver hair. And so, looking like a holy lion from a sacred painting, the girl whispered to Logan her subversive thoughts.

"What is needed at this time is agitation and fabrication."

"Incitement and... fabrication?"

"okay."

A faint playfulness appeared on the girl's white cheeks. It was a mischievous expression that I had never seen before, and it reminded me of Mores.

"Why do we have to tell the truth to those who won't accept it anyway? If we just say something pleasant to them, wouldn't it be better for us and would they feel a lot better?"

"... .."

"Just tell them what they want to believe and carry out your will. That's the most efficient way to benefit everyone."

Logan, who was speechless for a moment, turned his head towards Max without realizing it.

Then-

Huh?

Max, who was happily chewing on the bone, pricked up his ears as if he was curious.

'... As expected, Lee Seong-jin isn't coming. You didn't expect something like this to happen, did you? Yeah, I don't think so... ..'

Logan unconsciously grabbed Arjuna's handle.

Lee Sung-jin... When you come back, let's have a serious talk. What on earth did you teach little Sisley?